



January 21st, 2026
Week 11

After this I looked, and there in heaven was an open door. The first voice that I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

² Immediately I was in the Spirit, and there was a throne in heaven and someone was seated on it. ³ The one seated there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian stone. A rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald surrounded the throne.

⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones sat twenty-four elders dressed in white clothes, with golden crowns on their heads.

⁵ Flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder came from the throne. Seven fiery torches were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. ⁶ Something like a sea of glass, similar to crystal, was also before the throne.

Four living creatures covered with eyes in front and in back were around the throne on each side. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion; the second living creature was like an ox; the third living creature had a face like a man; and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings; they were covered with eyes around and inside. Day and night they never stop, saying,

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God, the Almighty,
who was, who is, and who is to come.

⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one seated on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before the one seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne and say,

¹¹ Our Lord and God,
you are worthy to receive
glory and honor and power,
because you have created all things,
and by your will



Together, chapters four and five, constitute visions of heaven that clear and sharpen our visions of earth. Sounds strange at first—"Visions of heaven that clear and sharpen our visions of earth." How can a vision of heaven help us see life on earth more clearly?

The apostle John begins Revelation 4, "**I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven**" (4:1). When John uses the term, he is not referring to a far-away place "out there" or "way up there." John is on earth, on the island of Patmos, when he is given this vision.

While sitting on the rock pile on Patmos Jesus Christ pulls back the curtain, opens the door and gives John a picture to help him understand what is going on right now in that other dimension, which, like radio waves, intersects and pervades this dimension.

What does John see in that other dimension so close at hand?

"Look," he says. 4:1 — **"Behold!"** 4:2— "Behold!" It is unfortunate that some translations miss this and render John's words as *"there before me."* In both verses John's word is a verb, the verb *"to see,"* and in both cases the verb is in the imperative mood — "behold," or "lo," meaning "look!" John is not making a statement. He is giving an exhortation, a command — **"Look!"**

We have learned that **"look"** is the most frequent command in the entire book of Revelation. The second most frequent is **"fear not."** We obey the second by obeying the first. When we look we are no longer afraid.

"Look!" says John, **"the door into heaven is opened."** **"And look! A throne!"**

That is what John wants his fellow disciples to see. A throne! There is a _____. There is a control center of the universe. There is a seat of authority and power. Through our ordinary set of glasses we could conclude otherwise. From the events of life—terrorist attacks, extreme tornados, injustice, personal tragedy—we could conclude that there is no central control.

"Look! A throne!" Not "way out there." Not "way up there." Close at hand. So very close. Right here. We cannot see it with the unaided eye. We may not be able to see it with the set of glasses given to us by parents, school or culture. But put on Revelation 4 glasses.

"Look!" Do you see the throne? It is the most dominant image of Revelation. John refers to it _____ times and uses other related terms _____ times. **"Look!"** says John, **"A throne."**



Five things stand out about the throne. John is struck by what is on the throne, what comes from the throne, what is behind the throne, before the throne and around the throne.

ON THE THRONE

“Look! A throne was standing open in heaven, and One sitting on the throne” (4:2).

Good news! The throne of the universe is occupied! It is not up for grabs. Again, with our ordinary glasses we could conclude otherwise. It often feels that headquarters is vacant. It often feels that there is no one in control. Or worse, that there has been a coup, and that the powers of chaos, evil and death have stormed headquarters and taken over. Look! Look!

Look! A throne and someone is sitting on it!

How that basic vision must have lifted John’s heart. Times were hard. Really hard. Rome was tightening its grip, becoming more and more repressive. The government was becoming more and more corrupt and increasingly hostile toward the disciples of Jesus.

In a.d. 57 the Emperor Nero began feeding Christians to the lions. Peter and Paul were crucified during that period. By a.d. 95 the Emperor Domitian was expanding his “reign of terror.” He had more than 40,000 Christians killed. Timothy was beaten to death during this period. In a.d. 96 John was exiled to Patmos, left to—as theologian Thomas Torrance has put it—“rot and bleach” on the rock.

“Look! A throne and someone sitting on it!”

Notice how the Someone is portrayed:

- **4:3 — “The One who was sitting is like a jasper stone and sardius in appearance.”** Note especially the word _____. John is attempting to describe in words and images what can never be adequately described.

