

INTRODUCTION:

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and a miraculous vision as testimony of the validity of all that would follow and be revealed in the Book of Revelation. Chapters 2 and 3 contained seven distinct letters written to seven churches that actually existed at the time of Christ's Revelation to John, and within these letters, we saw revealed a view of the future history of Christ's Church up until His second coming. Beginning in chapter 4 our view is shifted from earthly to heavenly. We will now shift our view from what was and was to be in the earthly Church to what is already known in heaven and will happen in the future. The main body of the Book of Revelation is still before us and is seemingly composed of seven series of eschatological visions with seven visions in each series. Chapters 4 and 5 serve as a fitting introduction to these series of apocalyptic scenes. Chapters 4 and 5 provide two visions, one of God (chapter 4) and one of Christ (chapter 5), in all their majesty, splendor, and power. God and Christ are depicted as far removed from the earth and its inhabitants, who during this present evil age are under the domination of Satan and his demonic forces, both supernatural and human. But we are assured that God and Christ are not unaware of our desperate plight, are not without deep concern about our sorrows and tribulations, and are not powerless to rescue us from our enemies and to save us out of this age of evil and wickedness. On the contrary, these two scenes portray them in all of their majestic might as a pledge that very soon they will intervene in the affairs of this world, will defeat and overpower Satan and his followers, will terminate his dominion, his age, and then will institute a new age under their own control for the benefit of the faithful.

CHAPTER 4:

In my research I have found two widely different views regarding the significance of the vision described in chapter 4. Some see this as the point in Revelation when the Church is raptured—taken from earth into heaven—where it will escape the punishment which is described in following chapters. Others only see John being taken into heaven in order to see and witness what he sees so we can learn from it and escape punishment through repentance and adherence to Christ's teachings. Rather than reading from a particular theological view point let us simply listen to what has been written.

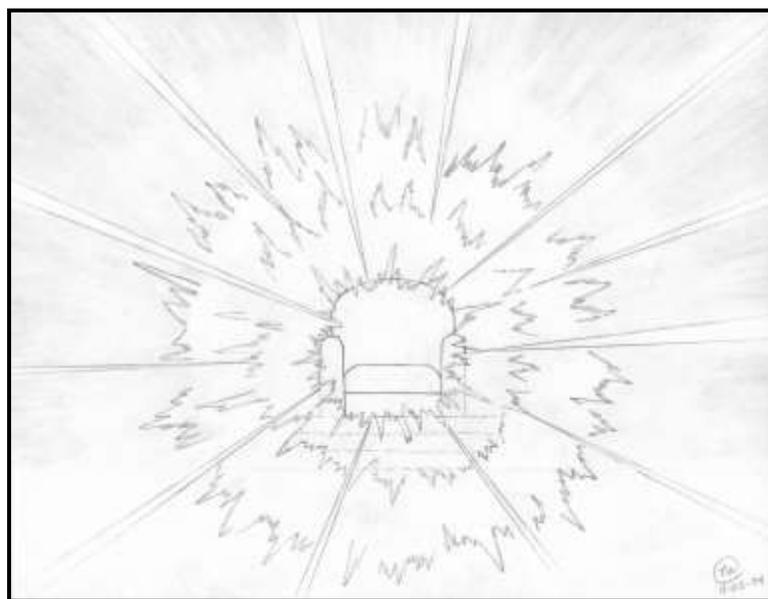
Revelation 4:1 states: ***“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking to me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”***” The key to interpretation of this verse is how one defines “these things.” Those who believe this is a reference to the “rapture” define “these things” as the completed history of the Church, therefore, “after these things” is seen as saying after the history of the church on earth is over because the Church has now been removed into heaven. A more conservative definition simply views “these things” as the future history of the Church on earth which has just been revealed to John, and now John will be shown additional things in heaven. What we can surmise with some certainty is that it is Christ who is speaking to John and inviting him into heaven. From Revelation 1:10 we know that the “first voice” was Christ’s voice and only Christ can open the door to heaven. Without adding additional meanings it seems clear that verse-1 describes Christ inviting John into heaven to see things which are in heaven and/or will occur in the future.

