

Worthy Is *the* Lamb



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Revelation 4, Ezek. 1:5–14, Revelation 5, Eph. 1:20–23, Heb. 10:12, Acts 2:32–36.*

Memory Text: “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” (*Revelation 5:5, NKJV*).

Last week, we looked at Christ’s messages to His people on earth. Now John’s vision shifts from earth to heaven and focuses on the “things which must take place after this” (*Rev. 4:1, NKJV*)—the future.

The vision of chapters 4 and 5 takes place in heaven’s throne room. The scene of chapters 4 and 5 symbolically portrays God’s control of history and of the plan of salvation. Before the future is revealed, however, we are shown the centrality of Christ’s high-priestly ministry in heaven to His sovereignty over the affairs of the earth and to His redemption of the human race. In such a way, chapters 4 and 5 provide Heaven’s perspective on the meaning of future events recorded in the rest of the book.

One also may notice that while the messages to the seven churches were written in somewhat straightforward language, from now on the book employs even more symbolic language that is not always easy to interpret. This language is taken from the history of God’s people, as recorded in the Old Testament. A correct interpretation of Revelation requires a proper understanding of its symbolic language in light of the Old Testament.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 26.

In the Heavenly Throne Room

Starting in Revelation 4:1, Jesus invites John to come up to heaven to be shown a panoramic survey of history from his time until Christ's return.

Revelation 4:1–8, Ezekiel 1:26–28, and Revelation 5:11–14 describe heaven's throne room. What do these verses teach us about the nature of the heavenly throne room?

The apostle looked through the open door into the heavenly temple and at the throne of God. The throne symbolizes God's rule and governing authority over creation, while the rainbow around the throne signifies God's faithfulness to His promises (*Gen. 9:13–16; Isa. 54:9, 10*). However, Satan, who usurped the dominion of this earth and is God's adversary, has disputed divine authority. The central issue in the great controversy between God and Satan is about who has the right to rule. The purpose of the heavenly council that John saw gathered in the heavenly throne room was to affirm God's rightful rule over the universe (*Rev. 4:1–8, Rev. 5:11–14*).

Read Revelation 4:8–11 and Revelation 5:9–14. What can you learn about true worship in these passages? In chapter 4, why is the Lord God worthy of being worshiped, and, in Revelation 5:9–14, why is the Lamb worthy?

Revelation 4 gives a general description of the throne room in the heavenly temple and of the worship that repeatedly takes place there. While the worship in chapter 4 praises God's creative power, chapter 5 celebrates the redemption provided by the slain Lamb. These chapters show that true worship recounts and celebrates God's mighty acts of Creation and Redemption. God, who created the world in six days, has the power and ability also to restore the world to its original condition and to turn it into the eternal home for His people, all of which He has promised to do.

Think about what the gospel teaches: the One who created not just us and our world, but the entire cosmos, also was the "Lamb who was slain" (*Rev. 5:12, NKJV*) for us. What amazing hope does this teaching present amid a world full of pain and turmoil?

The Heavenly Assembly in the Throne Room

The description of the elders in Revelation 4:4 shows that they are not angelic beings. The title “elders” in the Bible always is used for humans. In contrast to angels, who invariably stand in God’s presence, these elders sit on thrones. The white robes they wear are the attire of God’s faithful people (*Rev. 3:4, 5*). The victory crowns (from Greek *stephanos*, *Rev. 4:4*) on their heads are reserved exclusively for the victorious saints (*James 1:12*). All of these details suggest that the 24 elders are glorified saints.

The number 24 is symbolic: it consists of two sets of 12, the number 12 in the Bible being a symbol of God’s people. The 24 elders could represent God’s people in their totality, from both the Old and New Testament times. The number 24 also mirrors the chiefs of the 24 divisions of priests who took turns serving in the earthly temple services (*1 Chron. 24:1–19*).

The fact that the 24 elders were never mentioned before in the Bible implies that they are a new group in the heavenly throne room. They perhaps are the ones who were raised from the dead at the time of Jesus’ death (*Matt. 27:51–53*).

If so, these 24 elders who ascended to heaven with Jesus become representatives of humanity, to witness the fairness in God’s actions in the realization of the plan of salvation. In Revelation 5:9, the 24 elders, along with the four living creatures (*vs. 8*), fall down in worship before the Lamb who was slain and yet lives. Together, they sing a new song, extolling the Lamb as the One who is worthy, because: “ ‘You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth’ ” (*Rev. 5:8–10, NKJV*).

Revelation 4:6–8 also mentions the four living creatures, or beings. Compare their description with the four living beings in Ezekiel 1:5–14 and Ezekiel 10:20–22 and with the seraphim in Isaiah 6:2, 3.

