
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 4:1-5: "The Throne"

General idea: God stands above and opens His door to His Home for us to see. One day, we will see Him there, but for now, we can only imagine how it will be! John gets the great, anticipated glimpse that all people of all times have wondered about—what will it be like, the wonder of wonders, the layout and look of our eternal home. Imagine what you would see: His awesome sight! Imagine what would you hear: His voice! God tells John to *come on in and take a look at what must take place*. And John is there, in Heaven. Whether this is a physical transportation or a fantastic vision matters not. He gets to see what only a handful of men have seen while they still roamed this earth. John saw God's throne and the entire splendor that was there. There are no earthly words, none that even Greek or Hebrew could contain that would adequately describe what God has revealed to him. John is overwhelmed, but manages to grasp what few early images and metaphors existed that could describe this wonder. This passage starts off with a series of heavenly visions (chaps 4-8) as an attempt to convey this marvelous spectacle that is perhaps beyond our ability to even imagine.

God is portrayed as pure and as brilliant as precious, glowing gemstones, and a sea of glass is surrounded by further reverence and majesty. Elders and representatives serve as a house of worship, praising Him, clothed in His grace and presence. Yet, in this serenity are His supremacy, intensity, and power that are overwhelming and glorious. This was more than a foretaste of things to come; it was a show of strength and a demonstration of hope to those in distress and despair. One day we will be called there; but, in the meantime, we are fueled with His perseverance and productivity by the marvel of Him. He is to be our Hope so we can persevere with our call and faith. It is a call to seize the moment and take advantage of the opportunities He gives (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Vs. 1-3: This passage is cycle one (Rev. 4:1-8:1) in a series of seven heavenly visions given to John by Christ (Rev. 4:1-22:5). In this first cycle, God is presented on His Throne as the King of Kings, as The Supreme Majesty in sovereign control of all things. He is the One who rules and governs us; we are the ones who are to bow to His supremacy and surrender to His Lordship. The centrality of His Supremacy in this passage gives hope to those who are suffering, and purpose to those who have lost theirs.

- *After this.* This is a literary reference to the transition from the epistles to the seven churches over to John's heavenly visions.
- *I looked.* This possibly refers to a vision, or a vibrant dream (Ezek. 10:1; 44:4;

Dan. 10:5).

- *A trumpet said.* This means God is preparing to give a command or the pronouncement of His Word (Ex. 19:16). Here, many misguided interpreters read into the text a “rapture,” and string together other passages out of context to create a grand theology out of injudicious reading and inserting ideas that are not in these passages, such as 1 Cor. 15:51-54 and 1 Thess. 4:16-18. This is called “isagesis” which is a personal interpretation of a text from our own ideas. However, we are called to read His Word with “exegesis,” or a right explanation and analysis of the text from what it actually says. Also, because the word “church” does not appear until chapter 22, many think this means the church is not on earth during the last days. Again, this is reading into a text our ideas and not God’s. We are never to stretch or construe Scripture according to our whims and/or opinions. Rather, we are to plainly seek what He has for us from what He has clearly revealed to us.
- *Come up here.* This phrase is expressed in the same way Moses was called up to Mount Sinai and how Paul was “caught up” in to heaven (Ex. 19:3, 20-24; 24:12; 34:2; Ezek. 1:1; John 1:29, 51; 2 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 11:12-19; 17:1; 19:11; 21:9).
- *What must take place after this.* This indicates past, present, and future, and refers to what is referenced in Revelation. It is for the present and future as well as rooted in the past, but not completed as of this writing. Some misguided interpreters find the “rapture” in this phrase, which is again, totally reading into the text what “we want” that just is not there, not only violating the rules of biblical interpretation, but also (and ironically) the plain meaning and point of this passage, which is bowing to Christ and His ways rather than our ways and ideas (Dan. 2:28-29, 45; John 19:35; Rev. 1:1, 19).
- *In the Spirit.* This means *spiritual exaltation and prophetically inspired*—the wonders of the Lord, giving him this vision and insight for God’s glory and not John’s. This is a state of being *sensitive to spiritual understanding*, not necessarily “charismatic” worship. The Holy Spirit provided John the visions and took him to places he could actually see. Thus, he is recording authentic images he saw in reality; this was no mere dream. This can also mean that John was caught up or transported to God’s Throne. However, these particulars are irrelevant to the meaning (1 Chron. 25:1-6; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12-14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24; Acts 10:10; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).
- *There before me.* The representation of God ruling from his throne in heaven is a standard image from the Old Testament. This is a figurative depiction, not a literal description of our Lord (Psalm 47:8).
- *Throne in heaven.* Denotes a throne and refers to the earthly kings pompous dignity and prestige in contrast to God’s Preeminence and actuality of having

