

4. The Throne Room and the Sealed Scroll.

Revelation Chapters 4 and 5

The Book of Revelation

YouTube video link: <https://youtu.be/jAnd4PqaGxE>

After John the Apostle received Christ's message to seven specific churches in Asia Minor, now known as Southwest Turkey, the Lord had something special in store for him, a glimpse into the heavenly realm. In the previous chapter, John witnessed a closed door, symbolizing how closed in spirit the Laodicean believers had become to the Lord and the Lord's desire for a close relationship with His church (Revelation 3:20). The intimate relationship John had with the Lord Jesus was perhaps the reason that he was chosen to see what will yet take place on earth. Intimacy with Christ precedes revelation as to God's purposes. Anyone who claims to speak for God should demonstrate a life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The Lord's call to come up through the open door immediately brought John into an experience of being "in the Spirit" (v. 2). John describes what he saw:

The Throne in Heaven

¹After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ²At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. ³And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. ⁴Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads (Revelation 4:1-4).

We should not think that this is "astral traveling" or anything that New Age thinking would have us believe. Neither is John taking drugs or using occult means to experience an alternate reality. This experience was similar to that of the apostle Paul who wrote in the third person about being caught up to the third heaven:

¹I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— ⁴was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

In the case above, Paul was not permitted to share what he saw, or maybe what he saw was beyond words for him to communicate. What John witnessed was also hard for him to describe. The first thing he notices is the booming voice speaking to him like a trumpet (v. 1). When John writes about what he sees, he doesn't describe what God looks like. He writes in terms of the colors of the glory emanating from the throne of God. This inability to see God is like Paul's statement about the glory of God in his letter to his protégé, Timothy:

Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:16).

The only one who has seen God in His fullness is the Lord Jesus, Who said, “No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father” (John 6:46). John the Apostle was aware that a person was sitting on the throne, but John described His appearance as having the colors of jasper (ἴασπις) and ruby (σάρδιον) (some translations have carnelian).

Scholars have difficulty knowing the color of the jasper stone, for the color varies greatly. The modern jasper stone is somewhat dull and opaque, whereas the jasper referred to in the Scriptures is called "a very precious jewel" in Revelation 21:11 and "clear as crystal." Our best understanding of jasper, therefore, could be that of a diamond that has the appearance of different colors depending on one's perspective.

John also describes the glory of the One on the throne in terms of the color of a sardius stone, also known as carnelian, and translated as a ruby in the NIV. Both stones were part of the ephod that the high priest wore (Exodus 28:18). Surrounding the throne was a rainbow of emerald colors (v. 3), perhaps meaning different hues of green. Ezekiel the prophet also saw this same rainbow around the throne:

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking (Ezekiel 1:28).

John then describes seeing twenty-four other thrones encircling the throne of God, with twenty-four elders in white robes with crowns of gold on their heads (v. 4). Angels are never described in the Scriptures as having crowns on their heads, but believers who overcome self, sin, and Satan, are described as wearing crowns of victory. We must remember that God took John outside of time and space to view a scene that has not happened yet in our time. These elders could be representatives of those throughout the church age that God alone knows.

Some say that the twenty-four are representative of the twelve sons of Israel (Revelation 21:12) and the twelve Apostles (Revelation 21:14), and that is a possibility. We are reminded of Jesus' words to James and John when they were looking for a position to the right and left of Jesus. He said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared” (Mark 10:39-40). The figure of 24 may be taken from 1 Chronicles 24:1, where David divided the priesthood of Israel into twenty-four courses of priests. The priests in that Scripture could be a type, picture, or shadow of the body of Christ called to be “a chosen people, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, Emphasis added). The white linen robes that the overcoming elders are wearing symbolize “the righteous acts of God's holy people” (Revelation 19:8), with the crowns [*stephanous*] representing the crowns given to overcoming believers now made kings and priests to our God (Revelation 5:10; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 2:10; 3:11).

Worship of the Creator

What John saw was a scene reminiscent of the time when the people of Israel stood together at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18) after the nation came out of Egypt. The children of Israel heard rumbling, there was thunder and lightning and the sound of a trumpet. The mountain shook. A loud voice spoke, and the children of Israel were so afraid that they asked Moses to speak to God on their behalf. John records something similar in his vision:

⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. ⁶Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:5-8).

