

Chapter summary - John is taken up to heaven to be given a vision of "what must take place after this" (4:1). He sees God in His throne, worshiped by 24 persons identified only as "elders" (vv. 2-6a). The "living creatures" seen around the throne are familiar from the earlier visions of Isaiah (6:2) and Ezekiel (1:5-25; 10:1-22), continuously praising God as Creator and affirming His holiness (4:6b-11).¹

Chapters 4 and 5 are the introduction and background of the tremendous sweep of prophetic events predicted in the rest of the book. If chapter 4 and succeeding chapters relate to the future, they provide an important clue concerning the interpretation of the vision and the prophetic events which unfold in those chapters. One of the principal reasons for confusion in the study of the book of Revelation has been the failure to grasp this point. If Revelation has no chronological structure and is merely a symbolic presentation of moral truth, its prophetic significance is reduced to a minimum. If, as others hold, the predictions of this section of Revelation are already fulfilled in the early persecution of the church, it also robs the book of any prophecy of the future.

A literal interpretation of the prophecies beginning in chapter 4 is not fulfilled in any historic event and must therefore be regarded from the futuristic viewpoint if it is indeed valid prophecy. The events anticipated in the angel's promise to "shew thee things which must be hereafter" (4:1 [cp. 1:19]), should be regarded as a prediction of events which shall occur at the end of the age.²

Consider that the Throne of God, which was not in sight in the first three chapters of The Revelation, now comes into view; and so prominently, and in such character, from chapter 4 onward, as to make The Revelation become, "the Book of The Throne."

The throne was not seen when God walked with His first man Adam, in the garden. But later we read, "Jehovah sat as king at the Flood" (Psalm 29:10). Here it was for judgment, not worship.

The Throne is not seen in the history of Abraham or the patriarchs, for they were walking by simple faith, and were the depositaries of promises. They were not connected with a manifested Throne, but built altars for worship.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He has a nation for His name, and dwelt among them in glory (although Himself in thick darkness), sitting above the cherubim of the ark of the covenant, which was a type of the Throne on high...

Today God is on the throne of GRACE: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." The world's sin having been dealt with by God at Calvary, and thus all God's holy, righteous claims having been met, yea, and the world "reconciled" with His holy being, from God's side, the

¹ Richards, Lawrence O., *The Bible Reader's Companion*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

² Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 102

One sinned against, God sends forth His messengers to beseech men from their side to be reconciled to God! Furthermore, the believer is invited to come with boldness (literally, freeness, freespokeness) to this "Throne of Grace" (Hebrews 4:16)...

In Revelation, chapters 4 and 5, we find God's Throne set in peculiar character before us. In fact, the scene of Revelation 4 precisely corresponds to that of Daniel 7:9: "I beheld till thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days did sit," John's words being, "And behold, there was a throne SET in heaven" (Revelation 4:2).³

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III. the vision of the Heavenly Host, (Chs. 4, 5)

A. THE VISION CONCERNING THE THRONE OF GOD - (4:111)-- "A FIELD TRIP TO GOD'S THRONE" (4:1-11)

1. John is invited to the heavenly throne of God, (1-6a)

 **INTERPRETATION:**

The Revelation of God's Rule (1-2)

¹ **After these things**⁴ (after the first vision of Christ and the messages to the seven churches⁵ -- after "writing the things which [I] have seen, and the things which are" [Rev. 1:19]) **I** (John), **looked** (in astonishment), **and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard** (Jesus Christ's [chapters 1-3]) **was** (now commanding and clear), **like a trumpet speaking with me** (inviting me), **saying, "Come up here** (to the throne of heaven), **and I will show you** (make known to you), **things which must take place after this,**"⁶ (i.e., the things that are [1:19]).⁷

NOTES:

³ Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, pp. 86-88

⁴ **After these things** (Greek, *meta tauta*). This expression is most important, as we shall find throughout the book. It may mean merely a new vision, or a new phase of a vision, as in chapter 7:9. But in view of chapter 1:19, the use of the phrase in 4:1 is quite indicative of a *change from the church matters* of chapters 2 and 3 *to an entirely different scene and subject*. (Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, pp. 86-88)

⁵ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Logos)

⁶ The words "what must take place after this" are similar to those in 1:19, "what will take place later." Whereas 1:19 indicates that the events *will* take place later, in 4:1b the Greek word *dei* is used, which means that the events *must* occur. This points not only to the future but also to the sovereign purpose of God. The similarity of the two expressions confirms the threefold chronological outline given in 1:19. Both the revelation and its fulfillment are chronologically subsequent to chapters 1-3. Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Logos)

