SThe Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 4**

* **4:1-11– Adoration of The Almighty**
* The scene of the heavenly court in chapters 4 and 5 acts as a bridge between chapters 1-3 and the remainder of the book. The nature of apocalyptic language solicits that these chapters be present within the frame of the book. The saints get an encouraging glimpse of what takes place behind the scenes which emboldens them to maintain their faith and zeal.
* G.K. Beale adds: *“The main point of chs. 4-5 is God’s punitive and redemptive purpose for the world beginning to be accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ, through whose reign God’s purpose for creation will be consummately executed and divine glory accomplished”* (G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*).
* Chapters 4-5 are dominated by OT allusions to two prophetic figures in particular: Ezekiel and Daniel. Ezekiel 1-2 is clearly echoed in these chapters but perhaps even more striking, Daniel 7:9ff. is repeated essentially verbatim throughout chapters 4-5 as a way of reverting the audience back to that heavenly scene.
* **Verse 1**– After the vision of the Son of Man through which John is commissioned to write the letters of chapters 2-3, his attention turns now to the heavenly court and the majestic scene which follows. This scene mirrors Ezekiel’s prophetic call and role (Ezek. 1:1) to which we liken John as having a similar role.
* He is ushered into this heavenly court (does he go through the door or stand at the door?) by the one whose voice is like the sound of a trumpet (cf. 1:10). John’s purpose in relation to seeing this vision is to see the things that will take place *“after these things”* (cf. 1:19; Dan. 2:28-29, 45).
* Mounce emphasizes the importance of this vision and the scene of the heavenly court (Chapters 4-5) by saying: *“Since events on earth have their origin in heaven, the heavenly ascent is not unexpected. A true insight into history is gained only when we view all things from the vantage point of the heavenly throne”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
* **Verse 2**– John is once again in the Spirt (cf. 1:10; Ezek. 2:3; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5; for further information see notes on Rev. 1:10) and observes a throne in heaven (1 Kings 22:10; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Dan. 7:9). The word throne is used 47 times in this book out of the 62 times it is used in the NT.
* That the first thing John sees is a throne and that its occurrence in Revelation accounts for 76% of its total usage in the NT, points to the reality that this is of utmost important to the audience, John and God. It echoes and once again solidifies one of the major themes of the book: **God’s absolute sovereignty!**
* Everything is this vision and in the remainder of the book is centered on the throne imagery and the One John sees sitting on the throne (Isa. 6:1; Dan. 7:9; Heb. 8:1). One indicates a singularity but also an exclusivity.
* **Verse 3**– John does not describe the One sitting on the throne in human terms but instead he depicts Him as One whose radiance is utterly brilliant, majestic and blinding like light reflected off of precious stones and jewels (cf. Ezek. 1:26-28). One of the quintessential natures of God is that He is light (1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Jn. 1:5).
* **Verse 4**– John observes 24 thrones around the central throne on which *“elders”* who have crowns and white garments are seated. Their purpose and presence is revealed in 4:10-11 and 5:5, 8-10, 14. Their white garments depict the heavenly attire indicative of righteousness, holiness and purity. The crowns symbolize royalty, victory and authority.
* **Verse 5**– Lightning and thunder come forth from the central throne reminding us of the great Theophany at Sinai (Ex. 19:16). It, of course, indicates God’s awesome and infinite power which strike terror in the heart of man (cf. Job. 37:2-5; Psa. 18:12-15). The mention of what seems to be the Holy Spirit reiterates Rev. 1:4 (cf. Ezek. 1:13).
* **Verse 6**– The sea of glass like crystal is sometimes likened to the waters in God’s chambers (Gen. 1:7; Psa. 104:3; Ezek. 1:22). There is no way of knowing what this is for sure but the point is as Mounce says: *“…to create an unspeakably heightened sense of the transcendence and majesty of God”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
* Around the throne are four creatures full of eyes all around (cf. Ezek. 1:5, 18; 10:12). These four living creatures are likely angels or heavenly hosts of some kind. Their purpose like that of the elders is later revealed in 4:8-9 and 5:8-14. That they are full of eyes all around indicates knowledge and alertness.
* **Verse 7**– The four creatures are described individually as was the case with Ezekiel’s vision of the creatures (Ezek. 1:5-21, 23-28; 10:14, 21). These creatures reflect the power of God since they themselves are astonishing in description but also created by God (Col. 1:16). Some have stated that their descriptions may be a way of describing the angels’ strength, service, swiftness and intelligence.
* **Verse 8**– The purpose and role of these four living creatures is now stated. With their description of having six wings, it reminds us of the vision of Isaiah in 6:1-3. The eyes around and within are similar to the cherubim described in Ezek. 10:12, 16). Their purpose is to worship God endlessly and they laud Him as the one who is *“Holy, Holy, Holy”* just as the seraphim do in Isaiah (cf. Ex. 15:11).
* God, the One sitting on the throne, is completely separate from all His creation and is now further described as the Almighty and the eternal one (Gen. 17:1; Rev. 1:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15). He is justly due this never-ending adoration because He is completely in control, pure and able to do all things from beginning to end.
* **Verses 9-11**– The living creatures act as an ensemble leading the worship and praise of the eternal and Almighty God (cf. 5:14). As they worship, the elders join in revealing their role in this heavenly court. The only proper response to this majestic Theophany is to fall down as they have done in v. 10 (cf. Psa. 95:6).
* That they cast their crowns before His throne indicates that their authority isn’t supreme like the One on the throne but rather delegated. God Almighty is the only one deserving of exclusive honor and worship in accordance with His absolute sovereignty (cf. 1 Chron. 29:11-16; Psa. 115:1).
* The nature of their praise differs from the four living creatures because it primarily relates to His work of creation and not His divine attributes. Both parties acknowledge differing qualities and actions of God yet the goal is one and the same.
* Their praise begins by accurately acknowledging that God alone is worthy (Psa. 18:3; 29:1-2) to receive glory, honor and power. The answer to the question why is given as they turn attention towards God’s work in creation (Gen. 1; Isa. 40:26, 28; Jer. 32:17; Jn. 1:1-3; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:10).
* If all God ever did was create the world and everything in it, that alone would make Him worthy of the praise and glory He is receiving here. But the purpose of this vision and the adoration of the Almighty is to bring encouragement and boldness to the saints presently suffering and looking to suffer more. That God is on the throne and so big and majestic helps them to remain faithful to Him to the end.