

## Revelation, Part 8

Let's begin this session with a disclaimer. What we will be looking at from chapter 4 onward are things future. In recording his vision, John described what he "saw" using imagery and terms that were familiar to him in his time and culture. That was 2,000 years ago now, and we are left to interpret John's imagery with a 21st century understanding as if they were to happen in the near future, which they might.

Some of what John said is fairly easy to interpret but much of it is not, leaving many and varied interpretations by modern expositors of what John was trying to tell us. I do believe that some of the details of Revelation are not really for us to understand, but they will be clearly understood by those who are actually there and experiencing them. Obviously, this has left us in the uncomfortable position of being unable to be dogmatic concerning our interpretations of John's writings in Revelation, or what Jesus was saying in Mathew's epistle, or any of the OT prophets when they spoke on the End Times. What results are many different interpretations of John's vision, some accurate and some probably not even close.

As we attempt to work our way through the "future" part of Revelation, we may not always agree on what John says he saw. In chapter 9 John saw locusts with tails that sting. Was he describing a modern attack helicopter as many believe? Or was John seeing some previously unknown flying animal that closely resembled a locust? Or are they demons manifested in locust-like form?

This is not my first rodeo with Revelation. My first exposure was a book, "Late Great Planet Earth" by Hal Lindsey back around 1979, which ultimately led me to Christ. That was followed by a very detailed verse-by-verse study about ten years later under Bob Thieme which lasted over a year. Then I taught it myself about 15 years ago. I have read numerous commentaries on the subject by people I highly respect as biblical scholars, and even they do not agree on interpreting some details in Revelation. My point is this: Even the most learned and respected names in eschatology can't always agree on what John is trying to tell us. As for me, I will show you what I believe is the most accurate view, and even then, I will often also give you alternative views when I think it appropriate.

Will I always be right? If the best of the best can't agree, then you will have to decide.

I don't wish to get bogged down into contentious arguments over interpretation of the vision and turn this into a two year long study that leaves everyone confused and exhausted. During the discussion part at the end of each session, we can discuss other possible interpretations, but there will be limits put on that. If you wish to take strong issue with something I am teaching, it may be best for us to take that to emails, where you can present a scripturally supported case for your position.

That said, shall we begin? As I read John's vision, I would like for you to close your eyes and try to imagine for yourself what he is experiencing...

**Rev 4:1** After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup>At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <sup>3</sup>And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. <sup>4</sup>Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, <sup>6</sup>and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup>the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup>And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" <sup>9</sup>And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup>"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive

glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

We have already spent some time on the first four verses of this passage and seen the 24 elders are representing the resurrected Church raptured before the Tribulation begins. This is further supported by verse 10-11 where we seem them casting their crowns before the throne in an act of worship. What they are saying by this act is they are recognizing that their rewards (the crowns for service) really were earned as a result of the leading and enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God was the true power behind them receiving the crowns and it is He who deserves the glory. Keeping our focus on God as the source of all of our ability is very hard for us to do. We tend to want to take some of the glory for ourselves, do things in our own power. The moment we lose sight of that source is the moment we humans take something that ought to be gold, silver, and precious stones that pass the fire test and is worthy of crowns at the Bema evaluation and turn it into wood, hay, and stubble that burns up. God gets the glory, not us, and the moment we take the glory is the moment we take divine good and turn it into worthless human good.

Verses 5-8 gives us a mere glimpse of the Throne Room in Heaven. Based on this extensive yet limited description it must be truly magnificent. The sounds, lightening, thunder, and voices, must have been deafening and terribly frightening for John. The seven blazing lamps said to be the seven spirits of God should be understood to represent the Holy Spirit rather than seven individual spirits or angels, with the concept of the sevenfold character of the Spirit (Isa. 11:2-3; cf. Rev. 1:4; 5:6). The number seven represents completeness. With God the Father seated on the throne and the Holy Spirit represented by the seven lamps, the stage was then set for the Revelation of Christ Himself as the slain Lamb in chapter 5.

While John attempts to be accurate, we can only imagine, and vaguely so, what he is trying to describe. “The sea of glass like crystal.” Looking at the original text gives us little help; it is literally translated! John is seeing a wide expanse of something that is crystalline in appearance, and that probably refers to its clarity and perhaps sparkle. I get a mental picture of this broad expanse of sparkly surface surrounding the throne.

There were four living creatures (KJV - beasts, but the word really means living creatures) that were full of eyes both in the front and back. There are several interpretations of this imagery.

