

## Revelation Chapter 5

**Revelation 5:1.** *And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book [scroll] written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book [scroll], and to loose the seals thereof?*

*3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no man [one] was found worthy to open and to read the book [scroll], neither to look thereon.*

*5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book [scroll], and to loose the seven seals thereof.*

*6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four ~~beasts~~ [living creatures], and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as [having] been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. 7 And he came and took the book [scroll] out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.*

[Note: changes to the KJV text above in square brackets and ~~are~~ are from the 1904 Constantinople text as shown in *The Orthodox New Testament: Acts, Epistles, and Revelation, Volume 2, praxapostolos*, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, USA, 1999.]



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In the first century papyrus or parchments scrolls were the common forms of longer written documents. Although books, codices, existed, they were not in common use in the 1st century AD. Here, we see the One on the throne, God the Father, holding (το βιβλιον) a scroll, written on two sides and sealed with 7 seals. The seals, presumably placed there by God the Father, secure the message of the scroll from being read by unauthorized eyes. Seals can be placed sequentially on a scroll as it is being rolled up, so that it is divided into different sequential messages, or all could be placed on the outside as in Roman wills, in which the scrolls were tied up by seven separate witnesses [of an Emperor's death] and each tie sealed with wax over the knots. Only those witnesses had authority to open that particular seal -- but all would have to be present to open the seals and to read the scroll, i.e., the Emperor's last will and testament. Most likely, by what follows in the ensuing chapters, the sequential type of seals were used, so that only one revelation of the contents could be opened at a time.

We also have in Scripture a couple of examples to draw upon.

In the ***Book of the Prophet Ezekiel***, chapters 2-4, the Lord gives *a roll of a book* (scroll) written on both sides to the prophet to eat for the purpose of him delivering the Lord's stern message to the rebellious people of Israel. This scroll was not sealed, i.e., it was for immediate delivery.

In contrast, in the last chapter of the ***Book of Daniel*** (chapter 12) an angel revealed a number of revelations that were to befall Persia and the people of God from Daniel's time up to the time of great tribulation and the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. However, the revelation was then abruptly stopped, and the words sealed up to the end of time.

***Revelation 5:2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book [scroll], and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no ~~man~~ [one] in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no ~~man~~ [one] was found worthy to open and to read the book [scroll], neither to look thereon.***

Archimandrite Athanasios: "The great voice emphasizes the need to be heard in every corner of the earth and suggests the lofty substance, the great message, and the immeasurable worth of the scroll.

The 7 seals show this scroll is fully secured, and all of its contents unknown to all except its author -- not to the angels, nor the 24 elders, nor men on the earth. Not one single created being could open this scroll. None was sufficiently worthy to open God's hidden mysteries and knowledge of future things -- not even the purest angels. They could not open, nor even look upon it! So St. John was severely saddened and wept much. But not all was hopeless --

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Although no created being could loose the seals and open the scroll, the slain Lamb of God was worthy to open it.

***Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book [scroll], and to loose the seven seals thereof.***

Archimandrite Athanasios: “The elder is one belonging to the human race, so he shares in the distress of saint John. Since this elder now belongs [resides] in the heavenly realm, he sees and gazes upon Christ as the Victor, the One able to open the scroll. That is why he tells Saint John *Do not weep ...* but he does not mention the name Jesus Christ. He uses two other very familiar names from the Christological verses of the Old Testament. He says, *Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah triumphed.* This name is a reference to Genesis when Jacob gives the prophecies to his twelve children (Gen. 49.9). He tells Judah that from him the Messiah will come forth into the world. The Messiah lies down as a lion, and who will dare wake him up? Therefore, the lion is the Messiah, and the Scripture here makes Him appear as a lion. The elder purposely uses this most familiar Christological term to [for] the Jews of the Old Testament, to declare that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

“The other familiar name is from a verse in Isaiah (11:1-10) There, the prophet Isaiah names the Messiah a descendant of the root of Jesse, and he gives him messianic characteristics, which do not suit David. Jesse is the father of David, but David does not have these attributes. It is not possible that he have them because he is a man. So, the Messiah is a descendant of David.”