The four living creatures symbolize the exalted beings who serve God as His agents and the guardians of His throne (*Ps. 99:1*). Their wings point symbolically to their swiftness in carrying out God’s orders, and their eyes point to their intelligence. Their presence, together with the 24 elders and a myriad of angels around the throne (*Rev. 5:11*), shows that both heaven and earth are represented in the throne room.

The Sealed Scroll

Read Revelation 5:1–4. In light of Isaiah 29:11, 12, what is the meaning of the sealed scroll, and why did John weep?

The Greek text indicates that the scroll was lying on the throne at the right hand of the Father. It waited for the One who was worthy to take it and “ ‘to loose its seals’ ” (*Rev. 5:2, NKJV*).

In the words of Ellen G. White, the sealed scroll contains “the history of God’s providences, the prophetic history of nations and the church. Herein was contained the divine utterances, His authority, His commandments, His laws, the whole symbolic counsel of the Eternal, and the history of all ruling powers in the nations. In symbolic language was contained in that roll the influence of every nation, tongue, and people from the beginning of earth’s history to its close.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 7.

In short, the sealed scroll contains the mystery of God regarding His plans to solve the sin problem and save fallen human beings. The full realization of that mystery will occur at the second coming of Christ (*see Rev. 10:7*).

Read Revelation 5:5–7. Why is Christ the only One in the whole universe worthy to take the sealed scroll and unseal it?

The crisis in the throne room is related to Satan’s rebellion. This planet, although created by God, has been under the dominion of the usurper, Satan. John’s tears expressed the longing of God’s people, since Adam, for salvation from the bondage of sin. The sealed scroll comprised God’s plan for resolving the sin problem. No doubt with His immeasurable power God Himself could realize that plan. However, the redemption of the fallen human race required something special, and that was Jesus, who did “overcome” and thus was worthy to open the book, to assume the lordship over this earth, and become our Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary.

How do we learn to keep Jesus first and foremost in our Christian experience?

Worthy Is the Lamb

Read Revelation 5:8–14 along with Ephesians 1:20–23 and Hebrews 10:12. Together, what are they saying that should give us great hope and comfort amid a world that, in and of itself, offers so little of either?

As Christ the Lamb approaches the throne, He takes the scroll. This act shows that all authority and sovereignty belong to Him (*see Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:20–22*). At that moment, the whole universe acknowledges Christ's rightful rule over earth. What was lost with Adam has been regained with Christ.

When Christ takes the scroll, it shows He holds the destiny of all humanity in His hands. The four living creatures and the 24 elders fall down before Him and worship, as they did in Revelation 5:9: “‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain’ ” (*NKJV*). By this act of adoration, the exalted angels and the representatives of redeemed humanity affirm Christ's sacrifice on behalf of humanity. With His blood, He has paid the ransom for fallen human beings and offers them all the hope of redemption and the promise of a future we barely can imagine.

The four living creatures and the elders are now joined by the countless number of the angelic host surrounding the throne and directing praises to the Lamb that had been slain and now “lives to make intercession” for the fallen race (*Heb. 7:25, NKJV*). In unison, the occupants of the throne room exclaim with a loud voice: “‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’ ” (*Rev. 5:12, NKJV*).

At this point all creation in heaven and on earth joins together in offering royal adoration both to the Father and Christ: “‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’ ” (*Rev. 5:13, NKJV*). Their praise is met with an “‘Amen’ ” by the four living creatures and the prostration of the 24 elders, thus concluding this rapturous veneration in the heavenly throne room.

Physicists speculate that one day the universe will burn out, collapse in on itself, or just rip apart. What a contrast to the future presented in the Word of God! How can we start rejoicing, even now, in the future that awaits us?

The Significance of Pentecost

In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Acts 2:1–4 confirms one of the most decisive events in the history of the plan of salvation: the inauguration of Christ into His post-Calvary ministry as High Priest and King in the heavenly sanctuary (*see also Acts 1:4–8; Acts 2:33*). Through His high-priestly ministry at the right hand of the Father (*Rev. 5:6, 7*), Christ is able to carry out the plan of salvation to its ultimate realization. As our Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus works to save us. Through Him, believers may have free access to God and receive forgiveness for their sins.

Read Acts 2:32–36 along with John 7:39. What hope and encouragement do you find in the fact that Jesus stands in heaven as our Priest and King?

