

Introduction to the Second Vision: The Heavenly Court

Overview

Tentatively, we follow the common suggestion that the overall book consists of four visions, each introduced by John's statement that he "became" or "was carried" "in the Spirit" (chart):

Rev. 1:10 **I was [became γίνομαι G1096] in the Spirit** on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice,

Rev. 4:2 And immediately **I was [became γίνομαι G1096] in the spirit:** and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

Rev. 17:3 So **he carried me away [ἀποφέρω G667] in the spirit** into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, ...

Rev. 21:10 And **he carried me away [ἀποφέρω G667] in the spirit** to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

Each of these introduces a coherent section of the book:

- 1:10-3:22 consists of the seven letters to the churches, prefaced by a vision of the Lord instructing John to write those letters.
- 4:1-16:21 consists of three series of seven judgments, the seals, trumpets, and bowls, prefaced by a vision of the heavenly throne room from which the judgments are sent.
- 17:1-21:8 introduces the great whore, the kingdom of antichrist, and describes its defeat by the Lord and the establishment of his kingdom.
- 21:9 reveals the Lamb's bride, the New Jerusalem.

These four sections are chiastic: the outer two focus on the Lord's dealings with his own people, while the inner two describe his judgments on the world. Figure 1 shows the resulting overall structure.

In ch. 4-16, the central features are three series of seven things: seals, trumpets, and bowls. Note several features (Figure 2, chart):

- The first series (seals) begins with the court of heaven; the last (vials) with Satan and his courtiers the two beasts.
- The first and second series (seals and trumpets) have an interruption between the sixth and the seventh. Each of these separations prepares us for the next series of seven.
- As we study the contents of the series, we will find that they are not sequential, but nested (Figure 3). The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets, while the seven vials are announced

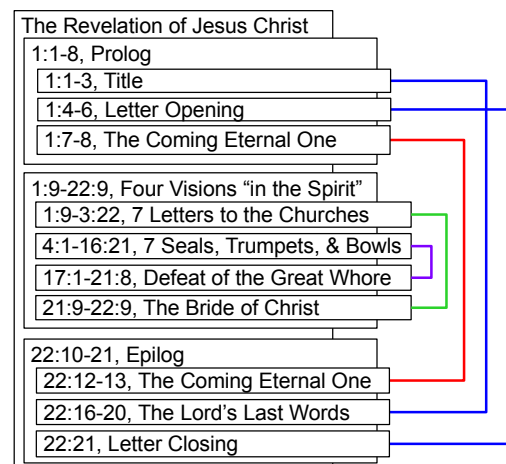


Figure 1: Structure of the Revelation

in the interruption between the sixth and seventh trumpet, and the seventh trumpet and vial describe the same event.

The imagery in the second vision is very surrealistic, with many allusions to earlier portions of Scripture. That’s why the Revelation is the last book of our Bible to be revealed: the reader needs to know all that has come before.

Exposition

Chapters 4-5 present the heavenly court, from which come the seals. Following the key phrases “I saw” and “behold,” we consider first John’s entry into heaven, then the various elements he sees, and finally the focus in ch. 5 on the book and its master.

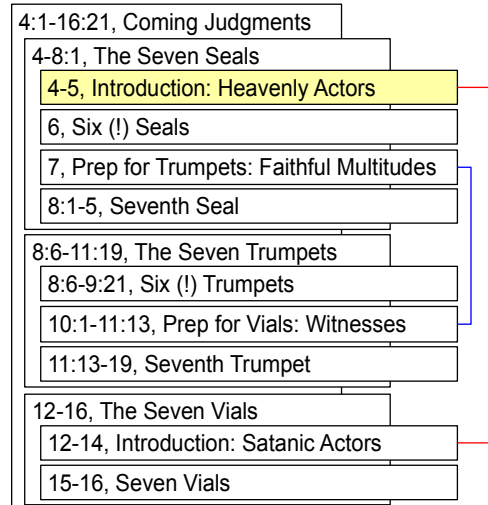


Figure 2: Structure of the Second Vision

4:1, John’s Entry into Heaven

4:1 After this I looked saw,—Or “I saw,” as the verb (ὁράω G1492 aorist indicative first singular) is translated elsewhere in the book. This verb emphasizes the visionary nature of the book, and its distribution (Figure 4, chart) identifies three major concentrations of visions in the book: 4-10 (the seals), 13-16 (the trumpets), and 19-21 (the Lord’s return and his kingdom).

and, behold, a door was opened in heaven:—The imagery recalls Jacob’s dream at Bethel, when he was fleeing from his brother Esau.¹ Like John, he saw an access opened between earth and heaven (chart):

Gen 28:12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the **angels of God ascending and descending** on it. ... 17
And he was afraid, and said,
How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the **gate** of heaven.

Note two differences between John’s vision and Jacob’s.

First, Jacob describes a “gate,” which is a fortified entrance into a city. John sees a “door,” which is much more inviting than a gate.

The second difference becomes clear in what John hears next.

Nested Judgments

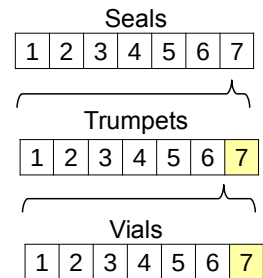


Figure 3: Nesting among the Series of Sevens

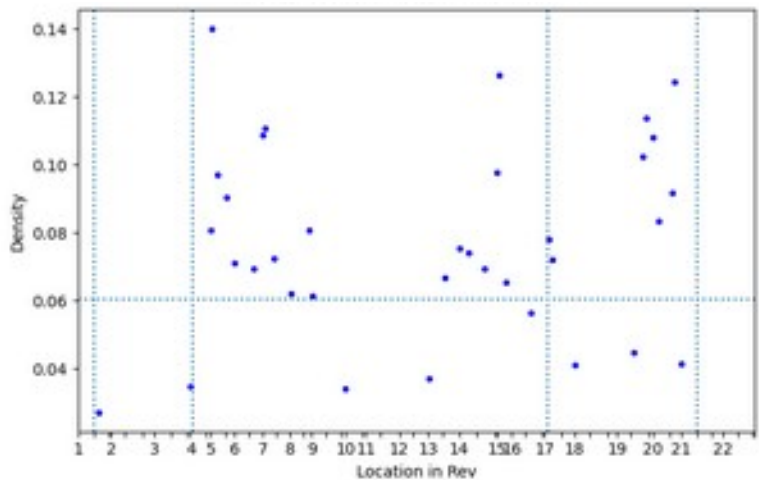


Figure 4: καὶ εἶδον (“and I saw”) and μετὰ < ῥοτος> εἶδον (“after this I saw”) in Revelation. Vertical dividers are references to being in the Spirit.

1 It is John the Evangelist who preserves the Lord’s application of this vision to himself, in John 1:51.

and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me;—The comparison of the voice to a trumpet shows that the one speaking is the Lord Jesus of ch. 1:

Rev 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, **as of a trumpet,**

What does the Lord say to his servant?

which said, Come up hither,—Here is the second distinction between John's vision and Jacob's. In John's vision, the access to heaven allows angels to ascend and descend, and throughout Jacob's life, he encounters angels:

- In Gen 31:10-12, the angel of God explains to him how it happens that his flock of marked animals is growing so rapidly.
- In Gen 32:1, when he leaves Laban after making a covenant, "the angels of God met him."
- In Gen 32:24, he wrestles with a superhuman man, apparently the angel of the Lord, at the fords of Jabbok.
- When he blesses the sons of Joseph in Egypt, he attributes his blessings to an angel:

Gen. 48:15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, **16 The Angel which redeemed me from all evil,** bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

But not once is he invited to come up into heaven. For him, the entrance to heaven is a fortified gate, beyond which he cannot pass.

In contrast, John sees not a fortified gate, but an open door. Instead of seeing angels coming up and down to represent heaven to him, he hears the voice of the risen Lord inviting him to enter. The difference results from the work that the Lord has done between the time of Jacob and that at which John writes. Hebrews explains this impact of our Lord's work (chart):

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that **we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens,** Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. **16 Let us therefore come boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb 10:19 Having therefore, brethren, **boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,** 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; 21 And **having an high priest** over the house of God; 22 **Let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

With our sins removed by our Lord's sacrifice, and assured that he is our advocate before God, we can come boldly into the Father's presence, without need of any other mediator. Indeed, Paul describes us as already seated with him spiritually in heavenly places:

Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and **made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:**

and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.—So far, the Lord has spoken to John while he is on earth, on the isle Patmos, about current earthly events in the seven churches. Now the focus shifts in two ways.

First, John is called “up hither,” to “heaven.” Throughout the Bible, we are reminded that events on earth are subject to a heavenly perspective (chart).

- Job’s earthly sufferings make no sense when viewed by themselves, but have clear purpose when we understand the heavenly discussion that lies behind them.
- Asaph in Psalm 73 laments

Psa 73:12 ... the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

He complains of the injustice of this arrangement, until he takes the heavenly perspective, accessible in God’s sanctuary:

Psa 73:16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

- The heavenly conflicts mentioned by the angel in Daniel 10, Michael vs. the prince of Greece and the prince of Persia, explains the senseless conflicts among human nations

So John now sees the heavenly perspective on what is happening among the churches on earth. The rest of the book will revisit the themes from the letters to the churches, but explained in terms of heavenly dynamics. The distribution of the word “heaven” confirms this focus. It appears only once each in the first and last visions, but is very common in the second and third (Figure 5, chart).²

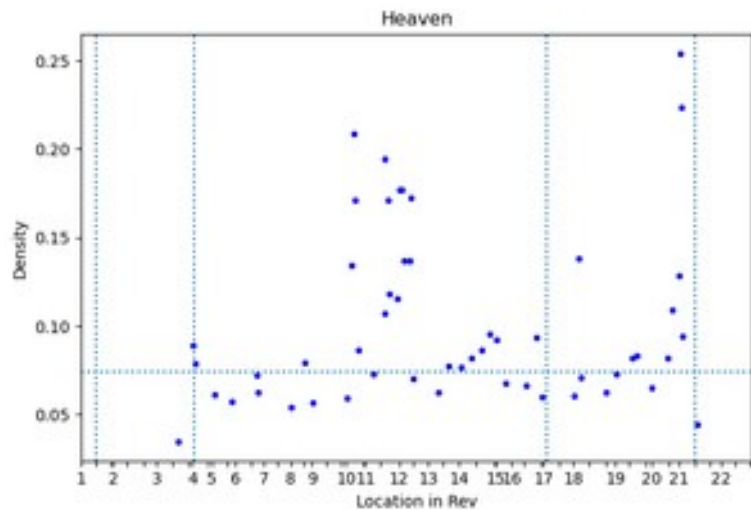


Figure 5: Distribution of "heaven" in the Revelation

We should learn to maintain a heavenly focus in our pilgrimage:³

Col 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

The second difference in perspective is that it includes not only what is going on in John’s era, but also to include “things which must be hereafter.”⁴ The future perspective is not absent in ch. 1-3. The Lord tells both Smyrna (2:10) and Philadelphia (3:10) of future persecution. And the

2 The lack of references to heaven in the first and last sections deserves attention. The first section describes our present life, here on earth, but the ultimate goal of all things in ch. 21-22 also has an earthly focus. As God’s saints, we have access to heaven, but our natural home is always the earth.

3 Compare the Psalmist’s attitude in 73:24, “thou shalt guide me ... and afterward receive me.”

4 See note for discussion of why Beale’s attempt to weaken the futuristic reference of this phrase is inadequate.

past and present are not absent in what follows. Still, the main focus of the rest of the book is series of events yet to come, culminating in the future kingdom of God on earth.

4:2-9 The Setting of the Heavenly Court

2 And immediately I was in the spirit:—This phrase has two functions.

1. Structurally, as the second of its four instances in the book, it reminds us that John is now reporting the second major vision.
2. Doctrinally, it reminds us of the role of the Spirit in instructing, guiding, and comforting us in a confused world (chart).

John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

As we face the challenges that confronted John among the churches of Asia, let us recognize and rely on the work of the Spirit to guide and help us.

and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone:—Repeatedly, when people come into the presence of almighty God, they report the dazzling light of precious stones.

Ex. 24:9 Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: 10 And they saw the God of Israel: and there was **under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone**, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

Ezek. 1:26 And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as **the appearance of a sapphire stone**: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. 27 And I saw as the colour of **amber**, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. 28 As the appearance of **the bow that is in the cloud** in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

The stones are different. In Exodus and Ezekiel, the prophet describes the pavement under the Lord's feet or the throne upon which he sits. Ezekiel goes on to describe the Lord himself as amber, yet another precious stone. John mentions "jasper" (probably our diamond)⁵ and sardine stone (a red stone). Earthly kings like to wear jewels; Almighty God appears as jewels. The overall impression confirms Paul's description,

1 Tim 6:14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: 15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; 16 Who only hath immortality, **dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto**; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Or as John writes elsewhere,

5 See discussion and refs. in Thomas. "Jasper" is clear (21:11), probably our diamond.

1 Jn 1:5 God is **light**, and in him is no darkness at all.

and there was a rainbow⁶ round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.—John’s vision again recalls Ezekiel (1:28), which compares the appearance of the Lord to “the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain.” The rainbow originated in God’s covenant with Noah in Gen 9:13-16, where God promises never again to destroy the world with a flood. It recalls God’s mercy, and thus provides comfort in light of the fearful judgments described later in the book. The word translated “emerald” is probably rock-crystal, which could refract a full spectrum.⁷

4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats [thrones]:—The seats of the elders are called “thrones,” the same word used for the central feature of the sanctuary.

and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting,—These elders are a central feature in ch. 4-5, where they are named 7x, but keep popping up throughout the rest of the book, as commentators or spectators of what is occurring on earth, and finally joining in worship to God when the great whore is destroyed (chart),

Rev. 19:4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

—The details in this verse help us to identify the elders (Table 1, chart). The thrones, white raiment, and crowns are all promised to those who are faithful in the churches. So it seems reasonable to identify these elders as symbolizing believers, seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). But why are there 24?

At the end of the book the number 24 comes up again. We are given a vision of the bride, the lamb’s wife, pictured as the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven. This city has twelve foundations and twelve gates:

Rev. 21:12 [that great city ...] had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of **the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:**

Rev. 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of **the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

The imagery strongly suggests that the lamb’s wife is made up of the saints of the old and new covenants, together. Both groups have major architectural roles in the city, and the number of each is twelve, for a total of 24. Similarly, in the churches of Asia, there would be both Jews and Gentiles who confessed the Lord Jesus and sought to overcome in their Christian lives.⁸

Rev 4:4	Rev 2-3
upon the seats [thrones] I saw four and twenty elders sitting,	3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne , even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. [Laodicea]
clothed in white raiment;	3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment [Sardis]
they had on their heads crowns of gold.	2:10 be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. [Smyrna]

Table 1: The elders and the churches

6 Curiously, ἵρις, not τόξον as throughout the OT. Swete speculates that the difference reflects the complete circle, enclosing the throne. Aune notes, based on Josephus Ant. 1.103, that ἵρις would be more familiar to readers who did not know the LXX, probably the majority of the Christians in Asia Minor.

7 HDB 4:620. Pliny says that Nero had an eye-glass made of this.

8 There may be a connection with Mat 19:28, “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit

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So the 24 elders represent the people of God, the true saints under both covenants, seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).⁹

5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices:—These features characterized the presence of God on top of Mount Sinai (chart):

Ex. 19:16 And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were **thunders** and **lightnings**, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the **voice** of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.

Throughout the OT, these elements characterize the appearance of God on earth to intervene in the affairs of men. A particularly graphic example is David's great psalm of praise, repeated in 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18. He recalls how he called on the Lord in time of trouble:

Psa. 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God:
he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.

Then he describes the coming of the Lord to deliver him.

7 Then the earth shook and trembled;
the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.
8 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils,
and fire out of his mouth devoured:
coals were kindled by it.
9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down:
and darkness was under his feet.
10 And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly:
yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.
11 He made darkness his secret place;
his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.
12 At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed,
hail stones and coals of fire.
13 The LORD also **thundered** in the heavens, and the Highest gave his **voice**;
hail stones and coals of fire.
14 Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them;
and he shot out **lightnings**, and discomfited them.
15 Then the channels of waters were seen,
and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.

By intervening in this way, the Lord delivered him from his calamity:

16 He sent from above, he took me,
he drew me out of many waters.
17 He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me:
for they were too strong for me.
18 They prevented me in the day of my calamity:

upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." But this imagery yields only 12 thrones, not 24.

9 Their identity as believers rather than angels, *pace* Mounce, Beale, Thomas, Beasley-Murray, and others, is confirmed by 5:9, which in the Majority Text, supported by Sinaiticus, reads "redeemed us to God." The objection of Thomas that the church is not a composite of Jew and Gentile seems to miss the point of the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

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but the LORD was my stay.
19 He brought me forth also into a large place;
he delivered me, because he delighted in me.

Since the Lord's appearances on earth are characterized by thunder, lightening, and loud noise, it is not surprising that when John beholds him on his throne, he senses these same characteristics.

This triple indication of the Lord's intervention appears three more times in the Revelation, in the description of the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh bowl:

Rev. 8:5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were **voices**, and **thunderings**, and **lightnings**, and an earthquake.

Rev. 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were **lightnings**, and **voices**, and **thunderings**, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Rev. 16:18 And there were **voices**, and **thunders**, and **lightnings**; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

Each of these is also accompanied by an earthquake. The repetition of these signs is one indication that the three series of judgments end at the same point.

and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.—We have met these seven Spirits before, in John's trinitarian greeting (chart):

Rev. 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from **the seven Spirits which are before his throne**; 5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

The designation, in parallel with the Father and the Son, clearly refers to the Holy Spirit. Of the three persons mentioned in the greeting, so far we have encountered the eternal Father and the Holy Spirit. But why is this Spirit described as seven in number?

We get a hint in the next chapter:

Rev. 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and **seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God** sent forth into all the earth.

That vision in turn draws from Zechariah's vision of the self-fueling lampstand, which our verse (4:5) picks up by picturing the seven-fold Spirit as seven lamps (recall Zech 7:2):

Zec 4:10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with **those seven [lamps]**; they are **the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth**.

The Spirit is described as seven to indicate that he is everywhere, throughout the world, and nothing can escape his searching eye. Four hundred years earlier, David understood that God's Spirit is one way that he is omnipresent in the world:

Psa 139:7 Whither shall I go **from thy spirit**? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. ...

So John beholds the Lord, characterized by the thunder and lightening of his fearful judgment, but also by the rainbow of his mercy, and thoroughly aware of everything that happens throughout his creation because of his seven-fold Spirit.

6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.—The vision continues to recall what Ezekiel saw by the river Chebar (chart). We have already discussed the jewel-like brilliance that both Ezekiel and John saw:

Ezek. 1:4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

But Ezekiel saw something else, too.

Ezek 1:5 Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of **four living creatures**.

We must distinguish the “beasts” of Revelation 4-5 from the satanic beasts that come later: the beast from the bottomless pit (11:7), from the sea (13:1), and from the earth (13:11). The word that describes those beasts is θηρίον G2342, “wild animal.” The word here is ζῷον G2226, “living creature,” and continues to direct our attention to Ezekiel.

Note the parallels between the visions (Table 2, chart).

Ezekiel saw the Lord upon his throne, carried by the cherubim. First he sees it in Babylon, where he is in captivity. Later, in Ezekiel 10, he sees this same throne, borne by cherubim, leaving the temple as the Lord abandons his house that Israel has corrupted with its wickedness. In both passages, the image is of a mobile throne carried by the cherubim. But now John, in heaven, sees the throne stationary, in its rightful place, and the living creatures are

Revelation 4	Ezekiel 1
6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal	22 And the likeness of the firmament ... was as the colour of the terrible crystal , stretched forth over their heads above.
and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts [living creatures]	5 Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures
full of eyes before and behind. [8, full of eyes within]	18 As for their rings [rims], they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.
7 And the first beast was like a lion , and the second beast like a calf , and the third beast had a face as a man , and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle .	10 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man , and the face of a lion , on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle .

Table 2: Comparison of Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1

standing by, like horses in their stable, ready to carry it wherever the Lord may command them.

Thus the throne reminds us of the sovereignty of God, while the living creatures illustrate his immanence, his ability to act anywhere whenever he pleases.

At first, the identity of the four living beings with the cherubim seen by Ezekiel is clear. But the next verse introduces features of another order of angels, the seraphim in Isaiah 6 (chart):

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Is. 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the **seraphims**: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

Table 3 (chart) summarizes the distinctive features of the two classes of beings, and how the creatures in Revelation 4 reflect both of them.

Feature	Cherubim (Ezekiel 1, 10)	Seraphim (Isaiah 6)	Living Creatures (Rev 4-5)
Position	Below the throne	Above the throne	Beside the throne
# Wings	Four	Six	Six
Four Faces	Each creature has all four	Not seen	One per creature
Eyes	Wheel rims full of eyes	Faces covered	Full of eyes
Meaning	Akkadian <i>karabu</i> "to bless" Also called "living creatures"	Burning ones— purifiers	"Living creatures"
Utterance	None	"Holy, holy, holy"	"Holy, holy, holy"

Table 3: What "beasts" did John see?

We should not be surprised to find hybrid angels. Our God delights to mix and match features in his creation. Before Europeans first visited Australia, they thought that all swans are white, but there they found black swans (Figure 6). Similarly, biologists thought that laying eggs (like birds and reptiles) was mutually exclusive with nursing the young (mammals), until they encountered, again in Australia, the platypus (Figure 7), which lays and hatches eggs, then nurses the babies. There's no reason that God's design of the angels is any less creative. And we will shortly hear a hymn by the elders that focuses precisely on God's creative power. They are praising the God of the Platypus.

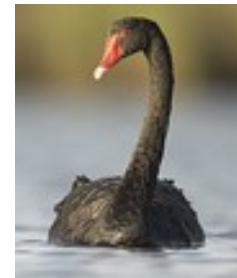


Figure 6: Australian black swan. By JJ Harrison (<https://www.jjharrison.com.au/>) - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=90332421>

8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him;—Six wings rather than four is characteristic of the seraphim

and they were full of eyes within:—This feature, mentioned also in v. 6, recalls the cherubim, who see all around them so as to direct the chariot.

Now both the living creatures and the elders offer praise. In both cases, tit consists of an assertion about the one who sits on the throne, and a reason for that assertion, and the themes of the two are closely linked (Table 4, chart). Compare and contrast both components.

and they rest not day and night,—This expression appears elsewhere in the Greek Bible only at the end of the discussion of the satanic actors in ch. 12-14, which introduces the seven vials just as chapters 4-5 introduce the seven seals.



Figure 7: Platypus. Frederick Polydore Nodder, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Rev. 14:11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and **they have no rest day nor night**, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

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“Rest” in both passages (ἀνάπαυσις G372) is the end of a task.¹⁰ What task is in view?

“Smoke” καπνός G2586 appears 12x in the Revelation. The first instance, 8:4, is incense offered by an angel, ascending to God along with the prayers of the saints, in the opening of the seventh seal. Other than 15:8 (the smoke that fills the temple from the glory of the Lord, the Shekinah cloud), all the others are the smoke of judgment. Perhaps this smoke is the involuntary worship offered by the servants of the Beast, as Paul anticipates in Philippians 2:

Phil. 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and **things under the earth**; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Thus what persists for ever is their torment, viewed as worship they are compelled to offer to the Lord. The satanic host, like the heavenly host, will be constantly involved in worship to God.¹¹

Here in Revelation 4, we are concerned only with worship by the heavenly host. We hear two hymns, one from the living creatures, the other from the elders (Table 4, chart).

saying,—The living creatures begin as do the seraphim in Isaiah 6 (Table 5).

Holy, holy, holy,—Both groups declare God’s holiness. To be holy is to be separate or distinctive, and God as the creator is absolutely distinct from everything else that we encounter. The threefold repetition emphasizes this character.¹² We might say, “Very, very holy” or “absolutely holy.” Compare other triplets in the Bible:

Rev 8:13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, **Woe, woe, woe**, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

In this case, the triplet is reinforced by the last three trumpets, which are called “woes,” and which in fact are the final and saddest of the judgments declared by the Lord.

Jer 22:29 O **earth, earth, earth**, hear the word of the LORD

All the earth is summoned to hear God’s judgment against the king Jeconiah.

Ezek 21:17 I will **overturn, overturn, overturn**, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.

	Living Creatures	Elders
Praise	The Lord is Holy	The Lord is Worthy to receive glory and honor ...
Motivation	Person: Eternal	Works: Creates all
Cross-Reference	9 give glory and honor and thanks to him that liveth for ever and ever	10 him that liveth for ever and ever

Table 4: Links between the hymns of Revelation 4

Isa 6:3	Rev 4:8
Holy, holy, holy,	Holy, holy, holy,
is the LORD of hosts:	Lord God Almighty,
the whole earth is full of his glory.	which was, and is, and is to come

Table 5: Comparing Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4

¹⁰ A different word, ἀνεσις G425, describes release from suffering or oppression. See Trench, *Synonyms* xli. But John nowhere uses ἀνεσις, so he may not be sensitive to the distinction.

¹¹ Compare Isa 66:23-24, which predicts that viewing the sufferings of the damned will be part of our eternal worship. That eternal torment magnifies the righteous judgments of God.

¹² Hengstenberg compares Ps 99:3, 5, 9.

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The Lord promises utter destruction to Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar.

Lord God Almighty,—This is the most common LXX rendering for the Hebrew “Lord of Hosts,” shifting attention from his armies to the power they represent (chart). But the LXX of Isa 6:3 simply transliterates Hebrew “hosts,” (κυριος) σαβαωτ (see note). The shift is a happy one. “Hosts” in the Hebrew title is the hosts of Israel,¹³ a place now taken by a union of Jew and Gentile.

which was, and is, and is to come.—This expression is truly distinct from Isaiah 6. There, he is declared thrice holy because he extends through all space (“the whole earth is full of thy glory”). Here, it is his existence through all time that is in focus, expressed in a phrase from 1:4, 8 that describes the Father in a trinitarian context (chart).¹⁴

Rev. 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; 5 And from Jesus Christ, [cf. 1:8]

Though the hymn deviates from Isaiah 6, a later verse in Isaiah combines holiness and eternity:

Isa 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that **inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy**; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

The Lord assures Isaiah that, though he is Holy (separated) and unconstrained by time, yet he devotes himself to the care of his contrite and humble people. That is precisely the message that we need, living in the world that the Revelation envisions—a humble people, poor in the eyes of the world, persecuted by Satan, but under God’s watchful care.

9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,—This summary of the angel’s praise shows that they are obeying David’s exhortation in Psalm 29, where “give glory and strength” is explained as “worship” (29:2b). Repetition of the phrase “glory and honor” in 4:11 reminds us that the elders are following a similar exhortation in Psalm 96 (Table 6). Putting these in a table calls our attention to their similarity and a few differences, which are instructive.

Psa 29:1-2	Psa 96:7-9
Psa. 29:1 Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty [sons of gods = angels, Gen 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7],	7 Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the peopleS ,
give unto the LORD glory and strength. [LXX glory & honor]	give unto the LORD glory and strength. [LXX glory & honor]
2 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name;	8 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name:
	bring an offering, and come into his courts.
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.	9 O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness:
	fear before him, all the earth.

*Table 6: Angels and Elders fulfilling Psalms 29 and 96 (differences in **bold**)*

13 The OT uses the plural only of armies, specifically the armies (tribes) of Israel; the first instance is Exo 12:41, “all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.” Angels and heavenly bodies are always singular.

14 The order of the first two terms is reversed between 1:4, 8 and 4:8. Moffatt suggests that this anticipates the emphasis in 4:11 on the past creation: “Thou wast there at the beginning, and art now, and shalt come.”

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- Both psalms speak of “giving” various attributes to God. Their context clarifies the meaning of this expression: it refers to worshipping God, offering praise to him. We might say, “ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength,” declare that he is glorious.
- Both psalms speak of “glory and strength,” which the LXX renders “glory and honor.” “Strength” is a more common translation of נָצַח H5797, but the LXX uses “honor” τιμή G5092 in these two places (and also in Ps 99:4, three of the 79 occurrences of the Hebrew word).¹⁵
- Psalm 29 is addressed to “sons of God,” an expression used elsewhere of angels, while Psalm 96 is addressed to people. “Peoples” is plural, including Gentiles.
- 96:9b emphasizes this call to the Gentiles by adding an exhortation to “all the earth.”
- The people are invited to “come into his courts,” but the “sons of God” receive no such invitation, because they already have access to the heavenly courts (Job 1, 2).

These are two Psalms that the people of God do well to keep in mind in the face of the kind of persecution that we have already seen in Revelation 2-3, and whose sources are revealed in Revelation 6-18. Both of them emphasize the sovereignty of God over his enemies, and his ultimate righteous judgment of the world (chart).

Psa 29:10 The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, **the LORD sitteth King for ever.**

11 The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

Psa 96:4 For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. ...

10 Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. ...

13 ... **he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness,** and the people with his truth.

10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship—

Throughout the Bible, the verbs “fall down” (נָפַל H5307 or קָרַע H6915, LXX πίπτω G4098) and “worship” (שָׁחָה H7812,¹⁶ LXX προσκυνέω G4352) occur together 35x, always in this order. The first emphasizes the physical posture; the second the attitude of the heart, as seen in its frequent amplification with verbal content (Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam 25:23-24;¹⁷ 2 Sam 14:4, 22; 2 Chr 7:3; Job 1:21 LXX; Matt 18:26; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 4:10, 7:11-12, 11:16-17, 19:4). The verb “worship” in Psalm 29 and 96 summarizes their praise and offerings to the Lord, not just their posture.

him that liveth for ever and ever,—Repetition of this phrase from 4:9 is the first of three links between the two hymns.

and cast their crowns before the throne,—Psa 96:8 tells them to “bring an offering,” so they give him the most valuable possession they have. But as we have seen, these crowns are themselves gifts from God (as promised to the faithful in Smyrna, 2:10). Their offering reflects David’s words when he dedicated his wealth to the construction of a temple in Jerusalem,

15 See note. Vocabulary correspondences like these are accessible to the reader who does not know Greek by using the Apostolic Bible Project, an English translation of the LXX and NT keyed to Greek Strong’s numbers, available as a free module in e-Sword.

16 Strong reports the root of this verb as שָׁחָה. We now know from cognates that the form is a *shaphel*, used only with this verb, of חָוָה.

17 Note parallel between נָפַל וְהִשְׁתַּחוּהוּ in 23 and נָפַל וְאָמַר in 24.

1Ch 29:14 But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord [our Lord and God, the Holy One],—In the Majority Text, the elders echo the angels not only in declaring God’s eternity, but also in acknowledging him as “the holy one.”

to receive [the] glory and [the] honour and [the] power:¹⁸—The praise that they offer the Lord recalls the description of what the angels offered, but with three changes.

1. In Greek, each of the nouns is preceded by the article: “the glory and the honor and the power.” They are referring to the praise that the angels have already offered, a third link between the two hymns together (after “liveth for ever” and “Holy One”).
2. The elders add the word “power.” We saw that “glory and honor” echoes the LXX in Ps 29:1 and 96:7, but that the Hebrew word that the LXX here renders “honor” is much more often translated “power” or “might.” Here the elders add on this more common translation, bringing out the meaning of the underlying Hebrew Psalms. The theme of God’s power is also in keeping with their focus on his creative activity.
3. They also omit the word “thanksgiving.” This omission may reflect the fact that ch. 4 focuses entirely on the Father and the Spirit, and has not yet introduced the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. Until we learn of that, creatures who are aware of their sin can praise him, but not thank him. Their thanksgiving here is entirely focused on what he has done with and for others. Not until 5:8-12 do they sing of what he has done for them.

for thou hast created all things,—The angels praise the Lord for his eternal person (who he is); the elders praise him for his work (what he does), and in particular for his work of creation. We are reminded of the complexity we have already seen in the orders of angels, echoed in the physical creation.

and for thy pleasure—This phrase is literally διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου, “because of thy will.”¹⁹ Cf. Nebuchadnezzar’s confession,

Dan. 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth **according to his will**²⁰ in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

God’s creative act, like everything he does, is not compelled or subject to approval by anyone else. He is absolutely sovereign.

they are and were created.—The combination of the present and past tenses has been confusing, and led to numerous variations in the text, but Paul tells us (speaking specifically of Christ),

Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Our God did not just set the world spinning and then walk away. Because of his pleasure it continues to hold together

18 Only here and in 21:26 do we find “the glory and the honor.”

19 The KJV rendering reflects the distinction that one can sometimes discern between √θελω (choice driven by desire or pleasure) and √βουλοω (rational, deliberative choice).

20 The verse is lacking in the old LXX. Theodotian would later (2nd century) translate, in Dan 4:35, κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ.

So the focus of the praise by the elders is on God’s creative work. They worship the God of the Platypus.

The parallels between the praise offered by the elders and that of the angels is instructive for our corporate worship. The elders align their praise to that which has already been offered. So, as we bring our offerings to the Lord under the guidelines of 1 Cor 14:26, we should be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading, taking into account what has already been shared.

What is missing in ch. 4? We have seen direct references to two of the three persons named in the greeting of 1:4-5: the Father (“which is, and was, and is to come,” 4:8) and the sevenfold Spirit (5b) (Table 7, chart). We should be asking ourselves, “What has become of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus?” The One who pervades chapters 1-3 on earth has suddenly gone missing in heaven. Chapter 4 began with the trumpet-like voice of Christ (4:1, cf. 1:10) inviting John to “come up hither,” but when John comes up, Christ is nowhere to be seen.

Chapter 5 is devoted to answering that question.

Table 7: Who is Missing in Revelation 4?

Revelation 1	Revelation 4
4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace,	
from him which is, and which was, and which is to come;	8 And the four beasts ... rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.
and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;	5 and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne , which are the seven Spirits of God.
5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.	

5:1-14, The Book and its Master²¹

The chapter has four sections, each introduced by καὶ εἶδον G1492 (translated “and I saw” or “and I beheld”).

1, I saw ... a book

5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne—Literally, “upon the right hand.” God does not grasp the scroll to prevent people from receiving it. It is there for anyone to pick up. Alford: “The lying on the open hand imports, that on God’s part there was no withholding of His future purposes as contained in this book.” But there is a problem.

a book written—Literally, “having been written.” The perfect tense of the verb means that the things in the book are determined already. God’s judgments are not forced from him after the fact by our sin. He planned the entire drama from the first (a great comfort for his suffering people).

There may be a more specific reference. 700 years earlier, when Daniel asked for the meaning of his last vision, he was told that its interpretation was shut up and sealed until the end (chart):

Dan. 12:4 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. ... 8 And I heard, but I

²¹ This is a favorite phrase in the Revelation, which first peaks in ch. 5 (Figure 4, chart).

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understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? 9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

The sealed scroll may be this promised interpretation. God promised Daniel that the book would be sealed “till the time of the end.” That time has now come, and the book is about to be opened.

within and on the backside,—This clause, together with the location of the scroll on God’s hand, call to mind the vision that Ezekiel saw when God called him to his ministry.

Eze 2:9 And when I looked, behold, an **hand** was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; 10 And he spread it before me; and it was written **within and without**: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

Scrolls were made of thin strips cut from the papyrus plant, laid at right angles to each other. It was much easier to write on the side where the strips ran horizontally than where they were vertical, so it was customary to write only on one side. The writing on the outside may suggest that the scroll was full to overflowing, or that a brief summary of the contents was written on the outside. But the main point of the notice is to establish the link to Ezekiel.

sealed with seven seals.—Ezekiel’s scroll was opened for him to read, but the scroll that John sees is sealed, consistent with Daniel’s vision. The seals have at least three functions (chart).

First, a seal makes the contents of the document inaccessible. We expect from 4:1 (“I will show thee things which must be hereafter”) that the scroll has to do with future events, but God reserves for himself the knowledge of his future purposes. This was the purpose for which God told Daniel to seal the book:

Dan. 12:4 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. . . . 8 And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? 9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Rom 11:33 O the depth of the riches
and of the wisdom
and knowledge of God!

how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? [knowledge]

or who hath been his counsellor? [wisdom]

35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? [riches]

Second, a seal clearly identifies the one writer of the document, like a modern signature.

1Kings 21:8 So [Jezebel] wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and **sealed them with his seal**, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth.

Third, a seal warns against tampering. Anyone who breaks it must answer to the one who has sealed it.

Dan. 6:17 And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king **sealed** it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Matt. 27:66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, **sealing** the stone, and setting a watch.

There is a great deal of speculation on the contents of the scroll, based mostly on extra-biblical parallels: is it the title deed to the universe? the marriage covenant of the Lamb? The will of the crucified Savior, or of the martyred saints? A bill of divorce against Jerusalem? Some think it is the Lamb's book of life, or the OT.

It may be helpful to recall the typology of books associated with God in the Bible that we studied when we discussed the "book of life" in 3:5 (Table 8, chart). John was invited into heaven to learn "things which must be hereafter," and the parallel scrolls of Daniel and Ezekiel describe coming events and judgments. Ezek 2:9 in particular describes "lamentations and mourning and woe." So it seems most natural to expect similar contents in this scroll, fitting the category of a book of divine decrees, and this will be confirmed as we see later references to it.

	Past Facts	Future Purposes
People's Actions	1. Record Book (OT, NT)	2. Book of Decrees (OT, NT)
People's States	3. Book of the Living (OT)	4. Book of Life (NT, maybe OT)

Table 8: Categories of God's Books

The idea that the bad things that will happen to this earth are already known to God should be a great comfort to us. However dark the times may be, he is in control, working all things according to the counsel of his own will (Eph 1:11).

How is the scroll sealed?

1. Most commentators (e.g., Swete, Mounce, Thomas)²² understand that as each seal is broken, another portion of the scroll is read, leading to the judgments of chapter 6. But this would require a method of sealing unknown in the ancient world, and we will see that the judgments of chapter 6 are not in fact sealed from knowledge, for the Lord Jesus already revealed them in Matthew 24 (see note)!
2. It would be more in keeping with sealed scrolls known from the ancient world for all of the seals to be on the outside, so that nothing in the book can be read until all are opened, a position advocated by Alford and supported by Bauckham, Osborne, Plummer, and Gundry. The judgments reflect the breaking of the seals, not the contents of the scroll. The contents of the scroll come later, after chapter 10, when the scroll, now unsealed, appears again.

2-5, I saw a strong angel

2 And I saw a strong angel, proclaiming with a loud voice,—There are three references to "a strong angel" ἄγγελος ἰσχυρός in the Greek Bible, all in the Revelation (chart):

- This one announces the sealed book
- A different one (ἄλλος) brings John the unsealed book in 10:1-2
- One casts a stone into the sea in 18:21, symbolizing the destruction of Babylon.

His strength probably enables the loudness of his cry, which is intended to be heard by all creation. Compare

Rev 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and **to every nation, and kindred, and tongue,**

²² I have previously advocated this position.

and people, 7 Saying with a **loud voice**, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?—The angel’s loud cry searches all of creation for someone with the credentials to open and read the book. His search discovers two reasons that the seals cannot be opened.

3 And no man one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.—The first reason is that no one is *able* [δύναμαι G1410], that is, no one has the power.

“No man” is actually “no one.” The search is not limited to humans. The three divisions, mentioned again in v. 13, recall Paul:

Phil. 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

“Things under the earth” would be a reference to hades, the place of departed spirits (Ps 63:9), and the abyss (ἄβυσσος G12), where the satanic hosts dwell (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 20:1, 3), always represented as below the earth, a place to which one descends. Thus the Lord, in forbidding idols, mentions this realm to exclude the worship of demons:

Exod 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

In all of creation, no being is found—no angel, no demon, no man alive or deceased—who has the authority to break or “loose” the seals, 5:2.

4 And I wept much, because no man one was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.—The second reason is that no one is *worthy*. A vignette from our Lord’s earthly ministry shows how serious this lack is. He proclaimed John the Baptist as the greatest of the saints under the old covenant:

Mat 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:

Yet when it came to loosing things, the Baptist was conscious that not only sacred scrolls, but things far more humble were above his qualifications. He said

Mar 1:7 There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am **not worthy to stoop down and unloose**.²³

The greatest OT saint was unworthy to loose even the sandal thongs of the Lord Jesus. How much less worthy would he be to open these ties, and set loose God’s judgments on the earth, even though his ministry was one of warning of those judgments (Matt 3:10).

John of the Revelation (the apostle, not the Baptist) wept at this realization. He ascended to heaven to learn of “things to come,” and now it appears that the document that contains this information, that has been sealed since the time of Daniel, is to remain inaccessible.

5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not:—But encouragement comes from one of the saints in heaven. (Often a saint can give encouragement when even an angel cannot. We should be alert to opportunities to encourage and comfort one another.)

23 ἄξιός + infinitive, as in Acts 13:25 MT and Revelation 5. John 1:27 uses ἄξιός ἵνα.

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The elder claims that someone is able to open the scroll. A human believer discovers what the angel cannot recognize. He introduces this person with two titles from the OT (chart):

behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda,—The first is from Jacob’s blessing on his sons. Of Judah and his descendants, he said,

Gen 49:9 **Judah is a lion's whelp**: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? 10 **The sceptre shall not depart from Judah**, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Judah was to be the royal tribe, as Levi was the priestly tribe. “Shiloh” has various exegetical interpretations, but all align on the Messiah, which is made explicit in the Jewish Targums. So here is encouragement for John: Perhaps the Messianic king, whose glory and power he saw in ch. 1, can open the scroll. But where is he? So far he is missing in John’s description of the heavenly court.

the Root of David,—Isaiah promised that a branch would spring out of the root of Jesse.

Isa 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

Again, the Jewish Targums agree with Christian interpreters that the reference is to the Messiah. This image of the Messiah as a branch is a continuing theme through the prophets (Jer 23:5, Jer 33:15, Zec 3:8, Zec 6:12). But Isaiah also drew the attention of the people to something distinct from the branch: the root from which it springs:

Isa 11:10 And in that day there shall be **a root of Jesse**, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

If the branch is the Messiah, the root must be the one from whom he springs. Our Lord will go on to claim to fulfill both of these promises:

Rev 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am **the root and the offspring of David**, and the bright and morning star.

Compare the paradox with which the Lord confounded the Pharisees,

Mat 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? 45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

Certainly King Messiah, the one who is both David’s son and David’s Lord, is authorized to open the seals, and the elder continues:

hath prevailed νικάω G3528 to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.—

“Prevail” is the word translated “overcome” in ch. 2-3, and means “to be victorious.” We noted that the book remained closed because no one was either able or worthy to open it. These OT promises address the problem of ability. Later, 5:9 will address the question of worthiness.

Νικάω is one of John’s favorite words (chart): of the 28 instances in the NT, 17 are in the Revelation, six in 1 John, and one in John, in the verse that we have discerned as the theme of the Revelation:

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John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have **overcome** the world.

We have already heard once that the Lord Jesus has prevailed, in enduring the cross:

Rev. 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as **I also overcame**, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

We will hear this a third time, at the final battle:

Rev 17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall **overcome** them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

All of these emphasize the power of the Lord Jesus in spiritual combat, and respond to the angel's finding that "no one was able to open the book" (5:3).

In the Revelation, the Lord overcomes three times. In the middle of the book, the forces of evil seem more powerful, for they overcome, with God's permission, four times. But the most common overcomers are the saints, who are said to overcome 10x, including the first and last instances of the verb in the book (Figure 8, chart, see notes).

With this introduction, John is prepared at last to see the missing person from chapter 4, the glorious exalted Lord Jesus, come and open the scroll. He looks, and what does he see?

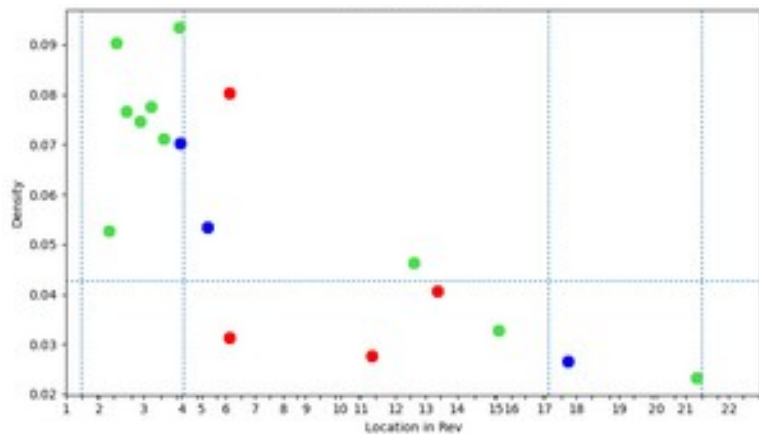


Figure 8: νικάω G3528 in Revelation. **Blue** = Christ (3x), **Red** = evil (4x), **Green** = believers (10x)

5:6-10, I beheld ... a Lamb

6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain,—John's expression recalls the exhortation of the Baptist, which he had recorded in his gospel (chart):

John 1:29 (cf. 36) The next day John [the Baptist] seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb** of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.²⁴

In the Revelation, John often calls the Lord Jesus "the Lamb." He uses the term ἀρνίον G721, a diminutive of the more common ἀρνήν G704 (37x in the Greek Bible, coded as ἀρνός in Rahlfs). Even more common is ἀμνός G286 (105x), the word in John 1:29. ἀρνίον appears 29x in the Revelation, but only five other times in the rest of the Greek Bible. It emphasizes his apparent weakness—not just a lamb, but a little lamb, one that seems to need special care. The first time that the risen Lord asks Peter to "feed my lambs" (John 21:15), this is the word he uses, the only other use in the NT.

24 "Behold" in John 1:29 is from the same verb (εἶδον) that appears as the suppletive aorist of ὁράω in Rev 5:6.

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We will need to pay special attention to the four distinct peaks of this word in the book (Figure 9). The first peak, ch. 5, shows him as able and worthy to open the scroll.

In John's gospel, the first appearance of the man Jesus on earth is introduced as "the Lamb ἀμνός of God," with a role that requires him to be a sacrifice for sin. In the Revelation, when the Lord Jesus appears on earth (ch. 1), he is glorified. But when we first see him in heaven, it is as the slain lamb. He is exalted to the right hand of the Father because he was "obedient unto death," and in heaven he forever bears the marks of his passion. Recall that after his resurrection, when he revealed himself to Thomas, his body retained these marks:

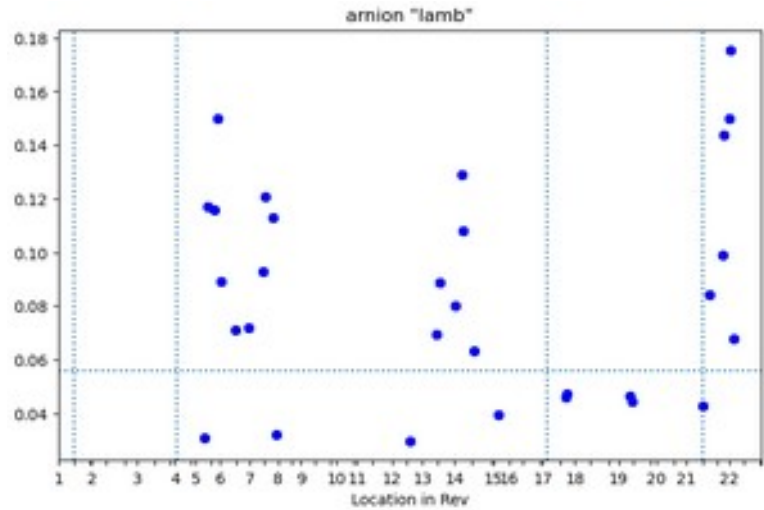


Figure 9: ἀρνίον G721 "lamb" in Revelation

John 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

The lamb is not only slain; it is standing. The Savior has not only died, but also risen again. This victory over death is part of what qualifies him to open the book and set loose God's judgments on the world. Recall the two obstacles that prevent anyone so far from opening the book: no one is worthy (5:2, 4), and no one is able (5:3). The proclamation of the elder, "the Lion ... has prevailed," addresses the obstacle of being able, of having sufficient power. The evidence of his power is that the lamb, though slain, stands. Who can withstand the judgment of one who has overcome death? Paul makes this argument to the Athenians:

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which **he will judge the world** in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that **he hath raised him from the dead**.

In addition to the paradox of standing though slain, the Lamb has two distinctive features that emphasize his ability to bring judgment. Both are seven-fold, reminding us of the extensive use of this number (56x in Revelation, out of 89 in the NT) to indicate completeness.

having seven horns—An animal's horn in the OT represents its power. David calls the Lord "my horn" along side other emblems of strength (chart):

Ps 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the **horn** of my salvation, and my high tower.

An animal with seven horns would have all power. No one can stand against the judgment that this Lamb will bring.

But power alone is not sufficient to judge. So is an understanding of the facts of the case, and the Lamb bears this qualification as well:

and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.—We have seen this seven-fold Spirit before, in 1:4 and in the lamps before the divine throne in 4:5. We saw that the imagery comes from Zech 4:10, “the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” This lamb not only has complete power to judge, he also has complete knowledge of the relevant facts.

7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.—With his ability to judge thus established, he claims the book.

8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb,—It is important to distinguish this clause from the next. Here, both the living creatures and the elders fall down in worship.

having every one of them [masculine, the elders, not the living creatures]—Now John focuses on the elders. The shift is clear in Greek. Greek, like French, Latin, Spanish, Italian, German, and many other languages, but unlike English, uses gender not only as a biological marker, but also as a grammatical one. For example, in French, *la maison* “house” is feminine, while *le bâtiment* “building” is masculine. In these languages, pronouns, adjectives, and participles must agree with their nouns in gender as well as in number. “A lovely house” can be *une maison belle* or *un bâtiment beau*, where *belle* and *beau* are two forms of the adjective “lovely,” one for masculine nouns and one for feminine. In this verse, “living creature” is neuter, but “elder” is masculine. The participle “having” and the pronoun “every one” are masculine, showing that they refer to the elders, not to the living creatures.

So now we are told of the distinctive equipment of the elders.

harps,—They need the harps because (5:9) they are about to sing.

Contrary to much popular art, the angels do not have harps. Only the elders do, consistent with the observation that throughout the Bible, only people sing. Angels are often said to speak (4:8; 5:12; Job 38:7²⁵), but they never sing. Music is a special gift that God has given to man, and we should use it to his glory.²⁶

and golden vials full of odours [incense],—They are also equipped with bowls full of incense (like the gold spoons full of incense brought by the princes of Israel in Numbers 7 to furnish the Tabernacle). In the OT, this fragrant composition was burned on a special altar in the holy place, right before the Holy of Holies (Figure 10, chart).²⁷

Consider how this daily offering of incense ranks in terms of proximity to the Lord.

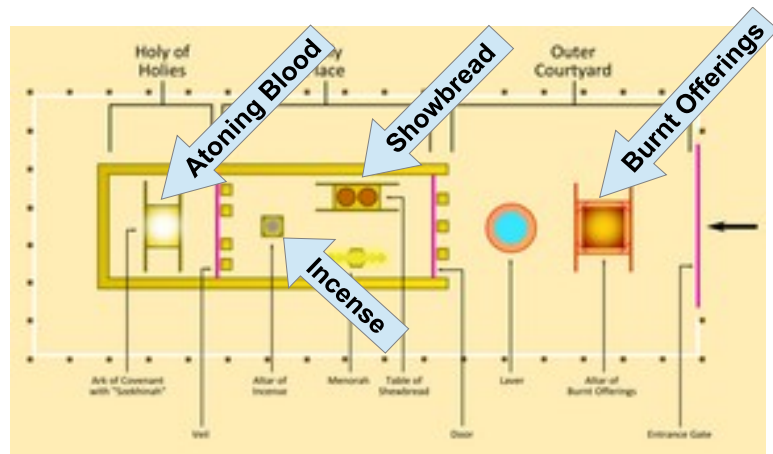


Figure 10: Diagram of the Jewish Tabernacle. Adik86, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

25 The morning stars in Job 38:7 are probably to be understood literally. See the next note.

26 AV sometimes represents the physical creation as singing: the morning stars (Job 38:7), the trees of the forest (1 Chr 16:33); pastures and valleys (Ps 65:13)1 (compare Ps 96:11-12; 98:7-8; Lk 19:40). Of these, only Ps 65:13 uses שיר H7892; the others use רגן H7442, which LXX never translates with a word for singing, but rather with words for joy, εὐφραίνω G2165 or ἀγαλλιάομαι G21. See note.

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- Most animal sacrifices were made at the brazen altar in the outer courtyard. This would include the offering of the passover lambs.
- In the holy place, the showbread on the north side, changed weekly (Lev 24:5-8) was closer than the brazen altar.
- The closest piece of furniture to the ark of the covenant was the golden altar, where the priests offered incense each day (Exod 30:7, 8).
- Only the blood of the day of atonement came closer to the Lord, and that only once a year.

Thus the incense was the frequent offering that the Lord ordained to be closest to him, suggesting that it brings him special pleasure.

which are the prayers of saints.—David recognized that incense symbolizes prayer (chart):

Ps 141:2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

This verse invites two comments.

First, we should respond to the use of this verse by Roman Catholics to show that “the saints in heaven offer up before the throne of the Divine Majesty the prayers of the faithful.”²⁸ But there is no evidence elsewhere in Scripture for this mediatorial role of departed saints.²⁹ There is, however, evidence that the departed saints themselves offer their own prayers:

Rev 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

It is most consistent with the context to see the elders, representative of the people of God, bringing incense in the form of prayer to God—their own prayers.

Second, the comparison of prayer with incense underlines the vital importance of corporate prayer in the life of the church. It is one of the four basic activities of the early church:

Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in **prayers**.

When Paul is instructing Timothy in principles concerning the local church, he begins,

1Ti 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, **first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks**, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

The prayers that we bring to God are the incense before the holy of holies—closer to him than the blood shed on the brazen altar. It is a special delight to our great God when his children acknowledge their dependence on him and call on him for help. He is not a begrudging father

27 It is important to distinguish between θυμίαμα G2368, as here (from Hebrew קטרר H7004), and λίβανος G3030, “frankincense” (Hebrew לבונה H3828). The latter was often applied to burnt offerings on the brazen altar, as well as to the showbread, but the former is only offered on the golden altar in the holy place. See note.

28 Haydock, G. L. (1859). Haydock’s Catholic Bible Commentary (Re 5:7–8). Edward Dunigan and Brother.

29 Ott (p. 340) cites Rev 8:3, but that verse can also be understood as describing two independent offerings, one by the angel and another by the saints. Ott’s other references are from the Apocrypha (2 Mac 15:11-16; Tob 12:12).

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who reluctantly makes time to hear our petitions. Rather, he is eager to hear from us, and takes pleasure when we confess our helplessness, recognize his power, and plead for his help.

Psa 50:15 ... call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

In fact, he may withhold a blessing that we could otherwise enjoy simply because we do not ask him for it:

Jas 5:2 Ye have not, because ye ask not.

The “prayer meeting” in most churches is the least well attended meeting, and some evangelical churches have replaced it with “midweek Bible study.” It ought to be precious to us, for it is precious to God. Recall his prophecy for this age in Malachi:

Mal 1:11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place **incense shall be offered unto my name**, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

Sometimes we have been discouraged that our gathering here is so small and weak, but a brother reminded us of this verse in Malachi. God desires that Gentiles should worship him “in every place,” and central in that worship is the incense of godly prayer. Let us resolve to delight his heart together by gathering for prayer.

9 And they sung a new song,—Here in heaven John hears the elders with harps sing a new song. Later, back on earth, he will hear that new song echoing from heaven (chart).

Rev. 14:1 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. 2 And I heard a **voice [sound] from heaven**, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of **harpers harping with their harps**: 3 **And they sung as it were a new song before the throne**, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Note the links to the present description: harps, being played in heaven, singing a “new song.”

We will shortly study the contents of this new song. But first, we should remember from our studies in the Psalms that the “new song” is a recurring theme there. Four Psalms exhort us collectively (plural imperatives) to sing a new song (שִׁיר חָדָשׁ H7892 H2318) to the Lord (Psa. 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1), echoed in Isa 42:10, while in two more David reports that he is singing a new song (Psa. 40:4 [ET v3]; 144:9). David was devoted to composing new songs, but how can he command the people collectively to sing a new song? Some of us can’t even carry a tune. How can we be expected to compose new works?

The frequent repetition of this expression suggests that it calls our attention to a specific kind of Psalm. The LXX translates the Hebrew expression שִׁיר חָדָשׁ in several different ways.³⁰ The Greek word used in the Revelation (ᾠδή G5603) is used only in Ps 144:9, suggesting that John has this Psalm in mind in using this expression. That Psalm promises a “new song” in response to a work of God’s deliverance:

Psa 144:5 Bow thy heavens, O LORD, and come down: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.

6 Cast forth lightning, and scatter them: shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them.

30 ὕμνος G5215 (Isa 42:10), ᾠσμα G779.1 (33:3; 40:4; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1); ᾠδή G5603 (144:9)

7 Send thine hand from above; **rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;**

8 Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

9 **I will sing a new song** unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee.

Psalm 40 makes the same point, that a new song is the appropriate response when God has brought us out of trouble:

Psa 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

2 **He brought me up also out of an horrible pit**, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

3 And **he hath put a new song in my mouth**, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

That is exactly the kind of song that we are about to hear—thanksgiving to the Lamb for redeeming them to God. It may be a song that others have sung before, but because it celebrates a new deliverance, it is for each of us a new song, one that we could not have sung before we were delivered.

Contrast the worship they utter in 4:11, praising him for creation—that might be called an old song, and worthy to be sung (though in fact the text only says that they spoke it).³¹ But here they are celebrating their personal deliverance.

saying,³² **Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof:**—In 5:3-4, the scroll remained closed because no one was *able* (that is, powerful enough) and *worthy* to open it. The elders answer the question of ability in 5:5 (“hath prevailed”), and now turn to that of *worthiness* (Figure 11, chart) with three statements about what the Lord has done and one on the consequences of his work.

Rev. 5:3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was **able** to open the book, neither to look thereon.

Rev. 5:4 And I wept much, because no man was found **worthy** to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

Rev. 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath **prevailed** to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Rev. 5:9 And [the elders] sung a new song, saying, Thou art **worthy** to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Rev. 5:11 ... many angels, and the living creatures and the elders ... 12 Saying with a loud voice, **Worthy** is the Lamb that was slain to receive **power**, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Figure 11: Two qualifications to open the scroll of judgment

The pronouns in the MT show an interesting variation. “Us” in 5:9 must be the elders, but MT’s “them” and “they” in 5:10 suggests a response from the living creatures (Figure 12, chart). If this is so, we see here the redeemed leading the worship in heaven. Our experience of forgiveness and redemption gives us an understanding of the most essential characteristics of God (Exod 34:6), his mercy, grace, and steadfast loyal love. Angels, who have never sinned and been forgiven, cannot fully appreciate these wonderful attributes, as Peter reminds us:

31 When it first happened, according to AV, “the morning stars sang together” (Job 38:7), though the verb used there (רנן H7442) refers to a joyful shout and is nowhere in the LXX translated musically (see note).

32 It is tempting to see in the contrast of ᾄδω and λέγω references to the elders and living creatures, respectively, corresponding to the shift in pronouns in the text that follows. More likely, though, the combination of verbs, also in 15:3, is suggested by Exod 15:1, the only other place in the Greek Bible where λέγοντες follows ᾄδω.

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1Pe 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of **the grace that should come unto you**: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand **the sufferings of Christ**, and the glory that should follow. 12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; **which things the angels desire to look into.**

KJV	Majority of Mss	Likely Speakers
9 Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and [thou] hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;		Elders ("they sang ...")
10 And [thou] hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.	10 And [thou] hast made them unto our God kings and priests: and they shall reign on the earth.	Living creatures ("... saying ...")

Figure 12: Believers leading the worship in heaven

First, we hear the song of the elders:

for thou wast slain,—After the introduction of the Lion and Root in 5:5, we are shocked in 5:6 to see a slain lamb, an apparent symbol not of victory but of defeat. 5:6 adds that he is standing, his resurrection demonstrating his *ability* to judge. But now, in commenting on his *worthiness*, the focus is on his death, the very aspect of his appearance that seems most surprising in 5:6.

Note the verb “slain” (σφάζω G4969, “to slaughter”) (chart, see note). Eight of its ten NT instances are in the Revelation, four times describing the Lamb (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8), twice the martyrs (6:9; 18:24), and twice others (6:4; 13:3). The other two NT instances are also by John:

1John 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and **slew** his brother. And wherefore **slew** he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.

This parallel reminds us that our Lord, like Abel, died as a righteous person at the hand of wicked men who were jealous to preserve their own prerogatives.

The verb is more common in the OT, especially Leviticus (39x), describing the death of sacrificial animals. Exodus uses it of the passover offering (12:6, 21).

Let’s meditate on the logic here: “Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain.” The Lord’s resurrection makes him *able* to open the book of judgment (5:5-6), for no one can stand against such a powerful figure. Now his death makes him *worthy*. Why is this?

Romans 2 offers a clue. It convicts both the moral gentile (2:1-16) and the self-righteous Jew (2:17-29) because they judge others while they are guilty themselves.

Rom 2:1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for **wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself**; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

Rom 2:21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, **dost thou steal**? 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, **dost thou commit adultery**? thou that abhorrest idols, **dost thou commit sacrilege**?

At this point, the sacrificial focus of the verb “to slay” is helpful. The sacrificial animals were to be without spot or blemish. Consider the requirement for the Passover lamb:

Exo 12:5 Your lamb shall be **without blemish**, a male of the first year:

Our Lord fulfilled the type by being without sin, though tempted in every point (Heb 4:15). In addition, in the one prior use of the verb “to slay” in the NT (1 John 3:12), John uses it to describe the slaughter of the innocent by the wicked. In applying it to the Lamb, he is putting our Lord in the place of Abel, whose works were righteous.

As the spotless sacrifice, as the innocent one slain by the envy of wicked men, our Lord has the qualifications to judge that both the moral Gentile and the hypocritical Jew lack. As the sinless one, he and he alone is worthy to judge.

and hast redeemed [bought] us to God by thy blood—Again, the vocabulary repays careful study (see note). The OT has beautiful pictures of redemption, all based on the Hebrew verbs פדוּ H6299 and לָקַח H1350, but these are never translated by the verb used here. This verb (ἀγοράζω G59) simply means “to purchase,” to acquire possession of something by paying a price. The imagery that should come to mind here is not the tabernacle, but the marketplace. Paul does speak of our redemption as being “bought with a price”:

1 Cor. 6:20 For ye are **bought** with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

1 Cor. 7:23 Ye are **bought** with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

In literature contemporary with the NT, expressions like these describe the purchase of slaves.³³ As Paul’s references show, the verb emphasizes our subsequent obligation to serve the Lord.

out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;—This fourfold description emphasizing the universality of our Lord’s people is common throughout the Revelation: 7:9; 11:9; 14:6. The closest OT parallels take us to Daniel, which repeatedly emphasizes the last three (2:4; 3:7; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14).

The shift in pronouns at v. 10 suggests that the living creatures now respond to the elders:

10 And hast made us them unto our God kings and priests:—They acknowledge the exalted office to which we have been promoted. Redeemed by the worthy judge, we are now worthy:

1Co 6:2 Do ye not know that the saints shall **judge the world**? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye **unworthy to judge** the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall **judge angels**? how much more things that pertain to this life?

and we they shall reign on the earth.—This insight is often missed. We have access to heaven, where we are now seated with Christ, but our proper domain of activity is the earth, first during the Millennium, and then through eternity when God creates a new heaven *and a new earth*.

The transition from *we* to *they*, marking the shift from the elders to the living creatures, shows how our praise as the redeemed starts a cascade of worship that continues through the chapter.

5:11-14, I saw ... many angels

Two more groups imitate the living creatures in following the lead of the elders in v. 10: a much larger company of angels in heaven, and all creatures not only in heaven but also on earth.

³³ Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 53-55, citing Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 324-328.

11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders:—The ones whose voice he hears are a host of angels, who surround the company that we have already seen (the throne, the living creatures, and the elders).

and the number of them [the angels] was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;—The numbers are consistent with Daniel’s vision of the enthronement of the Son of Man, another scene where “books were opened”:

Dan 7:10 **thousand thousands** ministered unto him, and **ten thousand times ten thousand** stood before him: the judgment was set, and the **books were opened**.