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “Although the book [scroll] is incomprehensible even to angels, he says, it is not to God Who for the sake of humankind became man, Who as the Creator is the Root of David according to his deity, but is from the root of David according to His humanity.”

***Revelation 5: 6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts [living creatures], and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as [having] been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. 7 And he came and took the book [scroll] out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.***

Archimandrite Athanasios: “What unfolds in this scenery is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity, with the One sitting on the throne -- the Father; with seven burning lamps - the Holy Spirit; and the Slain Lamb as the Son ...

“It should be stressed that, as the image clarifies, before the One sitting on the throne are the seven lampstands and the Slain Lamb. This signifies that the Father sends both the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world. The Son as God-man having been sent into the world is in a standing position. He mediates between God and man. What a wonderful image, especially where it says, *I saw the Lamb in the midst of the four living creatures and the elders.* He is in the midst, in the middle. Here is the throne and around it the twenty-four elders. Between the throne and twenty-four elders is the Lamb. The space in which the Lamb is standing shows God

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is on one side and humanity is on the other. In the middle then, we have Christ the mediator Who mediates between God and His people.

“Let us look at how beautifully Saint Paul speaks, *This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself as a ransom for all* (1 Tim 2:4-6). The man, Christ Jesus, refers to the human nature as well as to the Messiah, Who gave Himself as a ransom for all. Thus, when He is between God and the elders, between the saints and God, He takes the role of the Messiah, a redemptive role. [The role of the mediator].

Here we have the two views of the two natures of the Son of God Who took on flesh in a hypostatic union. With the divine nature, the Son sees God. He sees the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And with His human nature, He sees man, humanity, people. Thus God sees people not by simply seeing people, but by seeing the divine nature of the Son, which is united with the human nature. He sees the people through the Son. This is the image that we have before us in this chapter. This is Christ the mediator. So, in Christ we have the God-man, the Messiah, and the mediator. We see Christ here appearing as a Lamb. This is a great antithesis, of course, to the previous image in which He appeared as a lion. According to Victorinus [Bishop of Poetovivo / Pettavium, 2nd half of the 3rd century AD], ‘Christ became a Lion to destroy death. He became a Lamb to suffer for the sake of the people.’

“The image of a lamb was very dear and very common to the Hebraic life of worship. The Passover lamb was central to Hebraic worship. It is the typology of the Messiah as Moses records in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. The prophet Isaiah foretold this because he called the Messiah the Lamb [Isaiah 53:7 (The Suffering Servant)]. John the Baptist revealed the Messiah. He called out to Him, *Behold the Lamb of God, who lifts [takes away] the sins of the world* (John 1:29). In addition to this, the early Christian Church used the Lamb as the icon of Christ ...

“The paradox here is that this Lamb appears standing and slain simultaneously. If it is slain, how does it stand? Obviously something that is slain cannot stand. According to St. Andrew of Caesarea, ‘the use of the word *standing* shows life after having been slain. The symbols of the passion are made manifest through the image of the truly Slain and Standing Lamb.’ This expression points to the dual nature of Christ regarding the passion and the resurrection. He suffered upon the cross. He died, but lives because He resurrected. This is expressed most beautifully in the Slain but Standing Lamb. On the Sunday of the Resurrection, when the Lord appeared to His disciples, His hands were pierced. Here we have the Slain Lamb with pierced hands and with a speared side, and yet He is standing because He resurrected from the dead. What a truly superb image.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “The seven eyes and the seven horns of the Lamb indicate the seven spirits of Christ, that Isaiah mentioned (Isaiah 11:2), as also did the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 4:10).” -- in his vision of the the 7 lamps.

Archimandrite Athanasios: “In the Old Testament horns are a symbol of power and especially of royalty ... The seven horns show the fullness or the totality of the royal authority and power of the Lamb over all visible and invisible creation, over the angels, people, and

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demons. [*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. (Phil. 2:11)*]. This is symbolized by the seven horns. Seven horns on a Lamb - what a wonder image.

