

What Does Revelation Chapters 4 & 5 Teach Us?

Revelation 4 & 5

**Vision one of Revelation is complete; vision two (4:1–16:21)
—the longest of the four—is about to begin.**

Chapters 4–5 constitute one vision of two parts:

- Chapter 4! God the Father and Creation**
- Chapter 5! God the Son and Redemption**

**The thrust of the two chapters is that both by creation and
by redemption, God is sovereign over His world.**

**In chapters 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus has been visiting His
seven congregations, offering us a look from below, from the
ground.**

The picture now changes to heaven, giving us a bird's-eye view. The person seated on heaven's throne has sovereign authority over everything that occurs on earth.

What Does The Bible Say?

Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast.

The voice said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.”² And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. (Revelation 4:1-2 NLT)

Jesus tells John to come up to heaven in the Spirit.

This statement looks back and provides an outline for the book in terms of both structure and chronology. John is instructed to write

- **what you have seen (ch. 1),**

- **what is (chs. 2–3),**
- **and what will occur after this (chs. 4–22).**

What Does The Bible Say?

4 Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. (Revelation 4:4 NLT)

Who were these elders?

Here are suggestions:

Stars (from an astrological background)

Angels

OT saints

Angelic, heavenly representatives of all saints

Patriarchs and apostles representing the OT and NT saints together

Representatives of the prophetic revelation of the twenty-four books of the Old Testament

I believe the elders represent redeemed humanity and not angels for several reasons:

- 1. Angels are never called elders.**
- 2. Believers are granted to sit on thrones as coheirs with Christ (Matt 19:28; Rev 3:21; 20:4).**
- 3. White clothes, though applied to both angels and humans in Scripture, are mainly the apparel of the redeemed in Revelation (3:4–5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13–14; 19:8).**
- 4. Finally, the victors' “crown” (2:10) is appropriate more for the redeemed than for angels.**

In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. 7 The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. 8 Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—

the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

(Revelation 4:6–8 NLT)

You have to be careful not to be dogmatic in defining visions when God does not give us clues.

However, these verses are similar to the angelic beings of worship, with the characteristics of Isaiah’s seraphim (Isaiah 6:2–3) and Ezekiel’s cherubim (Ezekiel 1:5–25; 10:1–22).

The lion is the king of the animal world. It emphasizes strength and honor—that which is noble and respected.

The ox is a servant. It exercises great power for the benefit of others. It was the mightiest among the domesticated animals.

Man is the pinnacle of creation; only man has a “face” in this vision. He is intelligent, rational, and spiritual. He is the apex of all God made. He is God’s vice-regent on earth.

The eagle soars in the heavens and often represents a deity. It is the mightiest among the birds and the swiftest of God’s creatures.

These creatures are strong like a lion, serve like an ox, see like a man, and are swift like an eagle. Each, in its particular appearance, witnesses the greatness and glory of our God.

9 Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and

ever), 10 the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, 11 “You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased.” (Revelation 4:9–11 NLT)

The elders throw their crowns before the throne because He is why they are in heaven.

He created them.

He developed the plan of salvation for them.

The world’s future looks bleak to many people. But that is where Revelation 5 enters the scene with a word of hope and certainty.

What Does The Bible Say?

Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals. (Revelation 5:1 NLT)

We see God the Father with a scroll.

2 And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice:

“Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?”

3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it.

4 Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. (Revelation 5:2-4 NLT)

Who is worthy to open the scroll?

5 But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.” (Revelation 5:5 NLT)

Jesus the Messiah is the Lion.

6 Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth. 7 He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. (Revelation 5:6–7 NLT)

Jesus is the resurrected Lamb.

Verses 8-10 Jesus is praised by the Elders/the redeemed saints.

Verses 11-12 Jesus is praised by the angels.

Verses 13-14 Jesus is praised by all of creation.

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

1. God, Our Holy Creator, is Worthy of Worship

(Revelation 4:1-11)

2. God, Our Crucified Redeemer, Is Worthy of Worship

(Revelation 5:1-14)

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: John's account of the vision of Revelation was written around the mid to late 60s AD.

Explore:

While some consider the angel's invitation to Come up here (4:1) as a possible symbolic reference to the rapture of the church, there is nothing in the text to indicate this directive relates to the gathering of the saints. While there is much symbolism in the book of Revelation, at this point the text is

describing the apostle's experience as he was being ushered into the throne room of Heaven.

God, Our Holy Creator, Is Worthy of Worship

(Revelation 4:1-11)

The first thing John saw was the One seated on the throne (verse 2). Naturally, John's eyes would be drawn to the center of everyone's attention. This One's appearance was beyond comprehension and defied description, which is typically the case when the writers of Scripture attempt to explain what they witnessed in the presence of God. It's impossible to imagine what John saw. Even his efforts to describe what he saw suggest he was overwhelmed with the sights and sounds all around him—an emerald rainbow, flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, flames of fire, and a sea of crystal glass (verses 3 and 5).

