

PART 4: WORSHIP IN HEAVEN

CHAPTERS 4-5



MAIN IDEA

Chapters 4 and 5 describe a scene in heaven where sovereign God is seated on His throne, surrounded by saints and angels, from which the future events emanate. Throughout the rest of Revelation, the throne of God is the central object of focus.

COMMENTS

The first part (Chapter 1) dealt with the things which were (John's previous vision of the Son of Man). The second part (Chapters 2-3) dealt with the things which are (the seven churches).

The first two words in Chapter 4, "After this..." is referring to the third major section of Revelation, the visions that portray the future working out of Jesus' victory on the cross and the ultimate consummation in the new heaven and new earth at the end of history.

The Throne in Heaven (Chapter 4)

Jasper, Carnelian and a rainbow (4:3). These were the first and last of the twelve stones which represent Israel (Exodus 28:17-21). The jasper represented the tribe of

Reuben, the first tribe, and the carnelian represented Benjamin, the youngest tribe. Mention of two stones, accordingly, was intended to include all the twelve tribes of Israel. Reuben means behold “the son” and Benjamin means “son of my right hand.” This probably is referring to Christ who fulfills both names. A rainbow with the appearance of an emerald was around the throne.

The rainbow (4:3) is a reminder of God’s covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17). It may also represent God’s mercy during the judgments of the Tribulation Period.¹

Twenty-four elders (4:4). The identity of the twenty-four elders has been much debated. Some see them as human representatives of the church,² while others see them as symbolizing the unity of God’s people with OT Israel (led by the heads of the twelve tribes) and the NT church (led by the twelve apostles).³ It is unlikely they are angels.

Flashes of lightning (4:5) rumblings, and peals of thunder are indicative of the pending terrible judgments to come during the Tribulation Period. See also Exodus 20:18 (Mount Sinai).

Sea of glass (4:6a). The expression “like a sea of glass” is possibly representing the sanctifying power of the Word of God symbolized by the water. This is based on 1 Kings 7:23-25 where the laver, or bronze basin in the Tabernacle was filled with water (Sea) for the purpose of cleansing the priests before offering sacrifices to God.⁴

Four creatures (4:6b-11). Surrounding the throne are four strange-looking creatures full of eyes. Although they are called creatures, it is most likely they are angels.



The four living creatures seem to have a two-fold purpose. First, they worship God and whenever they give glory to Him, the twenty-four elders would fall down before Him, and lay their crowns before His throne. Secondly, they seem to represent four major attributes of Jesus Christ in the same way that the seven lamps represent the Holy Spirit (4:5):

- Like a lion: symbolizing Christ’s kingship as depicted in the Gospel of Matthew.
- Like an ox: symbolizing Christ’s complete obedience to the Father as depicted in the Gospel of Mark.
- Had a face like a man: symbolizing Christ, the ideal and perfect man as portrayed

¹ Cohen, Gary G and Salem Kirban. *Revelation Visualized*. Huntingdon Valley, PA: Salem Kirban, Inc., 1971, p. 118.

² MacArthur, John. *Because the Time is Near*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007, p. 111

³ ESV Crossway Bibles. *ESV English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2008, p. 2469.

⁴ Walvoord, John F. *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990, p. 546.

in the Gospel of Luke.

- Like a flying eagle: symbolizing Christ's heavenly origin as described in the Gospel of John.

The Scroll and the Lamb (Chapter 5)

A scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals (5:1-2). All attention is now brought to God the Father who holds a scroll in His right hand as a mighty angel proclaims "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" "Loud voice" would indicate that what is being said is of great importance.

No one was able to open the scroll (5:3-4). For a moment no one responded. No one was deemed worthy to take this scroll and break its seals.

The Lion of Judah is worthy to open the scroll (5:5-14). Eventually the "Lamb that was slain" takes the scroll and every creature in heaven and earth breaks out in singing and shouting praise to Jesus.



The meaning of the scroll could possibly be found in Jewish history. When a man had fallen into debt and lost his property or land, he was taken before the judges and a scroll was prepared. Everything owned was listed in the scroll and sealed several times.

A scribe would begin to write, then after a period of writing he would stop, roll the parchment enough to cover his words, and seal the scroll at that point with wax. Then he would resume writing, stop again, roll the scroll, and add another seal. There would be seven seals in all to prevent tampering with the scroll, or reading and revealing its contents.⁵

The scroll stated that the land had legally passed from the debtor into the possession of the one to whom he owed the debt; but this was not a permanent transfer. There were three ways the original owner could regain the lost property.

- The original owner himself could redeem it by paying for the value of the land at the time of redemption.
- If the original owner could not buy back the land, it was automatically returned at the Year of Jubilee (every 50 years).
- It could also be purchased by his nearest relative—a kinsman redeemer.

Adam who was effectively given "title deed" of the earth (Gen. 1:28) forfeited it to Satan when he sinned against God.

⁵ Raber, William. *Basic Bible Doctrine*. Arroyo Grande: Unpublished, n.d. Notebook., p. 82.

In Revelation Chapter 5 Jesus Christ, like Boaz in the book of Ruth, is our kinsman Redeemer. As Jesus breaks the individual seals on the scroll, he will instigate an incredible series of divine judgments against the domain of Satan and his forces for seven years before his Second Coming.⁶

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the rainbow in Rev. 4:3? (Hint see Genesis 9:12-16).
2. Though scripture doesn't describe John's reaction to what he saw in heaven (4:2-11), what do you suppose it was? What message does this scene in heaven convey to you?
3. For what reasons is the Father worthy of worship? Which of his deeds and attributes are praised in 4:8-11?
4. For what reasons is the Lamb being praised and worshipped (5:9-10, 12-13)?
5. What can we learn about worshipping God (its meaning, nature, reasons) from Chapters 4-5?

⁶ Geisler, Norman. *Systematic Theology, Volume Four*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005, p. 605.