



Revelation 4 & 5: The Vision Of The Throne

The Vision of the Throne that we find in Revelation chapters 4-5 is a central and controlling vision of the book of Revelation. What follows are some notes on this vision. We hope this information will be helpful as we engage with these chapters in the upcoming 2 Sundays (March 14 & 21).

NOTE: Much of the following information comes from the Faithlife Study Bible, the ESV Study Bible, Bible Gateway and other resources.

As you read through these chapters be aware of the following symbols as well as connections to both the Old Testament and 1st-century culture.

Rev. 4:1–5:14 Heaven Opened: The Lamb Receives the Scroll. These visions, portraying events to take place after the first-century churches' struggles, begin with a door standing open in heaven, leading to a vision of God on his throne receiving ceaseless worship, and of the Lamb, who receives from him a mysterious sealed scroll.

The throne (4:1) suggests sovereignty and power. Various aspects of the vision in this chapter reflect aspects of Ezekiel's and Isaiah's visions of God (Ezekiel 1; Isaiah 6)

Imitating Isaiah's and Ezekiel's reserve in describing visions of God's glory (see Isaiah 6:1–6; Ezekiel 1:26–28), John suggests luminous colors—jasper, carnelian, rainbow, emerald—but avoids precise description of the Almighty's visible features, perhaps because he knew no language to describe what he saw. The jewels of this book (cf. Revelation 21:19–20) are not meant to be interpreted individually but together signify the splendor and majesty of God.

Jasper and carnelian stone (4:3) Ezekiel describes Yahweh in a similar way (Ezekiel 1:26–27). In Exodus 24:10, Moses also describes the divine presence of Yahweh using precious stones. Like

Ezekiel and Isaiah, John does not attempt to give a precise description of God. Instead, he describes the overall effect of His glorious presence.

Twenty-four elders (4:4) Their number may reflect the orders of priests serving in the OT temple (cf. 1 Chronicles 24:7–19) but more likely they symbolize the unity of God’s people, encompassing OT Israel (led by the heads of the 12 tribes) and the NT church (led by the 12 apostles), like the new Jerusalem’s 12 gates and 12 foundations (Revelation 21:12, 14). Their thrones resemble those of God’s heavenly court in Daniel 7:9–10 (cf. Revelation 20:4).

Lightning, rumblings, and thunder display the terrifying splendor of God’s glory, as at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16).

The seven spirits of God (4:5) Possibly alludes to the sevenfold spirit of God in Isaiah 11:2. The number seven indicates the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s work (compare Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

Sea of glass (4:6) appears in prophetic visions of God’s throne room (Exodus 24:10; Ezekiel 1:22,26; Revelation 15:2). It is the “floor” of heaven and the “ceiling” of the created universe, and its transparent tranquility shows heaven’s peace in contrast to earthly turmoil. In Revelation, the sea likely symbolizes forces of chaos (see Revelation 13:1 and 21:1). A calm sea points to God’s ability to subdue chaos and bring order.

Four living creatures exhibit features of cherubim (full of eyes; lion; ox; man; eagle) and seraphim (six wings; “Holy, holy, holy”) glimpsed by previous prophets (Isaiah 6:2–3; Ezekiel 1:10, 18). Variation and blending of such features is a reminder that in prophetic visions, images symbolize mysterious unseen realities. These close attendants represent and yet transcend the whole of the created order on earth and in heaven as they ceaselessly praise God for his intrinsic attributes: infinite holiness and power, and eternal life (in the repeated description, “who lives forever and ever,” in Revelation 4:9–10). These creatures are possibly an allusion to the cherubim described in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10 or the seraphim of Isaiah 6:2–3. The number four often represents the entire created order (e.g., Revelation 7:1; Jeremiah 49:36). Thus, these creatures may represent all living things worshipping God.

Full of eyes in front and in back (4:7) The multiplicity of eyes symbolically suggests unceasing vigilance or great wisdom (compare Ezekiel 1:18).

Living creature was similar to a lion (4:7) While John and Ezekiel both describe four living creatures in their visions, the descriptions vary. In Ezekiel 1, all four creatures are identical. In Revelation, each has only one face and resembles a different creature: A lion, an ox, a human, and a flying eagle. Ezekiel’s creatures have four wings, but John’s have six, like the seraphim in Isaiah 6:2. John’s creatures are full of eyes, but the eyes in Ezekiel are on the wheels that move the creatures.