⁷ Upon examining the scenes following Revelation 4:1, we find...no mention of the "churches," until The Revelation itself is over, and the Lord Jesus is setting His personal seal to it in chapter 22:16ff...The Revelation having been sent to the assemblies, or Lord speaks to them. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, pp. 91

The Location of God's Rule

² **Immediately** (without delay), **I was in the Spirit; and behold** (thus being transported through the door, I saw), **a throne** (a seat of authority), **set in heaven** (the throne of the universe), **and One** (who rules the universe), **sat on the throne**, (exercising His power and authority).

F APPLICATION:

RESEMBLANCE'S TO THE RAPTURE IN REVELATION FOUR

1. **A voice**, (4:1 [*And the first voice which I heard*]; cp., 1 Thess. 4:16 [*the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel*])
2. **A trumpet**, (4:1 [*the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking*]; cp., 1 Thess. 4:16 [*with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God*])
3. **A going up**, (4:1 [*Come up here*]; cp., 1 Thess. 4:17 [*we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*])
4. **An immediacy**, (4:2 [*Immediately I was in the Spirit*]; cp., 1 Cor. 15:52 [*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised*])
5. **A change**, (4:2 [*I was in the Spirit*]; cp., 1 Cor. 15:51, 52 [*we shall all be changed -- we shall be changed*])

Conclusion: If Revelation does not actually and expressly teach the rapture of the church, it certainly illustrates it, for the parallels are too exact to be accidental.⁸

The Description of God's Rule (3-9)

³ **And He** (God the Father), **who sat there** (on the throne [cp., 1 Ki. 22:19; Psa. 47:8; Isa. 6:1; Eze. 1:26-28; Da. 7:9, 10]), **was like** (or had the appearance of), **a jasper**⁹ (flashing and radiating the brilliant colors of the color spectrum like a prism), **and a sardius**

⁸ John L. Benson, *Notes on Daniel and Revelation*, Practical Bible College, 1998.

⁹ "A transparent stone like glass or rock crystal," Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, (Logos) 1962. Like as, or even possibly being, the diamond, "signifying the glorious perfections of God." Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Logos)

stone in appearance (giving off a fiery red hue);¹⁰ **and there was a rainbow around** (encircling), **the throne, in appearance like an emerald.**¹¹

F APPLICATION:

This rainbow was a complete circle, not merely an arc, for in heaven all things are completed. The rainbow reminds us of God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:11–17), symbolic of His promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. God's covenant, as we shall see, was not only with Noah, but with all of His creation. Judgment is about to fall, but the rainbow reminds us that God is merciful, even when He judges (Hab. 3:2). Usually, a rainbow appears *after* the storm; but here, we see it *before* the storm.¹²

The **rainbow** ... symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy and grace. God's attributes always operate in perfect harmony. His wrath never operates at the expense of His faithfulness; His judgments never abrogate His promises. God's power and holiness would cause us to live in abject terror were it not for His faithfulness and mercy. God said of the faithful remnant of Israel who feared being swept away in His judgment of the nation, "They will be Mine ... on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Mal. 3:17).

¹⁰ Signifying the justice of God, that essential attribute of which he never divests himself in favour of any... This attribute is displayed in pardoning as well as in punishing, in saving as well as in destroying sinners. Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Logos)

It is ... to note that this is a throne in heaven, a reminder of the sovereignty of God who is far removed from the petty struggles of earthly government. Here is the true picture of the universe as being subject to the dominion of an omnipotent God.

The significance, however, goes far beyond the color... Each tribe of Israel had a representative stone, and the high priest had stones representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel on his breast when he functioned in his priestly office before the altar. This symbolized the fact that he as the high priest was representing all twelve tribes before the throne of God.

Significantly, the jasper and the sardine stone are the first and last of these twelve stones (cf. Exodus 28:17-21). The jasper represented Reuben, the first of the tribes, since Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob. The sardine stone represented Benjamin, the youngest of the twelve sons of Jacob. In other words the two stones represented the first and the last and therefore may be regarded as including all the other stones in between, that is, the whole of the covenanted people.