“Like jasper.” It is the perfect symbol, for jasper is a translucent stone like glass, revealing and yet concealing. “Like sardius.” Depending upon how the light shines, the colors of sardius range from yellow to red to green. The imagery suggests beauty, majesty and radiance. The One who sits on the throne is altogether lovely, dazzling beyond description.



- **4:8** — The living creatures call him, ***“the Lord God Almighty.”*** Almighty Pantocratos is the Greek word John uses; it is his favorite word for God. We are so used to the sound of the word that it no longer moves us. “All ...might.” On the throne sits One who has “all” might and power and strength. And is, therefore, in the words of Esther Ng of Hong Kong, “not a victim of circumstance nor of human manipulation.”
- **4:11** — the twenty-four elders sing, ***“You have created all things and by your will they have their being.”*** Everything that is, including Rome, the Caesars, the devil himself, owes its being to the One on the throne. Were God to cease to exist everything in the universe would also cease to exist.

Whether the world realizes it or not, whether we acknowledge the fact or not, we all live and move and have our being in him. Evil can “strut” on the stage of history “only as long as the Ancient of Days on the throne allows.”

“The Lord God Almighty, you have created all things.” And can, therefore, create again. Because God calls into being the first creation he can call into being a new creation. The next time we hear God speak in the book of Revelation is in chapter 21, ***“Look! I make all things new”*** (21:5).

There is hope because the One sitting on the throne is the Creator.

- **4:9** — The living creatures sing, ***“Holy, Holy, Holy”*** three times. Always three times, for Holy is the essential, fundamental attribute of God. Holy means wholly other, absolutely pure.
- **4:9** — The living creatures sing, ***“Who was and is and is to come.”*** There in the beginning, there in the end and there in the middle, the eternal contemporary. Let the vision stir your imagination!

“Look! A throne with someone sitting on it.”

“Our God reigns!” is the way the prophets put it. *“Our Father, who art in heaven”* is the way Jesus puts it. It does not mean *“our Father who art far, far away, remote and distant,”* but *“our Father who art on the throne, close at hand.”*

Again, with our ordinary set of glasses we do not see any of this. Scripture never promises that the visible circumstances of life will proclaim the sovereignty of God. The visible circumstances often call the sovereignty of God into question. That is when we need to put on Revelation 4 glasses!



The living God is so secure that in the vision God sits. Not once in the book of Revelation are we told that God stands. When orders are given from the throne “we do not even see a movement of his hand ... the command comes by voice alone.”

FROM THE THRONE

Revelation 4:5 — “*From the throne proceed flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder.*”

It is awesome to imagine what it all means. The language takes us back to Mount Sinai, thousands of years before, when Moses was called up the mountain by God.

Exodus 19:16-19 — *There was thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud and a very loud trumpet sound . . . and the mountain was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire . . . and the whole mountain quaked violently.*

When you trace the use of all that imagery through the Bible you learn that it is a way of declaring how awesome and how powerful and how holy God is. The imagery declares God’s right to judge—to judge all that is not right. The imagery declares God’s ability to overcome evil. Who or what can finally stand against this God?

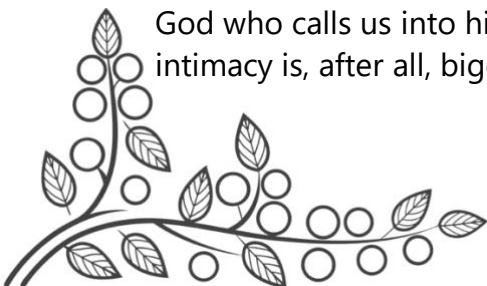
It is interesting to observe how this imagery is used in the rest of the book of Revelation. There are three series of judgments, three rounds of God executing his wrath upon evil: the seven _____, seven _____ and seven _____.

The fascinating thing is that the seventh of each series (the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, the seventh bowl) is opened with an echo of 4:5:

“from the throne proceed flashes of lighting and rumblings and peals of thunder.”

- Seventh seal — ***“peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake”*** (8:5)
- Seventh trumpet — ***“flashes of lightning, rumbling, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail”*** (11:19).
- Seventh bowl — ***“flashes of lightning, rumbling, peals of thunder, a violent earthquake ... and huge hailstones”*** (16:18-21)

The imagery tells us that we are, after all, dealing with Someone terribly awesome. The God who calls us into his presence, who calls us to himself, who invites us into tender intimacy is, after all, bigger than the whole universe, more massively powerful than



anything we have ever known. And the imagery tells us why we must pay attention. The imagery tells us why we dare not play games with God. We are dealing with sheer greatness.

