

Revelation 4–5 — The Throne of God in Heaven and the Lamb

Notes on The Revelation with Practical Reflections

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Chapters 4 and 5: The Throne of God in Heaven, And The Lamb Taking The Book

The apostle now writes the things which will succeed the course of the Assembly upon earth -the things which must be after these things {see Rev. 4:1}.

No account is given of Him who sat upon the throne, further than He was like a jasper and a sardine stone {Rev. 4:3};

for no human language can describe the glory of the Majesty in the heavens. In the latter part of the book we have the throne of God and of the Lamb {Rev. 22:1, 3}.

The scene is in heaven. God's throne is the center around which all is clustered. It is no longer Christ judging assemblies, but we see saints in heaven, and we have the counsels of God and the judgment of His throne in relation to the dwellers upon earth. The fourth and fifth chapters give us an introduction to the prophetic judgments. They may be read together; the former shows us the throne of God as Creator of all things, the latter the throne of God in relation to redemption. The Lamb is pronounced alone worthy to carry out the Divine counsels.

The

John says, After these things a door was opened in heaven, and the first voice -- that is, the trumpet-like sound which called his attention to the vision in the first chapter -- now says,

Before anything further is described, twenty-four elders are seen round about the throne, sitting on twenty-four seats or thrones. This is most blessed. 3 They represent the heavenly saints -- those who

Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter,

or, more properly, after these things {Rev. 4:1}.

The same words are translated after these things,

in chapters 18:1 and 19:1, and are intended, I believe; to show us what takes place after those that are Christ's at His coming {1 Cor. 15:23}

have left the earth. We do not get the taking up of the saints in the Revelation, because the distinctive calling of the Church is not the subject of the book: this is clearly taught in the epistles of Paul. After the Church of God has finished its course on earth, the saints are seen in heaven, in holy worship, and in immediate and unchanging connection with the throne of God. We are again told that

the apostle was in the Spirit {Rev. 4:2},

to remind us that we need the anointed eye, and power of the Holy Ghost, to perceive anything according to the mind of God. May we, too, be “in the Spirit,” while we further meditate on the deep things of God contained in this blessed book.

rainbow round about the throne

bright and beautiful, in sight like unto an emerald {Rev. 4:3},

tells us that the throne is set in relation to earth, and that He who set His bow in the cloud, as the token of the covenant that He would never again destroy the earth with water, is the faithful covenant-keeping God.

are Christ's at His coming {1 Cor. 15:23}.

We see them as raised ones in glory, seated on thrones, in perfect rest and blessing. They sit on thrones, as having bodies, and are not disembodied spirits, as some have supposed. Their pilgrimage is ended. The fight of faith is over. The wilderness is passed. The race is run. Their course is finished. Having suffered with Christ, they now sit in kingly dignity, made nigh to God by His precious blood. Each has a golden crown, and sits covered with white raiment, and they all worship, and sing the new song. Whatever changes occur, their place is always near the throne, for this is their home. They are known as elders until the marriage of the Lamb, when we read of the bride, the Lamb's wife {Rev. 21:9},

and also of the blessed,

who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb {Rev. 19:9}.

The throne is not, as it is now, a throne of grace, but of judgment, out of which proceed lightnings, and thunderings, and voices {Rev. 4:5}.

John says, A throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne {Rev. 4:2}.

3. Twenty-four is a representative number, for we see in the next chapter that they are out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Notes on the Revelation

Before Jesus comes for His saints, God's throne is known as a mercy-seat, welcoming the chief of sinners to God through Jesus and His precious blood; and “While the lamp holds out to burn, The vilest sinner may return,”

for Jesus still says, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest {Matt. 11:28}. Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out {John 6:37},

etc. But when the last member of the one new man {Eph. 2:15}

is called out and united to the risen Head in heaven, and the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, then the aspect of the throne changes, and God begins to assert His right to rule the universe, to chasten and judge men, and to clear the heavens and the earth for His Son -- the rightful heir and Lord of all. When this is done, and millennial blessing established, then, instead of lightnings, and thunderings, and voices {Rev. 4:5}

coming out of the throne, there will be a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb {Rev. 22:1}.

