

April 29
Lesson 9 (NIV)

BLESSING, GLORY, HONOR FOREVER

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Philippians 2:1-11](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Revelation 5:6-14](#)

REVELATION 5:6-14

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

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

KEY VERSE

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”—[Revelation 5:12](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the makeup of the expanding numbers of worshippers in Heaven.
2. Explain why the Lamb is worthy of worship.
3. Specify how his or her church can better fulfill the calling of Christians to be “kings and priests.”

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Destiny or Deity?
- B. Lesson Background

I. Seeing the Lamb ([REVELATION 5:6-8](#))

- A. Standing in the Midst ([v. 6](#))

B. Taking the Scroll (vv. 7, 8)

Who Holds the Future?

II. Singing a New Song (REVELATION 5:9, 10)

A. Worthy Lamb (v. 9)

The Diverse Church United

B. Exalted Followers (v. 10)

III. Worshipping with Hosts (REVELATION 5:11-14)

A. Countless Angels (vv. 11, 12)

B. Countless Creatures (v. 13)

C. Additional Praise (v. 14)

Conclusion

A. God's Position

B. Humanity's Obligation

C. Prayer

D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Destiny or Deity?

Many religious beliefs feature a strong sense of destiny, of divine control over the lives of humans. In the Greek mythological world of Mount Olympus, familiar to the first readers of Revelation, this was personified by the three goddesses of fate: one who spins the thread of life, one who allots the number of life's days, and one who cuts the thread of life at the time of death. The Greeks and Romans also believed in Fortuna, the goddess who determined a person's destiny, whether prosperous or disastrous.

The Bible presents God as sovereign; he declares, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isaiah 46:10). God's plans are not to be thwarted, for he has the power to carry out his will in all things (Proverbs 19:21). Yet God allows humans to devise and carry out their own plans for life, reserving for himself the final say on the outcomes (Proverbs 16:9). Unlike the capricious and unpredictable actions of the goddesses of fate or Fortuna, the Lord's will works with human wills for God's desired outcomes. These outcomes are always and utterly consistent with God's unchanging nature.

Today's lesson considers the ultimate outcome that God ensures will happen. In chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, John sees the Lord seated on his heavenly throne. In God's hand is a scroll sealed with seven seals; the opening of this scroll reveals the future, the events that "must take place after this" (Revelation 4:1, last week's lesson).

B. Lesson Background

Revelation 4 begins John's vision of the throne room of Heaven. John describes its majestic features and residents, including the living creatures who lead worship and the elders who bow in worship. The chapter ends with a song praising the worthiness of the Lord God to receive worship. This is based on God's being the one who creates and sustains all things. Chapter 5 begins with John's observation of a new detail: in the hand of the one seated on the throne (God) is an unusual scroll, unusual for two reasons.

First, it has writing on both sides, which is not the standard practice. The scroll is likely made of treated animal skins. With such scrolls it was much easier to write on the "flesh" side than the "hair" side. Writing on both sides gives the impression of the scroll overflowing with important information.

Second, the scroll has seven seals instead of the usual one seal. These are wax seals affixed by God himself. They can be broken only by one who has proper authority. Consequently, a search throughout Heaven attempts to find one worthy to open this scroll. Initially, no one with suitable authority is found. This disappoints John, and we are told that his disappointment moves him to tears (Revelation 5:4). John wants, even needs, to know what the words of the scroll reveal. He understands that this is why he has been granted access to Heaven, for the scroll will reveal what will take place on earth (4:1). Something seems wrong, even in Heaven, and John's sadness overwhelms him.

But all is not lost. One of the elders from the group near the throne tells John not to weep. The one who can break the seals, open the scroll, and reveal its secrets is arriving. This is the conquering Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5), Jesus, but he is also the Lamb; and his appearance begins our lesson for this week.

I. Seeing the Lamb

(REVELATION 5:6-8)

A. Standing in the Midst (v. 6)

6a. Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

The four living creatures and the elders are nothing new to John at this point (see last week's lesson). But the figure *standing at the center of the throne* is new. This newcomer is at the center of everything, the focus of Heaven and its residents. John's description of this figure contains important symbolic truth.

