

"REVELATION MADE RELEVANT"

*A verse by verse exposition of the Bible's most controversial book
Notes are Fr. Ward's personal observations with some interpretive explanations
held by various biblical scholars*

***Brief Overview of Rev. 1-3. See notes of previous studies for more details.

III. Worship, Wrath and Witness (Revelation 4-8 – theme of this year's Lenten Bible Study)

A. Worship (Rev. 4-5) – the focus moves from the Church to Heaven

1. The Throne of Heaven (Rev. 4:1-11)

- a) v. 1: ***"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."*** John is now given a glimpse into the throne room of heaven. He hears the first voice (**the Lord's**) that he heard in chapter 1. Recall what Jesus said to the Apostle Peter about the fate of John: *"Jesus said to him (Peter), "If I want him (John) to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" (Jn. 21:22)* Although Jesus says that Peter would face martyrdom, that is not the case for John. Jesus implies that John will actually experience Christ's return before his time on earth is over. How so? Through these visions of Revelation. ***"After these things"*** can refer to the end of the "Church Age" (time of the Rapture) and/or the beginning of the tribulation period (c.f. **Rev. 1:19** for the possible threefold division of the book – the futurist interpretation). One of the arguments proponents of the rapture use is that there is no mention of church (**ekklesia**) from **Rev. 4:1-22:16**. *Ekklesia* is used 16 times in the first three chapters. However, **"saints"** is then used to identify the elect of God in the aforementioned chapters. The **"saints"** are understood to refer to those believers, both Jewish and Gentile, who come to faith during the Tribulation Period. Others contend that **"church"** is used only in chapters 1-3 to refer to the Seven Churches, while **"saints"** simply refers to the Church during the time before Christ's return. Throughout the rest of Revelation, we will now see a series of interchanges between *what* happens in heaven and what happens on earth, thereby signifying that everything that happens on earth is ultimately controlled by heaven!
- b) v. 2: ***"Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne."*** John is in the Spirit when he glimpses heaven, similar to what the Apostle Paul experienced when he was caught up to the third heaven or *Paradise* (**2 Cor. 12:2-4**). Note: the first heaven we see by day (sky), the second heaven by night (planets and stars), and the third heaven by faith! The difference between Paul and John's experience was that while Paul could not share what he witnessed, John was told to write in a book what he saw and heard. John sees ***"One sitting on the throne."*** This is the throne of God, the source of all that happens in heaven and on earth.
- c) v. 3: ***"And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance."*** John attempts to describe what he sees. The jasper (a quartz that can be red, green, yellow, or brown in color

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and highly polished) and sardius (today called carnelian – translucent quartz orangish-red in color), as well as the emerald rainbow, all suggest the beauty, brilliance, and splendor of the Lord God. God's glorious colorful light emanates from His throne. As John declares in **1 Jn. 1:5** **"God is light."** The Apostle Paul says in **1 Tim. 6:16** that God **"dwells in unapproachable light."** John's vision echoes the visions seen by the prophets **Isaiah (6:1-5)** and **Ezekiel (1:26-28)**. The throne will serve as the center and focal point of all that follows. It is interesting to note that the throne seen by both John and Ezekiel describe God as being resplendent in light and surrounded by a rainbow (**Gen. 9:13-15**). The first rainbow mentioned in the Bible was the sign of God's promise to Noah and mankind that there would never be a worldwide flood. However, that rainbow and the ones we see following a morning or afternoon rain, is semicircular. The rainbow seen by Ezekiel and John, on the other hand, is circular. Why the difference? The covenant God made with Noah was based on the animal sacrifice made by Noah in **Gen. 8:20-22**. The rainbow encircling the throne reflects the sacrifice of Christ and His blood of the New Covenant of Everlasting Life made for all mankind (hence the song to the Lamb in **Rev. 5:6-10**). The rainbow of Noah is of the seven primary colors. The rainbow around the throne is emerald. Some commentators believe that the emerald or green color represents the new life that God will bestow upon us in the new heavens and earth after the current heavens and earth are destroyed by the forthcoming judgments. Recall that Adam and Eve were placed in a garden and that during the Millennial Reign the earth will be a place of new life and growth.