Furthermore, the names Reuben and Benjamin have significance. The word Reuben means "behold, a son." The word Benjamin means "son of my right hand." In both cases these terms seem to have a double meaning: first, the fact that though Christ is the representative of Israel, He is also the Son of God. Like Reuben, Christ is the first begotten son. Second, like Benjamin, Christ is also the "son of my right hand" in relation to God the Father. The person whom John sees on the throne looking like a jasper and sardine stone is, therefore, God in relation to the nation Israel. John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 104-105.

¹¹ John sees no form for God (Ex. 24:10), but only the brilliant flashing gems. "In the vision the flashing luster of the [jasper] and the fiery red of the [sardius] are relieved by the halo...of emerald which encircled the Throne." A complete circle. Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Logos).

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Logos).

⁴ **Around** (or surrounding), **the** (Almighty's), **throne were twenty-four** (other), **thrones, and** (seated), **on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders**¹³ **sitting, clothed in white robes** (which is symbolic of the imputed righteousness of Christ upon believers); **and they had crowns of gold on their head**, (which symbolizes a victor's reward [cp., 1 Jn. 5:4,5]).¹⁴

The Manifestation of God's Rule (5a)

⁵ **And from the** (central), **throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices**, (symbolizing the seriousness and righteousness of the judgments that God was about to present just as it was before He gave the 10 commandments, [Ex. 19:16]).

The Perfection of God's Rule (5b)

⁵ **Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are** (not the churches, but), **the seven Spirits of God**, (seven manifestations of His presence and power; symbolizing completeness or perfection).

¹³ We do not really know why this number is chosen, perhaps two elders for each tribe, perhaps the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles (Judaism and Christianity), perhaps the twenty-four courses of the sons of Aaron (1 Chron. 24:1–19), perhaps some angelic rank (Col. 1:16) of which we know nothing. Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Logos)

There are some problems related to the 24 elders being angels.

1. Nowhere else in Scripture are angels ever called "elders" (Rev. 4:4); but "elder" is a term that Scripture repeatedly employs with respect to the church.
2. Nowhere else does Scripture picture angels with crowns (Rev. 4:10); but crowns are awards of achievement for church saints. [The only possible reference to angels singing is in Job 38:7 prior to the fall of man.]
3. It is inappropriate for angels to be singing; elsewhere in Scripture angels speak, not sing (5:9). So far as we know, angels have not sung since sin entered the world.
4. It is unsuitable for angels to be thankful for redemption (5:9). Angels are irredeemable creatures, but the saints sing redemption songs.
5. The elders are sitting which symbolizes rest from their labors. The angels in verse 8 say that they never rest.
6. Angels will not reign during the millennial kingdom (Rev. 5:10; Heb. 2:5); but the saints will reign. John L. Benson, *Notes on Daniel and Revelation*, Practical Bible College, 1998.

¹⁴ Some would split the twenty-four elders into two groups of twelve, one representing the church and the other Israel. There is no compelling exegetical reason, however, for so dividing them. In all their appearances in Revelation they appear as a unified group of twenty-four, never as two groups of twelve.

It is unlikely, then, that the twenty-four elders are angels, or that they represent Israel, the Tribulation saints, or a combination of Israel and the church. That leaves one most acceptable possibility that they represent the raptured, glorified, coronated church, which sings the song of redemption (5:8-10). They have their crowns and live in the place prepared for them, where they have gone to be with Jesus (cf. John 14:1-4). John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 150

2. John is Witness to the heavenly attendants and activity around the throne of God - (4:6b-11)

NOTES:

The Representation of God's Rule (6-9)

- ⁶ **Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal**, (the floor around the throne was like glass, reflecting the brilliant colors and shimmering crystal [cp., Eze. 1:26]). **And in the midst of** (or above), **the** (center), **throne and around** (the immediate area of), **the throne, were four living** (angelic), **creatures full of eyes in front and in back**, (signifying here unlimited intelligence, ... ceaseless vigilance [cp. Eze. 1:4-25]).¹⁵
- ⁷ **The first living creature was like a lion** (signifying majesty and power), **the second living creature like a calf** (signifying patience and service), **the third living creature had a face like a man** (signifying intelligence and reason), **and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle**, (signifying sovereignty and transcendence).
- ⁸ **The four living creatures, each having six wings** (signifying that their supreme responsibility and privilege is to constantly worship God),¹⁶ **were full of eyes around and within**, (again signifying their unlimited intelligence and ceaseless vigilance). **And they do not rest** (relax from their worship), **day or night** (they praise God the Father nonstop), **saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was** (who has always been), **and is** (who always is), **and is to come** (who will always be),!"