First, the figure is that of a *Lamb*, a favored sacrificial animal in biblical teaching. Readers are reminded of the words of John the Baptist: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36; compare 1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Second, John includes the puzzling detail that the Lamb looks *as if it had been slain*. This does not mean that the Lamb exhibits a deathly pallor, but that it has evidence of a horrendous wound. It is the kind of wound that no living creature should have survived. The Lamb is not dead, though, or else the entire episode would make no sense. This is John's way of saying that the Lamb had been dead but is now alive again—a reference to the resurrected Christ.

6b. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

The description of the Lamb combines the number *seven* (the symbol of perfection or completeness; see Revelation 15:1, 8) with *horns* (the symbol of power; see Daniel 8:7-9) and *eyes* (the symbol of divine knowledge; 2 Chronicles 16:9). The Lamb has perfect and undisputed power. This is not a meek baby sheep, but the mighty, conquering Lamb of God.

Like the multi-eyed creatures near the throne who serve as God's witnesses of everything on the earth ([Revelation 4:6](#), last week's lesson), the seven-eyed Lamb also has personal knowledge of everything. This is because of the Lamb's close ties to the *seven spirits of God*, which (as noted in last week's study) is this book's way of presenting the Holy Spirit ([Revelation 1:4](#); [4:5](#)). The fact that the Spirit is *sent out into all the earth* calls to mind Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit ([John 15:26](#)).

What Do You Think?

What would life be like if Jesus were the touchstone of all your thoughts?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In business contexts
- In family contexts
- In your entertainment choices
- Other

B. Taking the Scroll ([vv. 7, 8](#))

7. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

No doubt all present, including John, watch in amazement as the Lamb does an audacious thing: he takes *the scroll from the right hand* of God! This is not an act of thievery or usurpation, however, for God has been waiting for the Lamb. The scroll and its decrees are prepared for the Lamb, and only he can break the seals and open the scroll.

8a. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.

The transfer of the scroll allows the worship of Heaven to resume, but now the *living creatures* and the *elders* are bowing *before the Lamb*. This is not to recognize a transfer of power that somehow diminishes the authority of the one on the throne. Rather, it is a recognition of the Lamb's authority and his unity with the one on the throne. (Regarding the nature of the living creatures, the elders, and the numbers associated with them, see comments on [Revelation 4:4, 6](#) in last week's lesson.)

8b. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

Following the transfer of the scroll, new details unfold before John's eyes. The elders, who previously had laid down their crowns when they fell in worship before the throne ([Revelation 4:10](#), last week's lesson), now have *a harp* that they presumably use for playing worship music.

Further, they all hold *bowls full of incense*, which is symbolic of *the prayers of God's people*. This is one of the few places in Revelation where symbolic language is explained—and for that we are grateful. The incense gives off an aroma and is later linked with prayer when the seventh seal is opened ([Revelation 8:3](#)). Because smoke from incense rises and creates a pleasing aroma, incense has come to symbolize prayers rising to God ([Psalm 141:2](#)).

HOW TO SAY IT

Alpha *Al-fa*.

Ephesus *Ef-uh-sus*.

Fortuna *Fawr-too-nuh*.

Judah *Joo-duh*.

Nostradamus *Noss-truh-daw-muss*.

Omega *O-may-guh* or *O-mee-guh*.

WHO HOLDS THE FUTURE?

Many have heard the name Nostradamus. Although he was born in 1503, his followers claim this man predicted future events, including World War II, the atomic bomb, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the moon landings, and the 9/11 terror attacks. Nostradamus's followers continue to pore over his quatrains—his collection of four-line prophecies—in an attempt to figure out what else the French astrologer seems to have successfully predicted.

Nostradamus wasn't received as kindly by his contemporaries, however. Some of his critics claimed he used sleep deprivation and hallucinogenic drugs to put himself into an altered state. Others labeled him incompetent because of his unorthodox methodology.