Surrounding the throne (verse 4) were 24 elders who wore white garments and golden crowns (Greek *stephanos*, which mark

achievement not royalty). Scripture does not identify these elders, although it is generally accepted that they represent believers. The idea is appealing that these could represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, which would picture an assembly of Old Testament saints and New Testament saints. But that is simply a matter of interpretation that is not clarified in the text. What is clear is their function—they were there to worship God.

Also around the throne were four living creatures: one like a lion, one like an ox, one with the face of a man, and one like an eagle. Whether these creatures are literal or symbolic is also a matter of interpretation, but as with the 24 elders, their function was also clear. They continually proclaimed: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! (verses 5b-8).

When the winged creatures proclaimed the glory of God, the 24 elders bowed down in worship to Him. As they cast their crowns before His throne, the elders declared God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power because He is the Creator of all things (verses 9-11).

Scripture affirms God is worthy to be praised for His work of creation.

- The angels were the first to express joyful praise when they witnessed God's creative work in shaping the earth – Job 38:4, 7.
- The heavens were made by the word of the Lord. He spoke and everything came into existence – Psalm 33:6-9.
- Psalm 104 is one long hymn of praise to God for His creative acts and provision.
- God's ongoing work of forming new life is praised in Psalm 139:13-16.

The New Testament reveals that Jesus was active in Creation.

- Our very existence is due to Him – Acts 17:28

- Everything was created by Him and for Him –

Colossians 1:16-17

It is appropriate that all of creation praises Him. Not only is He the source of all, He continues to sustain and hold all things together. We do not need to fear that the sun will go dark or the earth will stop spinning. He upholds the universe according to Hebrews 1:3.

We also can praise Him for the variety and beauty of creation.

We don't live in a world of gray. The universe was created in

vivid color and our bodies were created with the ability to

recognize and appreciate its beauty. In every season we can find

variety and beauty. Even in the extremes of height, depth, cold,

heat, light, or dark there are reasons to praise Him.

Explore:

Along with numerous references to the throne of God, there are several expanded descriptions of the throne room of Heaven: Isaiah 6:1-7; Ezekiel 1:4-28; Ezekiel 10:1-22; and Daniel 7:9-10. All of the accounts include some type of fire, whether burning coals or flames; most use some type of precious stone to describe the throne or the One on the throne. Lighting, stormy conditions, and rainbows are also common. Angelic beings are always present. The descriptions of these angelic beings have some similarities but also some differences. They are identified in various passages as living creatures, cherubim, and seraphim. The number of wings of these beings varies from four to six. Of those that include descriptions of these beings, four faces are often identified, but with some variation: the face of a man, the

face of a lion, the face of a flying eagle, and the face of an ox. Whether these faces are symbolic or literal is a matter of interpretation, for which there is no scriptural indication. There are sufficient differences in the details to conclude that these are similar beings, but not the same. One thing is certain: while they seem to function in different capacities, they all serve the One on the throne.

Explore:

Faithful Believers Overcome False Teaching

(Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20-24)

One of the biggest on-going challenges faced by churches is false teaching. Scripture provides frequent warnings to be on guard against false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 1:3-4). The church at Ephesus had been diligent about testing false prophets and opposing false teachings (Revelation 2:2). But Pergamum and Thyatira struggled to maintain a pure

faith. Both churches tolerated elements within their congregation that practiced some form of idolatry mixed with immoral behavior (Revelation 2:14-16, 20-24). Even seemingly minor compromises can pollute the church (1 Corinthians 5:6-13).

The teaching of Balaam (Revelation 2:14) is no doubt a reference to the Old Testament prophet who instigated the men of Israel participating in idolatry and committing sexual immorality with the women of Moab (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16).

We don't know anything definite about the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15) except they promoted some form of false teaching that was prevalent at the time since Ephesus and Pergamum both had to deal with them. Jezebel (Revelation 2:20) could have been the actual name of the false prophetess in Thyatira or the name could be a symbolic reference to the wicked queen of Israel (1 Kings 18 and 19). Regardless, this false teacher was promoting sexual immorality and idolatry in the church of Thyatira.

There is a mysterious connection between idolatry and sexual immorality. Scripture identifies idolatry as spiritual adultery (Ezekiel 23:37; Jeremiah 3:6-9; Hosea 4:12-13). The worship of false gods frequently involved sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 10:6-8; 1 Kings 14:23-24). God desires for His people to be pure in their relationship with Him and each other. It is not loving for churches to excuse sin. It is a false teaching to say that immoral sexual behavior is acceptable to God. God designed marriage as a one flesh relationship between one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24). Any other type of sexual relationship is sin and is to be repented and forsaken (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Scripture affirms the necessity for unwavering holiness in doctrine and lifestyle. Anything less is contamination. Jesus will war against those who tolerate false teaching or embrace sinful behavior in His church (Revelation 2:16).