**Rev 4:7** The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.

It is thought these creatures symbolize attributes of God. If so then:

- Lion — majesty and omnipotence
- Calf (or ox in some translations — really a young bull) — the most important domestic animal refers to service, labor and patience
- Man — as the greatest of all of God’s creatures especially in intelligence and reasoning power
- Eagle — greatest bird for supreme sovereignty and supremacy.

Another possible view is that they represent Christ as revealed in the four Gospels:

- In Matthew, the lion of the tribe of Judah;
- In Mark, the ox as the servant of Yahweh;
- In Luke, the incarnate human Jesus
- In John, the eagle as the divine Son of God.

One observation is the four creatures represent the arrangement of the Tribes of Israel camped around the Tabernacle during the wilderness journey.

- Judah - the Lion
- Ephraim the ox
- Reuben the man
- Dan the eagle

Another alternative is that the four living creatures are really angels whose function is to bring honor and glory to God. The use of the Greek for “living creatures” suggests they are real and not just symbolic, and that implies angels. The fact that they have six wings also suggests to me these are Seraphim, which are described as having six wings and sing this song, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

**Isa 6:1** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!”

John has been taken in the spirit to the very Throne Room of Heaven and shown things we can only marvel at. What he saw transcended his own experiences which limits his ability to express his vision. What we should take away from this vision is its majesty and magnificence, which someday we will get to see for ourselves. God is putting His sovereignty on display for mankind through the eyes of this man John, and we are getting a tiny peek into his vision. This must have been both terribly frightening and incredibly exhilarating at the same time.

What we see in this scene in Chapter 4 is all encompassing worship of God, and if you look at God’s plan throughout history, we can see that God is moving towards that goal where all will recognize His right to rule in the end. In a sense then, this scene may be representative of God’s ultimate goal, which we will see finally come to fruition at the end of the book. This is God showing us where He is going with all this. Next He will show us the details.

**Rev 5:1** Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” 6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of

incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” 11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” 14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Chapter 5 is really a continuation of chapter 4 and John’s vision of the throne in heaven. Here we will see the beginning of the opening of the seven-sealed scroll, which begins the wrath of God on earth and its inhabitants. John has been privy to a fantastic setting in heaven that he described in chapter 4. Now a tableaux will play out in that setting.

Chapter 5 begins with this seven-sealed scroll, which is most likely the same scroll we saw in Daniel 12 where Daniel is shown some end times events, some of which he speaks of and other details he is told in verse 9 to, “shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end”. What Daniel was told to seal up will now be revealed.

The seals are apparently fixed in such a way that they will be broken in sequence. The text suggests the seals were on the “backside” of the scroll, and I am not sure exactly how to interpret this. In any event, the seals are successively broken as the scroll is unrolled. Interestingly, Roman law required a will to be sealed seven times as illustrated by the wills of Vespasian and Augustus.

John’s attention is directed to this scroll by the pronouncement of a “strong angel”. The word translated “strong” means “mighty and powerful,” hence there is the implication that this is an important angel selected for this pronouncement. The angel “proclaims” with a loud voice. The word “proclaim” implies to announce as a herald. “With a loud voice”

signifies urgency and concern. The angel is probably Gabriel, the one who ordered Daniel to close and seal the book.

The angel proclaims with a loud voice and asks the question, “Who is worthy to open the book and loose the seals?” John then records in verse 3 that no one in heaven, on earth, or below the earth was able, and the word used for “able” means to have authority. No one in heaven, on earth, or below the earth is qualified to open the book. It is obvious from this that the contents of this scroll are impressive in character and requires the authority of someone like God to open it and reveal its contents.

**Rev 5:4** So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

The purpose of this was to impress upon John (and subsequent readers of John’s revelation) the importance of what is contained in this scroll.

**Rev 5:5** But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”

The “lion” is a reference to Genesis 49:9-10 where Jacob’s last words to his sons are recorded

**Gen 49:9** Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

The name Shiloh is derived from *shālâ*, “to be at ease,” and would mean something like “the peace-giver,” and refers to the promised Messiah. Here it is predicted that the future ruler of the earth will come from the Tribe of Judah, and Jesus Christ is of the Tribe of Judah. This ruler will bring all to subjugation to His rule, a look at the future Kingdom. The KJV translates the last part “unto him shall be the gathering of the people” but gathering should be translated “obedience”. The people will obey Him. “The Root of David” is a reference to the prophecy of Isaiah 11.

**Isa 11:1** There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

Jesse was, of course, David's father, and Christ is the "Son of David" and the "root of Jesse". Out of Jesse's "root" will come Messiah, and this passage describes His Kingdom rulership. Taken together these point to Jesus as Messiah and His Second Coming. Obviously, there are many other bits of evidence in Scripture that connect Jesus with His Messiahship but these are the most well known.

