

WORTHY OF WORSHIP

Lesson 3

Revelation 4–5



WELCOME

Recall and describe an especially impactful worship¹ experience. Why did it affect you so deeply?

INTRODUCTION

In **Revelation 3:10**, John warned the churches in Asia that a terrible time of testing was coming. In Revelation 4–5, John redirects their eyes and hearts to heaven. As Revelation was read aloud, God’s people heard dramatic, memorable and awe-inspiring descriptions of heaven, God the Father, billions of angelic beings and Jesus.

Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- Revelation 4–5 launches into the apocalyptic² literary style, which continues to the end of the book. These apocalyptic writings were meant to give people hope during hard times. The recipients of Revelation likely understood this literary style and its distinctive features, such as symbolic numbers and bizarre images.
- The throne of God is mentioned 47 times in Revelation,³ symbolizing God’s absolute authority and that He is the only one worthy of worship. His throne is mentioned 11 times in chapters 4–5 alone. The recipients of Revelation would have understood the importance of God’s throne, His universal rule and His worthiness of worship.

¹ Worship is the expression of love, adoration and praise to God. While people traditionally think of worship as singing, it can happen in many other ways, such as: reading and learning from Scripture resulting in a sudden sense of awe or gratitude, walking in the outdoors and expressing praise or wonder at God’s creation, hearing a story of God’s remarkable intervention in someone’s life, etc.

² Apocalypse: to unveil, to reveal, to uncover; to see the true nature of things. It is like God pulling back the curtain to reveal His divine perspective and plans. (The Bible Project)

³ Johnson, 132

Their understanding would have come in part because in that era the most powerful throne in the world was Caesar's throne. People throughout the Roman Empire were required to worship the emperor, especially during the reign of Caesar Domitian. The phrase "you are worthy" was used to herald the entrance of an emperor, especially into a city. Later, the Emperor Domitian added the phrase "our lord and god" as a reference to himself, thereby promoting, and even requiring, emperor worship.⁴ The imagery of God's throne is used in direct contrast to the unworthy earthly things and people that are worshipped.

- For this lesson each chapter will be presented separately, with questions in between. The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to clarify the passage and provide better understanding.



WORD

As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.

Revelation 4:1–11

Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this." And instantly I was in the Spirit,⁵ and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it.⁶ The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow.⁷ Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and

⁴ Barton, 54, 58

⁵ The phrase "in the Spirit," means being inspired by Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit was giving John this vision. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2177)

⁶ The One sitting on the throne is God Almighty.

⁷ Ezekiel described a strikingly similar vision of God on His throne in **Ezekiel 1:26–28; 10:1**.

twenty-four elders sat on them.⁸ They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder.⁹ And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.¹⁰

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back.¹¹ The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight.¹² Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”¹³

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, “You are worthy, O Lord our God,

⁸ “This is one of the more complex images in the Revelation, on which there is nothing close to consensus among scholars.” (Fee, 69) “John did not identify these 24 elders. Evidently, the worship they provided was more significant than who they were. Scholars have proposed several possibilities for the identity of these twenty-four elders”:

- 1) They represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples—thus being a representation of all the redeemed of God both before and after Christ’s death and resurrection.
- 2) They are the counterpart of the 24 priestly ranks who served in the temple, as in **1 Chronicles 23:6; 24:7–18**.
- 3) The 24 elders are a special order of angelic beings who live in heaven and worship God at his throne. (Barton, 55)

⁹ In Revelation, lightning and thunder are associated with significant events in heaven (**4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18**). These references echo the lightning and thunder that filled the sky at Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the Law and the power of God’s presence was manifest (**Exodus 19:16**). (Barton, 55-56)

¹⁰ People of John’s day feared the sea because it represented the forces of chaos. (Johnson 137) This image of a crystal sea was entirely different, beautiful and calm.

¹¹ The eyes symbolize knowledge and alertness. They see and scrutinize everything. (Barton 56)

¹² The awesome scene around the throne of God includes four living creatures, divine heralds of some sort, who are very similar to what Ezekiel saw in his vision (**Ezekiel 1:4–24**). Their various faces (lion, ox, human, eagle) may represent all living beings, whether animal or human, joining in the worship of “him who sits on the throne.” (Fee, 72-73)

¹³ Revelation is filled with hymns of praise like this one. They focus on the person and character of God (**Revelation 4:8, 11; 5:9–13; 7:12–17; 11:15–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 18:2–8; 19:1–8**). (Wiersbe, 68)

*to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased.”*

1. After reading Revelation 4, what are your impressions of heaven?

2. John’s vision of God in **Revelation 4:2–6** is similar to the one found in **Ezekiel 1:26–28** below.

Above this surface was something that looked like a throne made of blue lapis lazuli. And on this throne high above was a figure whose appearance resembled a man. From what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like gleaming amber, flickering like a fire. And from his waist down, he looked like a burning flame, shining with splendor. All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the LORD looked like to me. When I saw it, I fell face down on the ground, and I heard someone’s voice speaking to me.

How do the pictures, names and descriptions of God, found in Revelation 4 and Ezekiel, enlarge your understanding of Him?

3. The glory and grandeur of Caesar’s throne paled in comparison to the throne John described in heaven. This likely impacted the recipients of this letter greatly as they thought about emperor worship in their society. In our culture, what people or things are valued to the point of being worshipped?

