
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 4: 6-11: "Heaven Exposed to Us!"

General idea: A picture of a heavenly Choir, of all of creation praising God and His wonder as Almighty, Holy and Worthy. And so begins a foretelling of what will come about. The previous passage from 4:1 through 22:5 describes a series of heavily visions in seven cycles (see background article) that John receives from Christ, climaxing with the final judgment. The purpose is not just *eschatology* (End Times), but rather to give the persecuted church hope and encouragement, and chastisement to those in leadership who are "bent" on false teaching and bad motives. The goal is that we get our churches lined up to His will and call.

John gives us a picture of worship, as God is exclusive and pure. This is about how we come before God, because He is the Supreme and Sovereign Lord over all. John explains His Throne Room in terms of earthly metaphors of earthly kings, except that an earthly king thinks he is in control and deserves the veneration of his subjects. God alone deserves such praise. An earthly king holds court by force and control, whereas God has earned the right to be in command, and He alone is worthy. He has the right to rule and dictate His decrees over us—over all, because He is the One who created everything. There is no one greater; He deserves our wholehearted worship and reverence. This does not include only praise and song; it means putting Him first in all that we do in life. Real worship is how we reverence Him, not how we sing about Him. He wants our obedience and veneration over all else (1 Sam. 15:22-23; Rev. 5:8; 11:19; 15:5-8)

Vs. 6-8: Revelation is not just about what will happen in the future, but also what is happening now with the practice of our faith and how we lead our church. We are called to open our eyes to His wonder and worship Him solely—not our ways and trends, and not our pride and feelings. Revelation is about His church and that we run it His way, worshipping Him alone. Church and worship are not about what we feel we need or desire; rather, it is about Christ and what He intends.

- *Sea of glass.* This is an image of worship, as the temple had the "Bronze Sea" referring to the "basin" in the heavenly temple (Rev. 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17). Elsewhere, this image of water and worship is found when the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) was parted by God, as was the Jordan River's parting (which was actually a greater miracle). These images indicate that all that exists is submissive to God's supremacy, and He has victory over all that oppose Him. In conjunction, water also means that He supplies us with all we need (Ex. 24:10; Deut. 11:11; 1 Kings 7:23-25; 2 Kings 16:17; 2 Chron. 4:2-6, 15, 39; Psalm 11:4; Isa. 51:9-11; Jer 27:19; Ezek. 1:22; Rev. 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:2).

- *Crystal* indicates the magnificence, precious purity, and beauty of His Throne and Being as with verse three (Rev. 21:18-21).
- *Four living creatures*. A figurative image from Ezekiel and Babylon descriptions, this possibly refers to angelic ministers to God who act as protectors, guardians, and servants, giving their adoration. The point is that “God is Great;” God is universally glorious, and greater than any earthly power or king. This may also be an assault on the powers and authority of Babylon and Rome. To read into these images more than what is there misses the point of the passage and muddies the waters of Revelation (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:17-22; 1 Kings 7:29; 1 Chron. 12:8; 28:18; Psalm 18:10; Isa. 6; Ezek. Chaps 1, 10).
- *Covered with eyes*. Not necessarily a literal depiction, this perhaps means that nothing gets past them; they are all seeing.
- *Like a lion... like an ox... like a man... like a flying eagle*. Basically, these images mean the entire scope and sinful nature of all creation. *Lion* is the greatest of beasts, the *ox* is the greatest domestic beast and servant to man, the *eagle* is the chief of birds, and *man* is the chief of all (Isa. 6:3-5).
- *Six wings*. Ezekiel had similar visions where he saw four living creatures (Ezek. 1:6-11)
- *Holy, holy, holy*, is from Isaiah 6:3, and is an expansion of God’s divine name, power, and holiness found in Exodus. This is referring to the holiness of God and our duty and call to worship Him and Him only (Ex. 3:14-15; Isa. 41:4; Rev. 1:4).

