

Revelation 4:1-11

We may recall that the book of Revelation gives us its own inspired outline in Revelation 1:19: John is told to write things past (Revelation 1), things present (Revelation 2-3) and things future (Revelation 4-22).

Revelation chapters 4-5 give us a breathtaking view of the throne of God and introduce us to the events that lead up to “The Great Tribulation.” No two chapters are more worshipful than these two.

The main question that is crucial to these chapters is the question of time. The time question is this: “When do the events of these chapters occur and how do they relate to the Rapture and the Tribulation?”

The second part of the question is the easiest to answer as to how these events relate to the Great Tribulation. The beginning of the Great Tribulation starts in chapter 6. The Great Tribulation begins when Jesus Christ breaks open the first seal (Revelation 6:1). Since chapter 5 is the prelude which introduces Jesus Christ as being worthy enough to break open God’s wrath seals (5:1, 6-7) and since the Tribulation does not begin until the first seal is broken (6:1), it is obvious that this particular scene takes place just prior to the Tribulation period. **Chapters 4-5 occur just before the Tribulation begins.**

Now in determining how these chapters relate to the Rapture, there are five observations we may make:

- 1) These events obviously occurred after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:6).
- 2) These events obviously occur in the third part of the book (Rev. 1:19 / **4:1**).
This begins the future section of the book defined by the phrase “after these things.” The “these things” specifically refer to the things of the church. **In other words, after the Church Age these are the things that will happen.**
- 3) The Church is promised deliverance from the Tribulation (3:10) and it is very clear that these chapters are a prelude to the Great Tribulation.
- 4) The Church is not mentioned as being on earth after chapter 3 and is not mentioned again until Revelation 22:16.
- 5) The Lord is no longer viewed as being connected to the “lampstands on earth” (1:13; 2:1), but is now seen as operating a program of God’s wrath judgment out of heaven (5:6; 6:1).

Our conclusion is that the events of Revelation 4-5 occur after the Rapture of the Church just prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation. After the Church Age is over, immediately before the start of the Great Tribulation, the events described in these chapters occur and the Church is in heaven to witness them.

In Chapter 4, John gets his first glimpse of heaven. John is transported to heaven and writes down exactly what he sees.

What John sees is God the Father sitting on His throne and He has a scroll in His hand which contains the seven seals of wrath judgments to be poured out in the Great Tribulation. No one is worthy to approach the throne and take the scroll and start breaking the seals and that is when Jesus Christ enters. He publicly approaches the throne, takes the Scroll and starts breaking the seals, showing that He alone is worthy of pouring out God's wrath judgment. It is a stirring scene.

What is amazing for us is that we will be in heaven and see this happen just as John wrote it. We get to study this scene from Scripture and then we get to go to heaven and watch it play out.

Revelation 4:1 begins with a prepositional phrase which occurs twice in the verse, "after these things" (μετα ταυτα). This is the exact same construction that occurs in Revelation 1:19. This is important to see because this begins the section when the Church Age is over and we move into things future.

Dr. C. I. Scofield wrote: "Beginning with 4:1 the viewpoint of John is from heaven. Since the word "church" does not appear again in Revelation until 22:16, the catching up of John from earth to heaven has been taken to be a symbolic representation of the translation of the church as occurring before the events of the Tribulation described in chapters 6-19" (*The Scofield Study Bible*, NASV, Revelation 4:1 note, pp. 1726-1727).

There are some key similarities between what happens to John in these two verses and what will happen to us when we are raptured, but there are also five main differences which we may see from I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

Difference #1 - An archangel will announce the Rapture (I Thess. 4:16), whereas John heard a voice and we are not certain whose voice it was (**Revelation 4:1**).

Difference #2 - The "dead in Christ" are resurrected and caught up first at the Rapture (I Thess. 4:16), whereas only John was caught up to heaven in **Revelation 4:1** and there was no resurrection.

Difference #3 - The believer meets loved ones who died and instantly meets Jesus Christ at the Rapture (I Thess. 4:17a), whereas John first meets a throne (**Rev. 4:2**).

Difference #4 - The first heavenly thing the believer sees at the Rapture is Jesus Christ (I Thess. 4:17b), whereas the first heavenly thing John saw was the throne of God the Father (**Rev. 4:3**).

Difference #5 - The believer who is raptured will never be separated from Jesus Christ and will remain with Him forever (I Thess. 4:17), whereas John had to return to earth to die.

In verses 1-2, the actual process of getting John to heaven involved three main actions:

Action #1 - What John saw . **4:1a**

The first part of the process of transporting John to heaven was that he looked and saw a door . that had been opened in heaven. This point will shatter the theology of many people because one who goes to heaven does not see pearly gates but an open door. The twelve pearly gates show up when Christ creates a new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:21).