The exaltation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary was followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Revelation 5:6 mentions the seven Spirits that are “sent out into all the earth” (*NKJV*). As we saw in an earlier lesson, the seven Spirits denote the fullness of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. At Christ’s enthronement the Spirit is sent to the church. This sending of the Holy Spirit is one of Christ’s first acts as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit meant that Jesus had appeared before the Father and that God had accepted His sacrifice on behalf of humanity.

“Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. . . . When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise, He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 39.

Read Hebrews 4:16 and Hebrews 8:1. What hope and encouragement do you find in the assurance that Jesus, as Priest and King, has received all authority in heaven and on earth? How does believing this truth help you deal with everyday situations in your life and with the uncertainty of the future?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘To My Father, and Your Father,’ ” pp. 829–835, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The message of Revelation 4 and 5 is particularly important to the people of God living at the close of earth’s history. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked the beginning of the preaching of the gospel to all the world; the central message was about Jesus, who had been exalted as Priest and King at the right hand of the Father. This truth about Jesus was the heart of the early Christians’ belief (*Heb. 8:1*) and the cornerstone of their preaching (*Acts 2:32, 33; Acts 5:30, 31*). It also was their motivation and the source of their faith and courage in the face of persecution and difficult life situations (*Acts 7:55, 56; Rom. 8:34*). As a result, many people responded to their preaching. From that time on, the kingdom of God manifested itself, and keeps on doing so, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We never must forget that it is only the good news of salvation in Christ that can reach and transform human hearts and lead people to respond to the call of the eternal gospel to fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him (*Rev. 14:7*). Our only hope is in our Savior, who is our Priest and King in the heavenly sanctuary. He is with His people, and He always will be with them until the very end (*Matt. 28:20*). He holds the future in His hands.

Let us, therefore, never forget that keeping the essence of the gospel in mind will bring full success in preaching the final message to lost and suffering humankind. Nothing else we preach is more important than the Cross and what it teaches us about God.

Discussion Questions:

- ① One day we will be in heaven praising and worshipping the Lord for His goodness, His power, and especially His grace. What are ways that, even now, we can get in practice for the time when that great day comes? That is, how can we worship with grateful hearts and praise God now for all that He has done and will do?
- ② Read Revelation 4:11 and 5:9. In what roles do we see the Father and the Son here, and how are both roles central not just to the plan of salvation but also to why God is so worthy of our worship? How is the Sabbath, and what it teaches, an expression of these two wonderful truths about our God?

Two Impossible Prayers

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

One of the most perplexing questions that people ask is how to choose the right spouse.

For Mario Brito, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Inter-European Division, it was simple: He asked God two seemingly impossible things.

Mario remembered Maria while praying for a mission-minded wife when he was a third-year theology student at the Adventist University of France in Collonges, France. The two had met the previous year as students at the Spanish Adventist Seminary (now Spanish Adventist College) in Sagunto, Spain.

Mario had the strong impression that Maria might be the one. But he wasn't completely certain, so he prayed, "God, if You see that Maria should be my wife, put it in her heart to write me a letter."

This seemed an impossible request at a time when women never took the initiative in a dating relationship.

To Mario's surprise, he received a friendly letter about a week later. He wrote a warm letter to Maria and made the second impossible prayer request.

"Lord, the normal thing would be for Maria to answer," he said. "But if she is to be my wife, make it happen in such a way that she doesn't answer."

Weeks passed, and no letter came. The two didn't communicate again until the next school year when Maria moved to the Adventist University of France for her third year of studies. Soon, Mario and Maria were dating.

One day, Mario curiously asked Maria why she hadn't replied.

"I felt it was a cold and very formal letter, so I decided not to answer," she said.

Mario couldn't believe her description and asked whether she still had the letter. Maria retrieved the letter from her room, and the couple read it together. It was as warm as Mario remembered.

"What was wrong with it so you didn't answer?" Mario asked again.

Maria didn't know what to say. Mario then told her about his two prayers.

Maria smiled. "Now you have the explanation!" she said.

The couple married the next year.

Thirty-nine years later, Mario remains confident that he chose the right wife.



The couple served as frontline missionaries planting churches in unreached areas of Portugal for more than a decade. Mario went on to become president of the Adventist Church in Portugal and, in 2015, he was elected president of the Inter-European Division.

Mario and Maria's home also is a mission field. They raised a daughter, who is married to an Adventist pastor, and are the adoptive parents of 12 teenagers.

"Maria has a heart for mission," Mario said. "Yes, I believe it was the right match."

Part I: Overview

▶ **Key Text:** *Revelation 5:5, 6*

▶ **Study Focus:** We will center our attention in this lesson on the heavenly vision of Revelation 4 and 5 (*Rev. 4:1–5:14*).

