

Revelation 4-5 Study & Teaching Notes

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In teaching Revelation, our goal, with John, is to open up unseen reality. We want people to see - to see the big picture, to see what John sees, and to catch the meaning and impact of what we see with him. It's less about cognitive processing of propositional truth, and more about being captivated by the vision. Understanding symbols and imagery will help us grasp the meaning of the vision(s), but we don't want to get too bogged down in details. We need to zoom out to see the big picture, where all the images and elements combine to tell the story and make their impression, where unseen reality counters the propaganda of Rome (then and now) and calls us to follow the victorious slain Lamb and worship the One on the throne.

We will be teaching Revelation 5.1-17 at Urbana, but these notes should help us delve into the entire literary unit of the throne room scene of Revelation 4-5. Grasping the whole section will help us better understand and teach chapter 5.

We will have taught Revelation 5 well if our group is captivated by the slain Lamb and drawn into worship, singing with the cosmos the new song, seeing the glory of his self-sacrificial love, and following him on *that* path as priestly leaders among a new global people.

Immediate context of this scene in Revelation:

Jesus' messages to the churches. Question building: How can we be victorious?! Then heaven is opened & we see God on his throne, eternal worship, victorious Jesus (w/ explanation of how he was victorious and what he accomplished for us)

Structural notes:

- This throne room scene is something of a 2nd intro/context for the book. First we see the situation of the churches from Jesus' perspective, and here a vision of God's sovereignty in heaven and history.
- This section is introduced with both "open" and "in the Spirit" (2 repeated structural cues in Rev - key shift; this is particularly significant!? Foundational?)

Handout: Revelation 4-5 in Context

Outline for time together:

- Individual work with text (observe, context/background, Qs)

- Share together what we're observing (holding on interpretation) & formulate key interpretive questions
- Work in small groups around questions, seeking to answer from text (and context)
- Large group discussion through passage, using interpretive questions
 - Interpreting significance/meaning/message for original audience
 - Implications for us → application

Images in text to (potentially) unpack:

Note: What follows is simply observation/background work to help you work interpretively with the text. It will not be possible to thoroughly unpack all these images in any study, nor would you want too much time or energy expended in doing so. But the more thoroughly you understand the imagery and symbolism at work, the better you will be able to discern what to share, and which questions and topics that arise to sit with.

- 4.1 "door standing open in heaven" - Ezek 1.1
- 4.1 "voice like a trumpet" - Rev 1.10; Ex 19.13,16,19; 20.18; Lev 25.9
 - OT: Sinai; battle; warning; worship
- 4.2ff throne (>40x in Rev) - OT: Is 6.1-8; Dan 7.9-14; Ezek 1.1-28; 2 Kings 22.19
- 4.3 rainbow - Gen 9.12-16, Ezek 1.28
- 4.4 24 elders (represent community)
 - Domitian had cadre of 24 bodyguards
 - Babylonian pantheon: 24 star-gods
 - 24 orders of priests (1 Chron 24.4-5, 25.9-13) - heavenly counterpart?
 - 12 + 12 = 24 = symbolic of entire redeemed people of God (OT + NT)
- 4.4 "dressed in white"- Rev 3.4-5 (Sardis), 18 (Laodicea)... 6.11; 7.9, 13-14; 19.14
 - Worn by Jewish priests & worshippers
 - pagan temples barred worshippers with soiled garments
- 4.4 crowns - Rev 2.10 (Smyrna)
- 4.5 "flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder"
 - Ex 19.16-19, 20.18; Ezek 1.13
 - Rev 8.5; 11.19; 16.18 (7th seal, trumpet, bowl)
- 4.5; 5.6 7 lamps = 7 spirits of God - Rev 1.12, 20; Zech 3.9-4.10
 - 7 = symbolic # of completeness, wholeness, perfection
- 4.6 "sea of glass, clear as crystal" - vs. chaos, danger, threat, evil
 - Ezek 1.22; Ps 104.3 - celestial sea? (from separated waters of Gen)
 - Reflected in Temple - 1 Kings 7.23; 1 Chron. 4.2,6
 - Baptismal font? Like Red Sea, Jordan River, great brass sea in Temple

