Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* I am devoting only five daily emails to Revelation. But last year, I taught a twenty-week class on Revelation and all the sessions are [on my podcast site](https://scottengle.podbean.com/). The first was on Aug 20 2019 and the last on Jan 27 2020. You can listen to the podcast episodes via your browser ([here](https://scottengle.podbean.com/)) and through the Apple Podcast app and the Podbean player (iOS and Android).

Today, we come to one of the most stirring passages in the Bible. Take the time to really enter into the drama.

***Revelation 5 (NRSV)***

**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; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 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.”**

**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. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. 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. 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; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”**

**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, 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!” 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!”**

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

A quick review: John writes that he has been given the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is to be heard and kept. John’s first vision is of an awe-inspiring Jesus, whose mouth is the sword of truth. Jesus has letters for seven churches, who represent the church universal. These are churches in western Asia Minor in the vicinity of Ephesus.

*The throne room of God*

Then, in chapter 4, John is whisked away to the heavens, to the very throne room of God. The image of the ancient one is like that of precious stones and he is surrounded by an emerald-like rainbow, as in Ezekiel 1:26-28. Around the throne, John sees twenty-four other thrones on which are seated twenty-four elders. It is hard to be sure of the significance of twenty-four, though the simplest and probably best explanation is that the twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles.

From the throne emanate power and might, as thunder rolls amidst lightning. In front of the throne are seven torches representing the seven archangels who stand before the throne of God (also 1:4, 3.1, 5.6, 8.2, and even Luke 1:19!). Also in front of the throne is what John describes as a sea that is as calm as glass.

Also around the throne are four living creatures. They have eyes in front and behind, signifying that they see everything and guard the throne. These creatures are cherubim (plural of “cherub”). This image again draws on Ezekiel, this time 1:10, where there are four cherubim, though each has four faces. Here, the four faces (human, lion, ox, and eagle) are the same but each cherub has only one face. All four cherubim have six wings (Isaiah 6:2). The four faces of the cherubim are meant to represent the entire created order, which becomes evident when their Amen awaits the joining in of all creation (5:13-14).

*Worship*

And what are the creatures and the elders doing? They are worshiping. The cherubim sing praises to God’s holiness – without ceasing, as if they had been created for this sole purpose. The elders fall on the ground in their worship, casting their crowns before the throne. Before this scene closes, all of creation joins in the worship of the Creator.

Often, when we come to Revelation we are anxious to race on to the mysterious and scary scenes of beasts and destruction and special numbers. But the book is built around several dramatic and lengthy scenes of worship. They are the book’s center. Indeed, chapters 4 and 5 are the heart of the Revelation given to John, not the endlessly fascinating four horsemen of the apocalypse, though we’ll get to them tomorrow.

*The lion and the lamb*

Yet, amidst this worship there is soon mourning and tears. The one on the throne holds a scroll that, unlike most papyri, is written on front and back. It is sealed with seven seals, which signifies that the seal is completely and utterly closed, for seven is the number of completion and totality. What does the scroll contain? We are not told. It could be God’s plan for creation or it could be the rest of the book. Whatever the scroll contains, there is no one, in all the heavens and the earth, who is worthy to open it and John weeps because the scroll will remain closed. . . . Or might there be someone who is worthy?

One of the twenty-four elders comes to John and tells him that the Lion of Judah is worthy to open the scroll. Thus, we’d expect that John would turn to see a lion, the symbol of power and strength, standing ready to open the scroll.

Yet, when John turns, he doesn’t see a lion at all. He sees a lamb. But not a cute, white, leaping little lamb. John sees a Lamb standing there as if it had been slaughtered! The “Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered” calls on two key Old Testament images. The first is the Passover lamb, whose blood was spread on the doorway of the Hebrews so that the death of the firstborn would pass them by (Exodus 12). Of course, Jesus’ last meal with his disciples was a Passover meal reshaped around Jesus’ body and blood, representing a New Exodus. But the image of the Lamb here also evokes Isaiah 53, the story of the suffering servant who would take upon himself the iniquities of us all. A Christian could scarcely read Isaiah 53 and not see in it the story of Jesus’ sacrifice.

This scene is such a powerful moment in Revelation. John *hears* “Lion” but *sees* “Lamb.” The contrast couldn’t be more striking.

We think we know what power and might are, but Jesus Christ has revealed that the truth is far from our expectation. It is the Lamb who conquers. Craig Koester writes, “What John *hears* about the Lion recalls promises from the Old Testament, and what he *sees* in the lamb reflects the crucifixion of Christ. Both images point to the same reality. According to the Old Testament, God promised to send a powerful and righteous ruler. These promises are not rejected but fulfilled through the slaughtered yet living Lamb, who is not a hapless victim but a figure of royal strength.”

And strong the Lamb certainly is. The Lamb has seven eyes, all-seeing and all-present (see Zechariah 4:10), and seven horns, all-powerful, as horns were ancient symbols of kingly power. In Revelation, there are twenty-eight references to the exalted Lamb. It is the victorious Lamb of God from the end of the book who stands at the center of our Rose Window.

The Lamb then takes the scroll from the hand of God, causing all the elders and cherubim to fall down before the Lamb in worship, singing their acknowledgement that the Lamb, and the Lamb alone, is worthy to open the scroll.

Then angels too numerous to count join the elders and the cherubim in their worship of the Lamb. The crescendo presses forward as all the creatures of all the cosmos join in the praise of the one seated on the throne and of the Lamb. Finally, the four living creatures say “Amen!”

How cold a heart it would be that could be unmoved by this scene. Imagine for a moment that you are a Christian who is being persecuted. What would these words say to you? Who is really in control of this world? To whom should every knee bow and tongue confess? Would this not encourage you to persevere and to trust that Jesus, the Lamb, will be victorious over the powers that persecute you, even if it doesn’t always seem that way. It is as if the curtains of heaven have been pulled back, revealing to you the truth of what is and who is. We shouldn’t be surprised that it is this scene around which Handel composed the glorious final chorus in his *Messiah*.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott