

Revelation 4 God Is on the Throne

Introduction:

To begin let's take a look at our outline verse again:

Rev. 1:19 *Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this (literally after these things).*

- *the things which you have seen* meaning the glorified Christ of **Chapter 1**.
- *the things which are* or the things of the church in **Chapters 2 & 3**.
- *the things which will take place [after these things]*.

Compare with **Rev 4:1**:

Rev. 4:1 *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this (literally after these things)."*

We are about to enter into the heart of *Revelation*: the prophecies given to John regarding future events. This third and longest section begins with John going to heaven.

As we read the passage, try to count how many times the word *throne* appears. This is the scene in the throne room of heaven.

The Scene in the Throne Room of Heaven **Revelation 4:1-11**

4:1-2 Some people comment that these verses "teach a Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church." That is not exactly correct. Even Tim LaHaye, Mr. *Left Behind*, stops short of saying that. These verses do not explicitly "teach the Rapture."

There are some similarities here to the Rapture. This passage and the whole book of Revelation are both entirely consistent with a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, but neither explicitly teaches it.

There are at least three or four views out there on the Rapture. There are those in each group who attempt to read their perspective into the remaining chapters of Revelation. Upon closer examination, the evidence from Revelation is very inconclusive. I think the reason for this is that there is too much of an OT book of prophecy placed at the end of the NT. It ties the whole Bible together, and therefore, your view of the church is going to influence your view of Revelation. The same goes for any study of the Rapture.

Our concept of the Rapture is at least as much connected with our view of *Ecclesiology* (the study of the church) as it is with *Eschatology* (the study of Last Things). See teaching on **1 Thess. 4:13-18**. Both *pdf* note files and *mp3* audio files are available online.

4:2-11 The throne and the living creatures in this scene are comparable to what both Ezekiel and Isaiah saw. See **Isa. 6:1-8**; and **Ezek. 1:4-28 & 10:1-22**. In those earlier scenes, however, the elders were missing.

4:3 rainbow The terminology here indicates more of a full circle than an arc.

4:4 twenty-four elders Some conclude they are an unidentified class of angels. Others conclude they are men. If they are men, some say they represent the OT believers, namely the priests. Others say they are the 12 patriarchs of Israel plus the 12 apostles. Others say they represent the glorified church. Each of these views is held by honest, godly people and none of us can afford to be overly dogmatic. I opt for the latter – the glorified church – because:

- *Elders (presbuteros)* is a term used for men with delegated authority in both the Old and New Testaments. It is not used of angels. It's also the word from which we get our word "Presbyterian." John is not saying that there will be only 24 Presbyterians in heaven. It's important that we get that straight. ☺
- They speak of Christ redeeming people by His blood from every nation. Most existing MS even say "us" as in NKJV. **(5:9)**
- They are clothed in white robes as Jesus, just a moment ago in **Chapter 3**, said the church would be. See **3:4, 5, 18**.
- They are wearing crowns. The Greek word is *stephanos*, which is a wreath-like crown. The distinction is not absolute, but this is more a crown of victory or reward than that denoting ruling authority (*diadema*, See **Rev 13:1, 19:12**). It is the type of crown that is repeatedly promised to the Christian. See **1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 2:5, 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10, 3:11**.
- They are seated on thrones as the apostles were promised (**Luke 22:30**). Also, the entire church has promises that we will be joint heirs with Christ and will reign with Him (**Rom 8:17, 2 Tim 2:12, Rev 3:21**).
- They appear to function in the role of priests by having harps and bowls of incense (**Rev 5:8**). The priests were responsible for worship at the Temple during the Old Testament. In **1 Chron 24**, the entire priesthood was divided into 24 courses, each represented by one head of a father's house. Therefore, these 24 men can logically represent the entire church, a holy and royal priesthood of believers (**1 Pet 2:5, 9-10**).
- If we consider the generally chronological flow of *Revelation* and the Bible as a whole, we may note the following, all of which point to the elders as representing the church in glory:
 1. They were not present in heaven earlier – during the times of Isaiah and Ezekiel, when they viewed a similar scene.
 2. Immediately after the prophecy regarding the church age (**Rev 2-3**), they are present in the heavenly panorama that John views (**Rev 4-5**). This is also before the Tribulation period begins (**Rev 6**).
 3. They speak of a *yet future* reign on the earth. Notice the "shall reign" of **Rev 5:10**. This will not happen until after the Tribulation when Christ returns to earth to begin His Millennial Kingdom.

