

# Worshipping the Lamb Who Was Slain: Revelation 4-5

Covenant Church  
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## Rev 4:1-5:14

<sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! <sup>3</sup> And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; <sup>6</sup> and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

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

<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

<sup>11</sup> “You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created.”

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; <sup>2</sup> and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>4</sup> And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

<sup>6</sup> Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> They sing a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;  
10 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,  
and they will reign on earth.”

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures  
and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full  
voice,  
“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!”

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is  
in them, singing,  
“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might  
forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

## I. Interpreting the Symbols

### 1. Old Testament background

Revelation	Old Testament
<b>Rev 4:2</b> ...there in heaven stood a throne, <i>with one seated on the throne!</i>	<b>Isa 6:1a</b> ...I saw <i>the Lord sitting on a throne</i> , high and lofty; <b>1 Kgs 22:19a</b> Then Micaiah said... I saw <b>the LORD sitting on his throne...</b> <b>Ezek. 1:26a</b> And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne... <i>seated above the likeness of a throne</i> was something that seemed like a human form.
<b>Rev 4:3b</b> ... around the throne is <i>a rainbow</i> that looks like an emerald.	<b>Ezek 1:28</b> <i>Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day</i> , such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.
<b>Rev 4:5a</b> Coming from the throne are <i>flashes of lightning</i> , and rumblings and peals of thunder...	<b>Exod 19:16a</b> On the morning of the third day there was <i>thunder and lightning</i> , as well as a thick cloud on the mountain... <b>Ezek 1:13b</b> ... <i>lightning</i> issued from the fire <b>Dan 7:10a</b> <i>A stream of fire</i> issued / and flowed out from his presence.
<b>Rev 4:6a</b> ...and in front of the throne there is something like <i>a sea of glass</i> , like crystal.	<b>1 Kgs 7:23a/ 2 Chr 4:2a</b> Then [Solomon] made <i>the molten sea</i> ... (cf. vv. 23b-26; 2b-5)
<b>Rev 4:6b-7</b> Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are <i>four living creatures</i> , full of eyes in front and behind: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the first living creature like <i>a lion</i>,</li> <li>• the second living creature like <i>an ox</i>,</li> <li>• the third living creature with a face like <i>a human face</i>,</li> <li>• and the fourth living creature like a flying <i>eagle</i>.</li> </ul>	<b>Ezek 1:5a</b> In the middle of it was something like <i>four living creatures</i> ... <b>Ezek 1:10</b> As for the appearance of their faces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the four had the face of <i>a human being</i>,</li> <li>• the face of <i>a lion</i> on the right side,</li> <li>• the face of <i>an ox</i> on the left side,</li> <li>• and the face of an <i>eagle</i>;</li> </ul>

<p><b>Rev 4:8a</b> And the four living creatures,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>each of them with six wings,</i></li> <li>• are <i>full of eyes all around</i> and inside.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Isa 6:2a</b> Seraphs were in attendance above him; <i>each had six wings...</i></p> <p><b>Ezek 1:18b</b> ...the rims of all four [wheels] were <i>full of eyes all around</i></p>
<p><b>Rev 4:8b</b> ...“<i>Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty...</i>”</p>	<p><b>Isa 6:3b</b> “<i>Holy, holy, holy</i> is <i>the LORD</i> of hosts...”</p>
<p><b>Rev 5:1</b> Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne <i>a scroll</i> written on the inside and on the back, <i>sealed</i> with seven seals</p>	<p><b>Is. 29:11</b> The vision of all this has become for you like <i>the words of a sealed document</i>. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, “Read this,” they say, “We cannot, for <i>it is sealed</i>.”...</p>
<p><b>Rev 5:5b</b> See,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>the Lion of the tribe of Judah,</i></li> <li>• <i>the Root of David</i></li> </ul> <p>has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.</p>	<p><b>Gen 49:9-10</b> <i>Judah is a lion’s whelp</i>; / ...He crouches down, he stretches out <i>like a lion...</i></p> <p><b>Isa 11:1</b> A shoot shall come out from <i>the stump of Jesse</i>, / and a branch shall grow out of <i>his roots</i>.</p>
<p><b>Rev 5:9b-10</b> “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and <i>language and people and nation</i>; you have made them to be <i>a kingdom</i> and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”</p>	<p><b>Dan 7:14b</b> To [the one like a Son of Man] was given dominion and glory and kingship, that <i>all peoples, nations, and languages</i> should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and <i>his kingship</i> is one that shall never be destroyed.</p>
<p><b>Rev 5:11</b> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and <i>thousands of thousands...</i></p>	<p><b>Dan 7:10b</b> <i>A thousand thousands</i> served him, / and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.</p>

