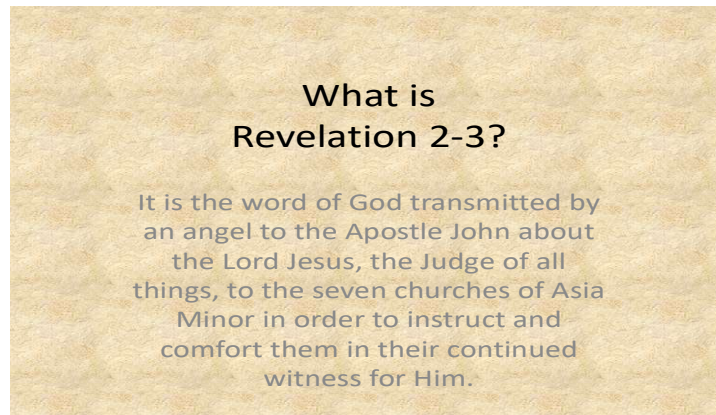


Commentary on the Revelation

- I. Prologue, 1:1-8
 - A. The Introduction, vv. 1-3
 - B. The Salutation, vv. 4-8
- II. “The Things Which Are,” 1:9-3:22
 - A. The First Vision, 1:9-20
 - B. The Messages to the Churches, 2:1-3:22



- III. “The Things That Shall be,” 4:1-22:5
 - A. The Second Vision, 4:1-11

This chapter, and the next comprise another vision of John that will carry us through chapter 16. In chapter one John is given a commission to record what would be revealed to him in the remainder of the book (a vision of heaven, indicating the authority of the messages that follow). After the first vision, recorded in chapters 2-3, examples of representative of churches through the centuries instructing them to persevere in their faithfulness to Christ though living in unsupportive, adverse cultures. The point of the vision that John records is to strengthen the churches by constructively criticizing them and with the encouragement that, in a future day, they will gain triumph through the Christ they serve (20-22).

The second vision, recorded in chapters 4-5, establishes the authority from heaven to judge the enemies of God and preserve His people in triumph forever. Chapter four takes us into the presence of God enthroned in glory with the right to judge; chapter five delegates the right of execution to the one alone who is worthy to do so. To reveal the emptiness of cultural concession, the problem in some of the churches, John tells us that God's enemies will be crushed (4-19). The lesson is: Be faithful. Do not become part of what will end in judgment; such is not the destiny He has for us! Hence, this major section of the vision encompasses two purposes: the first is to demonstrate God's judgment on His enemies and the second is to assure troubled

saints of their future in the presence of God (do not sell the eternal for the temporal or momentary).

A. The Divine Right to Judge and Reward, 4:1-5:14

These two chapters explain the right of Jesus to act in the role of a judge to condemn God's enemies; it provides a majestic insight into the very throne room of God! In chapter four John's vision takes us into the very throne room of God who alone has the sovereign right to both judge and redeem His creation. Chapter five extends the right of judgment and redemption to God's triumphant Son, the Lamb, because of His triumph over death. He, alone, is qualified to execute the judgment of God! In submission to become God's Lamb, even unto death, He is now God's executioner. The pastoral function of these chapters is to comfort and console God's people that He is in control of all events, even those that seem detrimental, and He will bring the final consummation of history in the judgment of the wicked and the eternal dwelling of the righteous in His presence forever. It might be stated this way: The wrath of men is coming, but also the wrath of God to limit and judge the wrath of men.

The textual background for these chapters is Daniel 7:9-18, 27. The sequence of events in Dan. 7 makes it clear that John is using the passage to construct these chapters.

1. God and the heavenly throne, 4:1-11

The connection between this chapter and the previous chapters is found in 3:21, the presence of Christ in the divine throne room.

a. The invitation, v. 1

"After these things," stated twice in the verse, indicates a new section in the book. As such, the point would be that the data in the book may not be presented in a chronological manner of sequence. Remember the book is apocalyptic; it seeks to express a concept more than present a historical lesson of sequential events. It must be remembered that the book is timeless in its application to Christians; there are many shadowed fulfillments of divine judgment and preservation that anticipates a final culmination so that its content serves every century of believers.

The mention of trumpet sounds is a call it John to enter the presence of God with the invitation "come up here," not in bodily form but a vision.

b. The revelation, vv. 2-11

1) The throne, v. 2a

The meaning of "in the spirit" has been debated. It would seem, because of John's interaction with numerous Old Testament passages that describe what He saw, that He was deeply engrossed in the meaning of what He saw in the shadows of OT revelation now suddenly explained more fully, then transported in some manner to heaven. He was having one of those "AH moments." Things he found unclear are clarified to a greater degree (most fully later). To him, and the other disciples, it must have been like

Jesus' post resurrection instruction or the Emmaus Road experience.

