

Revelation 5:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth,
was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

Analysis

And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.... This verse from Revelation's vision of the lamb who is worthy - christ's redemptive work, authority to open the scroll employs apocalyptic imagery rich with Old Testament allusions and symbolic meaning. The Greek text uses vivid apocalyptic language characteristic of Jewish prophetic literature, drawing heavily from Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah.

The symbolism must be interpreted within its first-century context while recognizing timeless spiritual realities. The imagery would resonate powerfully with persecuted believers facing Roman imperial cult worship, providing hope that despite present suffering, Christ reigns sovereign and will consummate His kingdom. The apocalyptic genre uses symbolic numbers (seven, twelve, 144,000), colors, beasts, and cosmic imagery to convey theological truth rather than photographic descriptions.

Christologically, Revelation consistently exalts Jesus as the victorious Lamb, the faithful witness, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every vision ultimately points to Christ's supremacy, His finished redemptive work, and His certain return to judge the living and dead and establish the new creation.

Historical Context

John received this revelation circa AD 95 during Domitian's persecution, exiled on Patmos for his testimony. The seven churches of Asia Minor faced increasing pressure to participate in emperor worship and pagan religious practices. Refusal meant economic hardship, social ostracism, and potential martyrdom. Understanding this context illuminates Revelation's encouragement to faithful endurance.

The apocalyptic genre was familiar to first-century Jewish and Christian readers. Rather than newspaper-style predictions, apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to reveal spiritual realities behind earthly events, encourage the faithful, warn the unfaithful, and assert God's ultimate sovereignty over history. Parallels with Daniel, Ezekiel, and intertestamental apocalyptic writings would help original readers decode the symbols.

Rome's imperial cult demanded worship of Caesar as divine, placing Christians in impossible situations—compromise their faith or face persecution. Revelation identifies Rome as "Babylon" and assures believers that despite appearances, the Lamb conquered through His death and resurrection, and all earthly kingdoms will submit to His reign.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 5:3 reveal God's character, particularly His sovereignty, holiness, and justice?

2. What specific encouragement or warning does this verse offer for maintaining faithful Christian witness amid cultural pressure?
3. How does this passage point to Christ's victory and the hope of new creation, and how should that shape your present priorities?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	οὐδεὶς	ἠδύνατο	ἐν	τῷ	οὐρανῷ	οὐδὲ	ἐπὶ	τῆς	γῆς
And	no man	was able	in	G3588	heaven	neither	in	G3588	earth
G2532	G3762	G1410	G1722		G3772	G3761	G1909		G1093
οὐδὲ	ὑποκάτω	τῆς	γῆς	ἀνοῖξαι	τὸ	βιβλίον	οὐδὲ		
neither	under	G3588	earth	to open	G3588	the book	neither		
G3761	G5270		G1093	G455		G975	G3761		
βλέπειν	αὐτό								
to look	thereon								
G991	G846								

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 5:13 (Parallel theme): 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.

Romans 11:34 (Parallel theme): For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Isaiah 41:28 (Parallel theme): For I beheld, and there was no man; even among them, and there was no counsellor, that, when I asked of them, could answer a word.