4:5 & 5:6 **seven Spirits** See also **Rev 1:4 & 3:1** and **Isa. 11:2, Zech. 4:1-10**

4:6 **sea of glass** Think of the bronze laver or sea that stood at the entrance to both the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Old Testament. John seems to suggest in Revelation that the “heavenly sanctuary” follows the pattern of the earthly tabernacle and temple (see **Heb. 9:23**). From Wiersbe, The parallels are as follows:

<i>Earthly temple</i>	<i>Heavenly sanctuary</i>
Holy of holies	The throne of God
Seven-branched candlestick	Seven lamps of fire before the throne
Bronze laver	Sea of glass
Cherubim over the mercy seat	Four living creatures around the throne
Priests	Elders (kings and priests)
Brazen altar	Altar (Rev. 6:9-11)
Incense altar	Incense altar (Rev. 8:3-5)
Ark of the covenant	Ark of the covenant (Rev. 11:19)

There is no temple in heaven in a material sense. All of heaven is God’s sanctuary for those who serve before His holy throne (**Rev. 7:15**).

4:6-11 **four living creatures** Compare to these O.T. scenes:

The emerald rainbow was around the throne vertically. These living creatures – some kind of heavenly beings – were around the throne horizontally. Wiersbe comments, “*They are, as it were, the king’s court.*”

- Isaiah saw *seraphim* with six wings who cried “**Holy, holy, holy!**” The term *seraphim* only appears in **Isaiah 6:1-6**.
- Ezekiel sees *four living creatures* in **Ezek 1**, which he sees again and calls *cherubim* in **Ezek 10**.
- There were *four cherubim* in the Holy of Holies in both the Tabernacle and the Temple. Two stood wing-to-wing behind and above the Ark of the Covenant. Two more bowed facing the center of the mercy seat, which covered the Ark.
- It seems that the *seraphim*, *cherubim* and these *living creatures* that John sees are somehow related. It’s not easy to say exactly how. Are they the same? Is it possible that the differences are only in the writers’ descriptions? Did they appear differently to each of the three writers? We’ll probably understand this when we finally see the heavenly throne room for ourselves.
- If we think back to the *elders* as representing the church, then the church, which may already come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer (**Heb 4:16**), will actually be brought into the holiest place of all at the Rapture.

4:8 Wayne Grudem explains God's holiness as follows:

God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.

John Feinberg goes quite a bit farther with his definition:

On the one hand, God is holy in that he is distinct or separate from everything else. Some call this aspect of divine holiness majesty-holiness ... As the majestic God whose qualities know no boundary, God's being is infinitely above his creatures. Moreover, as distinct from creation, he does not depend on anyone or anything to bring him into existence or to sustain him in being. ... Of course, there is only one being with such majesty and perfection. He is the unique ... God.

4:9-11 In his 1986 book, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Richard Dawkins said,

"Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."

In the throne room of heaven they recognize God as the creator and praise Him for it.

Dr. Dawkins and many like him see belief in God as a delusion. Sigmund Freud believed that God acted as an idealized father figure for humans. He provided an adversary to harsh Nature and an ally in the midst of life's troubles. For people who can't deal with reality, he saw God as the "ultimate wish-fulfillment." of our desire for a loving father.

It doesn't look like anyone here in the throne room of heaven agrees with them.

Beings of a much higher order than we are seem rather to agree with G.K. Chesterton, who said,

"If there were not God, there would be no atheists." (Where All Roads Lead, 1922)

Conclusions:

God Rules.

God's position on the throne in the throne room of heaven is meant to convey His sovereignty to us. He is the ruler over all things. How vital it is to recognize that in order to put every aspect of life into perspective.

Throw away your idols.

"God alone is God, and he alone merits first place—beyond every other love, every other anxiety, every other fear that consumes us". (Craig Keener)

Matthew 10:37-39 *³⁷He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*

God Is Holy

The words of the living creatures remind us that God is holy. God is utterly distinct from His creation and totally separated from sin and evil.

God Deserves Our Worship

Worship is not the invention of nice things to say about God; it is the recognition of who God already is (4:8), as well as what he has already done or promised to do (4:11; 5:9–12), and how worthy he is of our praise (4:11; 5:12–14). (Craig Keener)

We need the model of worship that **Revelation 4** gives us. The creatures before God's throne see God in all His present glory. We see Him imperfectly at best. As Paul put it,

1 Corinthians 13:12 *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

Worship Helps Us Recognize That God Rules

Praise puts persecution, poverty, and plagues into perspective; God is sovereignly bringing about his purposes, and this world's pains are merely the birth pangs of a new world (Rev. 21–22). (Craig Keener)

Live Like Your Goal Is to Glorify God.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

Closing Psalm:

Psalms 97:1-12(NKJV)

¹ *The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad!*

² *Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.*

³ *A fire goes before Him, And burns up His enemies round about.*

⁴ *His lightnings light the world; The earth sees and trembles.*

⁵ *The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.*

⁶ *The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory.*

⁷ *Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, Who boast of idols. Worship Him, all you gods.*

⁸ *Zion hears and is glad, And the daughters of Judah rejoice Because of Your judgments, O Lord.*

⁹ *For You, Lord, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods.*

¹⁰ *You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.*

¹¹ *Light is sown for the righteous, And gladness for the upright in heart.*

¹² *Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.*