John now experienced the glory of the Creator God as an incredible sight of lightning and rumblings, which this writer takes to be a vibration that causes the ground under John’s feet to quake, along with peals of thunder (v. 5). What an awesome experience it will be to stand before this holy God on that day when all men will give account to Him: “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matthew 12:36); “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Thank God that all who believe have a Savior who has paid our account for us! In the next chapter, Revelation 5, comes the opening of the seven-sealed scroll, i.e., the opening of which leads up to the judgments of God. What a terrible day it will be for those who are outside of Christ when those judgments come.

John then noticed a sea of glass, clear as crystal, before the throne (v. 6). This sea of glass is also similar to what the prophet Ezekiel describes: “Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads” (Ezekiel 1:22). John also writes later about those who overcome and stand beside the glassy sea: “And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name” (Revelation 15:2). This sight of God’s people could be the answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus in the upper room when He prayed, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22).

John then writes about four living creatures that are continually worshipping the Lord. These living creatures could represent all of creation, the lion being noble as the king of beasts, the eagle as being the highest of the birdlife, the ox being the strongest of animals, and the living creature having the face of a man representing the crowning creation of God, man. We see all of God’s creation standing before the Lord in worship and adoration for all He has done. Up until this time, the whole creation has been groaning in travail (Romans 8:19-23) for God’s crowning creation, man, to come into God’s fullness: “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:25 KJV). In the day in which we live, we are watching God at work in shaping and calling the Gentiles

(non-Jews) from all tribes, peoples, and languages (Revelation 7:9) into the fullness of the covenant of faith spoken to Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

Regarding the four living creatures, some Bible scholars have attributed these heavenly beings to cherubim and seraphim surrounding the throne. They are similar to the beings noted in Ezekiel 1:5-10. While there is much symbolism in the Book of Revelation, we cannot be dogmatic about these interpretations. In other words, the appearance of the creatures is meaningful, but they also are depicted as actual beings around the throne. It is clear that there is an order in the throne room of God. Around him are the four creatures, then the elders, then innumerable angels, and around them, all creatures everywhere, giving their praise to God.

John then saw the expression of thanks to God from His creation, i.e., the taking off of the crowns of victory and laying them before the Lord, for He alone is the One who gives us the victory (1 Corinthians 15:57).

⁹Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

¹¹“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things; by Your will they exist, and came to be” (Revelation 4:5-11).

Whenever ancient kings were defeated, the sign of their submission was that of the giving of their crown to the victor of the battle (2 Samuel 12:28-30). In more recent history, it became the sword of the opposing general. John saw a picture of all overcomers who would gain crowns of victory, laying their crowns before the Lord, Who alone had given them the victory.

As we come to chapter five of the Book of Revelation, we must remember that the chapter divisions came more than four hundred years after the New Testament was written. Chapter five, therefore, should be read as a continuation of chapter four of John's vision.

The Lamb Takes the Scroll

¹Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One seated on the throne. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals. ²And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” (Revelation 5:1-2).

The big question is, what is the importance of this scroll, and why is it sealed with seven seals? In ancient times, scrolls were made of papyrus or parchment and had columns of writing on them. The length of the message determined the size of the scroll. For instance, the complete scroll of the prophet Isaiah kept at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem is twenty-four feet long, with fifty-four columns of text.¹ When the scroll was finished, it was rolled up. If it was a legal document, witnesses were required to apply hot wax to the rolled-up scroll and put their seal into the wax.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_Scroll

The outside of the sealed scroll contained a brief summation of what was written inside. John Walvoord writes, "Roman law required a will to be sealed seven times, as illustrated in the wills left by Augustus and Vespasian for their successors."²

John's eyes are drawn to focus on the importance of this scroll, which is seen in the right hand of God. Voiced by a mighty angel, the challenge to the universe rings out for all to hear: "**Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?**" (v. 2). The picture is of an authoritative call loudly proclaimed through the universe for someone worthy who could break Satan's hold on Earth. This satanic bondage came about when Adam gave up his dominion when he obeyed the voice of the evil one in the Garden of Eden, where Satan was symbolized as the serpent (Genesis 3:6).

