



Revelation 4 Study Guide

Few subjects are more intriguing and interesting than the subject of heaven. In recent years, books from 4-year-olds to grown men and women have tried to detail for us what their “out-of-body experience” in heaven really was like.

Questions explode from our minds as we think about it:

- Where is heaven?
- Does heaven really exist?
- What does heaven look like?
- Who will be in heaven?
- Who won't be in heaven?
- How can I be sure I will go there when I die?
- What will we do in heaven?

All of these are excellent questions, but it is especially the last one, “What will we do in heaven?” that is the focus of Revelation 4:1-11.

In this chapter, we discover that heaven is **NOT**:

- floating on some white, puffy cloud strumming a harp;
- an eternal vacation that soon grows boring;

- an eternal sexual marathon as an exalted male procreates with his multitude of wives (Mormonism);
- an everlasting orgy of wine and women as taught in Islam.

No, our activity in heaven can be described and summed up in one word: **worship**. Worship of our great God is what heaven is all about, and worship is what we will do. For eternity we will see and be with the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. And, for eternity, we will give our worship to our God for: 1) who He is and 2) what He has done.

Revelation 4 informs us of several reasons why worship will be our joyous job, our outstanding occupation, and our heavenly honor.

Actually, chapters 4 and 5 are one heavenly vision consisting of two parts:

- 1) Chapter 4 focuses on God the Father and Creation, and
- 2) Chapter 5 focuses on God the Son and Redemption. The chapters reflect important aspects of Ezekiel 1 – 2 and especially Daniel 7.

G. K. Beale points out that Revelation 4 – 5 repeat 14 elements of Daniel 7:9ff and in the same basic order. They are also reflective of Isaiah 6 as well. In both chapters, God's throne is central. In both, the worship of God is essential.

+++++

And TVBC family: We are now at the proverbial "point of no return" in the study of Revelation. Many series of sermons on Revelation end with the end of chapter three because the first three chapters, comparatively speaking, are much easier to understand than the rest of the book. But as we enter John's vision in chapter four on 8-6-2023, we need to remind ourselves of two very important truths we learned when we started this study in May.

+++++

#1 – Remember, Revelation is, perhaps, best to be interpreted cyclically (in a way that is repeated many times), not chronologically or lineally.

For example: You might compare it to a photographer with a video camera, going around and looking at one great site from seven different vantage points. So, too, the book of Revelation consists of seven series of visions that all culminate around this entire gospel age. How long is that? Basically, from the end of the New Testament age to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Revelation must not be understood as progressing through time in a linear, chronological fashion, but as a cyclical view in seven different ways.

#2 – Revelation is to be interpreted largely (but not completely!) symbolically.

That is, John's revelation comes to us in terms of signs and symbols. It's expressive and almost surreal at time - rather than to be understood completely literally. In other words, we're more in the realm of the artist, poet, or composer than we are in the realm of the historian or the scientist.

To be clear: We're not suggesting that there are any errors in Revelation (or the Bible!) or that it's untrue historically or scientifically. However, we are saying that the historian and the scientist convey truth differently than does the poet and the composer. The poet and the composer convey truth symbolically and impressionistically. And that's what John is doing here!

And what a sight it is! We see:

- a throne surrounded by a rainbow and a sea of glass
- lamps of fire,
- four living creatures, each with six wings and full of eyes: one looks like a lion, one like a calf or an ox, one like an eagle, and one like a man.
- Then, combine that with twenty-four elders on 24 other smaller thrones, and we say:

"What are we to make of all this symbolism?!?"

+++++

Remember, the way to understand symbolic literature is to ask yourself the question, "What is the great picture being presented here? What is the big idea?"

The way to understand such literature is never to focus on every leaf of every branch of every tree and miss the whole forest. No, it's to focus on the forest through the symbols. So, what is the big idea, who is the central figure, and what is the central focus in Revelation 4 as John enters a second series of visions on the Isle of Patmos?

Clearly, like the subject of heaven but ever greater, it is the THRONE in Revelation 4 and 5. Seventeen times John speaks about the throne. So, all the symbols in these chapters are related to heaven's occupied throne.

+++++

I'm sure you have all learned something about the Copernican revolution. A man named Nicholas Copernicus of the early 16th century proposed the theory that the sun does not go around the earth. He said, instead, that the earth goes around the sun. In other words, our universe is not geo-centric around the earth, but helio-centric. That is, our solar system goes around the sun.

Now, Copernicus was very unpopular in Christian circles for this. Some even deemed him a heretic because everyone "knew" that everything revolved around the earth.

Today, we know, of course, that Copernicus was more correct than not. We know that the earth is not the center of the universe. We also know that the sun is not the center of the universe. We have carried truth beyond Copernicus. We know that there's more than one solar system— and we know that beyond our sun, moon, and planets there are stars, galaxies, and millions of solar systems.

+++++

But what John tells us in Revelation 4 is that at the center of the entire universe is a throne. That's the message of Revelation 4: This universe is not earth-centered or sun-centered. No, the universe is throne-centered because this universe is God-centered, and the Living God of the ages sits upon that throne.

So, big focus of Revelation 4: Heaven's occupied throne.

+++++

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Revelation 4.

1. How does John come to see the vision?

Who is instrumental in it?

In what respects is John unique and in what respects like us?

2. What features stand out in this vision?

3. How does the vision make you feel?

4. What is central to this vision?

5. How do the surrounding things enhance our understanding of God?

6. What are we supposed to learn about God from the vision as a whole?

7. How do you think the vision is related to the later actions of God in Revelation?

8. How do the 24 elders and 4 living creatures express their relation to God?

9. What do they thereby say about our relation to God?

10. What do the songs show about the singers?

11. What do the songs show about God?

12. How does this vision connect with the final new Jerusalem of Rev. 21–22?