Revelation 4:2 states: ***“Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.”*** This verse reinforces the view that it is John rather than the entire Church being transported to heaven at this point because John refers only to himself. John’s reference to being “in the Spirit” is generally interpreted as meaning his spirit rather than his body has been transported to heaven and/or what he is seeing that is in heaven is being revealed through the Spirit of God. The very first thing John sees is a throne with a being sitting on it. Based on the description in the following verse it is generally assumed that the being is God.

Revelation 4:3 states: ***“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.”*** Revelation 21:11 describes the jasper as “crystal-clear” and a sardius is a red stone like a ruby. Some see the clear jasper representing the purity of God. The color red could represent God’s righteousness or fire, symbolic for the Holy Spirit or the wrath of punishment to come. The “rainbow” around the throne can also be translated as a “halo,” therefore, this could either represent the holiness and glory of God or be a reminder of God’s promise to Noah not to destroy the world again by flood. We will revisit this image when we discuss verse-5.

Revelation 4:4 states: ***“And 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.”*** These twenty-four thrones and elders are mentioned again in Revelation 4:10, 5:8, 11:16 and 19:4. The elders are not identified anywhere but twelve of them are believed to be Jesus’ disciples. Regarding the disciples, in Matthew 19:28, when Jesus was speaking to His disciples He said, ***“Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*** Revelation 20:4 speaks of an undisclosed number of thrones on which people sit and pass judgment. Some believe the twenty-four elders are a combination of the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel. Others believe they represent the twenty-four groups or orders within the Levitical priesthood. All we can know for certain, using Jesus’ words from Matthew is that they are of those who follow Him.

Revelation 4:5 states: ***“And from the throne proceed flashes of lighting and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;”*** The description of lighting and thunder are similar to other theophanies (appearances of God) such as in Exodus 19:16 and Ezekiel 1:13. Combined with the description given in Revelation 4:3 above with a clear jasper in the center, I am reminded of the similarity of what my late wife was shown in one of her visions. She described the One sitting on the throne, saying, ***“The center of His Being was clear as crystal, and through Him, I could see the white throne on which He sat. Shooting out were rays of brilliant light, first transparent, then bright white, then blinding white the further it got from His center.”*** (See her drawing at right.)



Regarding the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, we are told these are the seven Spirits of God. Similar descriptions can be found in Exodus 25:37 and Zechariah 4:2-6. The seven Spirits before the throne of God were already mentioned in Revelation 1:4. Revelation 1:20 informed us that the seven lampstands are the seven churches and from this we derived that the Spirit of God dwells in the Church. Therefore, what we are beholding is the Presence of God and the Spirit of God.

Revelation 4:6a continues, saying, ***“and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal;”*** Ezekiel 1:22, 26 describes an *“expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal”* (1:22) and *“above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne”* (1:26). Ezekiel 10:1 connects the *“crystal expanse”* with a *“sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne.”* It would seem that the prophet Ezekiel was seeing the same thing as John only instead of a crystal sea being “before” the throne, Ezekiel looking upward from below, saw the throne above the crystal expanse. John’s point of view is from *heaven* and Ezekiel’s is from *earth*. So what is the crystal sea? Ezekiel saw it between him and the throne and John sees it before or below the throne, therefore it seems to be a barrier or separation between heaven and earth. Ezekiel calls it an “expanse” which might provide us a vital clue. Genesis 1:6-8a states: ***“Then God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. And God called the expanse heaven.”*** The crystal sea and the expanse may be the same thing—a barrier God has placed between heaven and earth. Perhaps this is something like what mystics call the “veil” that separates the unseen spiritual world from the physical world we live in. The view from above describes the sea as “like glass” which is the appearance of a sea void of waves and turbulence. It could be that in heaven all is calm and full of God’s peace. Another clue might be derived from Revelation 15:2, which states: ***“And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.”*** Those who have escaped the beast through Christ find themselves on the sea of glass, perhaps meaning that they are in heaven and at peace.

