

The Book of Revelation

Worthy is the Lamb

Lesson #4 for January 26, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 4&5; Ezekiel 1:5-14; Ephesians 1:20-23; Hebrews 10:12; Acts 2:32-36.

1. In Revelation 2&3, we reviewed the messages from Jesus to John about the seven churches. We saw that they not only represented the local churches present in John's day but also prophetically the different time periods down through the history of the Christian church until the second coming of Jesus.
2. In our modern world, it is common to watch newscasts coming from many different places in the same broadcast. The display simply switches from focusing on the newscaster, perhaps in Washington, D.C. or New York City, to events which are happening virtually anywhere in the world. In the book of Revelation, we see the "camera" shifting from God's people on this earth to the throne room in heaven. As we will see, that throne room includes: (1) God the Father, sitting on His throne, accompanied by (2) Jesus Christ, the Lamb, and surrounded by (3) four living creatures, (4) 24 elders, and (5) more than 100 million angels.
3. So far in the book of Revelation, the language has been fairly straightforward; we can imagine each scene as something we might have actually recognized from our own experiences here on earth. But, now we will begin to talk about things that we cannot even imagine. Four living creatures with eyes all over; a Lamb that was slain, and yet lives; etc. **We will discover that virtually all of these symbols that we read about in Revelation are taken from the Old Testament.** (Compare Revelation 4:1-8 with Ezekiel 1:26-28 and Revelation 5:11-14.)
4. Clearly, the throne room in heaven is a busy place. God's throne is also surrounded by a glorious rainbow which reminds us that God once destroyed the earth with a flood; but, He has promised never to do that again. (Genesis 9:13-16; Isaiah 54:9-10; Ezekiel 1:27-28)
5. And what are we supposed to learn from Revelation 4:1-8 and Revelation 5:11-14? Satan is not mentioned there even once. But, God's victory over Satan is the theme of celebration for the entire universe. **The central issue in the great controversy is the truth about God and the truth about Satan.** God has the right to rule because His rule of love is the only basis on which the universe can safely exist and live together in peace and harmony.
6. Read Revelation 4:8-11 and 5:9-10. In these two passages, we observe that God the Father is to be worshiped as representing the creation process. Our very existence was created by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—All working together.
7. But, there is more to celebrate than just creation. By living the life He lived and dying the death He died, Jesus Christ has accomplished salvation for every tribe, language, nation, and race. To all who accept His invitation, He is preparing a place for them to rule as priests in the heavenly kingdom. **God who was able to create the entire universe was able to create our world in six days; He has the power to restore it to its original condition and make it the eternal home for His people.**
8. Try to grasp the implications of the fact that the One who created the entire universe is the One who came to be the Lamb who was slain for our sake, who died for our sins, and who has won the great controversy by doing so.
9. Who are **the 24 elders** mentioned in Revelation 4:4? First of all, we should note that the

term *elders* is otherwise only used to describe human beings in the Bible. Angels always stand in God's presence; but, these *elders* are sitting on thrones. Revelation 3:4-5 tells us that they are wearing white robes which is the attire of God's faithful people. They wear victory crowns on their heads which is a right reserved exclusively for the victorious saints. (James 1:12)

10. Why are there 24 *elders*? *Twenty-four* in the Bible is clearly two sets of 12. The number 12 represented the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament and also the 12 disciples in the New. Thus, it seems clear that these 24 elders represent some of God's people both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And the fact that this is the first time these 24 elders are mentioned, suggests that this is a new group. They have just joined the throne room in heaven. Could they be the beings who were raised from the dead at the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ? See Matthew 27:51-53. It is important to notice that these 24 elders are some of the first ones to recognize God's fairness in all that He does and to sing His praise. If God were about to burn all His enemies—forever—in the fires of an eternally-burning hell, do you think these 24 elders and the others around the throne of God would be rejoicing and praising Him for His fairness, love, and kindness?
11. Read Revelation 5:8-10 again. Notice that these 24 elders say: "By your sacrificial death you bought for God people from every tribe, language, nation, and race.¹⁰ You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth."—*Good News Bible*.^{*} Once again, this suggests that the 24 elders are human beings.
12. Look at some additional evidence about who the 24 elders are.