- 4.6 4 living creatures - Ezek 1.4-11 cherubim; Is 62-3 seraphim
 - 4 = symbolic # of earthly completeness (4 winds, 4 corners, 4 cardinal directions)
 - Together represent all creation: wild beasts, domestic animals/beasts of burden, humanity, birds
- 5.1 right hand - of power, action; Rev 1.16, 20 (Jesus' right hand holds 7 stars which are the angels of 7 churches)
- 5.1-5, 9 scroll sealed w/ 7 seals - Is. 29.11-12; Ezek 2.8-3.2, Rev 10.9
 - Seals: only intended recipient has legitimate authority to open
 - Some Roman wills & contractual deeds sealed w/ 7 seals (7 witnesses)
 - Wills opened only after death
 - "writing on both sides" (5.1) - rare (recto & verso)
 - Interpretive options:
 - God's plan for history/redemption, symbolic of the destiny of the world - Ps 139:16; Is 14:24-27; Dan 8:26, 12.4; Eph 1:9-11, 2:10, 3:11
 - God's plan for judgment (note what unfolds as seals are opened in Rev 6-11)
 - The Lamb's book of life - Ps 69:28, Dan 12:1; Rev 3:5, 13:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27
- 5:5 "Lion of the tribe of Judah" - Gen 49:8-11
 - Lion = symbol of power
- 5:5 "Root of David" - Is 11:1-11 (titles messianic, combined in Dead Sea Scrolls)
- 5.5 "has triumphed" - Gr 3528 (Strong's)
 - same as "victorious" in messages to churches (8x - 2x to Laodicea)
 - 9x more in rest of Rev
 - John 16.33, Jesus: "I have overcome the world"
 - 24x by John (of 28 in NT)
 - 6x in 1 John (you have overcome the world/the evil one)
- 5:6 "Lamb...slain" - Ex 12 (esp. v. 12-13); Is 53; Jn 1:29, 36
 - Lamb = symbol of powerlessness
 - Jn 1.29, 36 (*amnos*); title used 28x (*arnion*) in Rev (only in writings of Jn)
- 5:6 "7 horns and 7 eyes" - Zech 3:9-4:10; 1.10; 6.5-7
 - Horns represent strength, authority, power
 - Eyes represent wisdom
- 5.8 "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people" - Ps 141.2; Rev 8.3
- 5.8 "harps" - OT leadership in worship (Ps 33.2, 2 Chron 5.12; 29.25; Neh 12.27), prophecy (1 Chron 25.1,6; 1 Sam 10.5)

- 5.9 “purchased”
 - like bride price or redeeming slave
 - new Lamb, new Exodus, new people (not just Israel!)
- 5.9 “persons from every tribe and language and people and nation”
 - 4-fold description – from *all* humanity
- 5.11 10,000 – largest # in Greek. 10K x 10K – innumerable.
 - Dan 7.10 hosts before God – judgment day

Chiasm of throne room scene & circles of worship in Rev 4-5:

Note: Observation of any of this may or may not come up in a group, but the teacher’s grasp of some of John’s structure can help the teacher facilitate a discussion that keeps true to John’s emphasis on the Lamb, why he is worthy, and what his death accomplished.

- Intro: One on throne (4.2-3)
- 24 elders (4.4)
 - 4 living creatures (4.6-7)
 - Creation worships God (4.8-9)
 - Elders worship God: “Worthy...” (4.9-11)
 - Scroll (sealed) in right hand of One seated on throne (5.1) ... none worthy, John weeps (5.2-3)
 - “Who is worthy...” (angel asks)
 - Lion/Lamb has conquered → worthy (5.2-6)
 - Lamb takes scroll from right hand of One seated on throne (to open it) (5.7)
 - Elders & creatures worship Lamb: “Worthy...” (5.8-10)
 - Creatures, elders, and myriad angels worship: “Worthy...” (5.11-12)
 - All creation worships God and Lamb (5.13)
 - 4 living creatures (5.14)
 - Elders (5.14)
 - Next: Lamb opens seals (6...), instigating judgment from the throne

Songs:

Note: As you teach, and as the group engages with the text, you can discern how much to delve into each/all of these. The notes below should help you, both as you explore further yourself and as you lead.