▶ **Introduction:** The passage covered in this lesson is divided into two parts. First, there is a general description of heavenly worship directed to the One sitting on the throne, God the Father (*Rev. 4:1–11*). Second, there is a moment of crisis in the heavenly throne room, but it is resolved by the appearance of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (*Rev. 5:1–14*).

▶ **Lesson Themes:** The lesson and the focus passage introduce the following themes:

I. Is Revelation 4 a General Description or a Onetime Event?

As we shall see, the details of the text answer this question.

II. The Biblical Concept of Worship

Worship is not about us. It is about what God has done and our appropriate, heartfelt response to it.

III. The Identity of the 24 Elders

The elders are not an angelic group; they represent God's people.

IV. The Meaning of the Sealed Scroll

The sealed scroll represents God's plan of salvation.

V. The Worthiness of the Lamb

The Lamb is uniquely worthy to open the scroll because of His combination of humanity and divinity.

VI. The Progression of the Five Hymns (*Rev. 4:8, 11; Rev. 5:9, 10, 12, 13*)

The progression underlines the divinity of the Lamb.

VII. The Cosmic Conflict

The conflict is the backdrop to this heavenly scene.

▶ **Life Application:** Participants are invited to consider the implications of this heavenly vision for earthly worship and for our understanding of the Sabbath.

Part II: Commentary

At the beginning of chapter 4, John is invited up to heaven for the first time (*Rev. 4:1*). Chapter 4 is a general description of the continual worship in heaven (see the textual evidence in theme I below), in which God the Father is worshiped on account of Creation (*Rev. 4:11*). But chapter 5 is a onetime crisis event in heaven. A problem is presented that seems so large that it appears as if even God Himself cannot solve it (*Rev. 5:1–4*). But the matter is resolved by the appearance of the Lamb, the God-man Jesus Christ (see theme V below). He is worshiped because He was slain and is our Redeemer, and this fact resolves the crisis in the universe (*Rev. 5:5–14*).

Main Themes of Lesson 4 Elaborated:

I. Is Revelation 4 a General Description or a Onetime Event?

Three pieces of evidence indicate that chapter 4 is not a onetime event but a general description of heavenly worship. (1) The throne in verse 2 is not set up; rather, it “was standing” (*NASB*) continually in heaven (Greek: *keitai*, imperfect tense). (2) The singing in verse 8 is not a single episode; it goes on “day and night.” (3) The singing of the four living creatures is continuously repetitive (“whenever” [*Rev. 4:9, NKJV*]).

II. The Biblical Concept of Worship

In Revelation 4:11, the basis of worship is “because” God created all things. In Revelation 5:9, worship happens “because” (*NIV*) the Lamb was slain and redeems. In Revelation 11:17, worship happens “because” (*NIV*) God has begun to reign. While often translated “for” in English, all three verses use the Greek word *hoti*, which means the reason or the basis upon which an action is taken. God is worshiped “because” of what He has done. Worship throughout the Bible is talking about, singing about, and repeating the acts that God has done (*Deut. 26:1–11; Ps. 66:3–6; Ps. 78:5–15; Ps. 111:4*). It even includes acting out the death and resurrection of Jesus through baptism (*Rom. 6:3, 4*) and the Lord’s Supper (*1 Cor. 11:26*). Worship in the Bible is not about us. Worship is about what God has done.

III. The Identity of the 24 Elders

The lesson rightly asserts that the number 12 in the Bible is often used as a

symbol of God's people and that the 24 elders could, therefore, represent God's people from both Old and New Testament times. But space did not permit mentioning the most important biblical evidence for these assertions. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus tells His disciples that they will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. This verse ties together the number 12, thrones, the apostles, and the 12 tribes. In Revelation 21:12, the names of the 12 tribes are written on the gates of the New Jerusalem, while the 12 foundations have the names of the 12 apostles written on them (*Rev. 21:14*). The number 24 adds 12 to 12, as occurs in Revelation 21. In Revelation 7:4–8, furthermore, the people of God are described in terms of 12 times 12 times 1,000 (144,000). The multiple of 12 is seen also in the height of the walls of the New Jerusalem, 144 cubits (*Rev. 21:17*). So the best explanation of the 24 elders is that they represent the people of God in both Old and New Testaments.