³But no one in heaven or on Earth or under the Earth was able to open the scroll or look inside it. ⁴And I began to weep bitterly, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside it (Revelation 5:3-4).

As the loud voice of the angel reverberates through the universe, at first, there is no reply. No one is found worthy, which causes John to weep bitterly.

What would be the consequences if no one worthy was found to open the scroll? Why did John weep bitterly when he thought that no one was able to open the scroll? What do you think the scroll is likely to represent?

Some scholars believe the scroll represents God's will and final settlement of the affairs of all the Earth, while others believe it represents the title deed to physical creation. All the promises of God, justice, judgment, and deliverance for God's people were wrapped up in that scroll. John was too hasty to weep, for one of the elders commands him not to weep and to look again as Someone appears to open the scroll, someone from the royal line of David, the lion of the tribe of Judah:

⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed to open the scroll and its seven seals" (Revelation 5:5).

How wonderful that Jesus is able to open the scroll, for He alone is worthy! If no one had been found to open it, the present suffering and captivity of creation would go on indefinitely! The scroll contains judgments that will be opened, but these judgments are necessary for the end of the present evil world and the restoration of all things. It can be seen as the title deed to creation but it also contains the means to how this restoration will come.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

Throughout human history, people have longed to see good triumph over evil and righteousness prevail over injustice. Humankind has struggled with all types of suffering caused by slavery to sin. Darkness prevailed due to evil forces, but there is One who has triumphed, not only for Himself but as the first fruit for all of humanity and creation itself (1 Corinthians 15:20). He broke the

² <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/revelation-5/>

invisible chains on the human heart for everyone who will come to Him and receive new life. Jesus the Messiah has triumphed to open the scroll!

Any Jew with an understanding of Jewish history knew of the prophecy of the One like a lion from Judah. On his deathbed, Jacob, or Israel, which is what God changed his name to, prophesied over the future of each of his twelve sons that became the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob prophesied accurately about the tribe of Judah:

⁸“Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. ⁹**You are a lion’s cub, Judah**; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? ¹⁰**The scepter will not depart from Judah**, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, **until he to whom it belongs shall come** and the obedience of the nations shall be his (Genesis 49:8-10, Emphasis added).

Jacob prophesied that the leadership of the nation would come from the tribe of Judah. The scepter (v. 10) was a rod or staff that symbolized power or authority, a scepter such as that held out to Queen Esther to approach the King of Persia (Esther 5:2). The lion is the king of beasts, and a lion's cub or young lion is exceptionally brave, knowing no fear in its strength and vigor. Jacob further spoke that the tribe would be like a lioness, said to be even fiercer than the male lion. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Jacob went on to say that One would come from the line of Judah, Who would take the throne of not only Israel but also the nations of the world (v. 10). Later, after David, the greatest king of Israel passed away, the prophet Isaiah went on to prophesy further that the more excellent King from the line of David would appear on the scene and lead the nation:

¹Then a shoot will spring up from **the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots** will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD. ³And He will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what His eyes see, and He will not decide by what His ears hear, ⁴but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and with equity He will decide for the lowly of the Earth. He will strike the Earth with the rod of His mouth and slay the wicked with the breath of His lips. ⁵Righteousness will be the belt around His hips, and faithfulness the sash around His waist (Isaiah 11:1-5, Emphasis added).

This Messiah King would come from the stump of Jesse, the father of King David, called the Root of David (Revelation 5:5), a descendant of the royal line of King David. The scepter of kingly leadership would not depart from the line of David until the One to whom the kingdoms of the world (Revelation 11:15) rightly belong shall come (Genesis 49:10). Christ’s birth in Bethlehem of Judah, the hometown of Jesse and David, fulfilled all these prophecies.

So, amid his tears, John looked again for a lion in the throne room; instead, he saw a Lamb:

⁶Then I saw a Lamb who appeared to have been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the Earth. ⁷And He came

and took the scroll from the right hand of the One seated on the throne. ⁸When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song:

“Worthy are You to take the scroll and open its seals,
because You were slain,
and by Your blood You purchased for God
those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.
¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom
and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign upon the earth” (Revelation 5:6-10).

Why is Christ seen as a Lion, yet also a Lamb? How will both sides of His character be seen throughout history?

Yes, John saw One from the tribe of Judah (5:5) and the kingly line of David, but Christ’s victory over Satan came about by His being a sacrificial Lamb. The Greek language speaks of a little lamb, a young Lamb that took a Jewish person back to the time of Passover when they sacrificed a little lamb in the prime of life (Exodus 12:5) to deliver them from Pharaoh’s slavery in Egypt. How can a lamb take on the beast of the Book of Revelation? (Revelation 13:1). He overcame Satan by purchasing salvation by giving His blood as the purchase price: “...by Your blood You purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (v. 9).

Man is seen as sold into slavery because of giving up his dominion over the Earth to the serpent (Satan) in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:26-28). When Adam and Eve obeyed the enemy rather than God, they were cut off from the source of life and the Tree of Life, and they came under servitude to Satan, a very real and evil spiritual being. The penalty for sin passed down to every human being is death (Romans 6:23), and the only way out of slavery to Satan was for an entirely perfect man to pay the penalty for him. A man cannot pay the price for another man (Psalm 49:7), but God, the creator of all things, by His redeeming value as a substitutionary sacrifice, could pay the penalty for man. Jesus, the God-Man, purchased all who will receive His gift of salvation and come under His covenant of love. “You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

This Lamb bore the scars of wounds received by being a lamb sacrificed, yet He was still alive and standing at the center of the throne (v. 6), bearing the wounds in His hands and feet by being a substitutionary sacrifice. The longing of Israel, and all believers everywhere, will come when Messiah comes in power and will roar from Zion as a lion:

The LORD **will roar** from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the Earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel (Joel 3:16).

The above words are yet to be fulfilled, and how glorious it will be for believers on that day. John now watches the Lord Jesus take the scroll, seeing a Lamb having seven horns, the number of

completeness, symbolizing the One with all power. Along with the seven horns on the Lamb were seven eyes, i.e., the entire seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit's ability in Jesus to see and know all things (Isaiah 11:1-2), "for God gives the Spirit without limit" (John 3:34). John considers this Lamb as He stood in the center of the throne of God (v. 6) and taking the scroll from His Father seated on the throne. All heaven broke out in worship as Christ took the scroll and the elders bowed down before the Lamb. All saw the bowls of incense, symbolizing the prayers of many all over the Earth, which was also the culmination of the prayers of the Apostle John. I'm sure he now wept again for the joy of the moment. Many of us will also see this scene in heaven if we should leave this Earth before the coming of the Lord, roaring like a lion in great power and glory.

The Lamb Exalted

¹¹"Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels and living creatures and elders encircling the throne, and their number was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. ¹²In a loud voice they said:

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing!’

¹³"And I heard every creature in heaven, and on Earth, and under the Earth, and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

‘To Him who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb,
be praise and honor and glory and power
forever and ever!’

¹⁴"And the four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped" (Revelation 5:11-14).

At the sight of the Lord taking the scroll into His hands, John is likely overcome with emotion, just as each of us would be if we were in heaven at the time. Remember, all that John is viewing is what must be hereafter (Revelation 4:1). The time will come when Jesus returns, and how ecstatic will be those whose lives have been bought by Him. We see many angels proclaiming and singing. We see the living creatures around the throne, the twenty-four elders, as well as many angels, myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, loudly giving praise to God. On top of that, John then hears every creature that has been longing for deliverance in heaven, in the sea, and yes, even under the Earth—all crying out to the Lord in worship, praise, and adoration. All creation has been waiting for this moment in time:

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not comparable to the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but because of the One who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and

brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until the present time (Romans 8:18-22).

What a great day that will be! The whole creation will be set free from its fear of man and will enjoy walking with us without fear of harm. Hallelujah!

Prayer. Lord, we see the nations in chaos and our world struggling with gross injustice, cruelty, and pain. What a glorious day it will be when You arise in power to triumph over the enemy of our souls and bring salvation to Earth. Make us ready, our hearts soft and open to You, our eyes looking to You in faith, while we proclaim, "Come Lord Jesus!"

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