The central and key song in this section, without which your group will miss the meaning of the passage, is the new song of vs. 9-10. Wherever else you sit in this passage, you’ll want to help the group unpack that song.

- Audience: At least some of these are likely familiar worship choruses
- Context: These also function as songs of resistance (appropriating language used of emperor and re-assigning to rightful ruler of the kings of the earth)
- Literary insight: songs/poems often highlight main message (like role of chorus in Greek drama)
- 4.8 song (of 4 living creatures) - Is 6.3; Ex 3.14; Rev 1.4, 7, 8
 - Fundamental activity in cosmos: worship
 - Worship God for attributes
- 4.11 song (of 24 elders) - Dan 7.14
 - God worthy of worship because created all
 - "You are worthy" - greeting for emperor's entrance in triumphal procession
 - "Lord and God" - introduced into emperor cult by Domitian?; Jn 20.28
- 5.9 **new** song (of 4+24) - to **Jesus**, informed by his work in redemption (new thing in worship of heaven after incarnation/cross/res)
 - New songs in OT: Ps 33.3; 40.3; 96.1; 98.1; 144.9; 149.1
 - Is 42.5-17 - new song b/c new thing - new covenant
 - Center of chiasm of songs in throne room in 4-5
 - Worthy because slain and purchased people from all humanity for God
 - Purpose of redeemed humanity: kingdom and priests - serve God, reign on earth (Rev 1.5-6, 3.21, 20.6; Ex 19.5-6; Dan 7.13-14) - not just Israel!
 - "kingdom and priests" - part of primitive hymn?
 - Reign or will reign? Tense unclear
- 5.12 song (of angelic hosts) - response to angel's call in 4.2: angelic hosts praise Jesus for redemptive death; perhaps also antiphonal response to elders' praise
 - Passover celebration also lists 7 praises
 - Similar list to be said to Caesar when entered Senate chamber (DJ)
 - 4.11 God worthy to receive glory, honor, power - Jesus here worthy of same 3 (in reverse order) + 4
- 5.13 song (of *all* created beings)
 - To one on throne and Lamb
 - 4-fold praise
 - Parallel 4.8 song (eternal worship of cosmos) → song now/future/forever
- Crescendo of widening circles of worship(ers)

Key Interpretive Questions:

- Throne room: setting, description, those present, activity?
- What is the scroll?

- Why the search for someone to open it?
- Why does John weep?
- How are we to understand juxtaposition of triumphant Lion and slain Lamb?
- How does Jesus' death make him worthy?
- What did Jesus' death accomplish?
- What does it look like for us to be a kingdom and priests? To serve God and reign on the earth?

Key implications/applications for us:

- Sacrifice is the path to victory. We will be victorious same way Jesus was, as we follow slain Lamb. (apparent weakness & defeat really strength and wisdom)
 - We live/work/minister *from* victory rather than toward it - How does this impact our lives, perspectives, hope, ministry, prayer...?
 - How is Jesus calling InterVarsity to suffer, sacrifice in this season?
 - What does it look like in your (my) life right now to follow the slain Lamb?
 - Patient endurance will always involve sacrifice
- We are to be priestly leaders
 - Drawing the nations to worship God, creating space, welcoming
 - Prayer, intercession (golden bowls of incense)
 - Leading like slain Lamb - How do/will we choose to use power?
 - Worship: will we enter in? (always already in progress, and not about us)
 - Rule: God has invited us into his governing. Now and not yet.
What does this look like now? Like Jesus in world as slain Lamb. How he brings kingdom of God on earth (through his death/res & in his people)
- Perspective:
 - Throne, and One sitting on it (God in heaven)
 - Lion = Lamb that was slain (how God relates to us in our world)
 - Sea of glass (evil/chaos submitted before throne of God)
 - Eternal reality of worship
 - Center, turning point of history: Lamb was slain to purchase...

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