"The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." That word translated "has prevailed" means to overcome or be victorious and implies He has the full authority to break the seals and read the contents of the scroll.

**Rev 5:6** And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

John fixes his gaze upon the One portrayed as the Lamb standing in the midst of the throne with the four living creatures. J. Vernon McGee contrasts the Lion and the Lamb this way, "The lion character refers to His second coming, since the lion speaks of His majesty. The Lamb character refers to His first coming as it speaks to His meekness or submission to the plan of God. As lamb He is savior and He is judged."

The horns seem to speak of His prerogative as King. The seven eyes probably refer to the seven spirits of God or the Holy Spirit (Zech 3:9; 4:10) as we discussed earlier. The Holy Spirit was sent out upon the earth (in a universal sense) at the beginning of the Church Age. The Lamb is seen as slain and yet He lives, a reference to Christ's death and resurrection. Taken together we see Christ portrayed as both savior and sovereign. Once more the Book of the Revelation is focused on Christ as the central character.

**Rev 5:7** Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb,



each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Christ, as the only one worthy, takes the scroll from the hand of Him who sat on the throne, God the father. The four creatures, angels, and the 24 elders fall down before the Lamb. Before it was worship He who sits on the throne, and now they worship the Lamb/Lion as God.

The incense represents the prayers of the saints, and it is assumed these saints are the saints on earth who come to Christ *during* the tribulation. God views prayer as a “sweet aroma”. He clearly values our prayers because they symbolize our dependance upon Him. Prayer is the language of dependance. Do not be afraid to go to God in prayer and ask for help in even the small things of life. That demonstrates our need of His help and our willingness to submit our will to His. Prayer is the essence of a vitally alive spiritual relationship with God.

**Rev 5:9** And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

The elders sing a new song celebrating the worthiness of the Lamb to take the scroll and open it. Note the reference to His death and our redemption through the Lamb’s blood. This new song could not have been sung before His redemptive act. “Ransomed people” were called of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, not just Jews but Jews and Gentiles. And they have been made kings and priests and they (we) shall reign on the earth with Him during the Millennium.

This is clearly a reference to the church. Only the church has been called out of many tribes, tongues, and nations. Only the church is given this promise of participation in Christ’s rule on earth during the Millennium. Only the church is seen as a kingdom of priests. This is further evidence that the 24 elders are raptured Church Age believers who are in heaven and have been evaluated and rewarded.

**Rev 5:11** Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads

of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

John “looks and hears”. He sees thousands upon thousands of angels and hears them sing with the four living creatures and the elders. Seven attributes are mentioned here: power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! Only the Lamb is worthy of receiving all of these. To this mighty chorus is added the praise of every living creature. All of creation now lends voice to praising the Lamb. I see this as connected to a passage in Romans.

**Rom 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

In Romans we see all of creation eagerly awaiting the revealing of the sons of God, and I think that is a reference to the Second Advent when the church as the “sons of God” return with Christ and begin the process of ending the “futility” that creation has been subjected to since the fall of Adam. “Futility” is a Greek word that is usually translated vanity and means empty of devoid of truth and appropriateness — depraved. Creation will be delivered from this “bondage of corruption” into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Church Age believers will be in resurrection bodies at the Second Advent. At that time, the rest of creation

will also be “resurrected” in the sense Christ will restore earth to its former glory of the Garden. In Romans we see creation eager awaiting deliverance from this corrupted state and figuratively groaning within itself. In Revelation we see creation rejoicing that the time of its deliverance from the Adamic curse is so very near and blessing the One who makes that redemption possible and a soon reality.

**Rev 5:14** And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

The scene in Chapter 5 can be seen as prophetic of future events in which the church bearing witness to Jesus Christ today will be in the presence of the Lord in heaven. Those who received Him in life will be present during His final redemptive work and numbered among those giving worship in heaven. So we are seeing some of what we will be doing in Heaven. Chapters 4 and 5 are an introduction and give us something of the heavenly side of the picture. In Chapter 6 we will turn to events taking place on earth. The same Lord and redeemer seen here being worshiped in Heaven will now be seen as the righteous judge of the wicked earth and the One by whose authority the terrible coming events unfold.

To most Christians Heaven is an unreal place, and we tend to focus on the here and now. But Heaven is very real, and John was given a glimpse of Heaven and allowed us some idea of what he witnessed. By contrast to the heavenly scene, Earth is revealed to be temporary and transitory, and its glory and glitter, magnificent as we might sometimes find it, is really tarnished. Revelation puts Earth and Heaven in proper perspective.

Next session we will begin our look at the judgments, beginning with the braking of the Seven Seals.