

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 4

Rev 4:1-8:1 (Introductory Overview)–

The commentary on the Seven Seals begins with an overview of significant structural clues.

Careful exegesis and analysis of OT and gospel backgrounds is critical to sound interpretation of passages like this.

Rev 4 (Introduction)–

The crucial word in chapter 4 is “throne.” Everything in the chapter happens in relation to the throne.

The word throne is a metaphor here for the right to rule. This is the major theme of chapters 4 and 5.

One of the clearest structural parallels in Rev is the use of Ezekiel 1 in chapter 4.

Dan 7, Isa 6, Exod 19 and 1 Kings 22 are additional major background texts to Rev 4 and 5.

The vision of chapter 4 draws together everything the OT has to say about the throne of God.

In Rev 4 the throne is described as a longstanding reality and the 3 “holies” of verse 8 are continuous. The vision is timeless.

The repetitive actions of 4:9-11 are further evidence for a scene of a general, timeless description of worship.

There are three major structural cues in Rev 4 and 5. First, the key word is “throne.”

Second, the major background of Rev 4 and 5 is the throne texts of the OT (Ezek 1, Dan 7, Isa 6, Exod 19, 1 Kgs 22).

Third, chapter 4 is a general description of what worship in heaven is like, not a specific point in time.

Rev 5 (Introduction)–

The vision of chapter 5 is clearly a point in time, a moment of crisis in the heavenly throne room.

The word “worthy” points back to 4:11, but in chapter 5 creation is not enough qualification to open the book.

Chapter 5 is clearly a point in time rather than a general description like chapter 4.

Rev contains the first references to “Lamb” as a symbol for Jesus Christ.

While Ezek 1 remains in the background of chapter 5, the main structural parallel is to Dan 7:9-14.

In alluding to Dan 7 the chapter interprets the cross in light of a prominent OT judgment scene.

It is the cross that makes “the Lamb” “worthy” to break the seals and open the book.

In Rev what John sees and what he hears appear opposite, yet represent the same person or entity in reality (Rev 5:5-6).

It is the death of the Lamb that makes Him worthy to break the seals and open the book.

There are five hymns embedded in the vision of Rev 4 and 5. They highlight the divinity of Jesus.

The fifth hymn in Rev 4 and 5 (Rev 5:13) is the climax of the five, with worship directed to both Father and Son.

While Jesus was equal with the Father before (Rev 1:17-18), the cross enhances His glory even further (Rev 5:9-10, 12).

Rev 6 (Introduction)–

The events in chapter six clearly build on chapter five. Everything that happens is related to the opening of the book.

Rev 4:1-8:1 (Intro)– While the events of chapter five take place in heaven, the events of six take place on earth (Rev 6:4, 8, 14-15).

Is each of the seals one-seventh of the book (in chap. 5) or only part of the prelude to opening the book?

There were two types of books in the ancient world, the scroll (rolled up sheets) and the codex (like today).

If the seven-sealed book is a scroll, the events of chap. 6 are NOT the content of the scroll.

If the seven-sealed book is a codex, the events of chap. 6 could be the content of the book in chap. 5.

Rev 6:14 indicates that by “book” John means a book that can be rolled up, namely a scroll.

The events of chapter 6 are not the contents of the book/scroll, the contents are only seen after all the seals are broken.

Chapter 6 is divided into three parts: 1-8, 9-11, and 12-17.

The primary OT background to Rev 6 is the curses of the covenant (Lev 26; Deut 28; Ezek 14; Zech 1 and 6).

Blessings and curses are the rewards and penalties that encourage parties to a covenant to fulfill their promises.

The language of covenant curse in Rev 6:1-8 seems clearly based on Lev 26:21-26.

A “curses of the covenant” text similar to Lev 26 is Deut 32:23-25.

Deut 32:41-43 applies the covenant curses to nations outside Israel. In a sense, the covenant is with all.

When God's OT people rebelled against Him, He allowed enemy nations to execute the "curses" of the covenant.

In Deut 32, war, famine and pestilence are applied to both God's people (23-25) and their oppressors (41-43).

Ezek 14:12-21 uses the war, famine, pestilence language to refer to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Zech 1:8-17 uses four horsemen language to describe God's judgment on the oppressors of His people.

Covenant curses come in two phases, judgments on God's people at the hand of their enemies and judgments on the enemies.

Rev 6 has many intentional parallels to the Synoptic Apocalypse (Matt 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21).