The centrality of the presence of God enthroned, combined with the insight that all the judgments that fall in subsequent chapters emanate from it, suggests that John want us to know that God is in control of all events. All mankind is judged by their affiliation, or lack of it, with God's claim to be the absolute sovereign who reigns.

2) The one on the throne, vv. 2b-3

John's sighting is that God who is sitting of the throne, the place of authority over the whole world. And He alone is the rightful ruler and sovereign over all things.

To describe the beauty of the scene John uses three gemstones . The jasper is a greenish, opaque stone though in 21:11 it is described as "crystal clear, perhaps a diamond because it is associated with the "sea of glass (4:6; 15:2; 21:11, 18, 21). It was the first stone on the high priest's breastplate (Exod. 28:17-21).

Sardius is a red stone and last on the breastplate suggesting that He is "first and last," the all-in-all. The rainbow in the appearance of an emerald should remind one of the Noah-story (Gen. 6-9) and the promissory sign of divine grace after judgment. As judgment brought a renewal of the earth in Noah's day, a final renewal is coming!

3) The "Elders" around the throne, v. 4

A heavenly entourage is about the throne of God, a court of sorts arranged in a circle around the throne.

Three things describe them:

They are sitting on thrones suggesting the exercise of rulership.

They are clothed in white suggesting holiness.

They are wearing crowns suggesting honored status.

It seems most probable that they represent all of redeemed humanity and the promise that we someday will rule and reign with Christ.

The elders most likely represent God's people. Saints of old, deceased believers, are seen as having received heavenly rewards (crowns), white clothing (righteousness), and rule (thrones). In effect, this sight in heaven would function to comfort and strength, enlivening suffering saints on earth! Here is a foretaste of the victory that all of God's children will enjoy.

The significance of "24" is debated. Perhaps it is the people of God from the twelve tribes combined in eternity with the followers of the twelve apostles.

4) The glory about the throne, vv. 5-6a

The sights and sounds emanating about the throne parallels those at Sinai suggesting the overpowering glory of the divine presence. The one who sits invested with authority is the divine judge.

The “sea of glass like crystal” is interesting because the sea in the Bible is often portrayed in a negative light as foreboding and unruly, even evil (21:1). Thus, John sees the unruly calmed and controlled by the power of God; the heavenly scene is a place of righteousness and holiness. It is a gleaming, translucent floor! Clearly, the emphasis is on the awesome presence and glory of God.

The “seven lamps” or “fiery torches” seems to be a visionary statement of God’s fullness and presence in heaven; the seven being the Holy Spirit as in 1:4.

- 5) The “Living Creatures” before the throne, vv. 6b-8a
Here we see another group before the divine throne. The portrayal of the four living creatures is mostly likely drawn from Ezekiel 1 with the mention of six wings drawn from Isaiah 6. The creatures (being symbolic, not literal, possessing a combination of the characteristics of animals, humans, and angels) seem to represent the whole of created life, animal and human. These multi-eye beings suggest divine knowledge as servants of the Lamb (5:6).

The “four living creatures” are subsequently more fully described below in function

- 6) The worship before the throne, vv. 8b-11
An antiphonal chorus of worship fills the heavenly visions as the four creatures worship God and the elders follow with song as well.

The living creatures seem to be more immediately before the throne of God than the elders, so the scene represents concentric circles in appearance (God in the center, the four creatures, and the twenty-four elders).

The hymns they collectively voice give us the essential point of the chapter; God is to be glorified because of His holiness and sovereignty. They worship God because He alone rules over all creation (as the subsequent chapters demonstrate).

- a) By the four living creatures, v. 8b
The endless praise of the creatures is interesting for its three-fold repetition of threes: three statements of holiness (a literary idiom indicating a superlative), three names for God, and a three-fold statement of God’s eternity. Thrice holy is God!
Lord: Jehovah, the I AM (Exod. 3:14, the covenantal God)
God (Elohim, the creator [Gen. 1])

Almighty (El Shaddai, the almighty one [Exod. 6:3])

“Was, is, and shall be” (or always) is a word play on the covenant name for God (Jehovah means “to be,” the eternally existent one who enters into relationship with His people).

b) By the twenty-four elders, vv. 9-11

The “twenty-four elders” join the living creatures in worship of the one upon the throne.