Judgment and curse then will be the exception rather than the rule. The fourth chapter, therefore, presents the aspect of God's throne to us as neither agreeing with the present nor millennial times, but it tells of a period of transition between the taking up of the heavenly saints, and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth, by His personal return with His saints. The seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God {Rev. 4:5},

are in strict keeping with the earthly character of the book: for it is not the Holy Ghost as one Spirit dwelling in the Church, as we get in Ephesians, but rather the manifold operations of God's Spirit through creation. The sea of glass, like unto crystal {Rev. 4:6},

may show the solid and everlasting transparency and pity before God's throne in heaven. We may notice, that in this fourth chapter the sea of glass is unoccupied, but after Antichrist has been revealed, and those who would not worship the beast and his image are put to death, a company is seen standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God (Rev. 15:2), who get the victory, by resurrection. The four beasts, or living creatures, are not introduced to us with the elders. We have first the elders described, then the characteristics of the throne, next the sea of glass, and then we are told that in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts (or living creatures), full of eyes before and behind {Rev. 4:6}.

Unlike the elders, they bear no mark of redemption, and their occupation in connection with opening the seals, and the vials of wrath, mark them out, I would suggest, as a class of intelligent creatures who carry out the commands of God in His governmental and providential arrangements. They answer generally to the description of the seraphim that Isaiah beheld

hundreds of years before Christ came, when he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne. He says, Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory (Isa. 6:2, 3).

And in our chapter we are told, The four living creatures had each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come {Rev. 4:8}.

How different the action of the twenty-four elders: they get off their thrones, fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the

throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created {Rev. 4:11}.

This is very blessed, for it tells us that God will be acknowledged and worshipped in heaven as the Creator of the universe, however blasphemed and denied on earth. The time is not far distant when men will not only worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, but will openly deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ; when infidelity and strong delusion will envelop men's minds, and the mystery of iniquity {2 Thess. 2:7},

which now worketh, shall spread itself to a world-wide extent (Rev. 13:8). Then the words of Jesus will have their full accomplishment, I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive (John 5:43).

Men will be given up to strong delusion. Nevertheless, God is, and He has created all things, and for His pleasure they are and were created. Thus the fourth chapter ends by showing us that God is worshipped in heaven as the sovereign Creator of all things. The fifth chapter ends by every creature praising and blessing God, and also the Lamb, because it is by the blood of His cross that creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption. "Soon will creation join in one, To bless the sacred name Of Him who sits upon the throne, And to adore the Lamb."

The throne of God having been presented to us in the fourth chapter, in relation to creation, and God fully owned and worshipped in heaven as the sovereign Creator of all things, the fifth chapter opens with the announcement of a book seen in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne, written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals. A strong angel proclaims with a loud voice,

Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof? {Rev. 5:2}.

This question then discloses the solemn fact, that no one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, had any worthiness or title for such work, nor even to look upon the book. No mere creature can meet God on the ground of worthiness, or lay claim or title to anything in His presence. The brightest and highest intelligences of God's creation have nothing but what they have received -- no beauty but what God has put upon them -- no righteousness but as formed by their Maker. The idea of worthiness is connected with something meritorious having been accomplished. The spotless angels, mighty in strength, which surround the throne of heaven, have no title to anything; for all they have is given. Not a single creature in the whole universe, then, was able to respond to the angel's question; and the discovery that no one could be found able even to look upon the book so filled the apostle's heart with grief, that he wept much {Rev. 5:4}.

John did not see any one able to rescue creation out of the hands of the spoiler, or worthy to execute the judgments of God. The elders, however, who had just been worshiping with adoring gratitude, and had sat calm and unmoved upon their thrones amid the lightnings, and thunderings, and voices, now manifest their spiritual intelligence; and we see it repeatedly in this book. They are acquainted with the mind of God. The question, Who is worthy? {Rev. 5:2}

Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof {Rev. 5:5}.

The person of Christ is here blessedly set forth by the elder -- His Godhead, as “the Root of David” -- the Creator of all things; His manhood, as made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and of the tribe of Judah; mighty now as a lion to trample in His fury upon the prey, though once on earth the meek and lowly Lamb, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 4 It was to this blessed Jesus that the weeping apostle was directed; for whatever be the sorrow that oppresses our hearts, there is a balm in Jesus to relieve us. When John faints and quails at His feet, as we saw in the first chapter, it is knowing Jesus as the living One, who was dead and is alive again, and that for evermore, that revives and cheers him for his onward service. If tears of sorrow run plentifully over his cheeks, when he finds none worthy to even look upon the book in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, it is a sight of Jesus that again dries up his tears. And so with us: we may be assured, that whatever makes us sad, it is only having to do with Jesus that can cheer and comfort us; and the contemplation of His spotless person, His finished work, His all-cleansing blood, His unchangeable priesthood, His sympathising heart, His almighty power, His advocacy in heaven, and His speedy coming, will calm our fears, comfort our hearts, elevate our minds, chase our sorrows, and fill us with hope. Nothing will compensate for a lack of personal communion with the Lord Jesus.

had long ago been settled in their minds. It had been their joy to take the crowns of gold from off their blood-washed brows, and, in lowly prostration, cast them before the throne. Great and wonderful as the work of God in creation was,

“From every stormy wind that blows, From every swelling tide of woes, There is a calm, a sweet retreat - ’Tis found before the mercy-seat.

when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy {Job 38:7},

“There is a place where Jesus sheds The oil of gladness on our heads; A place than all besides more sweet -It is the heavenly mercy-seat”

they knew that the stupendous work of eternal redemption would stand in unfading beauty when heaven and earth shall have passed away. The crucified but risen Son of God could alone answer the question of the strong angel. His sinner-loving, sacrificial death upon the cross makes known who is worthy. The unutterable sorrows of the Holy One, willingly made to be sin for us {see 2 Cor. 5:21}

upon the tree, so fully glorified God, and redeemed sinful man, that He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and rightly exalted to the highest seat of dignity, power, and glory, that God could give. This tells us of One who is able and worthy to take the book of God’s counsels, loose the seals, and execute God’s judgments. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; . . . and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man (John 5:22, 27).

The rejected Messiah -- the risen, glorified Son of man, then, is Lord of all {Acts 10:36};

for He is worthy. This the elders well knew: one of them, therefore, called out to the distressed apostle, and said,

John says, I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain {Rev. 5:6};

showing us that it was by the blood that Jesus prevailed to open the book, and that the cross is so precious to God that He has transplanted it, as it were, to His own blessed presence in the midst of the throne of heaven. There the Lamb is seen as it had been slain {Rev. 5:6},

not now in weakness, but in power; and that, too, in all the perfection of intelligence and wisdom, as we learn from His having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth {Rev. 5:6}. (Compare Zech. 4:10.)

Thus we see Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God {1 Cor. 1:24}, the Lion of the tribe of Juda {Rev. 5:5},

4. The allusion here to David and Judah also shows our Lords' relationship to Israel; for, as we shall soon see, they are to have blessing in the earth.

Notes on the Revelation

standing in the midst of the throne of heaven, a Lamb as it had been slain; . . . and He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne {Rev. 5:6, 7}.

We must not forget that the scene is in heaven; Jesus is there, and the elders, representing the heavenly saints who have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air are also there, before the seals are opened, or one of the apocalyptic judgments poured out. Such a glorious event, then, as the Lamb's title to take the book being ratified at the throne of God, called all intelligences to fall down with adoring reverence, as indeed all creatures of the universe shall yet do; and the honor put upon the blood of the Lamb by the throne of judgment and justice was like a signal for the redeemed triumphantly to celebrate the work and worth of Jesus. When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and fourand-twenty elders fell down before THE LAMB {Rev. 5:8}.

Spotless Lamb! Precious blood of Christ! God only can fully estimate its value, or give to Jesus the glory and honor of which He is worthy. We who have felt the filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and the guilt of a sinful heart, can in measure apprehend it; for we know that it was "For love of us He bled,
And all in torture died; 'Twas love that bowed His fainting 5head,

And oped His gushing side." A beloved brother says, It is by His blood the Lamb here prevails to take the book, or the title to the inheritance. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is seen in the person of the Lamb that was slain. His blood was His title. His blood made Him the purchaser of the inheritance; He is now its redeemer, as the prevailing Lion of Judah. And consequently, as the Lamb, He is the spring and fountain of all the resulting glories of the kingdom. Extensive virtues of the blood of Jesus! It has been the object of faith -the ground of worship -- the title of security -- the bond of covenants -- from the beginning. By it Abel was an accepted worshiper, and even Adam himself a believing reconciled

sinner. By it Abraham had the covenant of promise made with him. By it the people of the Lord dwelt safe while the sword of judgment passed over. By it the veil of the temple was rent -- all distance between God and sinners removed. By it the trumpet of the jubilee might give forth its gladdening notes; for on the day of atonement they were to sound it. By it the saints redeemed from earth, and seated in heaven, look to return and reign over the earth, in the train and honour of that slain Lamb, whose blood, but whose blood only, has all this prevalency in it.

