

# Revelation

*Part Sixteen  
Behold, A Throne  
(Revelation 4:1-11)*

*With Study Questions*

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After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup> And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> *The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" <sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: <sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:1-11).

## Introduction

Some may remember a debate I had with well-known (and very pleasant) atheist, Michael Shermer. In my research for this I spent a bit of

time in a book he wrote entitled *The Moral Arc*. In this book he argues that morality, through the ages, has been in a state of consistent ascension. Things are actually getting better.

- There are fewer despotic dictatorships.
- There is greater freedom to purchase property and goods than ever before.
- Rights to life, liberty, property, marriage, voting and speech is higher per-capita than ever before.
- There is greater wealth, affluence and less poverty, per-capita, than any time in history.
- People are living longer and healthier lives than ever before.
- Slavery is virtually outlawed throughout the entire world.
- A smaller percentage of people die as a result of war than ever before.
- Homicide rates are the lowest in human history.
- Judicial equality and civility are higher than ever before.

The list goes on. Any person with the remotest grasp of human history knows we are living in (let's say) the best 500-year span there has ever been.

Shermer goes on to credit this great moral amelioration to the Scientific Revolution, the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment. Many times in our debate he would point out some cultural or moral phenomena (usually the rise of atheism) then follow that observation with the words, "And it's a good thing."

Since he identifies himself as a former Christian, he might be offering a not-so-subtle claim of self-deification (a claim to be god). The declaration of goodness is God's refrain in the creation account. Perhaps it's unwitting. Perhaps he doesn't realize that when the Godness of the true God is removed, another god must fill the gap.

Please understand, I am not anti-reason, enlightenment or science. Scientific achievements aided physicians in the saving of my life, more than once. But science could not tell the physicians that that was a good thing. It just does not fall within the domain of science to calculate morality. The scientist of scientists, Albert Einstein, said it well.

**You are right in speaking of the moral foundation of science,  
but you cannot turn around and speak of the scientific**

**foundation of morality...Every attempt to reduce ethics to scientific formulas must fail.**

For two chapters we've seen Christ calling upon churches, of various levels of faithfulness, to persevere and overcome. We now move into the final portion of the three-part outline provided for us, the things **"that are to take place after this" (Revelation 1:19)**. Things were hot in Asia Minor for these churches and they were about to get hotter.

But what they will begin seeing now is the full force of the theme of Revelation, which is *The Triumph of Christ (of Christianity) Over All Opposition, or Evil*. In the true and final analysis, the arc of history would not be relegated to kings, presidents, oil cartels, economists, philosophers, scientists, or biological or chemical forces-as real as all those things might be. The moral arc of history will ascend, and the emphasis beginning in chapter four or Revelation is telling us why. We learn what is right, why it's right and why it will prevail.

The events and direction of history, as it leads us into eternity, is in Divine hands. The sneaking suspicion we all have the good will win out is not without cause. In the letter to Laodicea we asked, "Who will you believe?" As we move into chapter four, we might ask, "Who is in charge?" Those churches, all churches, all Christians, traveling the rough roads of earthly trials, must do so with an eye on heaven. Clark offers the goal of chapter four,

**The immediate purpose is to meet the moral needs of God's persecuted people, not to amuse them with splendid pictures, not to sketch a scheme of world events, but to lift their hearts and thoughts above the deadly decrees of tyrants, and their souls above the fear of prison, sword and stake.<sup>1</sup>**

**After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."<sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and *One* sat on the throne (Revelation 4:1, 2).**

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<sup>1</sup> The Message From Patmos. David S. Clark. P. 46

For the sake of being informed, the current popular, dominant view separates chapter three from chapter four by two thousand years (and counting). It seems a terribly unnatural way to read the Bible. This view also submits that the church is absent for the remainder of Revelation, having been raptured<sup>2</sup>, even though it is John, and only John is beckoned to **“Come up here.”** This, of course, would extract any application of what we’re reading from the very churches receiving the letter!

It is much more natural, ministerial, applicable and God-honoring to view chapter four as following Christ’s call to faithfulness in the previous two chapters. This would apply directly to them, then to all throughout history who might find themselves in similar times. In our times of joy and sorrow, grief and pain, elation and deflation, the Christian should ever live his/her life under the words, **“behold, a throne.”**

Sixty-two times the word **“throne”** is used in the New Testament. Forty-seven of those are in Revelation. Seventeen of those are in chapters four and five. There is to be no ambivalence in the minds of Christians regarding who determines the course of history. John is seeing, and recording, **“what must take place.”** The **“must”** *dei* in Greek is a strong word. It means *necessary*. The world is not Satan’s kingdom. It is not random.

**The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, “Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand...<sup>27</sup> For the Lord of hosts has purposed, And who will annul *it*? His hand *is* stretched out, And who will turn it back” (Isaiah 14:24, 27).**

**And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald (Revelation 4:3).**

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<sup>2</sup>The argument revolves around how the word ‘church’ is used twenty times in chapters one through three but not at all in chapters four through eighteen. But in the early chapters the local churches are addressed because they are the recipients of the letter. There is no reference to the invisible church anywhere in Revelation, but the words “saints” and “redeemed” is found, and who are they, but the true church.

God is incomprehensible so metaphors are used. The depth of study here goes beyond what our time allows. The “jasper” and “sardius” stones were the last and first stones of the high priest’s breastplate (Exodus 28:17, 20). The “rainbow” speaks to the covenant of peace with Noah (Genesis 9:13).