## 2. Interpreting the Symbols

a. “The first voice... like a trumpet” = Jesus (*1:10-18 tells us this!*)

b. Twenty-four elders = the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles

**Rev 21:12-14** [The new Jerusalem] has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of *the twelve tribes of the Israelites*; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are *the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*.

c. “Something like a sea of glass, like crystal” = the metal sea for purification in Solomon’s Temple (1 Kgs 7:23a/ 2 Chr 4:2a)? Baptism?

d. Four living creatures—each with six wings and full of eyes = “what is the noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in creation”?<sup>1</sup>

e. Scroll = the book of the eternal decrees of God” or the “Book of Destiny”<sup>2</sup>

f. “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” = David’s descendent who will rule forever, i.e., Jesus (Gen 49:9-10; Isa 11:1)

<sup>1</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 50. See also Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988: 62.

<sup>2</sup> Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 52; Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994: 28. All scriptural cross-references here are from Talbert.

- g. A slaughtered Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes = A perfectly-powerful, all-knowing, crucified(-and-resurrected) Jesus

### A Lamb

The Passover Lamb in **Exodus 12**?

**Isa 53:7** He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

Seven eyes = “the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (5:6 *tells us this!*), which themselves represent God’s “perfect knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>

In Zechariah 4, Zechariah, led by an angel, sees a golden lampstand with seven lamps on it, each with seven “lips” (4:2). Interpreting this imagery, the angel informs Zechariah that “These seven”—it is not entirely clear to which seven he is referring—are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth” (4:10).

Seven horns = “perfect power”

For “horns” being used metaphorically to “gore” someone militarily, see Deut 33:17; 1 Kgs 22:11.<sup>4</sup>

- h. Golden bowls full of incense = the prayers of the saints (5:8 *tells us this!*)

3. Interpretive takeaway: **Look to (a) Revelation’s own interpretations, (b) Old Testament imagery, (c) contemporary Jewish apocalyptic imagery, and (d) internal cross-references rather than to 21st century realities!**

Again, Revelation is not most faithfully read as a cryptogram!

## II. Worship

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### A. Nature of Worship

1. Selfless, uncontainable/escalating, joyful/singing

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<sup>3</sup> Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 29; cf. also Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 53 (“complete power”).

	Song 1 To the Lord	Song 2 To the Lord	Song 3 To the Lamb	Song 4 To the Lamb	Song 5 To the Lord and the Lamb
<b>Singers</b>	4 living creatures	24 elders	4 living creatures and 24 elders	4 living creatures and 24 elders and “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” of angels	“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them”
<b>Attribute...</b>	“Holy, holy, holy,	“You are worthy,	“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,	“Worthy is	
<b>To...</b>	the Lord God the Almighty,	our Lord and God,	[implicitly the Lamb]	the Lamb that was slaughtered	“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
<b>Ascribing...</b>		to receive <b>glory</b> and <i>honor</i> and <u>power</u> ,		to receive <u>power</u> and wealth and wisdom and might and <i>honor</i> and <b>glory</b> and blessing!”	be blessing and <i>honor</i> and <b>glory</b> and might forever and ever!”
<b>Because...</b>	who was and is and is to come.”	<i>for</i> you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”	<i>for</i> you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”		

2. Praising the Father and Son (and Spirit)

3. All (!?) creation

**Rom 8:19-23** For *the creation* waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that *the creation* itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that *the whole creation* has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

“Worship that scorns creation is impoverished... In worship every sign of life and every impulse to holiness, every bit of beauty and every spark of vitality—Hebrew patriarchs, Christian apostles, wild animals, domesticated livestock, human beings, soaring birds—are arranged around this throne center that pulses light, showing each at its best, picking up all the colors of the spectrum in order to show off the glories.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 62.