The identity of the elders is uncertain (remember this is a vision so that the point is in the image, not the details). Most commentators suggest they are believers. A clue may be that angels are never said to be wearing crowns or sit on thrones in the Scriptures, except fallen ones.

The action of “casting crowns” suggests acknowledgement of God’s character and right to rule; all praise and honor belong to Him. God is worshipped for being the creator, sustainer, and provider of all things that summarizes the meaning of Lord or Elohim.

Stott has a worthy comment at this point. “God has not abandoned the world, and it is indeed His world. He made all things and made them of His own purpose. John’s readers must think that evil is in control. Evil is real. But the divine purpose still stands (92).”

This chapter brings to my mind the lyrics of a hymn, a poem written in 1867 by Oswald Chalmers Smith, a cleric in the Free Church of Scotland. The poem is based on I Timothy 1:17.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessèd, most glorious, the ancient of days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;
 In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
 We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
 And wither and perish-but naught changeth Thee.
 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
 Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
 But of all Thy rich graces this grace, Lord, impart
 Take the veil from our faces, the vile from our heart.

All laud we would render; O help us to see
 'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee,
 And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,
 Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart.

Applications:

1. John's vision of the habitation of God, God upon His throne and those around Him submitting to His authority and worth, should settle in our minds that the God of the Bible, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the only sovereign in existence. All other authorities' rule, to whatever degree they do, by the power granted to them by God. This poses a question: To whom do you and I owe our primary and highest allegiance? Does your understanding of the character and person of God lead you to the right to question His authority over you? While we all think that God does not have our best interests in mind, and that we can live our lives better than He can through us, is there any legitimacy to such thoughts? Why do you think we have them?
2. I think it can be argued from our passage, and Rev. 21-22, that heaven is a place of exquisite beauty. When I see the colors of a flower garden, I often think that if this is beautiful how much more so is the dwelling habitation of God. It would seem that thoughts of heaven and the presence of God is an antidote to what so often consumes our thoughts (fears, memories). Do you make it a conscious effort to think about heaven and compare that to life as we now experience it? Do you search for hope by looking around, looking within, or looking up?
3. True worship is the extolling of the character and person of God. The kind of worship that takes place in heaven, the place of perfect worship. This should be a clue to the nature of what our worship should be like on earth (at best our shadowed attempts at worship should be identifiable with the worship accorded God in heaven). In your worship privately or at the gathering of other saints, is it God-focused or is it upon the benefits that God poured out upon you? Is your gratitude to God linked with observable benefits or is your attachment to God deeper than liking Him for being our beneficiary?
4. To direct our worship the "four living creatures" provide us with a substantive clue. When you worship God is the object of your adoration His absolute holiness? Do you thank Him that He is the Lord, the sovereign master over your life and conduct? Is He actually your Lord or only partially so? Do you recognize and tell Him that He also is the power and strength in your life? Or, instead are you trying to manipulate Him for

your benefit? Do you accord Him eternal existence, that He is the “always,” and that we are temporal, frail, and ignorant? Is your worship more about asking than adoring?

5. The casting of crowns before the throne of God as gifts to Him of appreciation is truly worth our meditation. You and I have nothing to give to God but what God has given to us. How can a finite person offer an infinite person anything of value since it is limited by our finitude? The miracle of divine grace is that God gives us abilities to use for Him, empowers us to do for Him, and then rewards us for what He has done through us. God is a debtor to no one for anything because He is the origin of everything. This is so that we can express our gratitude to God. God desires our praise and gifts and it made it possible for us to do so. Have you every thanked Him for allowing you to express thanks to Him?
6. This chapter is a picture of what our existence will be like when God gathers His followers to be with Him forever. Worship will be endless. It will be a perfect place full of unimaginable delights. It will be a place where all our longings and desires will find instantaneous fulfillment. All of the pains, disappointments, and sorrows of this life will suddenly disappear when we see God enthroned in heaven. Is that future day any great comfort for you today? If not, how can it become that for you?
7. One of the interesting things that John saw in his vision was a rainbow as He looked into the throne room of God. The rainbow image is derived from the Noahic Flood story and God’s promise that He would not destroy the world again through a flood. The rainbow in the sky was to be visible evidence of God’s promise not to destroy, but to preserve from destruction. That same image John saw suggestive of the fact that our God will deliver and preserve His people. The next time you see a rainbow think of our passage and Gen 9:11, 16. You should not doubt that God will keep His promise to you and preserve you unto your inheritance, one that is “reserved in heaven for you (I Pet. 1:4).”