

God's Planned Future

(4) Revelation 4-5

God's throne room and a scroll

Things that make the Revelation easier to understand:

- ✓ It's written chronologically, sequentially, and progressively moves forward in time.
- ✓ God gave the Revelation so that readers could be blessed (Rev 1:3; 22:7). Blessing can only occur when understanding happens. Therefore, God wrote the Revelation to be understood and enjoyed by its readers.

As we progress from the end of Revelation chapter 3 into chapter 4, it is obvious that John's vision has shifted from earth to heaven (Rev 4:1). The Revelation no longer views the church on earth because the church has been snatched up by Christ to heaven (Raptured, 1Th 4:16-17). In fact, John does not speak of the church again until chapter 19.

The Scene

In Revelation 4-5 John explains what he sees, hears, and feels right there within God's heavenly throne room.

Revelation 4:2-3 tells us of heavens centrepiece, *behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.*³

And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. It is as Jesus told the woman of Samaria *God is spirit* (John 4:24), so John sees God in His natural glorifying form of light, *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all* (1 John 1:5). John saw Yahweh's glory emitting from His heavenly throne which he depicts as *flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder* (Rev 4:5a). What a breathtaking sight, as God's glory beams out in multiple colours accompanied by thundering sounds.

John's visitation purpose

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" (Rev 4:1).

John had been invited to visit the heavenly throne room by the same one who spoke to him in chapter 1:10-20. The glorified Lord Jesus Christ was the trumpeting voice who spoke to John in this vision.

Of further significance is that Christ tells John the purpose for being invited. The reason was simply as Christ said, *"I will show you what must take place after this."* John's visit

was not for entertainment, and it was not just an information gathering tour of heaven. No, Christ specifically wanted John to see and understand the actual events of the future which were to be directed from the very throne of God.

The unfolding events in the coming chapters of Revelation were shown to John in advance for the purpose of clarity and understanding. Christ was NOT giving John a vague impression; this was NOT a clouded dream which John could not focus on with accuracy. It was Christ's desire for John to *see must take place after this*, not simply for John to have a feeling or an idea of the future. Christ spoke with absolute certainty and with divine authority of the definitive real-world events which must take place.

The throne room

John saw that *around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads* (Rev 4:4). These elders are representatives of the raptured church. This is reinforced by the song of worship they sing while bowed before the throne of God in Revelation 5:9-10. *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take*

the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

These elders qualified to sing about Christ because they had experienced the redeeming, saving power of Christ. Angels certainly had never experienced Christ's redemptive work on the Cross, nor had Old Testament saints. Plus, raptured New Testament church elders, representing the saints, would have known that only *blood ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*, would one day *reign on the earth* with Christ during the 1000 year kingdom (2Ti 2:12; Rev 20:6).

John continues to explain that *before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God* (Rev 4:5b). This is referring to the seven-fold Spirit of God, not seven separate spirits.

John MacArthur explains:

Unlike the lampstands mentioned in 1:12-13, these were outdoor torches, giving off not the soft, gentle light of an indoor lamp, but the fierce, blazing light of a fiery torch.

John identifies them as the seven Spirits of God. As noted in the discussion of 1:4 in chapter 1 of this volume, that phrase describes the Holy Spirit in all His fullness (cf. Isa. 11:2; Zech. 4:1-10). The sevenfold representation of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah speaks of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, reverence, and deity; in Zechariah of power; in Revelation 1:4 of grace and peace; and here of fiery judgment. Torches are associated with war in Judges 7:16, 20 and Nahum 2:3-4. John's vision depicts God as ready to make war on sinful, rebellious mankind and the Holy Spirit as His war torch. The Comforter of those who love Christ will be the Consumer of those who reject Him.

End Quote

(John MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Rev. 4:5)

John also saw that *before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal* (Rev 4:6). Later in John's visions of heaven he sees this great sight again, *and I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire...* (Rev 15:2). The sea John describes is not water as later in the Revelation John observes that in heaven *the sea was no more* (Rev 21:1). Rather, the sea is a large expanse of some type of glass as in Revelation 15:2. This massive glass expanse is similar, if not the same, as when *Moses, Aaron,*

Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰ *and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness* (Exo 24:9-10). The sight of God's multi-coloured glory beaming throughout heaven's throne room reflecting off the crystal glass sea is difficult for us to imagine. But this is the heaven waiting for all God's children and from where God administers the future and Jesus Christ takes and opens the scroll.

John also tells us that *around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:* ⁷ *the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.* ⁸ *And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,*

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4:6-8).

These 4 majestic creatures never sleep and seeing all that Yahweh does and hearing all that Yahweh says, they miss nothing, they never cease from audible proclamation of

God's holiness. The superior creatures are the cherubim referred to in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10. While all other activities in heaven continue to unfold, these 4 creatures never tire of thundering out worship which becomes the background theme of heaven emanating from the throne room.

These mighty creatures' worship in unison with the 24 elders. There is synchronisation between them all as the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to their eternal God (Rev 4:9), the 24 elders *fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*¹¹ *“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created”* (Rev 4:10-11). This heavenly anthem of worship never stops. Regardless of earth's activity, heaven echoes the hymns and declarations of Yahweh's worthiness to be worship and enthroned as Sovereign God of gods.

The scroll

Revelation chapter 5 begins with John's attention focused on what he *saw in the right hand of him who was seated on*

the throne, a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals (Rev 5:1). This scroll had writing on both sides of it. As each section (chapter) of the scroll was written it was rolled or folded, then a seal was placed on the scroll to lock that chapter before the next chapter was written. This scroll was the title deed to the world, and it contained God's planned process of taking the world back under His sovereign and eternal rule. It was a confidential document that could only be opened by the one legally entitled to open it.

Dr. Robert L. Thomas explains:

This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on. The full contract would be written on the inner pages and sealed with seven seals. Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside. All kinds of transactions were consummated this way, including marriage-contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract-bills, and bonds. Support also comes from Hebrew practices. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title-deed that was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses. A portion of text would be written, folded over and sealed, with a different

witness signing at each fold. A larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document. (Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1992], page 378)

As John watches this scroll, he *saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"*³ *And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it* (Rev 5:2-3). In all of creation, both angelic and human, no one was worthy or able to take the scroll from Yahweh and open it. John responds to this scene with loud weeping (Rev 5:4).

Then one of the 24 elders says to John, *"Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals"* (Rev 5:5). This is the glorified Lord Jesus Christ, descendant of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8-10; Heb 7:14). Jesus testifies to this in Revelation 22:16b, *"I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star"* (cf. Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15-17).

Jesus also qualifies to take and open the scroll because He *has conquered* death and the grave (Heb. 2:14-15). Christ *condemned sin in the flesh* (Rom 8:3), *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them* (Col 2:15. Cf. 1Pe 3:19). And through faith in Christ's substitutional death, believers share in Christ's victory. Christ achieved this *by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross* (Col 2:14. cf. 1Jn 5:5).

Christ, the worthy Lamb of God, *went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne* (Rev 5:7). At this the four living creatures, with the 24 elders, erupt in worship of the Lamb, proclaiming that He is *"Worthy... to take the scroll and to open its seals..."* (Rev 5:9).

Joining the four living creatures and the 24 elders are the innumerable angelic hosts of heaven, all worshipping the Lamb (Rev 5:11-12). Adding to this enormous choir are the voices of all in creation proclaiming, *"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!"* (Rev 5:13).

Heaven is booming with worship as God's glory flashes throughout in the most spectacular display of light radiating Yahweh's holy perfections. It is from this majestic scene of worship that Christ begins to open the scroll, one seal at a time, chapter by chapter the Scroll shall reveal the progression of Christ taking possession of His world again.

Having a clear understanding of Revelation 4-5 is important in eschatology because these two chapters establish Christ's authority, His power, and the certainty of the actual events that shall take place in God's planned future. Therefore, we enter Revelation chapter 6 with great anticipation of how it is that Christ will action the scroll as He unseals and reads it.