

The Throne Room Vision

Revelation 4

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Chapter 4 begins with a shift in location. For the last two chapters John has been receiving and recording messages to seven churches in Asia which, as we have seen, not only apply to the seven but also to all who will listen. As the chapter opens, John is presented with an open door pictured as an entrance into heaven. He hears a voice sounding like a trumpet symbolizing authority and is invited to come up and see what must take place after these things. “After these things” is a direct reference back to 1:19.

Shift to Heaven

Warren Weirsbe connects the trumpet voice of 4:1 with the call of the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 to represent the time when God will call the saints home.ⁱ Hal Lindsay and others note the church is not mentioned between chapters 3 and 22 indicating the church is absent. The scene has shifted to heaven and according to Lindsay and other leading dispensational teachers; the church has departed from the earth and arrived in heaven through what has come to be called the rapture.ⁱⁱ Their claim is that everything happening between these chapters is in heaven.

Mounce rebuttals Lindsay saying “There is no basis for discovering a rapture of the church at this point.”ⁱⁱⁱ He and Newport agree that the calling here to heaven is to John and not the church. There is even a question as to whether John was actually translated to heaven or whether in a trans like state he was seeing a vision of heaven. The invitation to heaven could indicate a physical translation; however, early in chapter one John calls his experience a vision. Newport believes there is an interchange between heaven and earth throughout the book of Revelation with events of heaven having a counterpart on earth. He also notes the only mention of the church in Revelation is in regards to the seven churches of chapters 2-3.^{iv} You will remember Mounce and Newport hold what we have called a Historical Premillennial interpretation of Revelation.

The Throne Room

Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation have been referred to as the throne room vision. Both dispensationalists and historical premillennialist agree to the central theme of these chapters as one of worship. Thrones have two primary purposes in the Bible, one is worship and the other is judgment. The throne as a symbol occurs more than forty times in Revelation. In fact, for every four times the word throne in a symbolic form is mentioned in Scripture, three of those are in the book of Revelation. It symbolizes the sovereignty and authority of God.^v In verse 2, John

mentions the One sitting on the throne as a reference to the Lord. This is reminiscent of the vision of Isaiah when He saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1-5).

The symbolism of the stones is rich and the references to Old Testament events seem to be prevalent. Jasper and sardius stones are found in the breast plate of the high priest (Exodus 28:17-21). Jasper is a clear stone and likely represents the holiness of God. The sardius stone is red and likely represents the wrath of God. The rainbow obviously pictures the post flood rainbow and God's promise never to destroy the earth again by water. It is worthy to note that the rainbow in heaven is not an arch but a circle indicating completeness.

Also around the throne with the presence of God, are twenty-four thrones each occupied by twenty-four elders. Attempts to identify these elders have typically fallen along two lines. One has been they are exalted heavenly beings often referred to as angels. Newport and Mounce take this interpretation pointing out that the song of praise later in chapter 4 does not pertain to humans or the church and must be sung by angelic beings. Mounce points out that on two occasions one of the elders acts as a spokesman or interpreter (5:5, 7:13) and on one occasion they serve as intercessors between the prayers of men and God (5:8).^{vi} The number twenty-four is a multiple of twelve which is often used as the number of divine government.^{vii}

From the dispensational viewpoint, Weirsbe sees the twenty-four elders as the people of God in heaven as "enthroned and rewarded." He sees them as representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles bringing the total to twenty-four symbolizing the completeness of God's people. Weirsbe also points out that angels are not numbered (Hebrews 12:22), crowned, or enthroned. There is also a distinguishing of the elders from angels in Revelation 5:8-11. The crowns referred to in verse 10 are stephanos crowns, or crowns of victory, and we have no evidence that angels receive such crowns.^{viii} Further, they are robed in white being pictured as overcomers who conquer because of their faith (1 John 5:4-5).

The flashes of lightening and sounds of thunder are probably symbolic of the righteous judgments of God. The truth comes from the Lord and it divides according to righteousness. The seven lamps burning before the throne coincide with the seven candles of the menorah in the Old Testament temple worship and represent the perfection of the Spirit of God. Before the throne there is a magnificent glow coming from what we might refer to as the floor. It is pictured as a sea of glass and compared to crystal. Four living creatures are found near the center of the throne. Their appearance is similar to the creatures of Ezekiel. Even through the similarities there are significant distinctions. In Ezekiel, they each have four faces, here, they have only one. In Revelation they have eyes all around where in Ezekiel they have wheels full of eyes. It is generally agreed these are heavenly beings.

The significance of the animal characteristics of the creatures, or beasts as they are identified in the King James, is the connection between nature and the creator. In this picture, God is being

worshipped as creator. There is a message here for the modern church and we will return to this subject a little later in our discussion.

Worship in Heaven

The record of the scene in heaven is one of praise. Two songs of praise are given, one sung by the four creatures and one by the twenty-four elders. At this point it is important to remember, John is receiving the vision in order to encourage people who were going through suffering and persecution. The thrust of the first hymn is one of God's holiness and his eternal nature. He was before the beginning of the earth, He is still God even in the midst of their persecution, and He always will be, even when those who are causing the persecution cease to exist in life as we know it. Again the theme is centered in God's relationship to creation. Some have suggested the number of creatures, four, represents the four corners of creation. The site of creatures praising God reminds of Luke's record of Jesus words following the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40). These creatures do not owe their salvation to Christ; His blood was shed for humans. Even so, all creation bows down to the movements of God. The stars are sustained by his hand. The mountains bear witness of His continual grace toward the creation. How much more should the redeemed of the earth worship the living God with praise?

Verses 9 and 10 are presented as a parallel account of the twenty-four elders during the praise of the creatures. The description of the actions of the creatures is one of giving God honor, glory and thanks. Each of these is a key element of worship. Honor recognizes God for His position and character. Glory speaks of the truth of God revealed and thanksgiving is the natural response of someone who sees the honor and glory of God. The description of worship by the elders begins with noting their posture. The elders fall down before God, who sits on the throne. The elders ascribe worth to God by relinquishing the outward manifestation of their victory as a gift to the One who lives forever. Verse 11 records their song of praise.

The praise of the song of the elders is centered in the creation work of God. The Bible says here He is worthy. This is the same term used to describe a ship that will perform well on water; we say she is sea worthy. God is perfect in His abilities to govern all creation for two primary reasons -- He made the creation and existed before the creation. In addition to those two reasons, the revelator points out that the only reason the earth exists is by the will of God. In Revelation 5 God is worshipped as redeemer yet here God is worshipped as creator. The praise of Revelation 4 is directed to God on the throne while in Revelation 5 it is directed to the Son (the Lamb).

The great word for us in Revelation 4 is one of worship of the creator. Worship of God as creator affects our stewardship of all the earth. Note the following concerning worship of the creator:

1. It is done in reverence (fear and awe) of the One who made and sustains our world.
2. Out of reverence, one who worships God will do so with great respect for other members of God's creation.

3. It is done in great humility. – Note the elders falling down and laying their crowns.
4. Worship requires action including words of praise.
5. God deserves our worship.

ⁱ Weirsbe, Warren. *Be Victorious*, Chariot Victor Publishing, Colorado City, CO. Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 946.

ⁱⁱ Newport, John. 1986. *The Lion and the Lamb*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, P. 170

ⁱⁱⁱ Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans, Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 2502

^{iv} Newport, John. *The Lion and the Lamb*, P. 170

^v Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*, Location 2506

^{vi} Ibid. 2528

^{vii} Newport, John. *The Lion and the Lamb*, P. 171

^{viii} Weirsbe, Warren. *Be Victorious*, Loc. 984