In the Greek text, there is an article “the” before the singular noun “heaven.” This means that John saw an open door that enabled him to look at “the heaven” that is the place where God’s throne is located. There are three heavens in Scripture: 1) Our present atmosphere where the birds fly; 2) The outer atmosphere where the planets are; 3) The heaven where God’s throne exists. All who have sight can see the first two heavens every day, but in order to see the third heaven, God must open the door. In fact, the participle “open” is perfect, passive in Greek, meaning that the door had been opened by God for John to see this and John had nothing to do with the action. A key point here is that no one will see heaven unless God opens the door of the heart and the door of heaven. There is only one way to heaven - faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Now the noun “throne” is used some thirty-seven times in Revelation and occurs thirteen . times in **chapter 4 (4:2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 9, 10, 10)**. This throne of God is something that really captures John’s eye. He sees what is “on the throne” (**v. 2**); what is “around the throne” (**v. 3**); what comes out “from the throne” (**v. 5**); and what is “before the throne” (**v. 6**).

Action #2 - What John heard . **4:1b-d**

In close proximity to what John saw, John heard a voice that was “like the sound of a trumpet.” A trumpet was used for signaling major military and religious events. The trumpet was a very distinct sound which pierced the air with great authority. When a voice is like the sound of a trumpet, it is a very commanding voice which rings with authority and in this case it is the authority of God .

The voice John heard communicated two main messages to John:

(Communication #1) - The voice commands John to “come up here.” **4:1c**

(Communication #2) - The voice promises to show John future things. **4:1d**

There is a tremendous parallel to what happens to John and what will happen to us at the Rapture, which is given to us in I Thessalonians 4:16-17:

- 1) We will look up and see a door in heaven open and we will see Jesus Christ come through that door up in the clouds.
- 2) We will hear a commanding voice probably first addressed to the dead “in Christ.”
- 3) We will hear a commanding voice of the archangel say “come up here.”

It would appear that even in early Scriptural data that the words “come up” are key words to going into the presence of God. Those were the very words God said to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12).

Action #3 - What John experienced. **4:2**

The Greek text indicates that there was no time gap in these actions - John saw, John heard and “immediately” he was in heaven. By means of the spirit (possibly the angelic spirit who is showing John these things or some special spiritual state of John), John immediately and instantly found himself in heaven.

When John got into this heaven, there were five sights that he immediately saw (4:2-8):

(Sight #1) - John saw a throne standing in heaven. **4:2b**

The emphasis here is that God’s throne was standing in the heaven. The imperfect tense of the verb indicates it is a throne that has been standing in heaven throughout all of past time. John was seeing it for the first time, but it has existed throughout all of time.

(Sight #2) - John saw One sitting on the throne. **4:2c-3**

The first thing that catches John’s eye about the One sitting on the throne is brilliant color. This is no coincidence because Ezekiel was impressed with exactly the same thing when he saw God’s throne (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

John specifically says the One sitting on the throne was like a “jasper stone and sardius.” We are not exactly certain what these colors are. Most scholars agree the sardius is a beautiful deep fiery red and the jasper is like a crystal clear brilliant shining diamond based on Rev. 21:11.

Encircling the throne was a “rainbow.” The throne is standing suspended in heaven and all around it is this rainbow which has the appearance of an emerald. This rainbow was a beautiful green, emerald color and John was seeing a display of supernatural, sovereign beauty.

Now the rainbow is a reminder of the faithfulness of God to keep His promises (Gen. 9:12-16), specifically to never destroy the world again by a flood. This rainbow does immediately connect us to the grace and mercy of God and the judgment of God coming from God’s throne (Ps. 29:10).

It is also noteworthy to point out that the jasper stone is the last stone which represents the last tribe of Israel (Exodus 28:9-10, 20, 21) and the sardius or ruby is the first stone that represents the first tribe of Israel (Exodus 28:9-10, 17, 21).

So these colors and this rainbow would clearly testify of the fact that God is faithful to keep all of His covenants and promises with Israel and with all humanity. We may expect that when we have the privilege of going to heaven, we too will see a beautiful majestic display of color at God’s throne.

(Sight #3) - John saw twenty-four other thrones around God's throne with twenty-four elders.
4:4

There were six specific realities John saw about these twenty-four elders:

- 1) They were twenty-four in number - there is a plurality of leadership and this number only shows up in Revelation (**4:4, 10**; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4). We cannot look to any parallel texts for help.
- 2) They were elders (πρεσβυτερος) - this term denotes an official leadership position.
- 3) They were sitting (καθημαι) - the present tense indicates a continual sitting (**4:2**), a permanency.
- 4) They were clothed in white garments - they had the righteousness of Jesus Christ. These clothes represent their purity.
- 5) They wore golden victor's crowns (στεφανος) on their heads - they had been judged and rewarded. These crowns represent their victory.
- 6) These twenty-four elders do various things: **1**) Sit on thrones; **2**) Fall down and worship God (**4:10**; 5:14; 11:16; 19:4); **3**) Know the precise program of God (5:5; 7:13-14); **4**) Are very close to Jesus Christ (5:6); **5**) Fall down and worship Jesus Christ (5:8; 7:11:16); **6**) Know the importance of prayer (5:8); **7**) Are able to sing praises to Jesus Christ (5:9-10); **8**) Know special worship songs no one else knows (14:3).

