

REVELATION 4

Rev. 4:1

- ἡνεωγμένη - Perfect present participle – “having been opened and continues to stand open.” See Gieschen’s discussion of the “open door” in Revelation in CTQ article. He argues that all three texts (3:8, 20; 4:1) refer to the same door, namely the entry to the heavenly sanctuary. *“This door, therefore, is not a metaphorical door to one’s heart, but the entry to the heavenly sanctuary that is accessed here on earth in eucharistic worship when we behold the presence of God in Christ and are united with Him through eating His body and drinking His blood”* (167). *“One of the lies these so-called ‘Jews’ surely shared with their Jewish brothers who worshipped Jesus is the accusation that Jewish Christians had abandoned YHWH and no longer had access to Him. To such a lie Jesus says: ‘you have an open door to the kingdom before you’”* (165). What awesome assurance for these Jewish Christians – they can know with certainty that God is present with them in worship; that they have access to YHWH.
- Chapters 4 and 5 are the heart and center of Revelation – there is no more important vision than the vision of the heavenly throne room. We must understand these two chapters if we are to interpret the rest of the book.
- “The first voice which I heard (was) as a trumpet” – This is the voice of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:12, where the Holy Spirit speaks and John turns to see Christ). This is not Christ’s voice – His is described as being “like rushing waters.” The Holy Spirit is guiding the revelatory experience of John.
- “What things are necessary to come into being after these things” – We should not understand this as all distant reality, but as present, future, and past reality – NOT just future reality! The sevenfold pattern reveals things that have happened, are happening, and will continue to happen throughout in every generation throughout the NT era.
- ἀνάβα - 2nd person singular aorist active imperative – “Come up.” John is granted the awesome privilege of going up to the Heavenly Throne Room to receive this vision. Dispensationalists (*Left Behind* theologians) make the ridiculous claim that this verse refers to the so-called secret Rapture of the Church before the 7-year Tribulation period. The rest of Revelation, they claim, is a description of that 7-year Tribulation period. This is so ludicrous that it requires no response – it is John, not the Church, who is told to “Come up” to the Heavenly Throne Room!

Rev. 4:2-3

- ὁμοίος language used in LXX (the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament) in Ezekiel 1:26-28; Daniel 7 (“likeness of a throne,” “likeness of a man,” “One like a Son of Man,” etc.).
- Here, the reality of God is taking on some semblance, some form (as a stone), to assure us that He is there. It is very non-descriptive in this scene, which emphasizes that one cannot see the Father; one only knows that the Father is present there on the throne; one knows He is present, but one does not see a particular form of the Father. One cannot see the unveiled glory of the Father. We can only see the veiled form of the Father, i.e., Christ.
- God’s throne is not shared with any other created being. Thus, when we move on in the vision and see the Lamb sharing the throne, we are being told very explicitly that Christ is God. We also see the seven Spirits there – the Holy Spirit is God. Thus, what you

have in this vision is a depiction of the reality of the One, True God, namely the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the God of Israel; the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.

- “And a rainbow was around the throne in appearance like an emerald” – This is like Ezekiel’s vision, where the bow was over the throne. Thus, what John is seeing is the very throne that Ezekiel saw. This is YHWH’s throne! This little detail about the rainbow kind of anchors the continuity between the two visions. Why is there a rainbow there? It symbolizes God’s promise to Noah.

Rev. 4:4

- “Twenty-four elders” – What is the background of this imagery of 24 elders? Gieschen quotes Beale, who says, “*An OT background in 1 Chronicles confirms an identification of the elders as saints. The number twenty-four is perhaps based on David’s organization of the cult of temple servants into twenty-four orders of priests (1 Chron. 24:3-19), twenty-four Levitical gatekeepers (26:17-19), and twenty-four orders of Levites commissioned to ‘prophesy in giving thanks and praising the Lord’ by singing to the accompaniment of ‘lyres, harps, and cymbals’ (25:6-31). These priests represented the people of Israel in their appointed service in the temple . . . The twenty-four elders may represent the same group . . . This background may be the best explanation why the elders perform mediatorial functions (e.g., 5:8) and participate in a heavenly liturgy in a cultic temple setting throughout Revelation (Rev. 4:10; 5:11-14; 11:16-18; 19:4). In addition, πρεσβύτερος (“elder”) is used in Heb. 11:2 of the great OT saints. (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC, p. 324).* Gieschen argues that this scene of the twenty-four elders around the throne informs us as to why there 24 orders of priest serving the earthly temple. The earthly temple is a reflection of the heavenly sanctuary. He rejects the traditional interpretation of the 24 elders as representing the 12 tribes and 12 apostles. This, in his mind, does not do justice to the imagery, in light of the OT background. With all of that said, it is just as possible that the traditional interpretation is true, that the 24 elders represent the 12 tribes and 12 apostles, especially since this would be consistent with other parts of Revelation (for example, the 144,000 of chapter 7 which has in view all believers of all time, both from the OT and NT).
- “And upon their heads were crowns of gold” – this imagery represents the victory that these saints have through Christ.