Revelation 4:6b-8 states: ***“and in the center around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, 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.”*”** Now we encounter our first great mystery of meaning. What or who are these strange creatures who stand in the presence of God? They will be mentioned in nine other verses in Revelation, always near His throne and almost always in continuous worship of God (Revelation 5:6, 8:14, 6:1, 6 and 11, 14:3, 15:7 and 19:4). In Revelation they are called “four living creatures.” Similar creatures are described in Ezekiel 1:5-12 and 10:1-22 which he calls “four living beings” and “cherubim.” The creatures Ezekiel describes each had four faces, resembling the faces of a man, a lion, a bull and an eagle, and four wings. They each were associated with wheels that were full of eyes. Isaiah 6:1-7 also describes beings he calls seraphim. They are with God and worshiping God and have six wings, but with two of their wings they cover their face so we don’t know what they look like. The description of the “four living creatures” of Revelation, the cherubim in Ezekiel and the seraphim in Isaiah, although similar, each have distinct differences so we cannot assume they are the same. There has been much speculation regarding the symbolic meaning of these creatures and their various parts. Generally, the “eyes in front and behind” are seen to represent that these creatures see everything, past and future. Some see the four different faces representing leadership; the lion leader of the wild beasts, bull or calf leader of domestic beasts, eagle leader of the birds of the air, and man as leader of all. These four creatures may have some connection with the four signs of the zodiac, the Bull, the Lion, the Scorpion (frequently depicted with a manlike face), and the Eagle (a nearby constellation substituted for Aquarius). They could also represent the four powers at the four ends of the earth and be related to the four points of the compass and the four winds. All of this is pure speculation because in reality we simply do not know what they represent. What we do know is that they are consistently portrayed as being near God and continuously praising Him. Their function seems clearly to serve and praise God. They provide us with a good example to follow.

Revelation 4:9-11 states: *“And when the living creatures gave glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 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, “Worthy are Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.””*

Now the four living creatures praise and honor God, and when they do so, all the elders join in to praise and honor God. The act of falling down before God and casting their crowns before Him is symbolic for both their submission to God and their acknowledgement that all of their rewards (their crowns) belong to God, i.e., they would not have them if it were not for God. This is reinforced by their words, acknowledging that God created all things and that everything exist (including themselves) because it was God’s will for them to exist. God deserves praise and honor for He is the source of all that is worthy of praise and honor. Their praise and words are also further assurance that God is in control over all creation, and will soon make His great power evident to all. Perhaps this scene is intended as evidence that God is about to do away with the present creation and create a new and perfect one for all who honor Him.

CHAPTER 5:

It is important to understand that the division of the Bible into chapters and verses only came into existence about 500 years ago and there were no such divisions in the original text. While chapters and verses assist us greatly in finding and referencing particular scriptures they are not necessarily divinely inspired and sometimes arbitrary. With that said, chapters 4 and 5 should probably not have been separated into two separate units. The scene John is witnessing in heaven continues from chapter 4 into chapter 5 in a seamless fashion. What does change is the focus of our attention, which shifts from God on His throne to the Lamb of God who is worthy to open the scroll in God’s hand. The emphasis shifts with the scroll from God the Father to God the Son, and likewise, the worship in heaven shifts from God the Father to God the Son, the Lamb of God. With the introduction to the scroll in chapter 5 we begin a transition which is preparing us to hear what has been written by God and will soon come to pass as the seals on the scroll are opened and the contents of the scroll revealed.

Revelation 5:1 states: ***“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.”*** Our attention is drawn to a book (scroll) which is held in the hand of God. It is sealed with seven seals and in such a way that a portion of it can be unrolled at a time. Seven is often symbolic for perfection and/or completeness. We are told that both sides of the scroll contain writing, both “inside and on the back.” The sealed scroll is referenced three places in the Old Testament. First, there may be a reference to it in Isaiah 29:11 which speaks of a sealed book (scroll) as part of a warning against Jerusalem. The book cannot be read because the people are unworthy to read it. In Ezekiel 2:9-10 we are told of a book (scroll) written on front and back which contains lamentations of mourning and woe. And finally, in Daniel 12:4, Daniel is instructed to seal up words he has been given regarding the end of time. All of these accounts are consistent in that they speak of a sealed book that speaks of terrible things that will happen at the end of time.

Revelation 5:2 states: ***“And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break the seals?””*** As a prelude to the termination of Satan’s reign, it is necessary to find someone who can open the book so as to release the seven plagues it contains, that God’s judgment may take place and be delayed no longer.