a throne. This is an image of the Old Testament Tabernacle where the “copy” of God’s Throne Room, made for His presence, was made known. Now, John sees the *real* heavenly version in a corporal state to condescend to his and our understanding (Ex. 24:9-11; 25 (25:40)-40; 1 Kings 5-7; 22:19; 2 Chron. 2-4; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; 10:1; Dan. 7:9-10; Heb. 8:5-6; 9:1-14; Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-16:1, 16:17; 21:22).

- *Someone sitting on it.* His greatness and splendor surpasses all understanding, as He is supreme and Head over the Church. Either the details are not given to us, or we are not able to comprehend with our human minds in our present state (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:13-15; 5:23; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).
- *Appearance of jasper and carnelian... emerald... around the throne.* This is an image of God’s purity and overwhelming elaborations, magnitude, majesty, and brilliance that is “reflected.” “Precious stones” means *precious* and *nothing else is like it*, and that He dwells in *unapproachable light* “whom no one has seen or can see” (Ezek. 1:26-28; Dan. 7; 1 Tim. 6:16).
- *Rainbow* refers to God’s mercy and grace, which we are called to reflect (Gen. 9:12-15).

Revelation is a book that describes events that are indescribable to a people in persecution who need hope and a purpose to cling to. It is not a book of mysticism, because the symbols do mean things that we can understand with a little research and O.T. understanding. Because of the subject, John can only use metaphors and word pictures to put it into writing because no mere words of earthly origin can adequately convey it. If we just see this as mysticism, we miss the point of what God is saying!

Vs. 4-5: What would a glimpse of heaven do to and for you? The point of this portion of Revelation is to motivate us as a Church to get right, and get busy in Him. How many churches do we know who are indifferent, who just get by and do nothing to exercise their faith or show who Christ is in their lives? Such a church is exercising faithlessness to the point that they actually scheme to not grow in Him, revealing their breach of faith and disloyalty. Such a church will not reach out. Their programs are superficial and inclusive to themselves and not available to others who need them; thus, they are not worthy to be called Christians.

- *Encircled the throne...surrounded by* is a parody of a king’s court, showing his importance. These images can help us see God’s centrality and eminence. These are visions of *angelic courtiers* as attendants serving in a royal monarch’s court (1 Kings 22:19; Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalm 89:6-7; Ezek. 1; Dan. 7:9-10)

- *Twenty-four other thrones.* In the art of that period, the image of a few (such as priests) means there are many more than depicted. Thus, the number does not mean an actual number. This applies through most of Revelation. Numbers are symbols, not accounting or actual numbers.
- *Twenty-four.* The number 24 can mean many things such as the 24 books of the Jewish canon, or the 24 orders a Jewish priest at the time took, or the completeness of the 12 tribes and 12 Apostles, indicating all who bow to Christ. These numbers are symbolic and not actual accounting as there were 14 apostles and 13-14 tribes depending on context of the listing. (Joseph was two.) (Deut. 21:6; 1 Chron. 24-25; Isa. 24:23; Dan. 7:9; Acts 1:26; Rev. 5:5-14; 7:4-17; 11:16-18; 14:3; 19:4).
- *Twenty-four elders.* *Elders* refers to those with authority. In the context of a church, they are God's representatives called to declare and serve Him wholeheartedly and righteously. Referring to God's "cabinet officials" denoting those "with wisdom" as His attendants who worship and serve Him, there are two theories—Angels or people, or perhaps an exalted category of Angels. Perhaps, it refers to the Church as triumphant; others say it indicates the ancestors of Christ. However, the passage and context suggest *celestial representatives*, which can mean the Church—as those who are redeemed or God's servants—or, more precisely, both. This is also suggestive of how a healthy church functions with elders who seek wisdom, serving and worshiping God. The application is that all who are in Christ are His representatives—individually, and collectively as the whole assemblage of Christians as the Church.
- *Dressed in white.* White, in ancient times, was associated with good and purity. In contrast, black was associated with bad. The dead were buried in white and priests were dressed in white (Rev. 3:4).
- *Crown* refers to victory.
- *Flashes of lightning.* Special effects in ancient times indicated an important event. Here, it is pointing to God's self-revelation. It is the symbolic representation of the awesome majesty and power of God. It refers to God's Supremacy and Authority and our duty to heed His voice and reverence Him. It is also a symbol of the fake god, Zeus' authority and vengeance (Ex. 19:16-19; Job 37:5-6; Psalm 18:11-15; Ezek. 1:4, 24; 43:2; Dan. 10:6; Heb. 12:18-29; Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).
- *Rumblings and peals.* An illustration of God's mighty power coming to deliver His people (Psalm 18:12-15; 77:18).
- *Seven lamps/torches* refers to the seven churches that are representative of God's Temple here on earth, as all churches are. The image that God is Light