“This communion of saints is not just the fellowship we enjoy with other people during a service of worship, but it includes also the idea that John expresses here—the unity of worship of the church militant on earth with that of the church triumphant in heaven. The prayers of believers here on earth are mingled with the worship of angels and archangels and all the host of heaven, in adoration of God and the Lamb.”<sup>6</sup>

## B. The Real Beneath the “Real”—Even Despite All (Agonizing/Impossible!) Appearances

### **Pulling Back the Veil**

“This is St. John’s word: he takes the old, everyday things of creation and salvation, of Father, Son, and Spirit, of world and flesh and devil that we take for granted, and forces us to look at them and experience again (or maybe for the first time) their reality.”<sup>7</sup>

“St. John’s vision shows his congregations that what they are presently doing in worship corresponds to what presently takes place at the very heart of things, heaven.”<sup>8</sup>

“Christians worship with a conviction that they are in the presence of God.... Outsiders, observing these acts of worship, see nothing like that. They see a few people singing unpopular songs, sometimes off-key, someone reading from an old book and making remarks that may or may not interest the listeners, and then eating and drinking small portions of bread and wine that are supposed to give nourishment to their eternal souls in the same way that beef and potatoes sustain their moral flesh. Who is right?”<sup>9</sup>

### **Redefine Reality—Who Is Really in Charge**

“John is pulling back the curtain and showing his reader the true locus of the world’s power’—and who is really ‘Lord and God’ (4:11).”<sup>10</sup>

“The worship of God is the heartbeat of the cosmos, even when we humans on earth do not see it, participate in it, or value it.”<sup>11</sup>

“The contrast between the pitiful plight of the church on earth conveyed by 2:1-3:22 and the awesome majesty of God and the Lamb portrayed in 4:1-5:11 is stark. It is in light of the latter that Christians should hear the words of 6:1-8:1. A merciful God is in control!”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books: 106 (quoting Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*. Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2001: 92).

<sup>11</sup> Gorman, *Reading Revelation*, 107.

<sup>12</sup> Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 30.

### III. Lamb Power

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“The shock of this reversal discloses the central mystery of the Apocalypse: God overcomes the world not through a show of force but through the suffering and death of Jesus, ‘the faithful witness’... Rome rules by the power of violence, but the one who is the true King of Kings and Lord of lords rules by virtue of his submission to death—precisely the opposite of armed violence against the Empire. That is why he alone is worthy.”<sup>13</sup>

“What follows is altogether unexpected. John looked to see the Lion, the king of beasts, and instead he sees a Lamb with the marks of slaughter upon it (5:6)! He looked to see power and force, by which the enemies of his faith would be destroyed, and he sees sacrificial love and gentleness as the way to win the victory. The might of Christ is the power of love.”<sup>14</sup>

“Revelation provides us with a complete deconstruction and reconstruction of our symbolic and narrative universe, our understanding of God, our understanding of power, our understanding of victory. Why? Not Caesar, but the slaughtered Lamb, is Lord of all!”<sup>15</sup>

**Rev 12:10-11** Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.

“It is no coincidence that the most powerful modern readings of Revelation have come from interpreters in socially marginalized positions who are seeking to call the church to countercultural resistance movements... Something very strange happens when this text is appropriated by readers in a comfortable, powerful, majority community: it becomes a gold mine for paranoid fantasies and for those who want to preach revenge and destruction.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996: 174-75.

<sup>14</sup> Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Gorman, *Reading Revelation*, 114.

<sup>16</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 183.