

A Heavenly Perspective

Rev. 4:1-11
David Rountree

Heavenly wisdom in Rev. 4:1-11 on how we are to live with God and be prepared for the future.

There is a glimpse here of who God is (v.8) and what he deserves (v.11).

4:1 is often the start of much confusion when seeking to rightly interpreting Revelation.

A Problem Invented

Schools of Interpretation for the Book of Revelation
Historicist
Spiritualist/Idealist/Cyclic/Eclecticist
Futurist
Preterist (Partial & Full)

For the *historicist*, Revelation 4-11 represents the sovereignty of God in the advancement of his church from the time of John through the end of the world. Chapters 4-7 are about the unsealing of the scroll which to the *historicist*, represents the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire. After these chapters, the book of Revelation focuses more on the internal affairs of the church.

For the *spiritualist*, the unsealing of the scroll that doesn't begin until chapter 5, represents mankind's cycles of war and judgment throughout history.

For the *futurist*, 4:1,2 opens the door to the rapture of the church. They see the "seven torches of fire" (v.5) as the seven churches of 1:20 that are now in heaven before the throne (note: v.5 does not call them churches but rather "spirits of God").

For futurists, 4:1 begins the third major section of the book of Revelation as outlined in 1:19. Notice the word "after" in 4:1. A literal interpretation, according to futurists, makes chapters 4-19 in our future.

- Futurist assumptions:
1. Revelation must have a chronological structure.
 2. 4:1 is the key to seeing the third major section of the book begins with the rapture.
 3. Chapters 4-19 speak of the great tribulation that can only take place after the church has been taken to heaven.
 4. Words at 4:1 connects with the rapture of the church.
 5. They assume a dispensational chronology.
 6. The 7-years prior to the return of Christ is the largest focus of the book of Revelation.

For the *preterist*, the sovereign judge is on his throne (4:2) about to unleash his wrath on the accused first century Jews (6:9, 10). Rev. 4 is announcing a first century fulfillment of events that are about to take place on Jerusalem (1:19; 5:1; 4:1). God's sentence is against Jerusalem and the breaking of seals in chapters 5-8 depicts the Jewish crisis of AD 66-70, the war between the Jews and Rome, bringing final destruction on the Jewish religious system/God's national church.

A Picture Imagined (4:1-11)

v.1: Jesus gives more insight into controlling his church for a long time, not a rapture. "The first voice" (Rev. 1:10). The text does not indicate any transition between a church age and a rapture.

According to the futurist, the rapture marks the beginning of the great 7-year tribulation. A position from J.N. Darby's dreams. Yet there is no mention in scripture of a 2000= year gap between

v.2-11: Jesus gives John a vision of how things are controlled from heaven; more specifically from God's Throne. The word "Throne" is mentioned 17xs in 25 verses (Chapters 4 & 5). Throne is presented as the spiritual control center of all things.

v.4: Around the throne of God were 24 elders on thrones. God has a back-up plan yet; he never slumbers or sleeps. God never needs a backup to control his creation. He employs his saints to reign with him.

v.5-8: God cannot be fully described in any human terms (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:15, 16) but John seeks to present us with his vision of the presence of God on his throne.

v.9-11. The mention of "glory" "honor" and "power" is instructive of how God is to be properly worshiped—a focus on what we give to God rather than on what we get for ourselves.

The seven lamps and the sea of glass are also before the throne (**4:5,6**). The Lamb (**L**) stands between the throne and the living ones on the one side, and the twenty-four elders on the other (**5:6**). But the Lamb later advances to the throne (**5:7**), and is now seated on it with the Father (**22:1**).

A Perspective Included

1. God is not waiting for an undetermined amount of time to rapture his church, but he is actively in control over his church for her care and advancement. He protects us from the evil one until we see him face to face (John17:15).
2. God has the power to bring about all he has said, whether judgments or blessings (4.1, he is enthroned in heaven—no higher authority or power.)
3. God is a Spirit without a body like men dwelling in inapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:13-16).
4. The throne of God is not made reference of as the physiographical center of the universe, but it is presented as the spiritual control center of all things. God is not bound by any physical constraints.
5. God cannot be fully described in any human terms (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:15, 16).
6. Notice the volume of God in these passages: Ezek. 1:24; Exod. 19:18, 19; Rev. 4:1, 5; 5:12. Why does God like being so loud?
7. Along with God's throne there are 24 thrones with 24 elders sitting on them (4:4). Christians are reigning with Christ (1:6); they wear crowns (2:10; 3:11); and they have kingly authority over the nations (2:26, 27).