Revelation 5:3 states: ***“And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it.”*** In this verse we are simply being informed that there is no one in heaven or on earth among humans and/or angels who is worthy to open or look into the book. No one in heaven and earth is good enough to know the secrets of God or to administrate over God’s punishment of the wicked.

Revelation 5:4-5 states: ***“And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.””*** John weeps because of his disappointment that no one was found worthy to open or look into the book, which would allow evil to continue its reign unpunished and delay the reward of the faithful. But John is reassured by one of the elders on the twenty-four thrones around God. The question asked in verse 5:2 was rhetorical in that the answer was known in heaven even before the

question was asked. Only the One who has “overcome” is worthy to open the seals. We are told that this person is the **“Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.”** The titles apply to the Christ and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus Himself states: **“I am the root and offspring of David.”** Our attention is now focused with anticipation on the only One who is worthy, our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Revelation 5:6 states: **“And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”** We see a shift from one type of animal imagery to another relating to Christ, from the Lion to the Lamb. The Lamb imagery reminds us of the Passover where a lamb is slain for the sake of God’s people. We are reminded that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Lord of Lords (Lion), has willingly sacrificed Himself (Lamb) for our sake, and through His sacrifice has “overcome” sin and death and become “worthy” to open the seals. Regarding the imagery of the seven horns and seven eyes, the horns are symbolic of complete power (the omnipotence of God) and the eyes are symbolic of complete awareness and knowledge (the omniscience of God). In numerous passages in the Old Testament “horns” are portrayed as symbols of power. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”** Likewise, as we have discussed regarding the four living creatures, “eyes” are often portrayed as symbols of seeing, which equate both to knowing and knowledge. The imagery is very similar to that found in Zechariah, chapter 4, which speaks of a vision of a lamp stand with seven lamps and seven flames, which are equated with the Spirit of God. Referencing the seven, Zechariah is told **“these are the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth”** (Zechariah 4:10b). In reference to Jesus, Hebrews 4:13 states: **“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”**

Revelation 5:7 states: **“And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”** Perhaps symbolic, but in the passing of the scroll which will release judgment upon the earth, we see the passing of authority to administer that judgment from God the Father to God the Son. Jesus taught His disciples, saying, **“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order**

that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him... For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:22-23, 26-27).

I believe this verse represents the central and pivotal point in chapters 4 and 5. Prior this point we see the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders which surround the throne of God worshipping God. After this point we now witness them worshipping the Lamb, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Revelation 5:8 states: *“And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”* Beginning with verse 8 we see a three-fold acknowledgement and praising of the Lamb which has begun with those closest to the throne of God—the four living creatures and twenty-four elders. In verse 11-12 we will hear all the angels of heaven add to the chorus, and in verse 13, all of creation both in heaven and on earth will add their praise.

Revelation 5:9-10 states: *“And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”* By the words contained in their “new” song it is clear that they sing about Christ who has purchased for God through His blood people of all tribes, tongues and nations. Jesus Himself at the Last Supper said to His disciples, *“This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many”* (Mark 14:24). Speaking of Christ, Paul will add clarity to this image in his own words, saying, *“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven”* (Colossians 1:19-20).

Revelation 5:11-12 states: *“And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor*

and glory and blessing.” The acknowledgement of Christ’s worthiness and praise for Him continues to radiate out from the throne to now include thousands of thousands of angels in heaven.

Revelation 5:13 states: ***“And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and domination forever and ever.”*** Ultimately, all of creation joins in and sings praise to the Father and the Lamb. In Isaiah 45:23 God declares through the prophet Isaiah, saying, ***“I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me ever knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.”*** And Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, will declare to us, saying, ***“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that a the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”*** (Philippians 2:9-11).

Revelation 5:14 states: ***“And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.”*** As chapter 4 began with praise for God the Father, chapter 5 ends with praise for both Father and Son. The four living creatures closest to the throne of God keep saying “Amen” which adds certainty to the message. And what is the message of chapters 4 and 5? Clearly, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are to be at the center of our worship, for they alone are worthy of our worship. And that authority to administer judgment has been given to Jesus, the Lamb of God, for the Father has given Him this authority and only Jesus is worthy to administer God’s justice—a justice that will punish the wicked and reward the righteous.

(This Concludes Part-3)