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.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} 54.

13. So, who are the **four living creatures** of Revelation 4:6-8? They must be compared with the creatures mentioned in Ezekiel 1:5-14; 10:20-22; and with the Seraphim mentioned 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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Monday, January 21.

14. Where did Lucifer/Satan fit in this picture? While Revelation 4 talks all about the throne room in heaven, we find ourselves suddenly in a crisis when we come to Revelation 5:1-4.
15. It is helpful to read Isaiah 29:11-12 in studying this passage. Scrolls in ancient times were rolled up and then sealed with dabs of sealing wax to be opened only by the intended

recipient.

16. Why is that **sealed scroll** in Revelation 5:1-4 so important? Look at the following two passages from Ellen White:

Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 294.1; *Mar** 282.7.

There in His open hand lay the book, the roll of 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 107*,* 1897, p. 1-2. ("Search the Scriptures," no date); *9MR** 7.2; *Letter 65*,* 1898 - To Frederick Griggs and Franklin Howe. Written from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, Australia.); *12MR** 296.3; *Letter 65*,* 1898; *20MR** 197.2. [Bold type is added.]

17. **It seems that this sealed scroll contains not only the history of our world, but also God's future plans for that world. So, why is Christ the only Being in the whole universe worthy to open that scroll?** Are we suggesting that not even God the Father or the Holy Spirit could open it? See Revelation 5:5-7. The One who is able to open that scroll is the One who has won the great controversy by coming to this earth and living and dying as He did. It is God's answer to Satan's rebellion. Surely, the rebellion in heaven must have been a crisis. But, now we see the answers to all of Satan's accusations; the One who has given us those answers was the Son—the Lamb of God—slain from the foundation of the world.
18. Read Revelation 5:8-14. One day, the entire universe will bow down and say that God has fairly and honestly won the great controversy.
19. What does it mean to suggest that all authority has been given to Jesus Christ? See Matthew 28:18; compare Revelation 5:9.
20. We are told clearly from Revelation 5:13 and Philippians 2:10-11 that when the great controversy is over, the entire universe—not only all those who are on God's side but also all those on Satan's side—will admit that God has done everything possible to save everyone that He can. This will lead to all of them praising and honoring His holy name. Compare Ephesians 1:20-23 and Hebrews 10:12.
21. Look at the **five hymns** being sung around the throne of God. (Revelation 4:8-11; 5:9-13) Notice the crescendo of praise offered to God the Father and Jesus Christ in Revelation.

Revelation 4:8-11:⁸Each one of the **four living creatures** had six wings, and they were covered with eyes, inside and out. Day and night they never stop singing:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, who is, and who is to come."...

⁹ The **four living creatures** sing songs of glory and honour and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, who lives for ever and ever. When they do so,

¹⁰**the twenty-four elders** fall down before the one who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They throw their crowns down in front of the throne and say:

¹¹ “Our Lord and God! You are worthy to receive glory, honour, and power.

For you created all things, and by your will they were given existence and life.” —*Good News Bible** (Revelation 4:8-11).

Revelation 5:8-13: ⁸As he did so, the **four living creatures** and the **twenty-four elders** fell down before the Lamb. Each had a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. ⁹They sang a new song:

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

For you were killed, and by your sacrificial death you bought for God people from every tribe, language, nation, and race.

¹⁰ You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth.”

¹¹ Again I looked, and I heard **angels, thousands and millions of them!** They stood round the throne, the **four living creatures**, and **the elders**,

¹²and sang in a loud voice:

“The Lamb who was killed is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength, honour, glory, and praise!”

¹³And I heard **every creature in heaven, on earth, in the world below, and in the sea—all living beings in the universe**—and they were singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honour, glory and might, for ever and ever!”—*Good News Bible** (Revelation 5:8-13). [Bold type is added.]

22. Consider this description and explanation regarding the five hymns.

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. 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.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 55. [Bold type is added.]

23. Read Acts 2:32-36 and John 16. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit after He ascended to heaven. In these verses and in John 7:39, we see that promise fulfilled.
24. Read Revelation 5:6; compare the following paragraph from Ellen White.