Nostradamus's continued popularity points to human anxiety and curiosity about the future, especially regarding the end times. But [Revelation 5](#) reminds us that our future is in the hands of the worthy Lamb. When the Lamb took the scroll, its contents became secondary to the rightful worship of the one holding it. Much more important than knowing the future is knowing the one who holds our future.

—L. G. S.

II. Singing a New Song

([REVELATION 5:9, 10](#))

A. Worthy Lamb ([v. 9](#))

9a. And they sang a new song,

Worship of the Lamb includes singing. What the elders sing is not an old favorite but *a new song*. [Revelation 14:3](#) is similar, but there it is the 144,000 redeemed who sing rather than the elders. Of the other seven occurrences of the word *new* in Revelation, all are actions of God ([2:17](#); [3:12](#) [twice]; [21:1](#) [twice], [2, 5](#)).

9b. saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God

The song John hears acknowledges the worthiness of the Lamb and therefore the appropriateness of offering him worship. The fact that the Lamb is eligible to be worshipped goes hand in hand with the fact that he is eligible to *take the scroll and to open its seals*. Because he was *slain*, people are *purchased for God*, sin’s price having been paid by the Lamb’s shed *blood* (see [Romans 3:25](#)). Yet he is the living Lamb, the one who has conquered death. This is a great victory indeed ([1 Corinthians 15:55](#))! Could anyone be more worthy to open the seals on the scroll than the Lamb?

9c. “persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

The elders’ song recognizes those who have been redeemed as being a marvelously diverse lot. The diversity is fourfold in nature, as the redeemed come from every family group (*tribe*), every *language* group, every cultural group (*people*), and every ethnic group (*nation*). This heavenly mix encompasses all the people of the world, symbolically represented by the number four (compare [Isaiah 11:12](#); [Revelation 7:1](#)). It is a mix that should characterize the church on earth.

What Do You Think?

What steps can a church take to achieve the diversity seen in [Revelation 5:9](#)?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Steps for ministers and elders to take

Steps for leaders of midsize groups (Sunday school classes, etc.) to take

Steps for leaders of small groups to take

Other

THE DIVERSE CHURCH UNITED

Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous “I Have a Dream Speech” rightly challenged the conscience of a country divided by racism. His vision for racial equality was rooted in his understanding of the Scriptures. For King, the uneven terrain of [Isaiah 40:3-5](#) represented the decades of racial injustice that fueled and was fueled by segregation.

King’s dream wasn’t wishful thinking or idle hope. He challenged his audience to participate in leveling “the mountain of despair.” A nation changed its laws and began to repent of its racism as a result (with a ways yet to go).

King’s dream of racial equality was preceded by John’s vision of a multinational, multiethnic redeemed people of God who are unified in their praise to him. Having read of that heavenly outcome, the question then becomes one of what we should be doing to bring it about. What are we doing to have a church on earth that is as unified in its diversity as the redeemed people of God in John’s vision?

—L. G. S.

B. Exalted Followers (v. 10)

10. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Another consequence of Christ’s redeeming, sacrificial death is the elevated status of this purchased people. They have now become a *kingdom and priests* (see also [Revelation 1:6](#); [1 Peter 2:5, 9](#)), which hearkens back to the Old Testament designation of Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” ([Exodus 19:6](#)).

Believers are given an astonishing and humbling responsibility: to *reign on the earth*. Entrusted to deliver the saving message of the gospel, Christians are appointed by God to extend his rule to every nation. In that way we have become priestly representatives who assist the great King and invite others to become part of the kingdom that is “not of this world” ([John 18:36](#)).

III. Worshipping with Hosts

([REVELATION 5:11-14](#))

A. Countless Angels (vv. 11, 12)

11. Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

The chorus is taken up by another group that surrounds the throne, as *many angels join the living creatures and the elders*. John does not attempt to count them; there are far too many. If we take the Greek word translated *ten thousand* and change the Greek letters to English letters that sound the same (a procedure known as transliteration), we end up with the English word *myriad*.

12. In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

This majestic choir proclaims what we might call the second stanza of the new song. It too acknowledges the worthiness of *the Lamb, who was slain*, and therefore the appropriateness of worshipping him. New is this stanza’s recognition of the Lamb’s worthiness to *receive* the sevenfold listing of *power* (ability), *wealth* (riches), *wisdom* (knowledge and how to use it), *strength* (might), *honor* (esteem), *glory* (splendor), and *praise*. These attributes include every possible qualification for worthiness (compare [Revelation 4:11](#); [7:12](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can you help your church proclaim Jesus “in a loud voice” in a figurative sense?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When opposition is strong

When opposition is low or nonexistent

B. Countless Creatures (v. 13)

¹³. Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

John’s view includes all creatures in every conceivable location. This includes all creatures *in heaven*, all creatures *on earth*, all creatures *under the earth* (perhaps the dead or whatever exists beneath the physical surface of the earth; compare [Philippians 2:10, 11](#)), and all creatures *on the sea*. This leaves out no one or thing. Again we see a grouping of four, the number representing the entirety of the earth.

This is a magnificent moment, a picture of all the universe joined in praise. This is as it should be. There are no holdouts, no protesters. Later, [Revelation 22:15](#) presents us some who are excluded from the presence of God, but for now there is a unanimous voice of praise.

The perfect list of seven attributes in the earlier new song has been condensed to four: *praise, honor, glory, and power*. The fourfold nature of this version is appropriate for the creatures of the world in their entirety. The list is similar to the original song of God’s worthiness in [Revelation 4:11](#) with one key difference: this time worship is directed *to the Lamb*. This is not the worship of a second deity, but an affirmation of the unity of Christ with the one seated on the throne.

What Do You Think?

What safeguards can we put in place to keep our worship Christ-centered?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding safeguards that lead up to worship

Regarding safeguards to enact during worship

C. Additional Praise (v. 14)

^{14a}. The four living creatures said, “Amen,”

John’s attention is drawn back to *the four living creatures*. What he sees and hears in this half-verse and the next is a repeat of [Revelation 4:9, 10](#). The *Amen* voiced by the creatures is derived from a Hebrew word that means “It is true” or “It is correct.” Nothing is out of place in the scene.

^{14b}. and the elders fell down and worshiped.

The “Amen” of the four living creatures is followed by a physical act from the 24 *elders* as they repeat their posture of worship ([Revelation 4:10, 11](#)). The Lamb’s sacrificial death and resurrection has unlocked the prison house of death and released God’s people from death’s power ([1:18](#)). He is truly the worthy one, and we cannot worship him enough.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to ensure that what others see in you affirms the truths of what you sing and pray?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When in the presence of unbelievers

When in the presence of believers

Conclusion

A. God’s Position

Our world is filled with awards. Sports teams keep trophy shops busy with orders. The roster of award shows on television includes the Oscars, Emmys, Tonys, Grammys, and Golden Globes. We have halls of fame for football players, rock bands, rodeo winners, etc. Schools hand out certificates frequently for all manner of achievements. Hollywood has its Walk of Fame. All compete for our attention, whether as spectators to admire achievements of others or as potential candidates to be recognized.

Acknowledging achievements is a good thing in and of itself. We must be careful, however, to distinguish proper from improper applause both given to and accepted from our fellow human beings. A primary lesson of Revelation is that God alone is worthy of receiving worship. God alone must be glorified (compare [Acts 12:21-23; 14:11-18](#)).

Revelation shows us that Christ, the Lamb of God, is also worthy of worshipful praise and glory. We may not understand fully the relationship within the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are important in Revelation, but there is no essential division between the three. They are one God. Worship in Heaven is given to the one on the throne and to the Lamb, and this is the same worship.

At the beginning of Revelation, “the Lord God . . . the Almighty” describes himself as “the Alpha and the Omega” ([Revelation 1:8](#)). At the end of Revelation, Jesus describes himself in the same way ([22:13](#)). There is no separation. May all glory be given to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

B. Humanity’s Obligation

When God established his covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, he called them to be “a kingdom of priests” ([Exodus 19:6](#)). Now, under the new covenant, Christians carry out that role as “a royal priesthood” ([1 Peter 2:9](#)).

Unlike under the old covenant, however, our priestly sacrifices do not consist of animals. Rather, our sacrifices are spiritual in nature ([1 Peter 2:5](#)); and our priesthood involves being living sacrifices ([Romans 12:1](#)). In that light, we are to “offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name” ([Hebrews 13:15](#)). Worship must never be about us. Worship, whether corporate or individual, should have an audience of one: the Lord himself.

The thanks that we offer can include gratitude that our eternal destiny does not rest on decisions made by three goddesses on Mount Olympus or any other fickle and unpredictable deity. The one true God is utterly consistent, always faithful to his promises, whether those promises involve positive or negative outcomes for people in various contexts. When we first read the book of Revelation, we may be astounded and even terrified by its imagery; but terror gives way to relief as we realize that in the end it is God who wins. Our choice concerns which side we want to be on. But that’s really no choice at all, is it?

B. Prayer

Lord God, may we give our worship to no other. May all glory and honor be given to you. May we join our voices with your worshippers from all over the world to sing your praises forever. In the name of your Son, amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Lamb is worthy of our worship.



Sheet 3—Spring 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lesson 9. In discussing [Revelation 5:9](#), point to this visual and ask, “How does this text’s lamb imagery connect with the lion imagery of [5:5](#)?”

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Bring to class some employment ads from the newspaper or Internet. Begin the discussion by asking each person to describe his or her current (or most recent) job. Briefly talk about the job's responsibilities and what he or she enjoys most about it.

Then divide students into small groups and give each group an ad, some paper, and a pen. Have each group choose one person to be the employer. Other students will be various job seekers. Groups will role-play job interviews, in which the applicants draw from their own life experiences in order to impress the employer. Encourage students to be creative as they think about experiences that might prove relevant to each job.

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the "Help for Hire" activity, which you can download. Have students work individually to rank the jobs described and then name things that might qualify them for their top pick.

After either activity say, "When applying for a job, we list accomplishments that might impress a potential employer. Today we will talk of one who has the greatest résumé ever."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups. Supply each group with pen and paper and one of the following assignments. Groups will read portions of today's text from [Revelation 5](#) and convert the images about Jesus' qualities into straightforward language for whole-class discussion. Sample responses are in italics.

Group 1—Slain Lamb (vv. 6-8)

Jesus is qualified to sit on the throne because of who he is and what he has done. He gave himself up to be sacrificed, yet he lives again! He has power that no other has. He has insight not available to any mortal. Only he is worthy to take the scroll from the hand of God.

Group 2—Universal Redeemer (vv. 9, 10)

Lambs were sacrificed by the people of Israel to atone for their sins. But Jesus did more!

The effect of his sacrifice went far beyond Israel. He paid the price for people throughout the world! Humans, created to be with God and to have dominion over the world, can be what God intends because of what Jesus did.

Group 3—Eternal God (vv. 11-14)

Jesus demonstrated that he was more than human and even more than an angel. He received praise in Heaven that is reserved only for the eternal, living God. And with good reason: that is exactly who he is!

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of "Savior of All" activity. Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss each of these verses in relation to [Revelation 5:6-14](#).

After either activity say, "The Lamb of God is worthy of our praise forever. However, people find it difficult to find a source of allegiance that is permanent and lasting. Why is that? What response do they give when they find this lasting allegiance? Let's find out how Jesus compares with other figures in world religions."

Into Life

Write the following on the board:

Muslims believe that God sent Muhammad as the last of the prophets to finalize the word of God.

Buddhists believe that Gautama Buddha was an enlightened teacher who shared his insights to help people end their suffering through the elimination of ignorance and craving.

Hindus may believe that one of their gods (Vishnu) would take human form (an avatar) occasionally to guide people back to the right path.

Close class by comparing these religious figures with Jesus. Ask, "Considering what Jesus accomplished that the others did not, how does this affect your calling in [Revelation 5:10](#)?"