

Oakland International Fellowship Jesse McLaughlin

Revelation 4-5: Handout

Understanding Worship

As noted in the prologue of the Revelation Series the Book of Revelation is similar in content and structure to Old Testament prophecies of Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel. In chapter 4 & 5 of Revelation John’s vision seems to parallel many of the things Daniel sees in vision of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man.

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| **Daniel** | **Description** | **Revelation** |
| 7:9 | The prophet “looks” | 4:1 |
| 7:9 | Throne in heaven with God seated | 4:2 |
| 7:9 | God’s appearance is described | 4:3 |
| 7:9-10 | Fire before the throne | 4:5 |
| 7:10 | “myriads of myriads” of heavenly beings surround the throne | 5:11 |
| 7:10 | Books/scroll | 5:1-5 |
| 7:13-14 | Divine figure approaches throne and receives a kingdom | 5:5-13 |
| 7:14 | The prophet experiences distress due to what he sees | 5:4 |
| 7:16 | The prophet receives wisdom concerning the vision from one of the heavenly creatures/beings | 5:5 |
| 7:18,22,27 | The saints are given authority to reign over a kingdom | 5:10 |
| 7:27 | Concludes with God’s eternal reign | 5:13-14 |
| **\*Chart adapted from Beale, G.K. and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, p.97** |

## 1) The Visons Continue (Rev. 4:1)

* John now looks and sees “a door standing open in heaven[[1]](#footnote-1).” Here “heaven” is best understood similar to the “heavenly places” in Ephesians 6:12. Wilcock writes of John’s location in the vision, “the sphere of spiritual reality, where the masks are off and both good and evil are seen for what they really are.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The rest of the scenes of Revelation are witnessed by John as he stands in the heavenly throne room pictured in chapter 4.
* In Revelation the phrase “after these things” refers to the sequence of the visions John is seeing not historic, earthly chronology.

## 2) Worshiping the Creator (Rev. 4:2-11)

***2****At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.****3****And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.****4****Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.****5****From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,****6****and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.* (Rev. 4:2-6)

* The divine throne is at the center of the heavenly scene described in chapter 4. The word “throne” is repeated 17 times in these chapters. Upon the throne sits “The One” - the LORD God, the Almighty. His appearance is described as like precious stones. Around throne is a rainbow. These descriptions draw on OT imagery (Ezek. 1:26, 28; Gen. 9:12-17) to show the glorious nature of God and the sovereignty of his reign over all.
* Surrounding the throne are the thrones of the 24 elders. The number 24 is a symbolic consolidation of the 12 patriarchs (tribes of Israel) and the 12 apostles. Therefore, the elders are the heavenly representation of the saints across time or in other words the Church universal worshiping around the throne.
* The four living creatures are seen in other scenes of OT prophecy (Ezek. 1:1-28, 10:1-22; Isa. 6:1-7). These creatures also bear symbolic significance. The number four is associated with “all creation”; such as the four winds of heaven or the four corners of the earth. In accordance with the significance of the number of creatures they together represent all of created beings and material.
* Worship Around the Throne
	+ *“Who was and who is and is to come”* (4:8) – The eternal nature of the One on the Throne is highlighted in this phrase.
	+ *“Our Lord and God”*(4:11a) – The rule of God as king is praised in this phrase. The title is similar to the way of addressing the Roman Emperor Domitian at this time was: dominus et deus noster.[[3]](#footnote-3) God is on the throne. He alone is the true Sovereign over all.
	+ *“You created all things, and by your will they existed and were created”* (4:11b) – God is deemed worthy because all creation was brought into existence through His will and power.

## 3) The Scroll (Rev. 5:1-4)

*Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.****2****And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”****3****And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,****4****and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.* (Rev. 5:1-4)

* The scroll contains God’s plan for judgement and redemption. John so longs for the will of God to be carried out that he is moved to tears. Each of the seals bears a summary of the contents on a portion of the scroll. As each seal would be broken a fuller view of God’s plan would be revealed and realized as we shall see in coming chapters.
* It may be that John is seeing a Roman will due to the following similarities: (1) the contents would be summarized on the back of the scroll (2) it would be sealed by 7 witnesses (3) unsealed and read after the death of the one that made the will to execute the inheritance (4) a trusted executor would carry out the details of the will.[[4]](#footnote-4)

## 4) The Lamb (Rev. 5:5-14)

***5****And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”* ***6****And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.****7****And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.****8****And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.****9****And they sang a new song* (Rev. 5:5-9a)

* The reader is expecting to see “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Gen. 49:9-10) but instead a slain Lamb come into view. The Lamb is a reference to the Passover lamb and to Isaiah’s messianic prophecy (Isa. 53:7). In this unfolding drama around throne we see Jesus as a Lamb that has conquered through self-sacrificing love. He is described as having perfect power (7 horns) and wisdom (7 eyes).
* Worship of the One on the Throne and of the Lamb
	+ Led by the elders with harps and bowls filled with incense
	+ *“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for* *You were slain, and by your blood* *you ransomed people for God”* (5:9) – The sacrifice of the Lamb has bought back the saints back from sin and death. The theme of Christ’s victorious death is an encouragement to the saints experiencing persecution.
	+ *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”* - 7 items ascribed to the Lamb for “conquering”
	+ *“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb…”* (5:13)- God receives worship (4:11), the Lamb receives worship (5:12) and both receive it together (5:13)

### Summary:

In chapters 4-5 we witness the fulfillment of OT prophecy and we see the glory of God and of the Lamb. The work of God in creation and in redemption are viewed as a unified whole. The response of all creation to seeing the divine plan unfold is God glorifying worship.

### Discussion Questions:

* What does this view of the “heavenly” throne room teach us about worshipping God?
* What does this passage have to tell us about the person and work of Christ?
1. All scripture quotations taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Wilcock, Michael. The Message of Revelation

 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Beale, G.K. and David Campbell, Revelation: A Shorter Commentary, p. 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Beale, G.K. and David Campbell, Revelation: A Shorter Commentary, p. 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)