- d) v. 4: **"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads."** John sees twenty-four thrones with a like number of elders sitting around the throne of God. Why the number twenty-four and who are the elders? Although, there are a number of views ranging from viewing them as a high order of angels to representatives of mankind, there is strong evidence that they do indeed represent redeemed mankind. First, the number twenty-four is significant as it is the same number that was used by King David to organize the priesthood under twenty-four heads in **1 Chr. 24:1-19**. In addition, the number twelve, is used throughout the Bible to designate divine government – twelve months of the lunar year, the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles, the twelve gates in the New Jerusalem (*named after the twelve tribes of Israel* – **Rev. 21:12**), the twelve angels at each gate, the twelve foundation stones (*named after the twelve apostles* – **Rev. 21:14**), the twelve thousand sealed from each tribe totaling 144,000, the twelve thousand stadia (length of the New Jerusalem). Therefore, it is a number of order and completion. **It is important to note that the term "elder" is never used of angels elsewhere in the Bible.** In addition, angels are never depicted wearing crowns or sitting on thrones. Only redeemed man is promised thrones and crowns (**Mt. 19:28; Rev. 2:10; 3:21; 20:4; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 2 Tim. 4:8**). In fact, such crowns will be bestowed upon redeemed mankind after passing through the fiery test of the judgment of reward (**2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15**). Those crowns are five in number – 1) *the Incorruptible Crown* (**1 Cor. 9:25-27**) 2) *the Crown of Life* (**Rev. 2:10**) 3) *The Crown of Glory* (**1 Pet. 5:2-4**) 4) *The Crown of Righteousness* (**2 Tim. 4:8**) 5) *The Crown of Rejoicing* (**1 Thess. 2:19-20**) While white is a color used to describe angelic appearances, it is also used of *the saints* throughout Revelation. It was also the color of the priestly garments worn by the OT priests in the Temple worship. Finally, we will see that these twenty-four elders sing a song of redemption in **Rev. 5:9-10**. Therefore, it is apparent that the twenty-four elders represent the Old Testament Saints (12 Tribes of Israel) and the New Testament Saints (12 Apostles).

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- e) **v. 5:** ***“Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;**”* Not only does John see the incredible majesty and beauty of God, he beholds His awesome power. Such terrifying displays of God’s presence also suggest His approaching judgment of the nations and His vindication of Christ and the saints. We find similar occurrences of God’s awesome power in **Rev. 8:5, 11;19, 16:18** and they echo the vision Ezekiel saw in **Ez. 1:13** and God’s thundering from Mt. Sinai in **Ex. 19:16**. Later in Revelation, John will see both the Father and the Son on the throne. The **“seven lamps”** which designate the **“seven Spirits of God”** represent the presence of the Holy Spirit (see Bible Study 2). Thus, all Three Persons of the eternal Godhead are present at the divine throne in heaven.
- f) **v. 6:** ***“and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”*** The **“sea of glass, like crystal”** John sees is similar to the one in **Ex. 24:10** and **Ez. 1:22, 26**. It denotes peace, beauty, and that all things are laid bare before God. John sees it again in **Rev. 15:2**, but this time it is mixed with fire and is occupied by the martyrs of the Tribulation. It represents the **“floor”** of heaven and the **“ceiling”** of the created universe. It also points us to the distinction between the heavenly tabernacle of God and the earthly tabernacle of man. For one is reminded of the **“brazen sea”** that stood before Solomon’s Temple (**1 Kings 7:23-45**) and which was in front of the Ark of the Covenant, the **“Mercy Seat”** which served as God’s throne on earth. We are introduced to four unique living creatures who are around the throne. The phrase **“full of eyes in front and behind”** suggests their exceeding knowledge of God and spiritual insight into the things past, present, and future.
- g) **vv. 7-8:** ***“The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf (ox in many translations), and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.”*** These supernatural creatures parallel the seraphim Isaiah saw (**Is. 6:3**), and the cherubim Ezekiel witnessed (**Ez. 1:5-25; 10:1-22**). They are heavenly creatures of the highest order as they are directly around the throne of God and engaged in the divine worship. They also seem to serve as guardians of God’s Throne since their main focus is on the holiness of God. They are also distinct from the 24 elders and the angels (**c.f. Rev. 5:11**). There are a host of various interpretations as to what their faces represent. Some have suggested that each creature represents qualities that belong to God such as power, strength, spirituality, and swiftness. Some of the early church fathers make a case for the creatures representing the four Gospels and their particular themes concerning Christ. There is even differences of opinion as to which one represents which gospel! However, a common view (also expressed by the great 4th century theologian Augustine) is that Matthew presents Jesus as the Lion of Judah, Mark – the servant who became the sacrifice (hence, the calf as a sacrificial animal); Luke – Jesus as the Son of Man; and John links Jesus to heaven as fully God (represented by the flying eagle). It should be noted that when the Twelve Tribes of Israel encamped in the Wilderness, there was a fixed order for the camp. All the tribes would be organized around the Tabernacle of the Lord which was in the center of the camp. Each tribe was grouped in threes, with a standard representing each group. The Camp of Judah rested on the East and whose standard bore a lion. The Camp of Ephraim was on the West represented by an ox.

