

Revelation 4 • The Heavenly Throne

Introduction

Since we find the word “throne” or “thrones” used thirteen times in this chapter alone (and forty-six times in the whole of the Book of Revelation), it is no surprise that this is the key word for this chapter and one of the main ones for the entire book. We are first presented with a heavenly picture of the throne of God as a sort of introduction to a major purpose behind the events described in the whole of Revelation, that it is the throne of God which rules the universe, not the thrones of men. Much of what takes place in the Last Days is Satan’s attempt to take the throne for himself as exhibited in the midway point of the Tribulation when the satanically-possessed Antichrist takes the newly built Temple and demands to be personally worshiped in God’s place. But ultimately Christ comes to earth to take His throne and rule from Jerusalem as He establishes His Millennial Kingdom. The details may be found in the seals, trumpets and bowls of the Last Days, but the ultimate agenda is all about who occupies the throne. For overcomers, it is most important to remember that God is on His throne and in complete control.

*The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
And His sovereignty rules over all. (Ps. 103:19)*

¹After 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.

[Read v.1]

Q: What does “After these things” mean?

A: The basic structure of the Book of Revelation was given in Rev. 1:19. In Revelation 1 (“*the things which you have seen*”) John saw Christ among the lampstands, in Revelation 2-3 (“*the things which are*”) are the present tense messages to the churches, and Revelation 4 move forward from there (“*the things which will take place after these things*”). It is a way of stating that what is revealed from this point forward has to do with future events.

“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. (Rev. 1:19)

Q: If we study other instances in Scripture of experiences with things from heaven, what might stand out as different about John’s experience?

A: There are several experiences recorded throughout Scripture which are described as “the heavens opened” to glimpse or hear something from heaven by those on earth. (See Eze. 1:1; Mt. 3:16; Acts 7:56; 10:11) But John in his vision is transported through an open door from earth to heaven where to him is revealed things about the earth from a complete, unhindered heavenly perspective.

Application: Whereas in Scripture it is recorded that most often God revealed to earth-bound persons something necessary to put earthly circumstances into a heavenly context, here God is revealing it all from His heavenly viewpoint that we might know the earthly circumstances in advance.

²Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. ³And 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.

[Read v.2-3]

Q: How do we know that it is God the Father who is sitting on the throne?

A: Because God the Spirit is represented by the seven lamps before the throne (Rev. 4:5) and God the Son in the next chapter will come before this throne. (Rev. 5:6)

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Q: How does John's "throne room" experience compare with other similar encounters recorded in Scripture?

A: It contains many parallels and no contradictions to those experienced by Moses, two sons of Aaron and the seventy elders (Ex. 24:9-11), Ezekiel (Eze. 1:26-28; 10:1), the prophet Micaiah (1 Ki. 22:19; 2 Chr. 18:18) and the prophet Isaiah (Is. 6:1-3)

Q: Is there any significance to the precious gems mentioned?

A: Many commentators offer that the jasper as a clear stone represents God's purity, the sardius as a red stone represents God's wrath and judgment, and the emerald as a green stone is associated with God's grace and mercy.

Point: *These are the attributes which are in equal tension with each other, that God is a pure and holy God and cannot abide sin which must ultimately bear His wrath and judgment, but His grace and mercy has provided a way for sinful man to escape the consequences for their sin.*

Q: What is significant in that "there was a rainbow around the throne"?

A: This was the sign of the covenant God made after the Flood to never destroy the world again with water. (Gen. 9:11-17) It is a constant reminder of God's promise and covenant of mercy. Even though the wrath of God is about to go out from His throne to effect final judgment, in His wrath God will still remember mercy.

*LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear
O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years,
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy. (Hab. 3:2)*

Q: Where else in Revelation will we see the rainbow?

A: In Rev. 10:1 Christ will be noted as wearing it about His head to remind us that is through Christ that grace and mercy, and the fulfillment of all of God's promises, have come to the world.

Q: How might Noah's view of the rainbow be dramatically different from that of John's?

A: Noah (and the rest of us to this present hour) could only see an arc in the sky, while John saw the complete rainbow roundabout the entire throne. Also, Noah witnessed the rainbow **after** the storm of God's wrath, but John witnesses it **before** the storm of wrath to come.

Point: *Because we "see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12), our earthly perspective is incomplete. When we get to heaven what we saw as a part of the pattern will be revealed completely and whole.*

Application: *The starting point is a reminder of the character of God Himself, that what is at work is the equal application of holiness, righteousness and grace.*

⁴Around 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.

[Read v.4]

Q: Who are the elders?

A: The best answer we can derive is going to come by examining other Scriptures which may be referring to them:

1. The term “elder” throughout Scripture always refers to a human, identifying them as someone having attained maturity. Whether found in the Old Testament or New, the term **never** refers to angelic or heavenly beings.
2. The “*white garments*” and “*golden crowns*” indicate that these elders are **redeemed**—in other words, they have been saved through the blood of Christ, which must happen to all saints regardless of whether they lived in the times of the Old Testament or the New. They personally testify that they are redeemed in their song of praise recorded in Rev. 5:8-10.
3. In other references in Revelation they are noted as singing praise (Rev. 5:8-10), and in that song they refer to all Believers in heaven as “*a kingdom and priests to our God*” (Rev. 5:10). This is what the New Testament teaches as the ultimate role of Believers in heaven.

Point: *Although we could speculate as to names and personalities, the greater lesson to take away from this verse is that if we accept this verse on its face value: there is already a cadre of redeemed Believers serving God in heaven. They are so prominent in their relationship to God that John notices them even before the angelic beings also in service to the throne of God.*

Q: Why are there twenty-four?

