

“GOD STILL REIGNS”

Revelation 4:1-11

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter served as the inspiration for Handel’s *Messiah*.

We may call this chapter “The Throne Chapter.”

- The word “throne” occurs 61 times in the New Testament.
- It occurs 46 times in the book of Revelation.
- It occurs **14 times** in this chapter. That amounts to 23% of all references!
- Do you think God is trying to tell us something?

In this last part of the book of Revelation we see the **final furious outbreak of evil and its attempt to destroy God’s people**: Antichrist’s kingdom, Satan’s kingdom and all its fury and its final overthrow.

Therefore, at the beginning of this section of the book, we see **GOD ON HIS THRONE RULING THE UNIVERSE**. He created all, and he will consummate all.

WHY ARE YOU WORRIED? GOD IS IN CONTROL!

Here we see the King upon his throne, and his attendants that surround him. But first let us prepare for the scene:

- John speaks of “after these things”-- that is after the revelation concerning the seven churches.
- Some believe this is a hint at the time of the rapture, and that John’s being called upward is a type of the rapture. That is not stated in the text and we must not presume that it was God’s intent.
- The “open door” standing in heaven; such indicates that John has access to see what is happening.
- John hears “the first voice” like a trumpet – a reference to chapter 1:10 of Jesus in his Majesty.
- The upward invitation: John received access in his spirit to enter heaven in order to see and hear what would take place “after these things”-- that is after the church age is completed and the time of the end has arrived.
- John is “in the spirit”: this may mean his spirit or the Holy Spirit. At any rate, he was not bodily transferred to heaven.

I. THE KING AND HIS THRONE (2b-3, 5-6a)

A. The King (3)

- “Jasper” (opaque variety of quartz usually red, yellow, or brown in color)
- “Sardine” stone (translucent fine grained silica brown or orange brown to even a reddish color)
- The key here is magnificence and beauty.
- We find no close description of his form: **We are not to visualize him.**

B. The Throne: John sees the throne first. The emphasis is upon God’s sovereignty.

1. A rainbow surrounds the throne (3)—representative of God’s faithfulness and fulfilling his promises.

2. Flashes of lightning, sounds, and peals of thunder proceed from the throne (5a); such seem to indicate not only God's divine power and judgments, but also his activity and involvement in his world.
3. Before the throne seven "lamps of fire" are burning.
 - We are told that these lamps represent the "seven Spirits of God".
 - Such represents the Holy Spirit in the wide diversity of his activity completely fulfilling God's plan and program.
 - The continual burning of these lamps indicates the continuous and efficient activity of Yahweh on the earth through his Spirit in the active manifestation of his light and truth.
4. A Sea of Glass is positioned under and in front of the throne (6).
 - Such may indicate the translucent holiness of God which serves as the foundation of his reign; nothing sullies the purity of God's just governance of his world.
 - It also portrays his justice based on his revealed truth and word.
 - We may compare the firmament underneath the chariot throne described in the book of Ezekiel (ch.1); also cf. Ex. 24:12.

II. THE ATTENDANTS OF THE KING (4, 6b-11)

A. Their Description

1. Elders (4)

- Seated on 24 thrones as co-rulers; around the throne in possibly a circle or semi-circle
- "Elders" conveys the idea of dignity and authority and wisdom.
- White garments represent purity.
- "Golden crowns" indicates ruling power and wealth

WHO ARE THESE ELDERS?

- 1) Israel and the church
- 2) The church ideally
- 3) The church raptured
- 4) Angelic beings

I favor the fourth view for the following reasons:

- The four living creatures are closer to the throne than they are.
- They join with the four living beings in 5:8 and worship the Lamb, and they offer the prayers of the saints (cf. 8:3 – an act of an Angel).
- One of them serves as an angelic interpreter in 7:13-14.
- In verse 14 John addresses him as "my Lord"; such an address would be inappropriate for a fellow believer.
- The statement in 5:9 is not conclusive to show they are believers or even the church; there is a significant textual variant that leaves out the second person pronoun "us."
- They are distinguished from the redeemed – 144,000 and cannot sing their song (14:3).
- Their white garments are appropriate for angels (John 20:12; Matthew 28:3; Acts 1:10).

- Notice the names of the ranks of angels: “thrones, principalities, rulers” (Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:10).
 - The Old Testament makes mention of God’s “heavenly council” (Ps. 89:7; I K. 22:19). The elders of Israel seem to be a counterpart of these heavenly elders (Ex. 24:11-12).
 - The angels, elders, and living creatures of 7:11 and 19:1-4 are distinguished from the saints.
2. The Four Living Creatures (6-8a)
- a. They are in “the middle and around the throne”-- seemingly on all four sides. Here we must compare the four cherubim of **Ezekiel chapters 1, 10** who were both the supports of and the means of transportation for the Lord’s divine throne.
 - b. They are “full of eyes in front and behind”-- they were able to clearly observe from all perspectives their duties and responsibilities in connection with God’s throne; they had keen insight and were concerned for the glory of God. Compare verse eight where we read they were “full of eyes around and within.”
 - c. One being had a face like a lion; a second a face like a calf; a third like a man; and a fourth like a flying eagle (7). Notice the distinction from the cherubim in Ezekiel who each had all four faces. Among other things, these faces indicate God’s concern for his entire creation, and the permanent place in his plan for such creatures. **[I guess that there is no fishing in heaven!]**
 - d. They had six wings, and eyes were under these wings as well; note that the cherubim only had four wings.
 - e. Because of this I would suggest that these beings are seraphim, not cherubim, and that their primary function was not so much to protect the holiness of God but rather to exalt the glory of God and give him constant praise.

Now that we have seen the attendants of the King, let us look at their function.

III. THEIR WORSHIP (8b-11)

A. The Living Creatures (8b-9)

1. Magnifying his divine attributes
 - Thrice holy—absolutely holy, set apart, and transcendent
 - Absolute power—the Almighty
 - Eternality: “**Was, is, is to come**”; and He “lives forever and ever” (9b)
2. Giving “glory, honor, and thanks”; the last word shows that the first two words are descriptive of God himself – they gave glory and honor to God, acknowledging all that he is, just as they rendered their thanks to God for all that he is and has done.

B. The 24 elders (10-11)

1. Their worship is simultaneous with that of the four living creatures: “when.”
2. Whenever the seraphs worship, he elders fall down before him in humble adoration and submission, since he “sits on the throne.”
3. They “cast their crowns before the throne”-- thereby they acknowledge that they have no right to such an honor and position, but owe everything to God. This behavior does not

prove that these are humans who thus worship before God. However they do represent the kind of behavior that will be manifested by rewarded believers.

4. They “worship him who lives forever and ever – note the same quality of the worship of the living creatures.
5. Like the seraphs, they render “glory and honor and power”-- note the addition of power instead of thanks.
6. They note the “worthiness” of their **Lord** and their **God**.
7. They glorify his position and attributes: he “sits on the throne” and he “lives forever and ever.”
8. They specifically praise him as Creator
 - He created all things.
 - All things exist (“were”) and were created because of his will.
 - Clearly God has a plan and purpose for his creation and all are responsible to him.

CONCLUSION

Such is the opening picture of this section of Revelation revealing the powerful judgments of God upon the earth in the last days. Notice that the focus is on the God who made everything and rules everything and works everything out for his divine glory.

I DON'T FEAR THE FUTURE. I KNOW THE GOD WHO CONTROLS THE FUTURE!

Worship the King!

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