BEHIND THE THRONE

Revelation 4:3 — “*And there was a rainbow around the throne.*”

The word translated “around” (kuklon) is fluid enough to mean behind, in the sense of encompassing from behind. The rainbow is the symbol of God’s promise to never again destroy the earth by flood. The rainbow is, therefore, the symbol of God’s mercy and faithfulness. We need it to be there after seeing what comes from the throne!

The rainbow declares that the holy One welcomes the unholy—“*it is safe to come.*” The rainbow declares that we can trust the living One when he judges. His judgments are merciful and his mercy is just. The rainbow declares that we can dare to dream of a new creation, for the One who promises keeps his promise.

IN FRONT OF THE THRONE

Revelation 4:5 — “*And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.*”

Lamps of fire symbolize the purifying and healing consequences of being in God’s presence, and the illuminating and revealing consequences. John says in his first letter, “***God is light and in him there is no darkness at all***” (1 John 1:5). John says the seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God (4:5).

Seven is the number of _____. “The Seven Spirits” is a way of referring to the Spirit in all his manifold completeness. Seven Spirits of God means the Spirit of God are completely there, completely available, completely complete. When we approach the control center of the universe everything is open, above board, clear and clean. No deceit, no games, no duplicity, no double messages, no manipulation. In the throne room we cannot but be changed.

“And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal” (4:6).

From the rest of the book we discover that, for John, the sea represents everything that _____. The sea represents all that seeks to overcome, undo, destroy the work of God.



As we learn from Revelation 13, it is from the sea that the first beast emerges. This

means, by the way, that John is not wearing “rose-colored” glasses. He recognizes the fact of evil.

“Look! A throne and before it what looked like a sea, smooth as glass, clear as crystal.”

What is John wanting his first readers, and us, to know? That chaos will not win! Before the throne chaos is stilled, chaos is subdued. What is amazing is that the sea is even in the picture, that chaos is even in the presence of God. What we are being told is that even chaos has a purpose in God’s sovereign rule. Even the forces ranged against God serve the kingdom of God!

We all know the reality of chaos. How often circumstances threaten to undo us. How often the pressures become so overwhelming that we feel as though the waves are going to crash in on us. How often our emotions are so churned up inside we feel we are going to split apart.

“Look! Look! A throne. With someone sitting on it. And before the throne a sea—smooth as glass, clear as crystal!”

John and his contemporaries needed this vision. The church was like a little boat being tossed on stormy waves. With the unaided eye, through the ordinary set of glasses, it seemed hopeless. Then they got Revelation 4 glasses. And they were able to sing with the psalmist, ***“O Lord, Yahweh, who is like you, O mighty Lord? You rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them”*** (Ps 89:8-9). Chaos does not win.

From the perspective of the heavenly vision we realize why the sea gets stirred up in the first place. Turmoil in the world is due in part to _____, and in part to the _____. Much turmoil in the world results from conflict among nations and ideologies. But the turmoil in the world, the upheaval and change, is finally due to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

“The time is fulfilled,” says Jesus, ***“and the kingdom of God has come near”*** (Mark 1:15). Thus, Thomas Torrance can say, “It is because the kingdom of God has already invaded this world and is breaking up the kingdom thereof that evil is provoked to such bitterness and to its final desperation.”

When we wear Revelation 4 glasses, we realize that we never need to _____. Nothing—including the sea—can overcome the One who sits on the throne!



What is really exciting is that when John is given a vision of the new creation the first thing we notice is that the sea is gone: ***“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea”*** (21:1).

Note the order (in Revelation 19-21) in which God judges the forces ranged against us: *first*, the beast (19:20), then the *devil* (20:10), then *death* (20:14), then *Hades*—the place of death (20:14) and then the sea—the power of chaos.

“Look! Before the throne a sea, smooth as glass, clear as crystal.” Say to chaos, “You cannot win.”

AROUND THE THRONE

“And around the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them twenty four elders and golden crowns on their heads Around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and back.” (Rev 4:4,6)

The number twenty-four is most likely suggested by $24 = 12 + 12$. And the $12 + 12$ most likely represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus the Messiah. It follows that the twenty-four elders then represent the redeemed people of God; twelve representing the church *before the coming of Jesus*, twelve representing the church *after the coming of Jesus*.