[A similar thing was spoken by the Lord to the Prophet Isaiah: *21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. 22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. 23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 24 Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. 25 In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory. (Isaiah 45:21-25)*]

“About the seven eyes, the prophet Zechariah writes, *The seven eyes of the Lord are watching over the entire earth (Zechariah 4:10)*. So, according to Zechariah, God Almighty has seven eyes, and in this verse of the Revelation we see that Christ has seven eyes. This is a characteristic of the Christology of Revelation, which clearly and repeatedly shows that Christ is God. Every step of the way in this book we see that the historical Jesus, the Jesus Who lived nearly two thousand years ago, is the eternal God Who incarnated.

“Another significant point is that the seven lampstands (the seven spirits of God) are found before the One sitting upon the throne and are sent out to the world. Similarly, the seven eyes of the Lamb are the seven spirits that are sent out to the world. Seven lampstands are before the throne of the Father. Seven eyes are on the Lamb. These are two different symbols but serve the same subject, the Holy Spirit in its fullness. All this imagery beautifully denotes that the Father and the Lamb send the Holy Spirit out to the world.

“Now let us compare all this to the language of the Gospel. *And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Paraklete* [comforter Gk. *παρακλητος* = one summoned as an intercessor] *and He will stay with you until the end of the age, The Spirit of Truth (John 14:16)*. The Father will send the Holy Spirit, the Son will ask on our behalf. A few verses later, Saint John writes that Christ said, *When the Paraklete comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me (John 15:26)*. Therefore, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The procession of the Holy Spirit takes place only from the Father. To send and to proceed are two different matters. The term *proceed* shows the life of the Holy Spirit in relation to God the Father [in eternity before time]. The term *send* shows the life of the Spirit in relation to the world [in time]. Again, these are two different things. So, as we see, both the Father and the Son send out the Holy Spirit. What is abundantly clear here is that the seven lamps in front of the Father are the Holy Spirit and the seven eyes of the Lamb are the Holy Spirit. In conclusion, the Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God as well. There is so much theology and Christology here! The entire Gospel reigns here within Revelation as the entire future of the Church unfolds before us.”

So far in this chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John we have seen the slain Lamb of God,

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Jesus Christ, come and approach the Throne upon which the Father was sitting. He was pronounced worthy by one of the 24 Elders to take the scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the Throne, and to open the scroll sealed with 7 seals. The Lamb's wounds display His sacrifice for our salvation.

In the Prophet Daniel we see (**Daniel 7:13-14**) we see a very complementary vision: *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, they brought Him near Him. 14 And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom, which shall not be destroyed.*

Daniel's prophetic words imply that this coming takes place from earth to Heaven. The Son of Man arrives on the clouds of heaven and is presented before the Ancient of Days [another expression for God the Father, the One sitting on the Throne]. Here, instead of receiving a scroll, He received everlasting dominion, an indestructible kingdom, and glory from God the Father. These visions portray in images the true historical events of Salvation: the crucifixion of the Lamb of God, the resurrection of the slain Son of Man, the Ascension of Christ with a cloud receiving Him, and His translation to Heaven to the Throne of the One sitting, where He is worthy to receive dominion over all and an eternal Kingdom. A beautiful picture of God's redemptive plan.