Eden. But the blood of Jesus, God's Lamb that was slain, restores all.

Both the living creatures and elders fall down before the Lamb; but having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints {Rev. 5:8},

we understand to be expressive of the elders only. Some have judged, from the living creatures and elders appearing both to sing as redeemed ones, that the both companies together represent the heavenly saints. If it were so, it is still clear that the Church would be removed before the apocalyptic judgments begin, or the Man of sin is revealed; for the living creatures are not only officially engaged at the opening of the first four seals (Rev. 6:1-8), but also, in Rev. 15, we find one of them giving seven vials to the seven angels, and the first is poured out upon the earth in judgment on those who had the mark of the beast, and worshipped his image (Rev. 16:2). The living creatures, however, in no other part of the Revelation bear any mark of redemption; and in this chapter, after all have been ascribing praise to God and the Lamb, the four living creatures said, Amen {Rev. 5:14}.

Not only too are they generally seen in separate action from the elders, but, as we have noticed, assist in carrying out the judgments on the earth; and, instead of manifesting the discernment and worship characteristic of the elders (except in Rev. 19, when God is worshipped, not for His redeeming love, but for judging the great whore), they repeat incessantly the cry, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty {Rev. 4:8}!

That they are created beings, and not mere symbolic expressions of the attributes of God, we judge from their giving thanks to God, falling down, giving vials to the angels, and corresponding so nearly to the seraphim of Isaiah, the living creatures of Ezekiel, and the cherubim that guarded the tree of life with a flaming sword. The elders, however, who are not disembodied spirits, but have glorified bodies, remind us constantly of redemption. They have crowns, they sit on thrones, are worshipers, clothed in white raiment, abide near the throne of God, and are characterized by spiritual intelligence; for they know who is worthy to open the book, who they are that come out of the great tribulation, and give thanks when the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. 6 We suggest, then, that the elders only sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and people, and tongue, and nation {Rev. 5:9}.

Thus, there is no blessing or dignity, nothing of either grace or glory, which this blood cannot command for us poor sinners; but there is no other price for anything, no other ground or title for blessing but itself. It does everything, and it does it alone. Adam lost both himself and his estate; he

became a sinner in his own person, and also an exile from

Thus we see that death is remembered where death cannot enter. It is generally admitted that the 10th verse should be altered to --

5. {It is suggested that the word "fainting" is not appropriate. We must keep in mind that He bowed His head as His own, deliberate act, in giving up His life -- John 10:17, 18).}

6. The difference between the elders and living creatures will be made very clear to any who will write out, in parallel columns, all the passages in the Revelation in which they are mentioned.

And hast made them unto our God kings and priests, or a kingdom of priests; and they shall reign upon the earth (Rev. 5:10):

{and made them to our God kings and priests; and they shall reign over the earth {Rev. 5:10, New Trans., JND}}. that is, the elders are in heaven, the prayers of Jewish saints (Dan. 7:21) on earth have ascended to the throne, and are as vials or bowls full of incense, and, though now in trouble, they shall yet be a kingdom of priests, according to Exod. 19:6, and reign upon the earth. As God has always had a witness in the earth, we expect that soon after the heavenly saints have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, God's Spirit will begin to inspire a remnant among the nation with a proper Jewish hope, and move them to resume the preaching of "the gospel of the kingdom"; and it is those who are referred to here. I say, resume the preaching of "the gospel of the kingdom"; for though it was preached by our Lord and the twelve, as recorded in Matt. 10, and was interrupted, yet it must be preached as a witness to all nations before the end come (Matt. 24:14), that is, the end of the age, when the Lord will come with His saints. Myriads of angels, forming a circle outside those who have just been singing, also say with a loud voice. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing {Rev. 5:12}.

They do not say, who redeemed us, but ascribe seven-fold worthiness to Him who died upon the cross. The circle of praise still widens. The vision leads the apostle on into the millennial time, when the result of Christ's death will be known and celebrated by every creature, when everything that hath breath will praise the Lord. The chapter concludes with the "Amen" of the four living creatures, and the worship of the four-and-twenty elders. The praise and worship and testimony of all creatures connected with heaven and earth to the glory of God and the Lamb, are brought out on the Lamb's taking the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. "Joyful now, the full creation Rests in undisturbed repose; Blest in Jesus' full salvation, Sorrow now, nor thralldom knows."

The next chapter opens to us the loosing of the seals, and the results.

Notes on the Revelation