

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 4

Part I

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A. General Description:

After describing what His responses would be to the churches selected in Revelation Christ now describes His “throne room in heaven” (Logos Bible software; calls chapter 4; His throne room). This is as if He is reasserting that even though things may seem out of control He is always in control.

This is a fulfillment to what was said in Philippians 2:8-11; “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (NASU)

Despite what Jesus did for us and how much people, even believers may ignore Him now, who Christ is as explained in Colossians 1:15-20 will become exposed even before the rapture. The churches, whether they respond to Him now or not, would have to recognize and exalt Him because “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.....” (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-4). Even the 24 elders would say; “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.” (Revelation 4:11) Whether we respect Him now or not forever He will reign before our eyes with every powerful person and creature worshipping Him.

The members of the churches enjoyed their assemblies while ignoring Christ’s headship. Christ describes this when He told the story of the owner of a vineyard. In that context the Son of the vineyard was killed. In a similar manner the Son in this case was not heard or respected when He came and talked to workers in the vineyard (Luke 20:8-23; the people in the church represented by the seven churches). No matter what chapter 4 portrays, Christ’s day in court is when everyone will know and bow.

B. Background Information:

There is considerable debate as to the identity of the twenty-four elders (4:4). Some interpreters regard them as a special order of angels. Others believe they represent the redeemed of all ages—twelve representing Israel and twelve representing the church. Since there were “twenty-four” orders in the Levitical priesthood (1 Chron. 24:4; 25:9–31), some have taken the number to be representative of believer priests. But in 5:9–10 the elders seem to be set off from those redeemed by Christ. In 7:13 one elder equals one being. It is probably best to regard them as human or celestial beings who have some responsibility for leading in heavenly worship (4:9–11; 5:8–12). Whatever their actual identity, their function in the book is clear. They were to reveal to the readers of John’s revelation the proper response to God—ceaseless praise and worship.¹

The “sea of glass” (15:2) alludes to the sea in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:23; 2 Chron 4:2, 6). It had always been natural to speak figuratively of God’s heavenly temple (e.g., Ps 11:4), given the ancient Near Eastern tradition of the earthly temple reflecting the heavenly one. John’s emphasis on worship leads to a portrayal of God’s throne room in exclusively temple terms: an altar of incense (5:8), an altar of sacrifice (6:9), the ark (11:19; cf. 15:5–8), which functioned as God’s

¹ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 740). Tyndale House Publishers.

throne in the Old Testament, and so forth. The crystal firmament derives from Ezekiel 1:22. The cherubim were covered with eyes in Ezekiel 10:12; the four creatures had four faces in Ezekiel 1:10 (where, however, each creature had all the features). Ezekiel's imagery may be intentionally figurative (cf. 1 Chron 12:8) but may draw on Babylonian throne and temple imagery and indicate a God greater than any pagans could have conceived; cf. also 1 Kings 7:29.²

c. Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions:

1. *After these things* – (vs. 1):

- a) “After these things,” marking the opening of the next vision in the succession. Here is the transition from “the things which are” (Rev 1:19), the existing state of the seven churches, as a type of the Church in general, in John’s time, to “the things which shall be hereafter,” namely, in relation to the time when John wrote.³
- b) The expression is used here in its ordinary, natural sense: “After having seen this, I saw,” etc.⁴
 - Even though five of the churches are failing Christ still holds all things in His hands; *“As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”* (Revelation 1:20)
 - The Lord’s throne in heaven is described after His headship through the church has been analyzed. Five churches are failing but His throne in heaven is undisturbed.
 - Our will to do what we desire can never disturb His will. He is always in control.

“*In the Spirit...*” John’s body was on the Isle of Patmos but his inner spirit was taken up to heaven in the same manner Paul was in 2 Corinthians 12:4.

- a) John was invited to go to heaven for a preview of coming events. He did this by means of a spiritual vision. John was on Patmos but saw the glories of heaven. The “door standing open in heaven” (4:1) was used to show that John was going into a hidden realm to reveal what was unseen. These events are to be viewed from the perspective of heaven, not earth. John was “in the Spirit” (4:2), that is, caught up in a continued ecstatic state.⁵
 - b) This vision is of heaven, not of earth as was true of chapters 1 and 2. The first vision of Christ and the messages to the seven churches began in 1:12f. This new vision of the throne in heaven (4:1–11) succeeds that to which it here alludes.⁶
2. “*standing open*”; not as though John saw it in the act of being opened. But in those visions the heavens opened, disclosing the visions to those below on earth. Whereas here, heaven, the temple of God, remains closed to those on earth, but John is transported in vision through an open door up into heaven, whence he can see things passing on earth or in heaven, according as the scenes of the several visions require.⁷

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 4:6–7). InterVarsity Press.

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 563). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴ Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. (1909). *Revelation* (p. 143). Funk & Wagnalls Company.

⁵ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 740). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁶ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Re 4:1). Broadman Press.

⁷ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 563–564). Logos Research Systems, Inc.