

Small Group Bible Study Guide: Revelation 4–5

The Throne, the Empire, and the Slain Lamb

Opening Orientation (Leader or Group Member Reads Aloud)

“Revelation is a prophetic unveiling that calls the church to faithful witness under pressure, exposes the true nature of empire and evil, and forms the people of God through worship, endurance, and hope.”

Revelation was written to churches living under the shadow of the Roman Empire. Rome presented itself as eternal, sovereign, and worthy of worship. Emperor Domitian, in particular, demanded to be addressed as “*Lord and God*.”

Revelation 4 and 5 show us what is really true—not from earth’s perspective, but from heaven’s.

“In chapter 4 and 5, before we see chaos on earth, we are shown sovereignty in heaven.”

Part 1: The Throne in Heaven (Revelation 4:1–11)

Read Revelation 4:1–11 together

Observation Questions

1. What is the central object in this chapter? What word is repeated most often?
 2. What details describe the one seated on the throne? What do you notice is *missing* from the description?
 3. Who surrounds the throne, and what are they doing?
 4. What is the repeated message of their worship?
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Interpretation: Why This Would Challenge Roman Imperial Claims

Many scholars believe John's vision intentionally echoes and confronts Roman imperial imagery.

In Domitian's time:

- Domitian demanded to be called “**Lord and God.**”
- He sat on a throne surrounded by officials and attendants.
- He presented himself as the ruler of the world.
- Coins depicted him with divine imagery, radiance, and authority.

Yet John describes the true throne—not in Rome, but in heaven.

Discussion Questions

5. Why do you think Revelation emphasizes the throne before showing any earthly events?

“Revelation begins not with beasts or timelines, but with Jesus walking among his churches, calling them to faithful witness under pressure.”

6. How would this vision encourage Christians living under Roman oppression?
 7. What modern systems, governments, or powers today claim ultimate authority over people’s lives?
 8. How does this vision challenge the idea that earthly powers are ultimate?
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Theological Insight (Bauckham)

Richard Bauckham writes:

“The worship of God in heaven reveals who truly governs history, regardless of appearances on earth.”

Discuss:

9. Why is worship central to understanding reality in Revelation?
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Part 2: The Crisis of the Scroll (Revelation 5:1–5)

Read Revelation 5:1–5 together

Observation Questions

10. What is in the right hand of the one on the throne?

11. Why is no one able to open it?
 12. How does John react?
 13. What is the Lion of Judah expected to do?
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Interpretation

The scroll represents God's plan for justice, restoration, and the future of the world.

But there is a crisis: no one seems worthy to bring justice.

Discussion Questions

14. Why do you think John weeps?
15. What does this reveal about humanity's inability to fix the world?
16. If you were expecting a rescuer, what kind of figure would you expect?

"We expect that our rescuer will match power with power; that the one who will save us will be able to out-muscle our oppressor."

Part 3: The Shocking Revelation of the Lamb

Read Revelation 5:6–10 together

Observation Question

17. What does John actually see when he turns to look at the Lion?
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This is the central shock of Revelation.

The Lion is the Lamb. The conqueror is the slain one.

"We do not expect a baby sheep! Especially one that has been killed by the power of our oppressor."

Discussion Questions

18. Why is it shocking that the Lion appears as a slain Lamb?
 19. What does the Lamb's death reveal about how God exercises power?
 20. Why is the Lamb worthy?
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Empire vs Kingdom Contrast Discussion

Read aloud:

Empire: dominates, threatens, kills, demands allegiance, controls by fear
Kingdom of God: serves, loves, redeems, governs by love

21. How does Rome represent the kind of power described as "Empire"?
 22. How does Jesus represent the kind of power described as "Kingdom"?
 23. Why would this message be both comforting and challenging to early Christians?
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Theological Insight (Darrell Johnson)

Darrell Johnson writes:

"The Lion conquers by becoming the Lamb."

Discuss:

24. What does this mean practically?
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Part 4: The Worship of the Lamb

Read Revelation 5:11–14 together

Observation Questions

25. Who is worshiped in this passage?

26. How widespread is the worship?

27. What does this say about Jesus' authority?

Key Theological Truth

The same worship given to God in chapter 4 is now given to the Lamb in chapter 5.

This is a radical claim. Jesus—not Caesar—is Lord.

Discussion Questions

28. Why is worship such a powerful act of resistance?

29. Why would Rome see Christian worship as threatening?

30. What does this passage teach about who truly rules the world?

Part 5: Redefining Power

Read aloud:

Empire: sword, coercion, threats, spectacle

Kingdom of God: self-giving love, sacrifice, truth, life for all

“The Lamb is not merely the means to power — the Lamb is the definition of power.”

Discussion Questions

31. How does Jesus redefine power?

32. Why is sacrificial love stronger than coercion in God's kingdom?

33. Where do you see “Empire-style power” in today's world?

34. Where do you see “Lamb-style power”?

35. Which kind of power do you find yourself trusting more?

Personal Reflection and Application

36. What fears or pressures in your life make it hard to trust that Jesus is truly in control?
37. How does the vision of the throne and the Lamb encourage you?
38. What would it look like to follow the Lamb in your daily life?
39. Where might Jesus be calling you to choose faithful witness instead of fear?

Closing Reflection (Read Aloud)

Before Revelation shows us beasts rising from the sea, it shows us the throne.

Before Revelation shows us evil at work on earth, it shows us sovereignty in heaven.

Before Revelation shows us conquering, it shows us a Lamb that was slain.

Because the Lamb is not merely the means to power.

The Lamb is the definition of power.

Closing Prayer

Invite participants to pray, thanking Jesus for his sovereign authority and asking for courage to live faithfully under his reign.