- a. What motivates this worship?
- b. How does the Revelation 4 image of the Living God in heaven help you put people or things you may worship, other than God, in perspective?

Revelation 5:1–14

Then I saw a scroll¹⁴ in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals.¹⁵ And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it.¹⁶

Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,¹⁷ the heir to David’s

¹⁴ “In John’s day some books were written on scrolls, pieces of papyrus or vellum up to thirty feet long, rolled up and sealed with clay or wax. [The seals] guaranteed the secrecy of the documents.” (Barton, 59) This preserved the contents for the person who had the authority to open them.

¹⁵ The seven seals on this scroll will be broken one by one in Revelation 6–8, as different parts of the prophecy on the scroll are revealed. (Johnson, 144) Remember, the number seven represents “completeness.”

¹⁶ Having searched the whole universe, the strong angel found no one who had the authority, power, wisdom or moral excellence to break the seals and open the scroll. (Johnson, 145)

¹⁷ The image of the lion comes from **Genesis 49:9**, where Jacob blesses his son, Judah, saying, “*he will be like a lion and the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor.*” This was a messianic phrase, meaning the Messiah would come from the line of Judah and have power like a lion. (Barton, 60)

throne,¹⁸ has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Then I saw a Lamb¹⁹ that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes,²⁰ which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God²¹ that is sent out into every part of the earth. He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.²² And they sang a new song with these words:

*“You are worthy to take the scroll
and break its seals and open it.*

*For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

*And you have caused them to become
a Kingdom of priests for our God.²³*

And they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions²⁴ of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus:

¹⁸ Some translations say the Root of David. The Root of David comes from **Isaiah 11:1–10**, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse [David’s father]; from his roots a branch will bear fruit.” The passage goes on to say that when this Root of David comes, he will bring justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed. He will bring peace and restoration to all of creation. (Barton, 60-61)

¹⁹ The word “Lamb,” referring to Christ, occurs 28 times in Revelation. The Lamb in **Revelation 5:6, 9** echoes the Passover Lamb in **Exodus 12:21–23** and the perfect lamb without blemish that the Israelites were told to bring as a sacrificial offering to the temple to cleanse them from their sins. John the Baptist introduced Jesus saying: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (**John 1:29**). As the Lamb of God, Jesus now stands in heaven before the throne of God the Father, having accomplished what He set out to do.

²⁰ The seven eyes are symbols of complete wisdom; the seven horns are a picture of complete strength and authority. Thus, the Lamb is the fullness of wisdom and strength. (Johnson, 147; Fee, 81)

²¹ The sevenfold spirit refers to Holy Spirit. (Duvall, 98)

²² These words reminded John’s readers that the prayers offered in light of their present suffering were being heard in heaven. (Fee, 84) He still hears our prayers today.

²³ See **1 Peter 2:9** for more about being a kingdom of priests.

²⁴ “Thousands and millions” is translated in some versions as “myriad.” The number of angelic beings was so great the Greek language had no word for it. (Fee, 86) “The word myriad was used by the Greeks to describe something too great to count. We might think of ‘billions upon billions.’ This is the entire angelic host.” (Barton, 67)

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing.”*

*And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under
the earth and in the sea. They sang:*

*“Blessing and honor and glory and power
belong to the one sitting on the throne
and to the Lamb forever and ever.”²⁵*

*And the four living beings said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four
elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.*

4. John wanted the scroll opened so badly that he wept when he feared no one could open it. However, one of the twenty-four elders reassured him that Jesus was worthy to open it. What made/makes Jesus the only one worthy to open the scroll?

5. Review the poetic songs to Jesus at the end of chapter five, specifically looking for descriptions of Jesus (the Lamb). List them here.

a. How do these descriptions help you see Jesus as the ultimate Overcomer?

²⁵ Scholars have done considerable research on the so-called “imperial hymns” that were sung at political events in Rome. The following words are found in those hymns and were shouted to the emperor: holy one, glory, salvation belongs to you, authority, worthy to receive power, righteous are your judgments, our lord and god, lord of the earth, lord of the world. John turns the imperial hymns on their heads and uses the same words to describe the Living God, the only one worthy of such praise. (Johnson, 147; Fee 140)

b. Worship is seen throughout the book of Revelation. It is an essential part of our relationship with Jesus, the Lamb. How do you practice worship in your own life?

6. In **Revelation 5:9**, God is praised for ransoming people from “every tribe and language and people and nation.”²⁶ Discuss the significance of this concept and its relevance to us today.

²⁶ This phrase occurs in similar wording seven times in Revelation: **5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15.**



WORSHIP

Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.

Revelation 5:12 says, “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!*” These grand words deeply inspired George Handel, and he put them to music in his masterpiece, *The Messiah*.

Reflect on these lyrics taken directly from **Revelation 5:12–14**, found in the section of *The Messiah* entitled *Worthy Is the Lamb*. Consider listening to Handel’s music,²⁷ or reading the lyrics aloud, as an act of worship to show praise, adoration and love for God.

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever. Amen.”

²⁷ Multiple versions can be found on YouTube.



WITNESS

Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.

Genuine worship is a powerful witness, and in the midst of it Holy Spirit moves. Our lives, attitudes, choices and actions reflect who we worship. How could you invite someone to experience worship with you?

Ask Holy Spirit to give you a name. Begin praying earnestly for God to move in that person's heart.