A: Again, look solely at examples from Scripture. The plainest, face-value explanation from Scripture is that it describes the organization of service to the King:

1. The priesthood was divided into twenty-four divisions. (1 Chr. 24:3-19)
2. The musicians serving in the Temple were divided into twenty-four divisions. (1 Chr. 25)
3. Solomon had twelve “*officials*” (1 Ki. 4:1-6) for the administration of his government and “*twelve deputies*” who provided for his household for each month of the year for a total of twenty-four.
4. *[Note In the interest of honesty and full disclosure, Paul closes the Book of Romans by listing the names of twenty-four individuals he asks to be greeted. This author has no clue how this might apply to the twenty-four elders, but if God reveals to you a connection, please email us and let us know.]*

Application: *Believer’s service on earth is a reflection of their service which is already in progress in heaven. This is a picture of how God sees the ultimate destination of all those redeemed in Christ as His kingdom and priesthood.*

⁵Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.

[Read v.5a]

Q: How might what is coming “out from the throne” speak of God’s judgment?

1. God thundered when He originally gave the Law (Ex. 19:16), and He thunders again to judge those who have broken the Law. (Ps. 29; 77:18)
2. This is similar to the way God warned Egypt (Ex. 9:23-28), those judgments again being replayed in Revelation.

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*But the LORD abides forever;
He has established His throne for judgment,
And He will judge the world in righteousness;
He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity. (Ps. 9:7-8)*

Application: *The greater purpose behind the events provided in Revelation is to bring all things to God's judgment.*

And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; ⁶and 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.

[Read v.5b-6]

Q: What is the difference between the things herein described and those in previous verses?

A: In v.2-3 it begins with "One who **sitting on the throne**", in v.4 are the things "**around the throne**", in v.5a what is coming "**out from the throne**", and here what is observed "**before the throne**".

Q: What do the seven lamps represent?

A: They symbolize the Holy Spirit (so told to us the first time in Rev. 1:4). Previously the Spirit was represented as a dove of peace (Jn. 1:29-34), but in this final age the Spirit ministers as a judgment of fire. This also corresponds to the seven-branched lampstand here found in the heavenly temple of which the earthly was a copy. (Heb. 9:23; Rev. 11:19)

When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, (Is. 4:4)

Q: What does the sea of glass remind us of?

A: The laver found in the earthly temple (1 Ki. 7:23-27) which is a picture of God's holiness.

Observation: *The heavenly temple's correlation to the earthly one will be made complete by the description of an altar of sacrifice in heaven (Rev. 6:9-11) and an altar of incense. (Rev. 8:3-5) The heavenly Ark of the Covenant is revealed in Rev. 11:19.*

Q: How would the four living creatures fit into this description of the temple?

A: They parallel the cherubim embroidered on the veil. (Ex. 36:8)

Application: *The things which take place on earth are a reflection of the reality of what is taking place in heaven.*

⁷The 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.
⁸And 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."

[Read v.7-8]

Q: Have we seen these creatures in Scripture before?

A: They are very similar, but not 100% identical, to the creatures described in Ezekiel 1 and 10, but appear to be much closer to the seraphim described in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah describes his vision of the Lord sitting on His throne in heaven.

Q: How might these creatures be connected to the rainbow previously described surrounding God on His throne?

A: After the flood, the covenant God made was not just with mankind, but with fowls, cattle and wild beasts. (Gen. 9:8-13) Additionally, mankind lost its dominion over creation because of sin. However, we know that in Christ dominion will be regained when the kingdom is established. (Is.

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11:6-8; 65:25). These creatures may teach that God is in control of creation and that He will keep His promise to deliver **ALL** of creation from the bondage of sin. (Rom. 8:19-24)

Q: How does what they are doing before the throne illustrate the true intention for ALL of creation?

A: They are giving glory and honor to God just as all creation is to give praise to God. (Ps. 148)

Q: What do the “eyes around and within” represent?

A: They signify the wisdom of God.

Q: How is this wisdom revealed to us?

A: The creatures never cease to proclaim the holiness of God.

Application: *The redeemed elders serve as a reminder that God will fulfill all His promises where His people are concerned, the creatures before His throne are a reminder he will fulfill all His promises where creation is concerned, and the revelation of the heavenly temple upon which the earthly is patterned is a reminder that everything will be fulfilled where His Word is concerned.*

⁹And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the 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.”

[Read v.9-11]

Q: When the elders join in with their own praise, what might be significant about the fact that they “cast their crowns before the throne”?

A: The crowns symbolize the rewards each was given for their service on earth.

Application: *Those who live in heaven, just as one day we also will live there, clearly realize that all praise belongs to God and to God alone. All works of man, even those justly awarded by God Himself, are the result of God’s glory, not man’s.*

Q: How does this “doxology” (the subject of their praise) compare with the other doxologies we come across in Revelation?

1. In Rev. 4:11 the praise is for God as Creator of all things.
2. In Rev. 5:9-10 the praise is for God’s redemption through Christ’s blood.
3. In Rev. 11:16-19 the praise is for God the Judge who justly punishes the world for its sins and rewards His followers.

Observation: *The doxologies roughly follow the chronology of history from the creation, to the cross, to final judgment. They provide a comprehensive picture of God in complete control over all things and how the events in Revelation bring all things to fulfillment.*

Application: *God is in control.*

Overall Application

Just as Revelation 1 serves an introduction to assure us that God is in control for “the things which are” (Rev. 1:19), Revelation 4 serves as introduction to all that follows for “the things which will take place after these things”. For the Believer there is not only the absence of fear but a cause for continuous praise because God is on His throne and in complete control over everything in heaven and on earth; for the sinner it is the greatest cause of fear as the opportunity for spiritual reconciliation draws to a close and nothing is left except the wrath of God’s judgment.

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