Both have been bought by the blood of the Lamb, which is made clear in Revelation 5.

The living creatures are harder to interpret. Some suggest they represent an exalted order of angelic beings who lead the rest of the heavenly host. Others suggest that they represent God's creation. John sees four living creatures. Four is the number of creation: four corners of the earth, four winds, etc. There are four living creatures: one “like” (there's that word again) a lion, one like an ox, one like a man, one like an eagle. There is a saying of the rabbis that may reflect the tradition behind this imagery.

Rabbi Abihu (ca. a.d. 300) taught that there are four mighty creatures. The mightiest among the birds is the eagle, the mightiest among domestic animals is the ox, the mightiest among the wild animals is the lion, the mightiest of them all is man; and God has taken all these and secured them to his throne

The four living creatures most likely represent the whole animate creation made by God for God. And what are the elders and living creatures doing around the throne? They are



_____ — they are worshipping the One who sits on the throne. Day and night the living creatures never stop saying over and over, ***“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come”*** (4:8).

When we “go to worship” we are entering a service already in progress. As I often say when leading public worship, “Worship does not begin with us and it will not end with us. When we gather to worship we step into a worship service that has been going on for a long time!”

John tells us that whenever the living creatures give glory to the One who sits on the throne, the twenty-four elders fall down before the throne and say, ***“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power”*** (4:11). The cry “worthy” does not come from the religious world. It comes from the secular world, from the political realm.

“Worthy” is what was shouted by citizens to the emperor when he entered a city. “Worthy” is what was shouted by the Roman senators as the emperor entered the great hall. Scholars have done a great deal of research into the so-called “imperial hymns,” the songs and choruses sung at political events. Here is a list of the words and phrases shouted to the emperor:

- Holy one
- Glory
- Salvation belongs to you
- Authority
- Worthy to receive power
- Righteous are your judgments
- Our lord and god (Dominus et deus noster, dominus terrarum, dominus mundi—literally, “Our lord and god, lord of the earth, lord of the world”)

The twenty-four elders and four living creatures know who truly deserve such shouts. And they know why. ***“For you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being”*** (4:4).

The longer we wear spiritual glasses, the more we realize how appropriate it is that the elders come off their thrones and cast their crowns down before the throne in the center of thrones. They take all they are and all they have and all they have achieved and lay it all down before the throne in the center. For all of life flows from and returns to and revolves around the throne in the center.

The single, most reliable indication that our vision is clear is that we are a _____.
_____. People who worship with their lips and hearts, with their minds



and bodies. People who worship with their words and deeds. People who surrender everything to the One who sits on the throne.

And this vision teaches us that the surest way to gain or regain an accurate vision is to *worship*. John says at the beginning of Revelation, ***“I was on the island of Patmos in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”*** (1:9). It was while worshipping in the power of the Holy Spirit that John’s eyes were opened to the larger reality around him. It was while worshipping that he discovered that the miserable rock pile was a sanctuary of the Holy One.

And that if he did not worship, the rocks themselves would cry out “worthy.” Lutheran scholar Craig Koester sums up the importance of what we have seen in this chapter. How would this vision of the heavenly throne room strike members of the seven churches?

Since the situations of the readers varied, their responses to the vision would probably have varied too. First, Christians facing the threat to persecution might have found the vision reassuring, since it shows that God reigns despite the hostility that they receive from human beings. Power ultimately rests in the hands of the Creator, not their accusers.

Second, those seeking to accommodate pagan culture would probably have been uneasy with the vision, for if God reigns, then compromising one’s convictions for the sake of social and economic ease warrants the censure they received in Revelation 2-3. In allying themselves with the non-Christian world, they distance themselves from the heavenly court.

Third, the complacent and self-satisfied would probably have found the vision disturbing, for in comparison to the splendor of God’s presence, their pride in wealth and prestige is shown to be an act of self-deception. But whether the vision is initially assuring or disturbing, it is designed to attract all types of readers to the heavenly chorus, where they too might join in singing praises to God and the Lamb.

Do not be afraid. Things are not as they seem. Look! A throne! With someone sitting on it. And from the throne lightning and peals of thunder.

And behind the throne a rainbow. And before the throne the seven Spirits of God and a sea, smooth as glass and clear as crystal. And around the throne, creation and the church declaring the glory and praises of the One who sits on the throne forever and ever. Look!

*Written portions are taken from “Discipleship on the Edge” by Darrell W. Johnson.