John tells us in his Gospel that “He must increase and we must decrease.” (John 3:29-30) If we refuse this vital call, God just may allow those hardships to come our way, breaking us down so we will yield and grow as His child. Just as good and loving parents will discipline their child, God will discipline us. But, this is not a personal attack; rather, it is a way to help us grow and be better used by our Lord (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 1:5).

Vs. 9-11: What would a glimpse of heaven do to and for you? This passage is about coming before our Lord, and our worship from our gratitude for who He is and what He has done for us as individuals. He is the depiction of the centrality of His Supremacy as Christ. Christ is the Priest, Head, Lord, and Prime Shepherd of the Church. He is the object and reason why we meet and function. Christ is the destiny and pattern we follow and emulate.

- *Fall down before him*. Anyone who comes before God falls “prostrate.” This is a form of reverence and homage.

- *Worship him.* An essential element is that all who proclaim God as Lord must also worship Him. Here, it refers to songs of praise for who He is in glory and what He has done in deeds (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; John 20:28; Rev. 1:6).
- *Lay their crowns...you are worthy* means the recognition that God alone is worthy of our praise and worship.
- *You created* acknowledges God as the creator of all things and Sovereign Lord over all. He made it and He gets to run it and all that is in the universe, including you and me!

Any church, no matter how good it has been in the past, can easily fail when we think we no longer need to put our best efforts forward. It is when we stop growing, stop learning, and stop reaching out to Him and to others that we fail as His church. When we live in the past, we are not living now—we actually are not living at all. Keep in mind that just about all churches were good and vibrant at one time or else they would never have been formed. It is when we fail to keep those things going that we fall short.

The Church is to be under His rule and kingship, not our committees and trends. We are to surrender to His lead and to His Way so we can proclaim His supremacy and majesty. If not, we engage in spiritual warfare, but not the kind that most Christians think of, as in our battling Satan. Rather, it becomes us battling God for control so we can conform His church to our pleasures. Satan does not need to battle us when we are already battling God. He will fuel our battling and provide the weapons, but he does not even need to do that, we are so good at it ourselves. Satan's objective is to manipulate those with bad intentions to battle the righteous and godly, to lead us astray, and/or to get us too busy to see Christ in our everyday lives.

Looking forward to His eternity? Great! But, consider this. We do not need to be in His Throne Room; He is here with us now. We just need to see His hand upon us now, feel His presence, and allow His supremacy to lead us in His way. In the end, God wins out. Satan's spiritual warfare against us is as futile as our war against God. He wins! There is no other way; His way is the best and most glorious for us and for Him. Satan wants our eyes distracted so we do not see Christ's majesty, with the goal being that we worship him and not Him. God wants us in spiritual purity and faithfulness in and to Him. The choice is given, the call is made; the choosing is up to us! How will we lead and manage our spiritual journeys? How will you lead and manage your church? Will it be His supremacy or your inclinations? Which way do you think will win out? Then, why would a person of faith in Christ choose to run his or her life or church by any way other than His?

Preterist view sees this passage as a courtroom with a Judge who is Sovereign, and who pronounces those who are guilty in the next chapter. They see the

phrase of “after this” as meaning it will happen right away and thus has already taken place in the first century. The 24 elders represent the worship of Christ, but are not angels or people. Rather, they are just an image made up for John to grasp His Throne. Others see the creatures and elders as angels or separate created entities that guard God (who needs no guard) and proclaim His Glory and Lordship. They also see this passage as an assault on the zodiac and astrology.