Now the real debate is who are these twenty-four elders? Truth is, we do not specifically know and apparently it is not necessary that we do specifically know. There are four main views:

(View #1) - Some say they are twenty-four angels.

Some say this is a special class of angels who have high authority at the court of God in heaven. The problem with this is that the word "elders" (πρεσβυτερος) is **never** used in reference to an angelic being. According to Moulten and Gedan this word is used some fifty-four times prior to Revelation and it **always** refers to humans. Further more the noun "crowns" (στεφανος) refers to a victor's crown which never is given to angels, but to an individual who has been judged faithful and victorious.

(View #2) - Some say they are twenty-four elders out of the Church Age.

These twenty-four elders represent the N.T. Church which has been resurrected and raptured. We do know that Jesus Christ promised that those who would believe on Him would receive "white garments" (3:5), "crowns" (3:11), and "thrones" (Rev. 3:21). We learn from Revelation 20:4, that the saints of the Church Age are given thrones and judgment responsibilities. The white clothing meant they were clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and the crowns meant they were highly rewarded with this privileged position. The biggest problem with this view is connecting the number twenty-four to the Church.

(View #3) - Some say they are twenty-four elders who represent God's program with both Israel and the Church.

This view says that there are twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles for the Church and the number of twenty-four represents the leadership of the program of God in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. According to Revelation 21:11-12, 14, the New Jerusalem will feature the names of the twelve tribes and the names of the twelve apostles. The problem with this view is that we must divide the number twenty-four by two and how did the O.T. saints received a resurrected reward when their resurrection does not occur until after the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2; Isaiah 26:19; John 11:24)?

(View #4) - Some say they are twenty-four priestly elders from Israel.

This view suggests that these elders are the completed priesthood elders connected to the final program of God in regard to Israel. In the O.T. economy there were twenty-four divisions of the Levitical priesthood (I Chron. 24:7-19), so this allows for a literal interpretation of the number. This certainly fits the flow of the book of Revelation, because much of what is about to occur is aimed at Israel. It also would mean that this would be a special moment when the highest leaders of Israel would recognize the importance of the Church. The problem is the same as above.

What we do know is that God's throne features high positions of structured and numbered leadership. There will be structured authority and submission to that authority.

(Sight #4) - John saw a lot of visual and audible activity coming from God's throne. **4:5**

- 1) John saw "flashes of lightening" - the most powerful and perfect lightening display ever seen.
- 2) John heard "sounds and peals of thunder" - lightening and thunder are often a prelude to God's judgment (8:5; 11:19; 16:18) and the intimidating presence of God (Exodus 19:16).
- 3) John saw seven lamps before the throne which represented the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit (conviction, regeneration, baptism, indwelling, filling, sealing, sanctifying). The Holy Spirit is typically not visible just like the wind (John 3:8), but at God's throne there are visible manifestations.

(Sight #5) - John saw a sea before the throne of God. **4:6a**

Before the throne of God was a "sea of glass like crystal." The Biblical image portrayed by crystal is one of something pure, clear and unhidden (Rev. 21:11; 22:1). What stands out to John is that before God's throne was a sea that was totally pure with nothing hidden. **This is critical to see about God's throne; it is a throne of total purity and nothing is hidden from Him.** We know from Revelation 15:2 that Tribulation martyred saints are standing on this sea, so we may assume that any person who is before God's throne is standing there in total purity and nothing is hidden.

(Sight #6) - John saw unusual creatures in and around God's throne. **4:6b-11**

The noun "creatures" (ζωα) refers to living beings. These are some kind of living being with both animal and humans features that exist at God's throne. **Three things are very clear, they are very unusual, they are real and they are living.** Both the O.T. and N.T. writers describe seeing these beings so they must be very important (Ezekiel 1:5-14; 10:10-14, 19-22; Isaiah 6:1-6; Revelation 4:6-11).

From the book of Revelation, we may conclude the following about these living creatures:

- 1) These beings always appear near the throne of God. **4:6; 5:6; 14:3**
- 2) These beings are particularly involved in worshipping God for His Holiness and Mercy, specifically in regard to sinful man. **4:8; 5:9, 14; 7:11; 19:4**
- 3) These beings are closely connected to the actual process of judgment. **6:7**
- 4) These beings are involved in knowing and revealing God's final program. **6:1, 7**
- 5) These beings were not hostile to the Apostle John. **6:1, 7**
- 6) These beings are in a position of recognizable authority. **4:9-10; 14:3**

There are three very peculiar attributes that are given to us about these beings:

- 1) They have several eyes and are able to look in all directions - front and back. **4:6**
- 2) They each have a distinct feature of an animal, a human or a bird. **4:7**
- 3) They each have six wings. **4:8**

Attribute #1 - They have several eyes able to look in all directions at the same time. **4:6**

This is obviously a reference to the fact that nothing escapes their eyesight. These beings can continually guard and monitor the throne of God and the Holiness of God and at the same time see everything that is happening. Never do these angels lose their focus on God, but they also never miss anything else either.

Attribute #2 - They each have a distinct feature. **4:7**

In Revelation, the four living beings each have one face - lion, calf, man and eagle.
In Ezekiel the four living beings each had four faces - man, lion, ox and eagle (Ezek. 1:6, 10).

Attribute #3 - They each have six wings which are used for covering and speed. **4:8**

In Revelation, the four living beings each have six wings and one face.
In Ezekiel, the four living beings each have four wings and four faces (Ezek. 1:6, 10).

When we compare Revelation with Ezekiel, there are five main differences:

Difference #1 - There is a difference in the number of the wings - six versus four.

Difference #2 - There is a difference in the number of faces - one versus four.

Difference #3 - There is a difference in the order .

Revelation - lion, calf, man, eagle

Ezekiel - man, lion, ox, eagle

Difference #4 - There is a slight difference in the content .

In both books, the lion, man and eagle are the same.

In Ezekiel there is an ox and in Revelation there is a calf.

Difference #5 - There is a difference in function .

In Ezekiel these beings are involved in much movement (1:14-21).

In Revelation these beings are involved in more monitoring (6:1, 3)

This raises several questions:

- 1) Who are these beings?
- 2) What do their faces mean?
- 3) Why are there differences between Ezekiel and Revelation?
- 4) How do these beings relate to Israel and the Church?

(Question #1) - Who are these living beings?

Another way to ask this question is this: “Are these living beings in Revelation Cherubim or Seraphim angels?”

Actually there are two major prophets in the O.T. who give us some insight into this question:

- 1) The prophet Isaiah ; 2) The prophet Ezekiel .

Isaiah describes the fact that he saw angelic beings he calls “seraphim” who have six wings - Isaiah 6:2. Two wings were used to cover the angel’s face , two were used to cover the angel’s feet and two were used to fly . All we know about the seraphim is what we see here. These angels are exalted angels who worship God at His throne and it is clear that **the four living beings in Revelation have a similar wing structure.**

Ezekiel is the prophet who gives us much more insight and information concerning these angelic beings (Ezek. 1:5-14; 10:9-14, 19-22). It is clear that he classifies these creatures as “cherubim” not “seraphim.” The “cherubim” angels are the highest ranked angels and it is clear that **the angelic beings in Revelation are “cherubim” with all the attributes of the seraphim.**

We do know that wherever God’s worship and presence existed, there were special designated angels. This was true in the O.T. temple and it is obviously true at the throne of God.

According to Exodus 25:17-22, cherubim were to completely guard the mercy seat of God.

According to Genesis 3:24, cherubim kept Adam and Eve away from the tree of life.

According to I Kings 6:21-28, cherubim were part of the decoration of Solomon’s temple.

According to Exodus 26:31-33, cherubim shut off the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

(Question #2) - What do these faces represent?

Ever since the early days of the Church, Bible interpreters believe that there is a very special New Testament Church Age meaning and representation of the order of the four faces. There have been various attempts to relate the four faces to the four Gospels and four different portraits of Jesus Christ.

The Lion represents Jesus Christ as King which is portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew.
The Calf represents Jesus Christ as a servant which is portrayed in the Gospel of Mark.
The Man represents Jesus Christ as a man which is portrayed in the Gospel of Luke.
The Eagle represents Jesus Christ as heavenly God which is portrayed in the Gospel of John.

To actually know what these faces represent, we must take a look at each one:

Representation #1 - The Lion. **4:7a**

The lion is referred to more than 100 times in the Bible and the vast majority of these uses are found in the O.T. and are closely connected to Israel. The lion is used two ways:

- 1) Literally - it refers to the literal animal known as the lion - i.e. Daniel 6:16-24
- 2) Metaphorically - it refers to various characteristics which a lion symbolizes.

The majority of uses of the noun lion are metaphorical and when it is used this way in Scripture it is specifically used of a fierce anger and ferocious judgment of God against God's enemies (Isaiah 31:4; Jeremiah 25:37-38; Hosea 5:14).

As we relate this face to these living creatures, we conclude that the lion element represents the fact that these living beings are closely involved in the fierce anger and ferocious judgments of God against God's enemies. In Revelation, this part of the being would specifically praise and worship God for His judgments.

Representation #2 - The Calf. **4:7b**

The calf is referred to some twenty-five times in the O.T. It is used in two ways:

- 1) Literally - it refers to a literal calf, the kind one would eat for food (Gen. 18:7; I Sam. 28:24).
- 2) Metaphorically - it is used in three different ways:
 - A. As a symbol of idolatry concerning the nation Israel - by far the most uses.
Exodus 32:4, 8, 19, 24, 35; Deuteronomy 9:16, 21; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19;
Hosea 8:5-6
 - B. As a symbol of millennial peace. A calf dwelling with the young lion. Isaiah 11:6
 - C. As a symbol of the future Promised Land. Jeremiah 34:18-19; Genesis 15:7-17

As we relate this face to these living beings, we conclude that these three points specifically connect this living being to Israel and the idolatry that has kept her out of the land, but also the Grace of God that will give her the land. This beast praises and worships God because Israel will receive her land and all idolatry and immorality will be eliminated. It is more than coincidental that just before Israel gets her land, the world in the Tribulation will be dominated by idolatry and immorality (Revelation 9:20-21).

Representation #3 - The Man . 4:7c

It is important to see that this living being as the “face like that of a man.” The emphasis in the Greek is on the noun “face”; literally the text reads “the face as of a man” (το προσωπον ως ανθρωπου). This too is an important concept that relates to God and Israel.

In the O.T., the idea of face specifically has to do with being in a favorable or unfavorable position with God. For example, when Israel was living in sin, God hid His face from her; that is she was no longer the object of His blessing (Ezekiel 13:17). When Israel was in captivity, she would wait for God’s face to turn toward her, thus restoring her blessings which included forgiveness and deliverance (Isaiah 8:17-18).

This “living being” becomes very active during this time period of Revelation. **He is particularly involved in praising God for the fact that God is about to favorably shine His face of blessing on Israel and bless her forever.**

Representation #4 - The Eagle . 4:7d

We need to observe that this fourth living being is not just any eagle, but like a “flying eagle.” There are five O.T. passages that are specifically related to this picture: 1) Deuteronomy 28:49; 2) Jeremiah 48:40; 3) Jeremiah 49:22; 4) Hosea 8:1; 5) Habakkuk 1:8. In examining these texts we may observe the following:

1. The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment against rebellious Israel . Deuteronomy 28:49-50
- 2) The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment against Israel’s enemies . Jeremiah 48:40; 49:22
- 3) The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment by raising up nations against Israel . Hosea 8:1
- 4) The flying eagle represents God’s final , swift, devastating judgment by rising up nations to come against Israel just before He delivers her. Habakkuk 1:8

Collectively speaking, the flying eagle represents the swift judgment of God against His own rebellious nation and against all of Israel’s enemies. This living being worships God because the final and swift judgment of God is about to hit the world, and in the end Israel will stand and all nations who were against her will be quickly destroyed.

These living beings worship God continually in regard to His holy judgments, and at this point, there is much action because God is about to take over everything.

(Question #3) - Why the differences between Ezekiel and Revelation?

Why are their four heads in Ezekiel and one head in Revelation? Why four wings in Ezekiel and six wings in Revelation?

The difference in the number of heads may be discovered by the number of major judgments which remained pertaining to Israel. We may notice in Ezekiel 1:5-15 that each living being had a connection to the earth. In Ezekiel's prophecy, it was during the time of the Babylonian captivity, which was the third major political power used by God to dominate Israel (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon). After the Babylonian captivity there were three more major powers that would dominate Israel - Persia, Greece and Rome. If we connect these four heads to four judgments yet to come, then there is still one left which is the power of the Antichrist during the Tribulation. As each judgment of God decreases so do the head numbers.

The six wings of Revelation show that this final judgment will be unusually swift. It will be faster than any of the other judgments. The thing to see about these living beings is that all judgment is authorized from God's throne.

According to **Revelation 4:8**, these living beings do not cease day and night to worship God in this very context of judgment. They sing about God's holiness, they sing about God's might and they sing about God's eternity.

The threefold repetition of "Holy, Holy, Holy" clearly is a reference to the entire Trinity.

We also may observe that at God's throne there is a reference to "day and night" which would mean there are observable time divisions in eternity. There is a day/night time division at God's throne.

It appears from **Revelation 4:9**, that when these living beings praise God because He is the Almighty Eternal God, the twenty-four elders do the same thing, only they fall down before Him and cast their crowns at His feet. It is clear that the living beings are high ranked because the elders do not do this until the living beings do. More than likely, these elders recognize the high rank of the living beings and they submit to their rank and do the same thing.

According to **Revelation 4:11**, the elders sing somewhat of a different song. They are worshipping God specifically for His creation.

It is one thing to worship God for what He does; but it is another thing to worship God for who He is. This is the highest form of worship. Worship God for who He is.

Any who take a serious look at the fourth chapter of Revelation cannot help but be moved with the majesty of heaven.

Revelation 5:1-14

Chapters four and five of Revelation are designed to establish the sovereign greatness of God and to show that God is the only One who is worthy to pour out judgment. Chapter four established the worthiness of God at His throne. **Chapter five** establishes the worthiness of Jesus Christ at His throne.

Only God is worshipped at the throne of God and since this chapter shows that Jesus Christ is worshipped at the throne of God and that He is authorized to pour out all the judgments of God, this is a great chapter that proves Jesus Christ is God.

Now there are three dramatic and prophetic sights that John saw. The conjunction “and” (και) which begins **chapter 5** coordinately connects us to what he saw in chapter four. There is specific chronology in that after John saw what he saw in chapter four, then next he saw what he saw in **chapter 5**.

PROPHETIC SIGHT #1 – John saw that no created being, human or angel, was worthy enough take the written scroll, which is located at God’s throne, break seals and start pouring out judgment. **5:1-4**

Now these verses may be broken down into two main actions of John:

(Action #1) - What John physically saw. **5:1-3**

There were two specific sights that John saw:

Sight #1 - John saw a written scroll. **5:1**

The word “book” or “scroll” is the Greek word “Biblion” (βιβλιον) which literally does mean a book. Two very persuasive arguments are given to suggest this book was in “scroll” format and not “book” format: **1)** There was writing on both sides of the paper, “inside and on the back” (**5:1**), specifically a scroll feature; **2)** Writing on scrolls was the format until the second century, which would indicate that John would use this word in the context of this written format.

Now there are three descriptions that John gives us of this scroll:

Description #1 - This scroll was located in a very special and sacred location. **5:1**

Most English translations read “And I saw **in** the right hand,” but the Greek text literally reads “And I saw **upon** (επι) the right hand.” The difference is very important because we learn that this scroll is in a takeable position. If something were “in” the right hand of God it is not in a takeable position (John 10:28). However, as Robert Thomas says, “The scroll lies on (επι) the open palm of the One sitting upon the throne,” which does present the possibility of it being taken (*Revelation*, Vol. 1, pp. 374-375).

The location of this scroll being at the right hand of God at the throne of God, is the most sacred spot this scroll could be located. As we shall see, this written scroll contains the final judgments of God, which will come directly from His throne. **We cannot help but observe how sacred God's written Word is to Him at His own throne.** Those who take God's Word lightly will certainly regret it when one stands before God.

Description #2 - This scroll contained writing on both sides. **5:1b**

The prophet Ezekiel noticed the same thing when he saw a heavenly scroll (**Ezekiel 2:9-10**). What this means is that this is a very thorough document, which contains God's judgments which will be thorough and complete. When God starts pouring out His judgments on this world, which are contained in this written scroll, it will be precise, thorough and full judgment.

Description #3 - This scroll contained seven seals. **5:1c**

Now the participles "written" and "sealed" are perfect tense, which means this took place at some point in the past and still existed as originally written and sealed in the present.

Now the book was rolled into a scroll and had seven seals on it. A scroll was made out of papyrus paper and each sheet was about 10 inches wide and 8 inches long. William Barclays says that the Roman scroll was about 11½ feet long, whereas the book of Philemon was a scroll of about 1 foot. Several sheets were joined together to form a scroll. They were typically rolled around a pole and on the end were the seals. So in order to read it, someone had to break the first seal, unroll it and read until you came to the next seal.

This idea of a "scroll" at God's throne, which contains God's judgments, has been seen before. Isaiah saw it (Isaiah 29:11-12); Ezekiel read it (Ezekiel 2:9-10); Daniel sealed it (Daniel 12:4, 9).

Once this scroll is opened, God will speak to this world for seven straight years, not by grace, but by ferocious judgment. This scroll contains the final judgments of God that will be poured out directly from the throne of God in a very short span of time. Typically, when God pours out wrath, He gives a lengthy grace period for people to turn to Him. There will be no such period for seven straight years. If God caused a devastating flood of judgment in just forty days (Genesis 7:17), think of the devastation that will occur when He pours out judgment for seven straight years.

Sight #2 - John saw a strong angel. **5:2-3**

The adjective "strong" (ισχυρον) means John saw a very strong, mighty and powerful angel (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 220). He was a very prominent and highly ranked angel. This angel was continually (present tense) proclaiming with a very "loud" voice, literally "mega" voice two questions:

Question #1 - Who is worthy enough to open the book ? **5:2a**

Question #2 - Who is worthy enough to break the seals ? **5:2b-3**

The noun “worthy” (αξιός) means who has enough weight at the worth level of God to be able to approach the throne of God, pick up the scroll and start breaking the seals which pour out the judgment of God?

Now we know that this high ranking angel immediately recognizes that he is not worthy enough to open this book and break the seals. John apparently sensed this because **verse 3** says “no one” was worthy enough.

No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was worthy enough to approach the throne of God and take this book. All of creation is disqualified. Those in heaven, angelic or human, are not worthy enough; those on the earth, even those right with God, are not worthy enough; those under the earth, all of the O.T. saints are not worthy enough. No created being has a worth level that is capable of approaching God’s Holy throne.

The fact is when it comes to God’s judgment that is what we all deserve. The only way we can even get to this heaven is to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ through judicial imputation and even with this clothing, we are not worthy enough to approach God’s throne.

(Action #2) - How John emotionally responded. **5:4**

When John saw this dilemma, he began to “weep greatly.” John is an apostle and obviously he is not worthy enough to do this so he wept. The adverb “greatly” means to weep a lot as opposed to a little. John literally was sobbing. Not one person, not one created thing was worthy enough to go to the throne of God, take the scroll, open it and look into it.