Now, let's consider the rest of the chapter using the correct Bible text of the Church. [bracketed phrases are corrections to the KJV text to bring it into correspondence with the 1904 Constantinople official Greek Text of the Orthodox Church]

**Revelation 5:8** *And when he had taken the book [scroll], the four beasts [living creatures] and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials [bowls] full of odours [incenses], which are the prayers of saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book [scroll], and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us [them] unto our God kings and priests: and we [they] shall reign on the earth. 11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts [living creatures] and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. 13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. 14 And the four beasts [living creatures] said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.*

**Revelation 5:8** *And when he had taken the book [better is scroll], the four beasts [living*

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*creatures] and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials [bowls] full of odours [incenses] which are the prayers of saints.*

Consider our Divine Liturgy. Do we not participate in a similar manner? Do we not worship and fall down before Christ in the person of the Bishop or Priest in the Small Entrance with the Gospel Book/Scrolls in his hands, as the choir chants: **“Come let us worship and fall down before Christ: O Son of God Who didst rise from the dead, save us who chant to Thee: Alleluia.”** [See photo next page] Is not incense, interpreted here as the prayers of the Saints, censed before the Bishop/Priest as he exits the Altar [Heaven] into the Nave [the Church in the World], and then returns with the Gospels into the Altar. Do you see how our liturgy is patterned after this?

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The Old Testament prophets besides describing the coming Messiah also described worship in the Messianic [Church] Age. In this regard within the Old Testament book of the Prophet Malachi is a very interesting prophecy:

*“Malachi 1:11. My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place **incense and pure offerings** will be brought to my name, **because my name will be great among the nations**, says the Lord.*

“Here we have a prophecy that the worship of God, which was formerly confined to Jerusalem, would in the future become universal. This was confirmed by Jesus in his conversation with the Samaritan woman St. Photini, at the well. In response to her question whether Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim was the proper place for worship (John 4:19), Jesus answered that in the Messianic Age [the Kingdom, the Church Age] true worship would not depend on location but on worship of the Trinity. His statement about worshipping the Father in spirit (Holy Spirit) and truth (Jesus Christ) (John 4:23-24) is a teaching that true worship is worship of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is striking about Malachi’s prophecy above is the reference to incense. Where, before, incense was offered [only] in the Jerusalem Temple, in the Messianic [Church] Age incense would be offered by the non-Jews. One of the most vivid memories many first time visitors have of Orthodox worship is the smell of incense. Incense is burned at every Orthodox service. In the Roman Catholic Church incense is used in the high Mass but not in most services. Most Evangelical and Pentecostal churches do not use incense at all. Thus, whenever an Orthodox priest swings the censer and the sweet fragrance fills the church one experiences a direct fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy. Protestants may complain about how strange incense is, but they should realize that the use of incense was an integral part of Old Testament worship and is one of the key markers of authentic biblical worship in the Messianic [Church] Age.”

Then there is the question of the *golden bowls of incenses* which St. John interprets for us as prayers of the Saints! These bowls of prayers in possession of the Elders in heaven are poured out before the Lord in worship. Whose prayers are they?

As the Psalmist King David says in Psalm 140:1-2 which we chant in Vespers: *Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me; attend to the voice of my supplication when I cry unto Thee. **Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee, the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.***

Here in Vespers, we see the prayers originating from the righteous on the earth arising and being set forth before God by the intercession of the heavenly Elders. In Revelation chapter 6 we will encounter the prayers of the martyrs who appear under the altar in Heaven. So it is that the prayers of the Church, the saints in Heaven and upon the earth that are presented before the Lord by these heavenly elders --

(Archimandrite Athanasios): Here is “a very beautiful image of the intercessions of the

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saints for the sake of the struggling Church. This clearly shows that it is very orthodox to ask for the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos and of all the saints. Thus the intercessions of the saints are not superfluous by any means. As we know, the Protestants and the various heretics in general, for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses say that the saints cannot pray for us, that we do not need the prayers of the saints. One very clearly sees here that the intercession of the saints for us is not unessential ... " Jesus Christ mediates between man and God as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Here in Revelation we clearly see that the elders offer their collected prayers, through their intercessions on our behalf to Christ, the Slain Lamb.