Rev. 4:5-6

- “The seven Spirits” = The Holy Spirit.
- “The four living creatures” – cf. Ezek. 1 – very similar descriptions, with some differences, but enough to say that John is seeing the same thing as Ezekiel saw.
- “In the midst of the throne and around the throne” – The throne is made up of these four living creatures, but the throne is the center of it. Thus, the throne is, in a sense, a living throne, a throne like no other throne, for God’s angelic beings make up the throne. The four living creatures are the “four angels of the Presence” (again, see the continuity with Ezekiel 1).
- “A sea of glass, like crystal” – The cosmos stretches out before the throne like a crystal sea – emphasizes the cosmic nature of the throne; it’s not just a throne in a certain place

with a red carpet leading up to it, but the living throne of God that exists over and above and within the cosmos.

- Again, the vision in 4 and 5 assures Jewish Christians that they are being faithful to YHWH in worshipping Jesus, who is YHWH. These chapters are the heart and center of Revelation.
- The most powerful portrait of Christ is as the Lamb, which emphasizes the ongoing humanity of Christ and shows us that humanity is no an eternal part of God. Revelation goes out of its way to show that Christ is One with the Father (He shares the throne; He has the same titles; He is given same worship, honor, praise, etc.). Christ is YHWH, the same YHWH that created the cosmos; that appeared to the OT saints, etc. One cannot read Revelation correctly without understanding that Jesus Christ is YHWH. Revelation also clearly shows the True nature of the One True God, i.e., the Triune Nature. The Holy Spirit is guiding the revelatory experience of John, and is depicted as sharing the throne with the Father and the Son.
- Of all places where you would expect to see the victorious “Son of Man,” on the throne, you see this slaughtered Lamb instead. This breathes the authenticity of this visionary experience of John. If he was making this up, he surely would have placed the exalted Son of Man, the all-powerful figure that is depicted in Ezekiel and Daniel, on the throne. Instead, he writes that he sees this slaughtered Lamb. This is a huge twist that has tremendous significance. The slaughtered Lamb is the exalted Son of Man, the victorious One, the Christ, the One who was slain but not lives. Also, this is not the cute, little lamb that is often pictured in iconography, etc., but this Lamb is standing victorious and has seven horns and seven eyes (all powerful and all knowing). This is not just a meek, mild, little lamb that rolled over and died, but the Lamb that was slain and conquered death, rising to eternal power and glory.
- In Revelation, there is a contrast set up between the Lamb (Christ) and the beast (representing Satan and his evil influence in the world). The question is put before the reader, “Who are you going to follow and worship?” The powerful, wealthy, war-mongering beast will lose to the Lamb – nay, has already lost to the Lamb! The reality of Christ is pictured through this awesome portrait of the Lamb. Christ’s humanity is not sidestepped, but rather emphasized throughout Revelation. This is the theology of the cross at its best.
- Also, the imagery of the Lamb is tied into the OT Passover meal. This Lamb, THE PASCHAL LAMB, offers His body and blood in the Christian Eucharist! In the Passover meal, the body was eaten and the blood poured out. Now, the body is eaten and the blood is drank for life and forgiveness. This is what happens Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day! Jesus comes to Christians in worship as the Lamb who offers His very body and blood. As John sees this vision, he understands that this is what happens every Lord’s Day. *“It is vital to understand that first-century Jews remembered the Passover deliverance and anticipated the eschatological deliverance in the Passover meal where they ate an unblemished lamb. The depiction of Christ as the Passover Lamb in the heavenly sanctuary helped Christians see that He is one and the same as the Christ whose flesh they ate and whose blood they drank when they celebrated the Christian ‘Passover’ each Lord’s Day on earth. It is, no doubt, this strong Passover theme in the Lord’s Supper that led the church to incorporate the Agnus Dei into their eucharistic liturgy” (Gieschen, Sacramental Theology in the Book of Revelation, CTQ, p. 169-170).*

Rev. 4:7-8

- The “four living creatures” have often been interpreted as the four Gospel writers, or the four Gospels themselves. An interesting thought, but that is not exactly right. These are the “four angels of the Presence.” But, it is easy to see how Christians related these to the Evangelists, for these four living creatures point to the Presence of God, just as the four Evangelists point people to the true Presence of God, which has been revealed as Jesus Christ. Thus, we can say that these four angels of the Presence function in the same way as the Evangelists, but they are not the Evangelists themselves.
- We can see familiarity in the descriptions John gives of these four living creatures with the descriptions Ezekiel gave.
- “Six wings” – Same as Isaiah’s description of the Seraphim (Is. 6). In Isaiah, they are covering their eyes, indicating that they are creatures, who are not worthy to behold the unveiled glory of God.
- “Holy, holy, holy” – The Sanctus of Isaiah 6 – John is experiencing the same worship scene around the throne as Isaiah. This is the angelic liturgy – the great Te Deum that is continuously sung around the Presence of God.
- “The One who is . . . is coming” – Identification of the Father here. The Father is the “Lord God Almighty.” We hear the Creed here, “God the Father Almighty.”

Rev. 4:9-11

- Strong affirmation of God as Creator in these verses – speaks against all pagan conceptions of various gods (sun gods, Zeus, etc.). It is because God is the Creator that He is due all honor, worship, praise, glory, etc. This is where Christians show who is the One who is truly worthy of worship, i.e., the One True Triune God, the Only Creator of the universe. This is a polemic against all false gods and the Emperor cult that existed in the first century. Christians have the only true worship of the only True God! This strong affirmation of God as Creator undergirds the emphasis of the redemption of creation that the Lamb has won, which we will see in the next chapter.
- Just imagine what this vision meant to John and to Christians of that day. He and they are assured that God is still in control and that they are being faithful to the Creator in worshipping Jesus Christ – tremendous comfort in a very difficult time.