Now one question we would ask is, “Why should John weep?” The Church has been raptured and is in heaven and he himself is in heaven, so why cry about this? The answer is because this scroll is God’s “Deed Title to the World.” The judgments in the scroll pour out God’s final wrath on a God-mocking, Christ-rejecting world as a prelude to Jesus Christ coming and taking over the world. All of the future promises of God, including the wonderful blessings for Israel and the eternal hopes of all the believers, are contingent upon this scroll being opened.

PROPHETIC SIGHT #2 – John saw that Jesus Christ was worthy enough to take the written book, which is located at God’s throne, break the seals and start pouring out judgment. **5:5-7**

One of the twenty-four elders commanded John to stop weeping. John is an elder on earth who is weeping in heaven because of the unknown, and an elder in heaven tells him to stop weeping because of One who is known. John can stop weeping because of Jesus Christ.

Now the elder gives two descriptive titles to Jesus Christ, both of which are connected to Israel:

Descriptive Title #1 - Jesus Christ is the Lion out of the tribe of Judah . **5:5a**

This is a very emphatic construction in the Greek Text, Jesus Christ is “the Lion, the out of the Judah tribe” Lion. This description is taken from Genesis 49:8-10, 12. Jacob is pronouncing a blessing on his twelve sons and the promised blessing to Judah is that through him would come One who would gather Israel and crush all enemies and would rule over all peoples in the world.

The lion is the king of the beasts and Jesus Christ is King of everything, including lions. Every force against God and against Israel will go down by the judgmental hand of Jesus Christ.

Descriptive Title #2 - Jesus Christ is the Root of David . **5:5b**

This is taken from Isaiah 11:1-10. It speaks of the One who would come through the Davidic line who would reign as King over the entire world and bring to it a millennial peace.

The elder tells John to stop weeping because there is One who is worthy. There is One who “has overcome.” This verb “has overcome” (νικᾶω) means that Jesus Christ has prevailed and has conquered. He is the conqueror; He is the Jewish King and He is able to pour out judgments and take over the world.

When the elder had said these things to John, according to **verse 6**, John saw Jesus Christ Himself and he points out four Divine realities about Jesus Christ:

(Divine Reality #1) - Jesus Christ is a Lamb . **5:6a**

Jesus Christ is called the Lamb at least 28 times in Revelation. This title emphasizes the fact that He is the Divine Redeemer, who is able to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Isaiah predicted that the Divine Messiah would be led as a “lamb” to slaughter (Isaiah 53:7) and Jesus Christ was that Lamb.

(Divine Reality #2) - Jesus Christ is a standing Lamb as if slain . **5:6b**

Slain lambs do not stand, they lie dead. But this Lamb is standing and the tense of the participle indicates He was slain at a specific moment in the past, but continues to stand in the present and on into the future. The phrase “as if slain” is not given to question Christ’s death as being a real death; it is given to show that this one-time dead Lamb is now alive, standing at God’s throne.

Now one question is if the Lamb is standing, what are the indications that He was slain? The answer is the nail prints. The nail prints are still there on the Lamb. His hands and feet were pierced and the thorn marks are still on His forehead and that wound in His side still has a scar. Jesus Christ is a lion, but He also is a lamb (Luke 24:40; John 20:20, 27).

(Divine Reality #3) - Jesus Christ has seven horns . **5:6c**

The number seven is used for completion and the image of horns is one used in Scripture for kings who are in sovereign control and have sovereign authority and power (Daniel 7:24; Zechariah 2:18-19).

What this imagery reveals is that Jesus Christ has complete , total sovereign control, authority and power over everything.

(Divine Reality #4) - Jesus Christ has seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God. **5:6d**

As we have already observed, this refers to the complete and total work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is in charge of the work of the Holy Spirit in this world. His work knows all, sees all and covers all. **Jesus Christ has full charge of all of God's work in the entire world.**

Now verse 7 is extremely important. The verb "took" (literally "receive") is what Dana and Mantey call a dramatic perfect (*Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 204). **This is a very dramatic eschatological moment in the whole program of God.**

All of heaven is watching the throne of God and the Lamb of God comes, after there has been a realization that no one is worthy to approach God's throne. The Lamb goes to the throne, takes the scroll out of the right hand of God the Father. Joseph Seiss said this is the sublimest individual act in Revelation. This will be a spectacular moment and we will be there to witness it in all of its glory and majesty. Jesus Christ will literally and dramatically take God's judgment into His own hands. He is the slain Lamb and He is the sublime Lamb.

This is a special moment for many reasons. First, as the Lamb, Jesus Christ already took on Himself the judgment and wrath of God that could save sinners. Second, it is time for the sinners who have rejected Him, to take the wrath of God on themselves. Jesus Christ will pour out wrath that these people did not have to experience. This will be a very dramatic moment.