The next few verses describe a New Song, a new song because it reflects the new covenant between man and God. This is an antiphonal song with two choirs: the presbyters on one hand, and the 4 living creatures on the other hand. In the Orthodox Church antiphonal singing is quite common, so the best Biblical text of the New Testament [the official Constantinople 1904 Greek New Testament text] in these verses make perfect sense. However, the Protestant KJV Bible translators used a different text which doesn't make sense, because they didn't appreciate the antiphonal nature of the song. The Living Creatures begin with:

**Revelation 5:9a** *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof:*

Archbishop Averky gives us a very insightful analysis of this new song: "And they [the 4 living creatures] chanted a hymn to the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind, an authentically new song not heard from the creation of the world, concerning which the Psalmist David already prophesied (Psalm 97.1) [-10, O sing unto the Lord a new song, for the Lord hath wrought wondrous things. His right hand and His holy arm have wrought salvation for Him. The Lord hath made known His salvations, in the sight of the nations hath He revealed His righteousness ...]. The new song is that which the Holy Spirit teaches those who have been delivered from the oldness of the letter and who are enlightened among all tribes and peoples. Of them he [St. John] says that they will reign on that earth which the Lord has promised to the meek (Matthew 5.5). In this song the new Kingdom of the Son of God is glorified, that Kingdom in which He reigns as the God-man Who bought it with the high price of His own blood. The redemption of mankind, although it refers only to man, was nevertheless so astonishing, so touching and sacred, that it aroused the most lively participation of the whole choir of heaven, so that all together, angels and men, glorify God for this work and worshipped Him that liveth unto the ages of ages."

Next, the 24 presbyters representing redeemed mankind respond:

**Revelation 5:9b.** *for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*

So far, the Biblical texts are the same. Note: here not everyone is redeemed. There is no

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universal salvation, a heresy, but salvation is afforded a portion out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, those that accept Christ Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Redeemer in true faith.

Lastly, the 4 living creatures chant a final strophe in reply:

**Revelation 5:10** *And hast made us [them] unto our God kings and priests: and we [they] shall reign on the earth.*

On this earth now during the Church age, and on the new earth in the Age to come.

**Revelation 5:11** *And I beheld, and I heard [as] the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts [living creatures] and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand [Gk. “myriads of myriads”], and thousands of thousands.*

St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 14, 321a: The tradition in Scripture is that the angels number a thousand times a thousand and ten thousand times ten thousand [*cf.* Daniel 7:10]. These numbers, enormous to us, square and multiply themselves and thereby indicate clearly that the ranks of the heavenly beings are innumerable. So numerous indeed are the blessed armies of transcendent intelligent beings that they surpass the fragile and limited realm of our physical numbers.”

The angels are also here with us in our worship Services, praying and chanting with us, even if we are totally obtuse to their presence. In the Lives of the Saints occasionally we hear of a meek and humble Saint seeing or hearing the Angels chant hymns during Orthodox worship.

Now the whole of heaven and earth join chorus together and cry out together praising and glorifying Christ God: *12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*

(Archimandrite Athanasius): “Why is the Lamb worthy to receive and open the seals of the scroll, that is, to reveal the future of the Church? He is worthy because He was slain. He is worthy because of His sacrifice on the cross. He is worthy because He redeemed us for God’s sake. His redemption is universal since He shed His blood for all people and, because, when the Lord sent His disciples unto the ends of the earth, the message of salvation became universal.”

**Revelation 5:13a** *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that [the things that] are in them, heard I saying,*

Again, the whole chorus of heaven and earth cry out together

**Revelation 5:13b** *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*

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A fitting Doxology, or giving of glory to the subject at the end of a song (canon, hymn, etc.). In ancient Greek: **δοξολογία** doxologia, derives from **δόξα**, doxa, "glory" and **-λογία**, -logia, "saying".

Consider the Great Doxology, a fitting end to Matins: “We praise Thee; we bless Thee; we worship Thee; we glorify Thee; we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory:”

***Revelation 5:14a*** *And the four beasts [living creatures] said, Amen.*

The 4 living creatures provide the ***Amen***, i.e., Let it be as spoken. We affirm it! We pledge ourselves to it. And as a sign of awe and worship, a prostration by mankind is made before their Redeemer.

***Revelation 5:14b*** *And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.*