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The Camp of Reuben was on the South and had a man on its standard. The Camp of Dan was represented on its standard by an eagle. This affirms in the strongest of terms, that Israel was indeed, God's chosen vessel for Him to reveal His will, purposes, plan, and Messiah to our world. These four living creatures also proclaim the eternal and holy nature of Almighty God with the Trisagion (**Holy, holy, holy**). This is the same affirmation that the seraphim declared before the prophet Isaiah in **Is. 6:3**. In Hebrew, the double repetition of a word means emphasis, but the thrice mention of "holy" means the superlative! God is first and foremost "holy." There is no other word (not even love) used of God three times in the Bible except "holy." That God is "Holy" means that He is set part from all creation as its Creator and He is totally pure and righteous. One can also make the case that this reflects the triune nature of the Godhead. God is also eternal – **"Who was and Who is and Who is to come."** This song of God's holiness serves as the first of five hymns sung during the heavenly worship described in chapters 4 & 5. The first two are addressed to God, the next two are addressed to the Lamb, and the final one is directed toward both. There is also an increase in the number who are singing in worship with each successive song. The final hymn in **Rev. 5:13** is sung by **"every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them."**

- h) **vv. 9-11: "And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11" Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."** As the four living creatures pay homage to the Lord God's holiness, the twenty-four elders worship God, casting their crowns before His throne. The very crowns bestowed upon them by the Lord are simply given back to the Lord in acknowledgment that everything ultimate belongs to God. For God alone is worthy to receive glory and honor and power. Why? By virtue of His creative power and His will! For it is only by His will that we were created and that we can continue to live! The ultimate expression of true love for God is to worship Him for who He is and what He has done and continues to do. In addition, such worship includes grateful submission to God's divine authority.

Personal Application:

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the Revelation of Jesus Christ is all about the wrath of Almighty God and judgment. However, as we have seen from the first words in Chapter 1 and now in Chapter 4, Revelation is first about **Who God is** - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and more specifically **Who Jesus is** – the eternal Son and Lamb of God. Moreover, the Triune God is first and foremost **Holy**. He is set apart from all creation as its Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Thus, we can only find our purpose in God. Revelation also demonstrates that the greatest expression of devotion to God is **worship**. When we understand Who God is and what our response should be to His divine nature and work, this will lead to a centered and ordered life, which in turn will lead to the greatest of all personal states – peace. Such peace can only come through **the blood of the Lamb**, and **this gift** is only found through **a personal relationship** with the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit!