

THE UNVEILING

Session 4

The Throne and the Lamb

Revelation 4–5

A Fourteen-Session Inductive Study for Young Adults

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. (Revelation 5:12, RSV2CE)

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group walks through the open door of 4:1 into heaven's throne room and discovers two things: that what happens there is a liturgy, structured worship with hymns, white robes, incense, and prostrations, and that at its center stands the book's great paradox: John hears of a Lion and turns to see a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.

Catholic Touchstone. Revelation 4–5 is the most complete picture of heaven's worship in all of Scripture, and at its center is not an idea but a slain and standing Lamb. Leader, hold this to yourself: the Church's doctrinal reading of these chapters (CCC 1090; 1137–1139) is the warrant of the Session 9 Assembly. Read those paragraphs now and keep them entirely in reserve until that night; teach heaven's worship at full strength tonight and name no Mass connection.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 4 shows the throne; chapter 5 shows the Lamb. Hold them together: the session is one vision in two movements, and the whole rest of the book unfolds from this room.

Nearly every furnishing of chapter 4 comes from the Old Testament throne visions. The One seated, described only as light and gemstone (no form is given: Jewish reticence about depicting God is fully intact), the rainbow recalling the covenant with Noah, the sea of glass, the torches, the four living creatures with faces of lion, ox, man, and eagle: Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6 supply the parts, and your group will find them tonight. The twenty-four elders (*presbyteroi*, the Greek word behind the English priest) wear white and gold crowns; twenty-four is most naturally twelve plus twelve, the tribes and the apostles, the whole people of God of both covenants, and twenty-four was also the number of the priestly divisions David appointed (1 Chronicles 24). The elders do priestly things: they fall down, they cast crowns, and in 5:8 they hold harps and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, presenting the prayers of God's people before the throne.

The worship is antiphonal and escalating: the four creatures sing the thrice-holy (4:8, from Isaiah 6:3, the hymn the Church sings at every Mass as the Sanctus); the elders answer (4:11); then in chapter 5 a new song to the Lamb (5:9–10), then myriads of angels (5:11–12), then every creature in heaven and on earth (5:13), and the creatures seal it with the liturgical word: Amen (5:14). Worship in this book is not spontaneous chaos; it is ordered, communal, and cosmic.

Chapter 5 turns on a scroll sealed with seven seals: God's plan, which no one in creation is worthy to open. John weeps. Then the great pivot of the whole book: one of the elders says, Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered (5:5), titles straight from Genesis 49 and Isaiah 11. John looks for the Lion, and what he sees is a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain (5:6). He hears Lion; he sees Lamb. The conquering promised in the letters (to him who conquers) is defined here once for all: Christ conquered by being slain. How Christ and his saints conquer in this book is by self-giving sacrifice, and every later vision of judgment must be read with this one in view, without dissolving the book's real teaching on divine justice. The Lamb is standing (risen) yet bears the marks of slaughter (the sacrifice is perpetually present before God); the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 and the servant led like a lamb to the slaughter in Isaiah 53 stand behind the image.

Say plainly what the new song celebrates: by thy blood thou didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God (5:9–10). The universal Church, purchased by the blood of the Lamb, made a priestly people: this is the vision's payoff, and it is why the Church has heard her own Eucharistic worship in these chapters from early centuries.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Isaiah 6:1–3: the enthroned Lord, the seraphim, and Holy, holy, holy. Revelation 4:8 takes up the hymn; the Church sings it at every Mass. Discovery passage tonight.
- Ezekiel 1:5–10, 26–28: the four living creatures and the rainbow radiance around the throne. Discovery passage tonight.
- Genesis 49:9–10: Judah is a lion's whelp; the scepter shall not depart from Judah. Revelation 5:5 names Christ the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
- Isaiah 11:1, 10: the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the root of Jesse; Revelation 5:5 calls Christ the Root of David.
- Exodus 12:3–13: the Passover lamb, whose blood delivers; Isaiah 53:7: like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. Revelation 5:6 fuses them in the slain, standing Lamb.
- 1 Chronicles 24:1–19: the twenty-four priestly divisions; background to the twenty-four elders.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies* (summary)

Writing in the second century, St. Irenaeus taught, in substance, that the four living creatures around the throne correspond to the fourfold Gospel: lion, ox, man, and eagle picture the one Christ proclaimed by four evangelists. The creatures who never cease their hymn are, for the Church's oldest readers, a portrait of the whole of revelation gathered into praise.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God*, Book 22 (summary)

At the very end of the *City of God*, St. Augustine describes, in substance, the life of the world to come as one unending Sabbath of praise: there we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise; this is what shall be in the end without end. Revelation 4 and 5 show that praise already sounding: what Augustine awaited, John was shown.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies*, Book 3

St. Irenaeus links the four living creatures with the fourfold Gospel: as the cherubim have four faces, so the Gospel is given to the Church in four forms, one Gospel held together by one Spirit. St. Irenaeus is the early witness to linking creatures and Gospels; the now-familiar emblem assignments settled later in the tradition. It is a family memory worth telling: the Church has been praying inside Revelation 4 almost from the beginning.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1090: in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey. The single most important paragraph for this session.
- CCC 1137–1139: the Catechism's own reading of Revelation 4–5: the throne, the Lamb standing as though slain, and all who take part in the Church's liturgy already sharing in the liturgy of heaven.

- CCC 956: the saints in heaven do not cease to intercede for us with the Father. The golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (5:8), show that intercession in image; mark the application as ours, but the paragraph's teaching is exactly this.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Furniture of Heaven, the densest night (silent): Holy, holy, holy (4:8); the twenty-four elders in white with golden crowns (4:4); the sea of glass (4:6); the prostrations (4:10; 5:8, 14); the golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (5:8); the Lamb standing as though slain (5:6); Worthy is the Lamb; the new song (5:9); the Amen (5:14). Teach the throne room's worship at full strength as heaven's worship, and teach the intercession doctrine of 5:8 fully: the doctrine is not the secret; the shape of the list is. Name no Mass connection tonight. If anyone names one, smile, have them write it down, and keep it for Session 9.

Lamb thread planted at its source tonight: heard Lion, saw Lamb. The hear-then-see pattern returns in Session 6 (hears 144,000, sees a countless multitude); do not point it out yet.

Prayers-of-the-saints thread planted (5:8): incense bowls. It develops in Session 7 (8:3–4) and grounds the Dig Deeper on intercession.

Scroll: opened seal by seal starting next session. If asked what the scroll is, honest answer: the book never labels it; God's plan or God's covenant decree are the common readings, held with open hands.

No mention of the sealed guess until Session 8.

Session Goals

1. The group assembles the throne room from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 by opening the passages themselves.
2. The group discovers the hear-Lion, see-Lamb pivot and can state what it defines: conquering means self-giving sacrifice.
3. The group can describe heaven's worship precisely: antiphonal, embodied, vested, unceasing, and scripted.
4. The group can explain the twenty-four elders and the bowls of incense as the praying, priestly people of God.
5. Each participant takes the thrice-holy hymn (4:8) as their first prayer of each morning this week.

Timed Plan (75–90 minutes)

- Opening prayer: 5 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build (Revelation 4–5, with discovery passages): 45–55 min
- Send questions: 8 min
- Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer, distribute Take-Home 4: 7–10 min

Pre-chosen cuts if time runs short: drop the Dig Deeper box, and take Question 5 (the elders) as leader input rather than discussion.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of hosts: heaven and earth are full of your glory. Open the door for us tonight as you opened it for John; let us see the throne, and the Lamb, and our own prayers rising like incense before you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Describe the most awe-inspiring room or place you have ever walked into. What made it feel that way?
2. When you picture worship in heaven, what do you honestly imagine? Where did that picture come from?

Build

Read Revelation 4 aloud.

3. John's throne room is furnished almost entirely from older visions. Discovery: one group open Isaiah 6:1–3, the other Ezekiel 1:5–10 and 1:26–28. What did John's first hearers, who knew these texts, recognize in Revelation 4?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

From Isaiah 6: the enthroned Lord high and lifted up, the six-winged creatures, and the hymn itself, Holy, holy, holy. From Ezekiel 1: the four living creatures with the faces of lion, ox, man, and eagle; the gleaming, gemlike radiance; the rainbow brightness around the throne. John is saying: the God of Isaiah and Ezekiel is the God on this throne, and the covenant rainbow of Noah still circles it. Notice also what is not described: the One seated has no form, only light and precious stone. Even in heaven's throne room, God is not reduced to an image.

4. Look at how the worship of chapter 4 actually works: who sings first (4:8), who responds (4:9–11), what do they do with their bodies and their crowns? Is this worship spontaneous or structured? What does the structure seem to do for the worshipers: constrain them, or carry them?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It is thoroughly structured: antiphonal (creatures sing, elders answer), embodied (they fall down, they cast their crowns), robed in white (vestment-like imagery), unceasing, and scripted: the same hymn day and night. The Amen seals it at 5:14; incense fills golden bowls at 5:8 and will rise from the altar at 8:3–4. Structure here is not deadness but glory: form is what lets many voices become one, and fixed words are never empty when they are true and the hearts are in them. (Leader: if anyone says aloud where else they have sung these words, smile, have them write it down, and keep it for Session 9.)

Read Revelation 5 aloud.

5. A sealed scroll, and no one worthy to open it: John weeps (5:4). Then the elder announces the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (5:5). Discovery: open Genesis 49:9–10 and Isaiah 11:1, 10. What do these titles promise? Then read 5:6 slowly: what does John actually see when he turns to look at the Lion?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The titles are the oldest royal promises in Scripture: the scepter that will not depart from Judah's lion, the root of Jesse from which the true King grows. John hears the announcement of a conquering Lion, turns, and sees a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. He hears Lion; he sees Lamb. This is the interpretive key to the entire book: the conquering happened at the cross. The Lamb is standing (risen, alive) and yet bears the marks of slaughter (the sacrifice remains eternally present and effective before God). Every promise to him who conquers in chapters 2–3 now has its definition: conquering looks like Christ, which means it can look like losing. Behind the image stand the Passover lamb whose blood delivered Israel (Exodus 12) and the servant led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).

6. Read the new song (5:9–10). What did the Lamb's blood accomplish, for whom, and what did it make them? Where have we heard that last phrase before?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

By his blood he ransomed people for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation: the Church is universal by purchase, catholic in the oldest sense. And he made them a kingdom and priests to our God: the very words of Revelation 1:6 and Exodus 19:6, now sung in heaven. The priestly people theme is no longer a greeting; it is the content of heaven's newest hymn. Then watch the worship expand in rings: creatures and elders (5:8), myriads of angels (5:11), every creature everywhere (5:13), until the four creatures say Amen (5:14). The worship of the Lamb is headed toward being cosmic.

7. The twenty-four elders: white robes, golden crowns, harps, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (4:4; 5:8). The Greek for elder is *presbyteros*, the word behind the English priest. Who might the twenty-four be, and what are they doing with the prayers?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Twenty-four is most naturally twelve plus twelve: the tribes and the apostles, the whole people of God of both covenants; it was also the number of the priestly courses David established (1 Chronicles 24). Hold the identification with open hands (the text does not label them), but the picture is strongly priestly: a worshiping company, white-robed and crowned, and they hold the prayers of the saints before the throne as incense in golden bowls (the offering and rising come at 8:3–4). Prayer on earth does not evaporate; it is present before God in heaven's liturgy. This is the biblical picture behind the Catholic confidence that the saints in heaven intercede for us (CCC 956), and it develops further in a few chapters; keep your eye on the incense.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IS STRUCTURED WORSHIP MAN-MADE DEADNESS?

Present this at full strength before answering. A sincere Christian might argue: Jesus warned against heaping up empty phrases; true worship is in spirit and truth, from the heart, led freely by the Spirit. Scripted prayers, vestments, incense, bowing on cue: that is exactly the man-made ritual that smothers living faith. (Many Protestants, to be fair, worship liturgically; this objection lives in the low-church conviction that Scripture authorizes only spontaneous, word-centered worship.) Churches of fixed words repeated week after week practice exactly the kind of worship the New Testament liberated us from.

8. What is right in that concern? And what have we just seen with our own eyes in Revelation 4–5?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

What is right: ritual can go dead. Our Lord did warn against empty phrases and honoring God with lips while hearts are far away; Sardis proved last session that a church can keep the forms and lose the life. No Catholic should wave that off; the danger is real, and the answer to dead ritual is living

ritual, not no ritual.

But look at what heaven does. The most Spirit-filled worship in existence, worship with no fallen hearts in it at all, is structured, repetitive, antiphonal, vested, postured, and full of incense. Repetition did not deaden the seraphim. The creatures never cease to sing the same hymn, and it is never empty, because the words are true and the hearts are in them. Structured worship at its best is rooted in Christ's own work and heaven's worship; fixed forms legitimately develop under lawful authority, and their heart is joining a praise larger than ourselves. Whether particular rites and claims are warranted is a further question our companion volumes take up; what tonight settles is that structure, repetition, and ceremony are not the enemies of Spirit-filled worship, since heaven itself worships this way. The real question the objection leaves us with is not whether to have liturgy but whether to bring our hearts to it, and that question Revelation asks every worshiper as sharply as anyone.

DIG DEEPER

Worthy is the Lamb, and worship belongs to God alone. Notice that the Lamb receives the same worship as the One on the throne: every creature blesses him who sits upon the throne and the Lamb together (5:13), and the creatures' Amen falls on both. In a book fierce against idolatry (later an angel will twice refuse John's worship: worship God), this shared worship, and finally shared throne (3:21; 22:1, 3), is a quiet, massive claim: the Lamb belongs on the Creator's side of the line. The Church's confession of Christ's full divinity is not imported into Revelation; it is sung there.

Send

9. Heaven's worship is unceasing, embodied, and unashamed. What one habit of your own worship: posture, attention, preparation, could you bring one degree closer to the room you saw tonight?
10. Where in your life right now do you need the hear-Lion, see-Lamb lesson: that God's way of conquering can look like sacrifice, patience, or apparent defeat?

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, pray Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come (4:8) aloud as your first words of the day.
- Once this week, bring one specific worry to prayer and picture 5:8: your prayer in a golden bowl, presented before the throne.
- Read Revelation 6 in preparation for next session.
- Memorize the memory verse below.

Memory Verse

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:12, RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. Lamb of God, who was slain and who stands, teach us your way of conquering. gather our prayers into the golden bowls, and bring us, with all your ransomed people, to the worship that never ends. Amen.

Distribute Take-Home 4 as people leave.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 4, in order:

- Revelation 4 (read aloud)
- Isaiah 6:1–3 (discovery, group A)
- Ezekiel 1:5–10, 26–28 (discovery, group B)
- Revelation 5 (read aloud)
- Genesis 49:9–10 (discovery)
- Isaiah 11:1, 10 (discovery)
- Exodus 12:3–13 and Isaiah 53:7 (leader background, the slain Lamb)
- 1 Chronicles 24:1–19 (leader background, twenty-four courses)
- Memory verse: Revelation 5:12