refers to the Church as the body of believers whose duty it is to be a light and a witness for Christ. This is why some commentators take this as meaning the Holy Spirit; however, the theme is that His character is the Light we follow and proclaim, and refers to the O.T. account of how God's Glory descended into the Tabernacle. Now, our purpose is to point to His glory, as the Church is the light of the world. Proclaiming the Church as a *lamp stand* is saying the Church is significant as the true place of reverence to God (Gen. 1:3; Ex. 25:31-40; 1 Kings 7:49; Zech. 4:2; Matt. 5:14-16; 18:20; 28:20; John 1:4-5; 8:12; 14:18; Acts 26:13; Eph. 1:10; 5:8-13; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 1:4-5; Rev. 1:12-13; 2:9; 3:9).

- *Seven spirits of God* means an angelic court pointing to God's Fullness. The word, *seven*, means completeness, perfection, and its importance is compounded. Some believe this is referring to the seven celestial beings (Rev. 8:2). However, context and word meaning attest to the Holy Spirit and His various roles as Counselor, Bearer of Wisdom, Fruit, etc. (Isa. 11:2; Zech. 4:2-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:14).

One day, this door will be open to us and we will be there. The question is, are you ready and have you lived the life He has called you to? God calls us to be earnest in pursuing a serious, deep—rooted, and determined faith. It is a call to persist in our faith and determination, regardless of obstacles—physical limitations, spiritual depression, spiritual warfare, or our circumstances. If everything came to us instantly, there would be no growth, no appreciation, no maturity, and no faith. Faith requires resistance and struggle to make it flourish and grow. God is not the One Who always holds us back; it is usually our refusal to reach out and seize the opportunity. It is we who refuse to exercise our faith and grow. It is we who speak just a simple prayer with no earnest thought behind it, with no zeal or realization of God's mercy and grace. We get so caught up in our own struggles that we do not look past the crowd to call His Name. We do not realize that He will stop, look, and listen—just for us!

God has given you an open door. What does it take for you to answer and to open it?

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?

8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Can you imagine what Heaven will be like? Or, is it so far above your ability to imagine that it is a mere hope?
2. Do you believe that there are no earthly words ~~that~~ none that even Greek or Hebrew could contain ~~that~~ that would express what God is like in person or what Heaven is like? Do you think such wonders are perhaps beyond our ability to even imagine? How so? Why not?
3. What would you do if you got the glimpse that John did? What can you do to be more sensitive to spiritual understanding?
4. John, Ezekiel, and Daniel all used images and metaphors to describe this wonder. What do you suppose are the reasons for this?
5. Why do many Christians today get so caught up in these images that they miss the point of the message? Have you ever done that?
6. How would you describe God's supremacy, intensity, and power? How is this passage a demonstration of hope to those in distress and/or despair?
7. Many misguided interpreters *read into* a Bible text, stringing together other passages out of context to create a grand theology out of injudicious reading and insert ideas that are not in the passages. What could be causes and motivations for this? Why are we called to read His Word with "exegesis," or a right explanation and analysis of the text from what is actually in it?
8. God's character is described in this passage as *gemstones and brilliance that is "reflected."* Have you ever thought that we are called to reflect some of God's characters, such as mercy and grace?
9. One day, this door will be open to us and we will there. The questions are, *are you ready, and have you lived the life He has called you to?* What do you still need to do?
10. What does it mean to your church that Christ is the One who rules and governs us? What should it mean? How can your church do a better job of communicating that we are to bow to His supremacy and surrender to His Lordship?
11. What would it mean to your faith and relationships to be better at seizing the

moment and taking advantage of the opportunities He gives? Remember, the application is that all who are in Christ are His representatives, both individually, and collectively as the whole assemblage of all Christians who are the Church. How can you make this so in your life and church?

12. In the meantime, as we wait to see all this for ourselves, how can we fuel our perseverance and productivity by His marvel? What can you do to further persevere with your call and faith?

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