“Holy, holy, holy!” (4:8) This echoes the song of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:2–3.

Put Down (4:10) The phrase describes submission: the 24 elders, though wearing crowns, realize the ultimate source of their power—God Himself, the Great King.

“Our Lord and God” (4:11) Domitian (who ruled from AD 81–96), who may have been the Roman emperor during John’s exile on Patmos, demanded that his subjects call him “our lord and god.” John sets up a clear contrast between the true king and the one whose rule will eventually be done away with.

5:1–14 This continues the throne-room vision initiated in Rev 4. Here, the glorified Christ is reintroduced as the slain Lamb, and He takes the seven-sealed scroll in preparation for judgment. Verse 2 asks who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals; the remainder of the chapter answers that question.

A scroll (5:1) The scroll contains God’s plan for history, spelled out in the events that are about to come upon the world (see Revelation 6).

Sealed up with seven seals (5:1) The number seven indicates completion; the contents were completely inaccessible (see 22:10; compare Isa 29:11; Dan 12:4).

Artifact Seal

Seals have been used throughout history as indicators of authority, identity, and approval. The earliest known seals date from the fourth millennium BC. They often took the form of necklaces or rings and were closely guarded. The seals were impressed upon wet clay or hot wax. The images on each seal were unique to their owners and served to identify property, safeguard against fraudulent transactions, and ratify official documents and rulings.

I began to weep loudly (5:4) If the scroll could not be opened, John would not be able to see the events that were to come (see Revelation 4:1).

The tribe of Judah (5:5) The royal tribe, or the tribe from which Israel’s rulers would come (Genesis 49:9–10).

The root of David (5:5) An allusion to the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1, 10 (see Revelation 22:16).

has conquered (5:5) An allusion to Christ’s death and resurrection—events viewed as decisive victories in the war against evil. Christ’s conquering activities give Him the right to rule (see John 16:33).

Lamb standing as though slaughtered (5:6) John hears about a lion, but turns to see a lamb. Lamb imagery relates to Jesus’ death on the cross. The tradition of viewing His death as a sacrifice—like the sheep sacrificed in the OLD TESTAMENT—arises out of Isaiah 53 (see Isaiah 53:4–8, 10–12). The early church applied the title “Lamb of God” to Jesus, understanding His death to substitute for their sin (e.g., John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet 1:19). The victory spoken of in Revelation 5:5,

then, was brought about through sacrifice. This concept would have instilled hope in those being persecuted; victory for them would likewise come through sacrifice.

Seven horns and seven eyes (5:6) Horns symbolized power and eyes symbolized wisdom. Christ is completely powerful and wise.

The seven horns and seven are “the seven spirits of God” (5:6) Possibly alludes to the sevenfold spirit of God in Isa 11:2. The number seven indicates the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s work (compare Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

A harp (5:8) A common instrument in Israelite worship (see Psalm 33:2; Revelation 14:2).

Golden bowls full of incense Here and elsewhere, incense symbolizes the prayers of God’s people (e.g., Revelation 8:3–5; Psalm 141:2).

A kingdom and priests (5:10) See Revelation 1:6

They will reign on the earth The theme of coregency continues throughout the book, culminating in 20:4 (see Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 20:4).

numbering thousands upon thousands (5:11) Rather than taking this as a precise number, this was probably John’s way of saying they were innumerable (compare Daniel 7:10).

Comparison: Doxologies to God and the Lamb (in the book of Revelation)

Ascription	To God / One On The Throne	To The Lamb
Dominion		1:6
Thanksgiving	4:9; 7:12	
Honour	4:9, 11; 5:13; 7:12	5:12,13
Glory	4:9, 11; 5:13; 7:12; 19:1b	1:6; 5:12, 13
Worth	4:11	5:9,12
Power	4:11; 7:12; 19:1b	5:12
Blessing / Praise	5:13; 7:12	5:12,13
Salvation	7:19; 19:1b	7:10
Might	7:12	5:12
Wealth		5:12
Wisdom	7:12	5:12