Rev 7 (Introduction)–

Rev 7 provides the answer to the question at the end of Rev 6, at the Second Coming, "who will be able to stand?" (6:17)

The key OT background text to this chapter is Ezek 9:1-7.

By alluding to Ezek 9 Rev 7 builds on the fall of Jerusalem to describe the final events of earth's history.

Rev 4:1-8:1 (The Time of Revelation Five)–

The time when the Lamb takes the book in chapter 5 is the crucial issue in how one reads chapters 6 and 7.

The key to the timing of the Lamb taking the book in Rev 5 can be found in Rev 3:21.

The four clauses of Rev 3:21 correspond to the four chapters of the seven seals, a summary introduction.

The work of overcoming is defined in Rev 12:11; it is based on blood, testimony and settled commitment.

To sit with Jesus on His throne (Rev 3:21) makes one eligible to receive all the promises He makes to all seven churches.

The latter half of Rev 3:21 is about the cross and the enthronement of Jesus Christ.

Both Rev 3:21 and 5:5 use the word "overcame" to refer to the cross of Christ.

Rev 5:6 makes it clear that the overcoming of Jesus occurred with the cross and the resurrection.

Rev 3:21 and the Seven Seals–

Rev 3:21 provides a four-part summary in advance of Rev chapters 4-7.

Rev 3:21 indicates that Rev 6 is about the people of God struggling to overcome in the course of Christian history.

The best date for the scene in Rev 5 is AD 31, when Jesus died, rose, and ascended to heaven.

The core events of the New Testament era are the death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' enthronement in Rev 5 has many parallels in the NT (Heb 8:1-2; Acts 2:31-36; Eph 1:20-22; Heb 1:1-3; 1 Pet 3:21-22).

The Role of the Seals in the Structure of Rev--

The clearest evidence for the time of Rev 5:5-6 is the parallel with 3:21.

The Seals are in the first half of Rev, which focuses on the realities of the whole Christian age.

The chiastic parallel to Rev 4-5 is found in Rev 19.

The crowns in 6:2 and 19:12 are different, the first a victory crown, the second royal crowns (plural).

In Rev 6:10 the judgment is future, in 19:2 it is past. This shows Rev 5 is not end-time.

Parallels to Rev 19:17-18 confirm that the sixth seal (6:15-17) concerns end-time events.

The first half of Rev recalls the intercession in the sanctuary, which involves the whole Christian age.

The first half of Rev builds on the spring feasts of the Jewish year, Passover and Pentecost.

If one reads Rev 4-5 on the basis of the annual feasts, Rev 4-5 is based on the feast of Pentecost.

The Pentateuch and Hebrews suggest that Rev 5 portrays the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary.

The absence of the ark or of the Greek words for judgment suggest Rev 4-5 is not Day of Atonement.

Language related to the Most Holy Place is absent in Rev 5.

"Lamb" is not specific to the Day of Atonement as "male goat" would be.

The key concepts of Rev 5 are all appropriate to the First Century, not the end-time.

Rev 6 is parallel with the Synoptic Apocalypse (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

The seals of Rev 6 show the same three-fold outline of Christian history as the Synoptic Apocalypse.

The whole Christian age (Rev 6:1-8), time of persecution (6:9-11) and end-time (6:12-17).

Multiple evidences confirm the location of Rev 5 in the First Century (AD 31).

Rev 4 (Chapter Introduction)--

Chap. 4, a general description of heavenly activity, sets the stage for the decisive event of chap. 5.

Rev 4:1--

"After these things" connects with Rev 1:19. John moves now to the part of the book concerned with the future.

“After these things” does not require the distant future (end-time) but includes the immediate future after chaps. 2 and 3.

The metaphorical door to heaven was standing open so John could view what was going on in heaven.

The trumpet reference points back to Rev 1:10. Jesus here calls John from earth to heaven.

“After these things” means that what follows this point in Rev is “what must happen” in John’s future (Rev 1:1).

Rev 4:2–

John becomes “in the Spirit” four times in the book of Rev (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

This reference to “in the Spirit” takes John into heaven, the other three call him to a different place on earth.

Fourteen references to the throne make this the central theme of the chapter, God’s right to rule the universe.

The vision of Rev 4 and 5 is grounded in the five OT throne visions (Ezek 1; Dan 7; Isa 6; 1 Kings 22; Exod 19).

The throne was not set up in Rev 4:2, it was already an ongoing reality when John was invited to look at it.