PROPHETIC SIGHT #3 – John saw that Jesus Christ was worshipped as God at God's throne by all of creation. **5:8-14**

One of the things that absolutely proves Jesus Christ is God is His reaction to worship. Time and time again the Bible stresses that only God is to be worshipped (Exodus 34:14; Isaiah 42:8; Revelation 22:9). Jesus Christ, Himself, said only God was to be worshipped (Matthew 4:10). Whenever godly men were worshipped, they totally rejected it (Acts 10:25-26; 14:8-18). Whenever godly angels were worshipped, they totally rejected it (Revelation 22:8-9). One of the most powerful proofs that Jesus Christ is fully God is the fact that He was worshipped and fully accepted it. Even God the Father said that His Son was to be worshipped (Hebrews 1:6). In this text, He is worshipped at the throne of God proving He is God.

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When Jesus Christ actually does take this scroll into His own hands, three different worship scenes will occur:

(Worship Scene #1) - Jesus Christ receives worship from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. **5:8-10**

When Christ takes the book in His hand, these highest ranked authorities in heaven fall down before Him in worship. The reason for this is because He now has the final judgments of God in His hands. Now to express the worship, each elder has two items of worship:

Item of Worship #1 - Each elder has a harp. **5:8a**

There are two main instruments that will be used in heavenly worship at God's throne:

1) A harp; and 2) A trumpet. The use of harps in Revelation is always connected to people not angels (Revelation 14:1-3; 15:2; 18:21-22). In the O.T., it was the Levites who played the harps (I Chronicles 25:1, 6).

Now the harp was specifically an instrument used, especially in the O.T. economy, for Jewish praise and worship of God (Psalm 33:2, 12; 98:5; 147:7, 12). **In many passages the harp was a specific praise instrument, praising God for what He would ultimately do for Israel.**

There are two specific praise themes for which harps were used: 1) They were used concerning the destruction of Israel's enemies (Psalm 33:10, 19-21); 2) They were used concerning the blessings of prosperity for Israel both physically and eternally (33:12).

It is clear that these elders realize that things are about to happen specifically for and with Israel.

Item of Worship #2 - Each elder has a golden bowl. **5:8b**

Now the golden bowls were full of incense which were the prayers of the saints. There is an article "the" before prayers and before saints, meaning these are specific prayers offered by specific people. Contextually the prayers would be those requesting that Jesus Christ return to earth to reign as King and establish Israel as His nation on this earth. Prayers for the Rapture will have already been answered.

Jesus Christ had taught His Jewish disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come on earth" and the golden bowls show the pure value of this prayer which is now about to be answered.

In **verses 9-10**, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders begin singing a new song. This is a 28 voice choir. The reason why this song is new is because what is about to happen has never happened before and will not ever happen again. **The major thrust of this new song is why Jesus Christ is worthy enough to take that scroll and open the seals and it zeroes in on four major Christological accomplishments:**

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Accomplishment #1 - Jesus Christ was slain . **5:9a**

Jesus Christ allowed Himself to be slaughtered like a sheep. He did it for us. He gave up His physical life so we could have eternal life.

Accomplishment #2 - Jesus Christ shed His own blood for our redemption . **5:9b**

There are two great themes that prompt worship at God's throne: 1) Creation (4:11); 2) Redemption (**5:9b**).

Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption and the price was very high, His own shed blood.

Accomplishment #3 - Jesus Christ made us royalty . **5:10a**

Jesus Christ has made us to be a kingdom of priests unto God. In the O.T. only Aaron and Levi were priests. But by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, we have been elevated to a status of priesthood. This proves that the Church is in heaven because we are the priests unto God.

Accomplishment #4 - Jesus Christ gave us kingdom authority . **5:10b**

We will actually reign with Jesus Christ on this earth. This will occur in the Millennium.

(Worship Scene #2) - Jesus Christ receives worship from an innumerable heavenly choir of angels. **5:11-12**

When the holy angels see this, they will break out in their own worship hymn to Jesus Christ. This particular hymn has been beautifully set to music by Don Wyrzten. There are two critical facts to see:

Fact #1 - This is an angelic praise hymn. This is a hymn that angels will sing.

Fact #2 - There is an article before each noun, "the" power, "the" riches, "the" wisdom.

In other words, the angels are singing that Jesus Christ is worthy to receive "the power, the riches, the wisdom, the might, the honor, the glory and the blessing" that belongs to God. Jesus Christ is the worthy Lamb of God and He is due the same honor and glory as God because He is God. He is totally, truly and completely God.

(Worship Scene #3) - Jesus Christ receives worship from all creation. **5:13**

Here is a moment when every created thing, regardless of location - heaven, earth, sea - will all acknowledge Jesus Christ. Believers in heaven, on earth, and on the sea. No matter where the believer is located, all will worship Jesus Christ at this moment in this praise service. The essence of the praise is that both the Father and the Son are worthy of this worship and the living beings and elders say "Amen" and fall down and worship again (**5:14**).