IV. The Meaning of the Sealed Scroll

Ask the class how many options they can think of for the meaning of the sealed scroll of Revelation 5. Some biblical options include a last will and testament, the constitution of Israel (*Deuteronomy*), a record of human history, an emblem of the Lamb's right to rule, a record of human deeds, the book of life, and a list of rewards and punishments for human behavior (judgment). Based on a comment in a letter of Ellen G. White, the lesson suggests that the scroll contains the history of God's providences and the prophetic history of the nations and the church. The lesson sums up with the conclusion that the sealed scroll represents the plan of salvation. John weeps (*Rev. 5:4*) because the plan of salvation will not be implemented unless someone is found worthy to open the scroll.

How do we know the book (*Rev. 5:2* [Greek: *biblion*]) is a scroll and not something more typical of books today? We know because the same word is used in Revelation 6:14, which says that the "sky receded as a scroll [Greek: *biblion*] when it is rolled up" (*NKJV*).

V. The Worthiness of the Lamb

The Lamb is uniquely worthy to open the scroll (*Rev. 5:5, 6*). The key qualities of the Lamb in the chapter are twofold. The Lamb is slain, which points to His human nature. On the other hand, the Lamb is worshiped along with the One sitting on the throne (*Rev. 5:13*). This points to His divinity. The God-man is unique in all history. Of all intelligent beings (see *John 1:3, 14*), only the divine-human Jesus could fully reveal the character of God and atone for human sin, because He is fully God and fully human. So, embedded in this symbolic vision is a profound Christology, a doctrine of who Jesus Christ is.

VI. The Five Hymns (*Rev. 4:8, 11; Rev. 5:9, 10, 12, 13*) Underline the Divinity of the Lamb.

The divinity of Christ is underlined in the progression of five hymns in this vision. The first two hymns praise the One sitting on the throne (*Rev. 4:8, 11*). The third and fourth hymns praise the Lamb (*Rev. 5:9–12*). The fifth hymn offers worship to both the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb (*Rev. 5:13*). The fifth hymn is the clear climax of the series, in which blessing, honor, glory, and power are acclaimed as belonging to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

A second feature of these hymns also highlights the fifth hymn. It is the climax of a grand crescendo of singing. The first hymn is sung by the four living creatures (*Rev. 4:8*). The second hymn is sung by the 24 elders (*Rev. 4:11*). The third is sung by both the four living creatures and the 24 elders (*Rev. 5:9, 10*). The fourth hymn is sung by more than 100 million angels (*Rev. 5:11, 12*). The fifth hymn is sung by every creature in the universe (*Rev. 5:13*). So the fifth hymn is the climax of a great crescendo as all attention focuses on the throne, affirming the divinity of the Lamb.

VII. The Cosmic Conflict Is the Backdrop to This Heavenly Scene.

A striking aspect of Revelation 4 and 5 is the total absence of Satan, in spite of the fact that the heavenly crisis must have something to do with the cosmic conflict (*see Rev. 2:9, 24*). But the role of Satan in Revelation 4 and 5 is clarified in Revelation 12:10. Revelation 12:10 summarizes the scene of chapter 5 in terms of Christ's coming to power. But His coming to power is paired with the casting down of Satan, the "accuser of our brothers" (*ESV*). The verse clarifies that Satan accuses the brothers "day and night." This act is strikingly reminiscent of Revelation 4:8, where the four living creatures sing the triple holy song "day and night." Their constant praise drowns out the constant accusations of Satan, which are no longer heard or seen. Satan is absent from the scene of chapters 4 and 5 because he has already been defeated and cast out on account of the Cross.

Part III: Life Application

1. Considering the biblical evidence regarding worship in theme II in the previous section, talk about the typical worship service in your local church. *Is it God-centered, or is it centered on the worshipers? Does it emphasize what God has done (Creation, the Cross, daily promptings of the Spirit) and our response to His work or what we*

must do on our own? Understanding and practicing this truth is the secret of unleashing God’s power in a local church. If worship seems powerless, it is because it is not centered in God. In Bible times, when people praised God for what He had done for them in the past, the power of God’s original act was unleashed in the worshiper’s present (2 Chron. 20:5–22, Dan. 9:15, Dan. 10:19–21). Worship is not about us; it is about God. Worship is not telling one another what we should do; it is reminding ourselves and one another of what God has done for us.

2. *What is the relationship between Revelation 4 and 5 and the Sabbath?* Worship is presented to God and the Lamb on account of Creation (Rev. 4:11) and salvation (Rev. 5:9, 10). In the Old Testament, the Sabbath is the memorial of both Creation (Exod. 20:11) and the Exodus, the great act of Israel’s salvation (Deut. 5:15). So the Sabbath points us to the mighty acts of God in Creation, the Exodus, and the Cross. Keeping the Sabbath is not about earning merit with God. When we remember the Sabbath, we also are remembering the great things God has done for us, and this remembrance is the foundation of true worship.