While Rev 4-5 allude to Dan 7, it is not depicting the same scene or the same point in history.

The description of God in this chapter is vague, in harmony with the second commandment.

Rev 4:3–

The jasper was a variety of quartz found in various colors, often striped or spotted, and was anciently sometimes called chalcedony.

The sardius is a variety of what is called carnelian today, a reddish, semi-transparent, precious stone (see Exod 28:17-21).

The Greek of “all around” is ambiguous. Not clear if the rainbow circles the throne or arches over it.

In the flood story of Genesis, the rainbow assured that God is faithful in keeping his promises (Gen 9:12-17).

Rev 4:4–

“All around” here is best understood as a horizontal circle around the throne.

The Lesser Sanhedrin had 24 members and 23 sat in a semi-circle with the leader in front and center.

The word for “throne” is the same as the one on which God sits. The elders assist God in ruling the universe.

There is no main verb in this verse. The imperfect indicative force of *ekeito* in verse 2 is carried over into this verse.

A possible background text is Isa 24:23, where God manifests end-time glory in Jerusalem before His “elders.”

The number 24 in relation to elders seems to be based in part on the 24 divisions of the priesthood in ancient Israel (1 Chr 24:1-19).

The 24 elders function as priests (Rev 5:8), but are not called priests in the best Greek manuscripts of Rev 5:9-10.

24 is made up of 12 plus 12 and 12 is an important symbolic number in Rev.

The 24 elders are related to the tribes of Israel (21:12-13) and the apostles of the Lamb (21:14).

White garments are associated the people of God (Rev 3:4-5; 6:10-11; 19:8).

The crowns worn by the 24 elders are not royal crowns, they are victory crowns (like Olympic medals).

The wearing of victory crowns leaves it somewhat ambiguous (Rev 2:10; 6:2; 9:7) which side you are on.

Rev 4:4 (Excursis on the 24 Elders)–

Who are the twenty-four elders, and why do they play a role in Revelation 4-5 and beyond in the book? Stay tuned.

The 24 elders remind the reader of Rev 3:21, where overcomers join Jesus on His throne. The elders prefigure this.

The manuscript tradition of Rev 5:9-10 does not settle the issue of who the 24 elders are.

White robes and victory crowns (Greek: *stephanous*) typically represent the reward of the righteous in Rev.

In NT scholarship the 24 elders are viewed either as angels or some form of redeemed humanity.

Angels never sit on thrones, wear crowns or are called elders in the Bible or early Judaism.

The 12 apostles sit on thrones and are associated with the 12 tribes in Matt 19:28 and Luke 22:30.

The 24 elders are symbolic representations of the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles, faithful humanity as a whole.

The 24 elders may be associated with the ancient “saints” who were raised to life at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion.

The 24 elders may be the raised saints Jesus presumably took with Him to heaven at His ascension (Eph 4:8).

The scene of chap. 4 may describe the ten days between the ascension and the enthronement (chap. 5).

The chorus in Greek tragic drama often had 24 members, but scholars have not been impressed with the connection.

The 24 elders are portrayed in direct contrast with Laodicea.

For the first time, the throne is the source of something, in this case a manifestation like a thunder storm.

The verb tense here (“came”) is continuous past, referring back to “was there” in verse 2. A visionary description.

Lightnings, noises and thunder is the language of a thunderstorm, the typical description of a theophany, an appearance of God.

The Greek word for “lamps” here is different than the one behind “lampstands” in chapter 1.

Seven “Lamps of fire” nevertheless recall the seven lamps of the sanctuary, the only source of artificial light there.

The reference to the seven spirits, along with the one on the throne and the Lamb, makes up the divine triad in this vision.

Rev 4:6–

“As it were” signifies that John’s description of the of the heavenly vision is approximate rather than exact.

Since ancient glass was often semi-opaque, the reference to crystal emphasizes the transparent clarity of the sea of glass.

The combination of fire and crystal recalls both the appearance of God on Sinai (Exod 24:9-17) and Ezekiel 1:22-27.

The “sea of glass” very likely recalls the laver of the Hebrew tabernacle and the bronze “sea” of Solomon’s Temple.

The four living creatures are clearly part of the throne but are not occupying the throne itself.

“In the midst of the throne” may recall the “midst of the thunderstorm in Ezek 1:4-5 rather than indicate location.

In 1 Enoch, a Jewish book known in NT times, there are four archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael.