Christ's ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. 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** 38.3-39.0.

25. Read Hebrews 4:16; 8:1. Does it give you confidence and courage and hope to know that Jesus Christ is ministering as our High Priest before God's throne in heaven?
26. Have you found that the good news about Jesus Christ and the salvation/healing He offers is a great way to reach out to others? Have you encouraged them to join God's people?
27. If we know for sure that the day is coming when we will join (1) the four living creatures, (2) the 24 elders, and (3) the millions and millions of angels in praising and honoring God the Father and the Son, shouldn't we begin that now? How can we do that?
28. Do you rejoice and praise God because He created you and has redeemed you? Do you understand clearly how the process of salvation actually takes place? Do you understand what the issues were/are in the great controversy and how they were answered? How does knowing those answers convince you to stand firmly for God's side in the great controversy?
29. So, what have we learned so far? **Revelation 4 is a general description of what John saw as he looked into the heavenly throne room. Revelation 5 begins with a crisis arising when no one could be found to unseal the scroll. But, then Jesus Christ appeared and was able to open the scroll.** Let us now review some important questions from this lesson. What is implied by the fact that everyone standing around is continually offering praise to the Father and the Son? What evidence is there that this is a continuing and ongoing process?

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*]).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 53. [Content in brackets and italic type are in the source.]

30. Luke 15:7,10 tell us clearly that there is rejoicing in heaven over one soul that repents more than over 99 righteous persons who do not need repentance. Is this one soul that repents someone from planet earth while the 99 are the inhabitants of the rest of the universe?
31. **Repeatedly, we are told in the book of Revelation (See Revelation 4:11; 5:9; 11:17.) that worship happens because God can be trusted, He has won the great controversy, and now, He is reigning unopposed in heaven.**
32. Why do we say that the Lamb is worthy? (Revelation 5:5-6) In order to save human beings and to win the great controversy in the eyes of the entire universe, God did something absolutely unexpected and remarkable; He chose to become a human Baby, live a life as an ordinary human being, conduct an earthly ministry for three and one-half years, and then die of sin while hanging on a cross. Did Satan rejoice when Jesus was born? Thus, God has made it clear that we have a choice: (1) We can choose to live a life like Jesus lived and end up living with God for eternity; or (2) We will die of sin—separated from God—as Jesus died. In our passage in Revelation 5 especially verses 5-6 and 13, we see a combination that reveals the profound Christology of Jesus Christ who was/is fully human and fully divine.
33. Remember that from the beginning of the great controversy in heaven, Lucifer/Satan has denied the divinity of Christ and demanded that he, Lucifer, be treated as equal or superior to Christ in all of His activities.
34. Why is the great controversy important? How does it impact our understanding of Revelation 4&5? It is interesting to note that we hear nothing at all about Satan in these two chapters. Why is that? Isn't he the one who started the great controversy and caused the crisis in heaven? The answer is found in Revelation 12:10 where Satan seeks to continually accuse God's people on this earth. But, how does heaven respond? There is constant "day and night" singing praise to God for the answers He has given in the great controversy; that drowns out the constant accusations of Satan. So, Satan is no longer heard.
35. Is God's name praised and honored by the way you worship in your church? Our churches are not supposed to be comfortable clubs where we gather to associate together. We go there to worship God; that worship is all about God. It is not for talking about what we have done or what we would like to do or even a time to be entertained by the pastor.
36. Look at some outstanding examples of how God has stepped in and helped His children at various times in the past. See 2 Chronicles 20:1-29; Daniel 9:15; 10:19-21.
37. So, when you worship on Sabbath, what are you thinking about? Are we praising God's name because He created us? Freed us from sin? And healed us through the salvation offered by Jesus Christ? **All of the great acts of God in Scripture are associated with the seventh-day Sabbath: (1) Creation, (2) the exodus from Egyptian slavery, celebrated at Mount Sinai, and (3) the fact that Jesus rested in the grave over the Sabbath between His crucifixion and resurrection morning.** Aren't those adequate reasons for praising the God of heaven?

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