F APPLICATION:

First on God's priority list is holiness.

The Duration of God's Rule (9)

- ⁹ **Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him** (God the Father), **who sits on the throne** (of the universe), **who lives forever and ever** (eternally)

The Justification of God's Rule (10, 11)

- ¹⁰ **the twenty-four elders fall down** (and prostrate themselves), **before Him who sits on the throne** (the Creator and Sustainer of the universe), **and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne** (relinquishing the honor bestowed upon them, in order to honor the One who bestowed it), **saying:**

¹⁵ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Logos).

¹⁶ John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, p. 154 From Isaiah's vision, we learn that the seraphim ... used their six wings in the following manner: "with two [they] covered [their faces], and with two [they] covered [their] feet, and with two [they] flew" (Isa. 6:2). Four of their six wings related to worship; with two they covered their faces, since even the most exalted created beings cannot look on the unveiled glory of God without being consumed. They also used two wings to cover their feet, since they stood on holy ground. Worship is thus their privilege, calling, and permanent occupation. (Ibid.)

¹¹ **“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive** (to be ascribed with), **glory and honor and power; for** (the reason being), **You** (by your decreative will), **created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.**”

F APPLICATION:

These chapters... describe the entire universe from the aspect of heaven. The purpose of this vision is to show us, in beautiful symbolism, that all things are governed by the Lord on the throne. 'All things' must include our trials and tribulations.¹⁷

FROM THE THRONE OF THE UNIVERSE GOD GOVERNS

1. ***Inflexibly*** or ***Permanently*** (4:2) --the throne is set, fixed, stable
2. ***Gloriously*** (4:3, 9, 11) --the dazzling gems, the glory & the honor
3. ***Dependably*** or ***Faithfully*** (4:3) --the rainbow of promise
4. ***Perfectly*** (4:5) --seven spirits suggest perfection & completion
5. ***Tranquilly*** (4:6) --the sea of glass
6. ***Intelligently*** (4:6) --eyes
7. ***Sovereignly*** (4:7) --a lion
8. ***Benignly*** (4:7) --the ox
9. ***Humanely*** (4:7) --face of a man
10. ***Transcendently*** (4:7) --the eagle
11. ***Actively*** (4:8) --wings, rest not
12. ***Eternally*** (4:8-10) ---*John L. Benson*

THE THRONE OF GOD

1. On the throne (4:2, 9)
2. Round about the throne (4:3, 4, 6)
3. Out of the throne (4:4, 5)
4. Before the throne (4:5, 10)
5. In the midst of the throne (4:6) ---*John L. Benson*

GOD UPON HIS THRONE

1. The ***Posture*** of God (4:2)
2. The ***Glory*** of God (4:3) --the dazzling gems, (sardius and jasper)
3. The ***Faithfulness*** of God (4:3) --the rainbow of promise
4. The ***Wrath*** of God (4:5) --divine judgment proceeds from the throne
5. The ***Spirits*** of God (4:5)
6. The ***Holiness*** of God (4:8)
7. The ***Authority*** of God (4:8) --"Lord"
8. The ***Omnipotence*** of God (4:8)
9. The ***Eternity*** of God (4:9)
10. The ***Sovereignty*** of God (4:11) ---*John L. Benson*

¹⁷ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 84

TRUTHS ABOUT THE PLACE CALLED "HEAVEN"

NOTES:

1. Heaven is a ***real*** place (4: 1); it is not a fiction or a state of mind.
2. Heaven is an ***accessible*** place (4:1) -- a door open and an invitation to enter.
3. Heaven is a ***populous*** place (4:2-6)
 - 1) God is there (4:2)
 - 2) 24 elders are there (4:4)
 - 3) 7-fold Spirit is there (4:5)
 - 4) 4 living creatures are there (4:6)
4. Heaven is a ***governmental*** place (4:2, 5); the throne of the Universe is located there, and from there God sovereignly directs all things.
5. Heaven is a ***tranquil*** place (4:6); unlike earth, which experiences continual upheaval.
6. Heaven is a ***busy*** place (4:8); there are no idle beings in heaven.
7. Heaven is a ***worshipful*** place (4:10-11); all the creatures in heaven engage in worship. ---*John L. Benson*