The four living creatures direct the four horses of Rev 6:1-8 and possibly also the four winds of Rev 7:1-3 (see Zech 6:5).

The four living creatures are not “beasts” (Greek: *therion*), but “living beings” (Greek: *zôa*).

“Full of eyes” in front and back confirms allusions to Ezek 1:15-18 and 10:12.

Rev 4:6 (The Identity of the Four Living Creatures)–

Cherubim in the Bible are two and three-dimensional representations of angelic figures like Rev 4.

Sphinxes were an ancient example of winged animals with human characteristics.

Outside the Bible *cherubim* guarded temples and mediated between the gods and human beings.

There are multiple parallels between Rev 4 and Ezek 1. A clear allusion.

The concept of “exile to Babylon” is a context for both Ezekiel and Rev. Ezekiel and John are both offering assurance that God has not lost control of history. The differences between Rev 4 and Ezek 1 show John adapting Ezek for his own purposes.

The representation of God’s throne in Ezekiel 1 is modeled on the ark of the covenant. The six wings and “holy, holy, holy” indicate an allusion to Isaiah 6.

Throughout the OT *cherubim* are pictured as attendants of God, usually in a sanctuary context.

The early church Fathers tended to associate the four living creatures with the four gospels.

Another common observation is that the living creatures represent the tribal standards of Israel.

The four living creatures represent the angelic portion of God’s heavenly kingdom.

Since the living creatures are introduced with ordinal numbers, they are probably always listed in this order (see Rev 6:1-8).

Rev 4:7–

The image of a lion represents leadership and authority in the Bible, generally positive.

The ox is a sacrificial animal that signifies endurance, perseverance and strength.

Within the animal kingdom humans stand out for intelligence, reason, and the ability to tell right from wrong.

While most birds fly, the eagle is known for the speed, power and altitude of its flight.

The lion, ox, man and eagle exhibit qualities that are all ascribed to angels in the Bible.

The first seven verses of this chapter are concerned with what heaven looks like.

Verses 8 to 11 describe the sounds and songs of heaven.

“Full of eyes” means the four living creatures are full of alertness, perception and knowledge.

“Day and Night” is a colorful way of saying that the living creatures offer continual, ongoing praise.

“Day and night” anticipates Rev 12:10, where Satan is the one who accuses the “brethren” day and night.

The continual triple holy of the four living creatures is not mindless repetition, it is countering the accusations of Satan (see Rev 12:10).

The triple holy is drawn from Isa 6, but John leaves out the final phrase, “the whole earth is full of His glory.”

When applied to human beings holiness means separated by God for a specific purpose.

When applied to God, holiness means separate from all things impure, separate, in fact, from all creation, from all created things.

In Hebrew “Almighty” is more of a military term, in Greek it is more political. Rev is often more Hebraic than Greek.

The three-fold cry of holy corresponds to the “was and is and is to come” at the end of the verse.

Rev 4:9-10–

“Whenever” with future is not good Greek. God is not on trial in the literary skill, or lack of it, of the writers He chooses.

Glory, honor and thanks are an unusual mix. But thanks yields gratitude and gratitude yields worship.

“Forever and ever” echoes “the one who is and was and is to come” (Rev 4:8) in describing the eternity of God.

“Fall down” and “worship” both mean to prostrate oneself in devotion to another in Greek.

Rev 4:11–

This is the second of five songs that praise the self-sacrificing love exhibited in creation and the cross.

In this verse “worthy” is a predicate adjective meaning deserving, qualified or fitted for. In First Century Asia Minor, the emperor Domitian was known as “Lord and God.”

The three-fold use of the article (“the glory, the honor, the power” in Greek) represents universality, all of each.

Creation is the reason given here that the one sitting on the throne is worthy of worship.

“All things” here is the Greek word for the entire universe.

Creation owes its existence to the will and purpose of God. It is also a witness to the character and purpose of God.

The last two verbs express the original creation and its ongoing continuation.

Rev 4 (Summary)– This chapter builds on the throne passages of the OT to illustrate the character and the government of God.

Rev 4 (Spiritual Lessons)–

Worship in the Bible is all about God and what He has done, it’s not about us and what we should do.

The throne room of God lays all earthly claims to power and glory in the dust.

Detailed exegesis of the Bible enables us to see truths about God and ourselves we might otherwise have missed.

God longs for our worship because He has chosen to put His heart in a place where He needs us.