Explore:

In Scripture, the number seven frequently is symbolic of perfection or completeness. This is first seen in the seven days of Creation. Seven is also used to represent the perfection of God. Since elsewhere in Scripture the Holy Spirit is identified as one person of the Trinity, it is clear there is one Holy Spirit, not seven. However, as a spirit, the Holy Spirit is not limited to a physical body and as God, is omnipresent (also pictured in the seven eyes of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6). Therefore the “seven spirits of God” are generally interpreted to be the perfection or complete fullness of God’s Spirit. God the Spirit is often described as a fire. So the seven flames of fire around the throne do not have to be viewed as needing a lamp or torch to hold the fire, these could be self-sustaining flames. This idea fits with the tongues of fire that were evident on those in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3). Flames of fire accurately depict

the Spirit, in that, there is a definite presence but it has no particular shape or body.

Explore:

God, Our Crucified Redeemer, Is Worthy of Worship

(Revelation 5:1-14)

There is no break in the story as we proceed into chapter 5 (chapter and verse divisions were added by Bible scholars in the Middle Ages as an aid for finding specific passages of Scripture). As John adjusted to the overwhelming sight of the throne room, he began to notice more detail. He saw a scroll in the hand of the One seated on the throne (verse 1). This scroll had seven seals. We may think of them as adhesive tabs or dollops of wax with an impressed image indicating the authority of the one who sealed the document. The seals also communicated that the one who opens the document must be an agent of the one who sealed it.

This is clearly an important document to be sealed in such a manner. It must communicate an important message. But sadly, in spite of a universal search, no one was found worthy to open the scroll and reveal its message (verses 2-3). As John mourned the situation, one of the elders announced there is One who is worthy—the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (verses 4-5).

These two expressions are filled with prophetic messianic significance. In Jacob's blessing of his 12 sons he referred to Judah as a lion's cub and revealed that Judah would be the tribe of royalty until a future king would arise (Genesis 49:8-10). Isaiah spoke of a descendant of Jesse (King David's father) on whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest (Isaiah 11:1-3). This root or branch would establish righteousness and peace (Isaiah 11:4-9), draw the Gentiles to His kingdom (Isaiah 11:10; 49:22), recover the remnant of God's people, and conquer their enemies (Isaiah 11:11-16).

Jeremiah also prophesied of the kingdom of this righteous branch who would execute justice and righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-16). Zechariah foretold that the Branch would come and the iniquity of the land would be removed in a single day (Zechariah 3:8-9). The Branch would build the temple of the Lord and rule on the throne (Zechariah 6:12-13).

The apostle Paul identified this root of Jesse as Jesus Christ (Romans 15:8-12). Jesus alone fulfilled all the prophecies about the Messiah. Here in the final revelation, John is informed there is One who is uniquely worthy with the right qualifications and authority to open this sealed scroll.

John saw a new detail in the throne room—a lamb. This lamb was standing, yet as though it had been slain (verse 6). This lamb is a picture of the Passover lamb. Jesus' death during the Passover season clearly identifies Him as the one without blemish whose blood delivers from bondage and death. Yet

Jesus' death also fulfills the Day of Atonement sacrifices, in that God's judgment was fully satisfied and His wrath was appeased so sin could be covered and removed.

It may seem odd that Jesus is identified as both the Lion and the Lamb. However this dual role fulfills the seeming contradiction in Messianic prophecy of the Eternal King (Isaiah 9:6-7) and the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:1-12).

Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection demonstrated He alone was worthy to open this scroll (verses 7-8). By His blood the people of all nations, ethnicities, and languages were redeemed from the penalty and bondage of sin and brought into God's kingdom (verses 9-10). We have the privilege of joining the chorus of praise from the throne room of Heaven in proclaiming Worthy is the Lamb (verses 11-14).

Explore:

The Triune Nature of God: It is impossible for us, as mere mortals, to fully comprehend the triune nature of God. There is nothing in all creation that accurately describes or illustrates the relationship of God in three Persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). All efforts to illustrate this relationship fall short and in some cases fall into heresy. But in Revelation 4 and 5 we are confronted with the enigma of seeing one God in three Persons. This was also witnessed at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:16- 17). In Revelation 4, God the Spirit was before the throne represented by seven torches or lamps of fire (4:5) as God the Father was seated on the throne (4:2; 5:1). In chapter 5, the Lamb took the scroll from the One seated on the throne (5:7). The Lamb also possesses the fulness of the Spirit, represented by seven eyes (5:6). Although we cannot comprehend the triune nature of God, Scripture repeatedly affirms there is one God and He is Father, Son, and Spirit—each fully God and yet one God, not three. So by confidence in the

accuracy and reliability of God's Word, we accept by faith that God is a Trinity.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an

opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ- followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 4

Share some beautiful, majestic, awe-inspiring sights that you have seen. What was remarkable about what you saw?

Question 2 of 4

Why does Revelation 4:1 not refer to the rapture of churches?

Question 3 of 4

Why is it noteworthy that the elders cast their crowns, which the Lord gave them, before the throne? What has the Lord given you that you can use to worship Him?

Question 4 of 4

Why was Jesus, alone, worthy to take and open the scroll?