

WHY THE TEARS?

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **and I began to weep loudly** because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it (Revelation 5:3–4 ESV).

Overwhelmed with grief and dismay at this turn of events, John began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it. Weep is from *klaio*, the same word used to describe Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and Peter's bitter weeping after betraying the Lord (Luke 22:62). It is thus a word that expresses strong, unrestrained emotion. This is the only time in Scripture that tears are seen in heaven (cf. 7:17; 21:4).

W. A. Criswell explains why John wept:

[John's tears] represent the tears of all God's people through all the centuries.

Those tears of the Apostle John are **the tears of Adam and Eve**, driven out of the Garden of Eden, as they bowed over the first grave, as they watered the dust of the ground with their tears over the silent, still form of their son, Abel. Those are **the tears of the children of Israel** in bondage as they cried unto God in their affliction and slavery. They are the tears of God's elect through the centuries as they cried unto heaven. They are **the sobs and tears that have been wrung from the heart and soul of God's people** as they looked on their silent dead, as they stand beside their open graves, as they experience in the trials and sufferings of life, heartaches and disappointments indescribable. Such is the curse that sin has laid upon God's beautiful creation; and this is the damnation of the hand of him who holds it, that usurper, that interloper, that intruder, that alien, that stranger, that dragon, that serpent, that Satan-devil. "And I wept audibly," for the failure to find a Redeemer meant that this earth in its curse is consigned forever to death. It meant that death, sin, damnation and hell should reign forever and ever and the sovereignty of God's earth should remain forever in the hands of Satan. (*Expository Sermons on Revelation [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969], 3:69–70.*)

John's weeping, though sincere, was premature. He need not have wept, for God was about to take action. Similarly, Jesus told the widow at Nain (Luke 7:13) and

those weeping over the death of the synagogue ruler's daughter (Luke 8:52) that their tears were inappropriate because of what He was about to do. John wept because he wanted to see the world rid of evil, sin, and death. He wanted to see Satan vanquished and God's kingdom established on earth. He wanted to see Israel saved and Christ exalted. John knew that the Messiah had been executed, Jerusalem destroyed, and the Jewish people massacred and scattered. He was well aware that the church faced intense persecution and was infected with sin (chaps. 2–3). Everything seemed, from his perspective, to be going badly. Would no one step forward to change this? Was no one going to unroll the scroll and redeem God's creation? **But John need not have wept, because the search for the one worthy to open the scroll was about to end.** [*MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1999). Revelation 1–11 (pp. 165–166). Chicago: Moody Press.*]

The tears of the saints ...

You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book (Psalm 56:8 NLT).

My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:3 ESV)?

Again I saw all the people who were mistreated here on earth. I saw their tears and that they had no one to comfort them. Cruel people had all the power, and there was no one to comfort those they hurt (Ecclesiastes 4:1 NCV).

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone (Revelation 21:4 NCV).