Futurist view sees this passage as the turning point from dealing with the Church to dealing with the “last days” that have not occurred as of yet. In addition, they see the phrase “after this” and “the triumphant” as referring to after the Church age and thus, since the Church is no longer mentioned much, they mostly believe the Church will not be a part of these events because it has been “raptured” (even though there is little to no scriptural support for this theory, 1 Cor 15:51-54, 1 Thess. 4:16-18, and Rev. 7:9-17; 22:16 are twisted out of their context as they ignore word meanings and other phrases used for the Church such as “redeemed” and “saints” in Rev. 5:8-9; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7-10; 14:3-4, 12; 15:3; 16:6; and 17:6, seeing these as meaning characteristics of the church but not the church (a big stretch away from the actual meanings for this view). The 24 elders represent the first 24 ancestors of Christ listed in Genesis 5 and 7 (this is a big stretch, reading into the text what is not there); others see them as exalted angels who serve God, and some see this as the 24 elders adhering to the Levitical orders (1 Chron. 24:4; 25:9-13) and functioning as priests. Others say they represent the redeemed. They see the seven lamps and spirits as referring to the Holy Spirit. They see the *sea of glass* as solid, meaning we no longer need the cleansing of the water because of Christ. *The four living creatures* are living entities that can represent the attributes and qualities of God, the attributes of nature, or as four portraits of Christ from the four Gospels, as King, Servant, Son of man, Son of God. However, such views are wildly speculative and not rooted in Scripture. Their function is to praise God and execute His sovereign will.

Idealist view sees this passage as a vision, depicting the entire church age. They ignore key words and context. They see the phrase “after this” as meaning “this is what I saw” (not what the words actually mean). They see these images as representative of the Ezekiel and Isaiah passages combined into one series of images of God’s purity and holiness. They see these beings as a separate class of angels or celestial representatives. The 24 elders represent the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles of the Church (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 21:12-14). They also see the *seven lamps* and *spirits* as referring to the Holy Spirit. The elders and such are to glorify God because He is Worthy and reassures the people who are being persecuted.

Historicist view sees this passage as depicting the Sovereignty of God and the privilege we have to know Him and worship Him. These images parallel the ancient courts of kings such as King Solomon, who had the lions carved on either

side of his throne, as well as the Babylon and Roman emperors who had similar images on their thrones. The 24 elders represent the entirety of the Church triumphant that replaces the Jewish priests and sacrificial system with Christ as Lord. However, these angelic hosts were real beings, depicted according to our ability to comprehend. These depictions are in humanistic terms so we can get how glorious God is, far beyond any human rule. The images refer to God's stability, preeminence, and His ability and right to govern through His rule, wit, power, intelligence, vigilance, and energy.

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. What would a glimpse of heaven do to and for you? How would this glimpse of heaven motivate you and your Church to get right and get busy in Him?
2. Why does the Church exist? What about your church? Why is this so often forgotten in our boardrooms and planning? How does this passage give hope and encouragement to the persecuted church?
3. How does this passage give chastisement to those in leadership who are "bent" on false teaching or bad motives?
4. How would you describe or define worship? What do worship, reverence, and praise mean to you and your church? What should they mean?
5. Why does God alone deserve our wholehearted worship, reverence, and praise? How has God earned the right to be worthy? Why does God have the right to rule and dictate His degrees over us and over all? How will this affect your spiritual formation?
6. What can be done to help you and your church further understand that all that exists is subdued under God's supremacy and He already has the victory?

How can this help fuel your hope to persevere at those times when you have failed or feel downtrodden? How can His Lordship help your church meet the goal of better lining up to His will and call?

7. What does the centrality of God's Supremacy mean to you? How would you handle it if God were preparing to give a command to you?
8. What does it mean in the practice of your faith that Christ is the Priest, Head, Lord, and Prime Shepherd of the Church? How do you exhibit, in your daily faith, that He is the Object and Reason why we meet and function as a church?
9. Take a look at the four main views for this passage. Are there any particular one that appeals to you? If so why? What do you think about the idea that there are good insights from each one (and bad ones) and we could get a better picture of Revelation by knowing them all?
10. How do some churches battle God for control of His church for their pleasures? How will you lead and manage your spiritual journey? How will you lead and manage your church so you are not battling Him, but rather, serving Him?
11. Any church, no matter how good it has been in the past, could easily fail. How does the breakdown of putting our best efforts forward contribute to this? What about that when we stop growing, stop learning, and stop reaching out to Him and to others, our churches fail? What can your church do to prevent this?
12. How is God exclusive and pure? How are we to come before God? What can your church do to better reverence God, not just in song, but also in motivations and behaviors?