It is worth noting that prior to prophecies of great judgment, we are given a vision designed to instill the advocacy of our High Priest and the loving patience and mercy conveyed by the rainbow. No wonder that when Paul had a similar encounter, he was able to say, “**For me to live is Christ and to die is gain**” (Philippians 1:21). It must be noted, that it is reprehensible to use a symbol which God has designed for His own glory and the peace for our souls, as a symbol for that which is antithetical to His character.<sup>3</sup>

The scene moves from the One who was on the throne to host of heaven, the holy entourage. Chapters four and five of Revelation (along with Isaiah 6) helped to form the liturgies of synagogues and the early church.<sup>4</sup> How do, even unfallen, creatures respond to the One who sits on the throne?

**Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads (Revelation 4:4).**

There are numerous guesses regarding who these twenty-four elders are. Some think they represent the old and new dispensations (twelve tribes and twelve apostles). Others believe they are a high rank of angels. Stars, OT saints, books, priestly order (1 Chronicles 24:4; 25:9-13), etc. We haven’t time to dig into the merits of each position. Suffice it to say it is an awe-inspiring event of which we are given a glimpse.

It is one thing for one sinful creature to admire, or respect, another sinful creature. And the admiration of peers generally exceeds the admiration of fans. When a group of musicians holds a specific musician in a unique category, it is noteworthy. The opinion of experts upon a higher

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<sup>3</sup> Again, we observe the hearing and seeing (a concomitance). Hear one thing and see another. This recurrence will help us understand the entire book.

<sup>4</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (p. 312). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

expert is cause for reflection. When I fly and feel turbulence, I always try to find the flight attendant to see their reaction.

Here we are seeing powerful, unfallen and/or redeemed creatures. They are, at least for now (Hebrews 2:6, 7), superior to us. What is happening here and what are they doing?

**And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> *The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come” (Revelation 4:5-8)!**

It is critical that we understand that in this vision we are not given some reduced version of God. “**Lightnings, thunderings, and voices**” are all reminiscent of Sinai with the full force of God’s law and holiness “**so that all the people in the camp trembled**” (Exodus 19:16). The “**sea of glass**” may speak to God’s separateness or His calming power over that which is normally turbulent or the delivering power of the Red Sea.

We also see the most powerful of living creatures who are closest to the throne. That they are “**full of eyes in front and back**” reveals their vast knowledge as God’s agents. The “**lion...calf...man...and...eagle**” strength, work, intelligence and majesty. Rabbis interpreted this as king of wild beasts (lion), king of domestic beasts (ox), king of all birds (eagle) and king of all creatures (man).

These creatures also seem to be a combination of both Seraphim and Cherubim (Ezekiel 10:20; Isaiah 6:2). They operate in a continuous state of worship, extolling God with the only attribute given to God in threefold repetition, which is His holiness. He is the eternal Lord God Almighty!

As we wind this down, let us not lose sight of the context of this vision. The church is called to perseverance, faithfulness and victory. They had to be wondering-questioning-whether or not it was worth it. Even as Jesus had charged them to be “**faithful unto death**” (Revelation 2:10).

There is a direction that history, as it would eventually fold into eternity, is taking by the sovereign hand of the One who sits upon the throne. Some might ask why I include history and not just eternity? Because what we read in Revelation, though here from a heavenly perspective, is primarily concerned with what is happening on the earth. At the onset, after all, we are informed that Jesus is **“the ruler of the kings on earth” (Revelation 1:5).**

Yet, let us not miss that this entire enterprise begins with the vision of a celestial worship service. It is a service that, in a real albeit spiritual sense, we join during our time of worship. John continues.

**Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:<sup>11</sup> “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:9-11).**

It’s almost as if to live a life which lacks a fear of man, we need to live a life, giving glory and honor and Thanks to God. The glory given by the **“living creatures”** is accompanied by the elders falling down, worshiping God and casting down their crowns as if to acknowledge that any victory, glory, reward or authority they have is derivative from Him.

The focus of the worship, at least in chapter four, is on God as creator and sustainer of all things. In chapter five the emphasis turns to redeemer. But for now, let us pause and recognize that Jesus is seeking to spur His church on to faithfulness by giving them a vision of who is in control of (not only eternity) but of history.

I recently heard perhaps the most well-known pastor in California (if not America) emphatically state that “We don’t win down here. We lose. You’re a postmillennialist. You thought we were going to waltz into the kingdom as we took over the world. They killed Jesus. They killed all the apostles. We’re all going to be persecuted.” Not only does he have a very flawed view of postmillennialism, he said all of this from his multi-million-dollar facility full of members who are well-fed, well-clothed, driving their nice cars to their beautiful homes. He then compared postmillennialism to the prosperity gospel.



This is just the opposite of the message Christ is giving these seven churches. It is true that they may die in their faithfulness, but their blood will be, and has been, the seed of the church. This pastor's great success, as a pastor (and I think he has had great success) is due, in part, to the sacrificial saints that went before him. Even my atheist friend Shermer knows that good will win out in history. He credits science and nature. Revelation four gives all glory to God. It is in this light, that we are called to persevere and to overcome.

## Questions for Study

1. Surveying history, are things getting worse, better or staying the same? Why (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss Clark's assessment of why Revelation 4 was written (page 4)?
3. What does today's dominant view say happens at Revelation 4? Why do you think this is a sound or unsound interpretation (page 5)?
4. What is happening in the vision of Revelation 4 and what is it designed to accomplish (pages 6, 7)?
5. Discuss the images given in the vision and what they evoke (page 7).
6. What is the starting point when it comes to the glory of God in the human enterprise (pages 8, 9)?