12 Saying with a loud voice,—The angels’ praise expands the two hymns in 4:9, 11, while reordering the terms to combine the insights about the Lamb made earlier in the chapter.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.—Chapter 4:8, 9 ascribed to Jehovah (4:8 the Lord God Almighty, from Isaiah 6) glory, honor, thanks (only 4:9), and power (only 4:11). Now these attributes, with two more, are ascribed to the Lamb. A statement praising a person by attributing good qualities to him is called a “doxology.” The first doxology in the NT, at the end of the Lord’s prayer, is a subset of these: “thine is the kingdom, and the power $\delta\upsilon\lambda\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$, and the glory, for ever” (Matt. 6:13). Revelation has ten such doxologies. Table 9 (chart) summarizes the attributes ascribed to God in each of them.

In any discipline, and not just Bible study, an important reasoning tool is placing similar things alongside each other. By doing this, and observing similarities and differences, we can learn a great deal about each instance. We’ll see that the comparison offered by the chart helps us understand 5:12 better, and we’ll come back to it in future studies of other doxologies.

Before we look at the details, let’s not miss the significance of such an array of praise (chart):

Persecution leads to Praise.—We have here ten doxologies. In the entire rest of the NT, I count only 14, ten to God the Father and four to the Lord Jesus, and no other book has more than two (see note). We often think of the Revelation as a dismal book, with demonic opposition to God, persecution of God’s people, and terrible judgments. The frequency of its doxologies reminds us that the end result of all these things is to bring praise to God. As Asaph sang,

Psa 76:10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

First, let’s get oriented to the chart.

- The first line shows who is speaking.
- The second shows who is being praised
- The third shows the form in which the praise is cast. Most times, it takes the form, “Glory and honor and power be (belong) to the Lord.” These are labeled “to” Once (19:1), this is preceded by “Alleluiah,” which is the Hebrew expression “Praise the Lord.” Three times, it begins “Worthy is xxx to receive” Once (12:10) we have the announcement that certain attributes are now realized.
- Most of the table consists of the different attributes ascribed to the one being praised. The numbers in each column give the order in which the items appear. The elders in 5:9-10 say that the Lamb is worthy to open the book, and focus on the reason: his redemptive death.

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(Speaker)	1:6 John	4:9, Living Creatures	4:10-11, Elders	5:9-10, Elders: The slain Lamb is worthy to open the book ...	5:12, Angel Host	5:13, All Creation	7:10, Many People	7:11-12, Angel Host	12:10 Voice from Heaven	19:1 People in Heaven
(Recipient)	Jesus Christ	God	God		Lamb	God & Lamb	God & Lamb	God	God & Christ	Lord our God
(Form)	to ...	to ...	Worthy		Worthy	to ...	to ...	to ...	Now is come	Alleluiah; to ...
Glory	1	1	1		6	3		2		2
Honor		2	2		5	2		5		3
Thanks		3						4		
Power δύναμις G1411			3		1			6	2	4
Blessing					7	1		1		
Riches					2					
Wisdom					3			3		
Strength, might ἰσχύς G2479					4			7		
Power κράτος G2904	2					4				
Salvation							1		1	1
Kingdom									3	
Power ἐξουσία G1849								4		
(Response)	Amen				Amen	Amen →	Amen			

Table 9: Doxologies in the Revelation. Numbers indicate the order of the attributes.

- Finally, in three cases, there is a response to the praise.

Study of this table offers several insights into the angels' praise of the Lamb in 5:12.

The Lamb is Equal with God.—The same attributes ascribed to God are ascribed to the Lamb: Glory, honor, power (δύναμις). And three times (5:13; 7:10; 12:10) the praise is offered jointly to both of them. The Son is worthy of equal honor with the Father.

The Lamb is Powerful.—These doxologies use four words to describe the Lamb's strength, power, and might (see note). 5:12 uses two of them, 5:13 offers a third, and in 12:10 we encounter a fourth. Only two doxologies (4:9; 7:10) lack a power word. Our version can translate any of them "power," as well as by other terms, but it is helpful to distinguish them (chart).

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δύναμις G1411 is the most common and general term (120x in the NT). If you wanted to choose one term that could include every aspect of God's power, you'd use this one. Though it usually appears later in a doxology, in 5:12 it comes first, bringing together “worthy” and “power.” Thus this doxology unifies the Lamb’s satisfaction of the two requirements to open the scroll: he is worthy, and he is powerful (Figure 11).

The first of the specialized terms that we encounter in the Revelation, in the praise that John offers the Lord Jesus in 1:6, is κράτος G2904. It refers to the power associated with a ruler, and is often translated (as in 1:6) “dominion.” Our Lord has this kind of power because he is king of kings and lord of lords, the “root of David” (5:5).

The praise to the Lamb in 5:12 adds ισχύς G2479, emphasizing physical strength. Think of the “lion of the tribe of Judah” in 5:5. Paul gives us a good example of this word in refining the general word δύναμις by focusing on the power of our Lord’s resurrection,

Eph. 1:19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his **power δύναμις** to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his **mighty power ισχύς**, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he **raised him from the dead**,

When we get to 12:10, we will read of “the kingdom of our God, and the *power* ἐξουσία G1849 of his Christ. This word refers to power that is assigned by one person to another. A better translation might be “authority.” This is the word that the Lord Jesus uses in Matt 28:18, “All power [authority] is given unto me.” Think of an ambassador, who is sent by one country as their representative to another country. Our Lord has this kind of power because the Father has assigned him his role (compare Daniel 7).

We should Praise God Fully.—The table does show us one shift from God’s praise in 4:9 to the Lamb’s in 5:12. The Father receives “thanks,” but the Lamb receives “blessing.” In studying the Psalms,³⁴ we saw that these are two varieties of praise (chart). The Hebrew usage suggests that “blessing” focuses on the Lord’s benefits to us:

Psa 103:2 **Bless** the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all **his benefits**:
3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;
5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

“Thanksgiving” focuses on his intrinsic character, as in these allusions to Exod 34:6,

Ps 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1 O **give thanks** unto the LORD; for **he is good**: for **his mercy** endureth for ever.

(Note that this usage is just the opposite of what the English words might suggest.) This distinction holds good in comparing the doxologies. When the focus is on the intrinsic attributes of the one sitting on the throne, his holiness and eternity, he is offered *thanksgiving*:

Rev 4:9 those beasts give glory and honour and **thanks** to him that sat on the throne, **who liveth for ever and ever**.

But after the elders praise the Lamb for redeeming them, the angels offer him *blessing*.

Rev 5:12 Worthy is **the Lamb that was slain** to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and **blessing**.

34 See note on praise, bless, and thank in https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_101thru106.pdf.

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We should include both kinds of praise in our worship. We typically focus on blessing the Lord for the benefits he gives us. But we should also thank him for his intrinsic attributes—his glory, his power, and his holy and loving character as revealed (for example) in Ex 34:6.

The Lamb will Rule on Earth.—“Wisdom,” “riches,” and “strength” (ἰσχύς G2479, physical might) are new to 5:12. These all have to do God’s control over the created world. Recall the role of wisdom in creation in Proverbs:

Pro 3:19 The LORD by **wisdom** hath founded the earth;
by understanding hath he established the heavens.
20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

Riches are the physical treasures of the created world, and physical might is required to deal with the physical world. These attributes are particularly appropriate to the incarnate Lamb, the one who will fulfill Adam’s destiny as lord of the earth:

Gen 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and **let them have dominion ...**

13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them,—All created things join this innumerable chorus of angels. Their description begins with the same three categories mentioned in 5:3, among whom the strong angel found no one able to open the book. As we noted there, these three categories recall Paul’s prediction of universal worship of the Lord Jesus:

Phil. 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

Now that promise is fulfilled.

John adds a fourth category, “such as are in [on] the sea,” possibly a reference to the galleys that brought Roman power to Asia Minor. The fourth realm may be motivated by an observation of Job’s friend Zophar (chart):³⁵

Job 11:7 Canst thou by searching find out God?
canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?
8 It is as high as **heaven**; what canst thou do?
deeper than **hell**; what canst thou know?
9 The measure thereof is longer than the **earth**,
and broader than the **sea**.

The full knowledge of God goes beyond what one can find in these four realms. So it is fitting that all the inhabitants of these four realms echo the praises of God as he has been revealed in these chapters, the glorious resident of the throne and the slain and risen Lamb.

heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.—Again, Table 9 enables us to compare this doxology with the previous ones. Note the following details:

- Up to this point, the ones giving the praise have been either John, or the heavenly host. Now every created being joins in the praise. This is consistent with the parallel we observed with

³⁵ I owe this reference to Aune.

Philippians 2: John is hearing praise that will be appropriate at the final culmination, when all the Lord's foes are suppressed.

- Previously, God and the Lamb receive separate doxologies, though the overlap in the terms of praise suggest their parity. Now they jointly receive attributes, emphasizing their equal deity.
- The doxology begins with “blessing,” acknowledging the benefits that God gives his creatures. The changing first word shows the shift in focus. The doxologies in Revelation 1 and 4 begin with *glory*, focusing on God's intrinsic nature. 5:12 begins with *power*, the Lamb's ability to open the scroll (5:12). Now all his creatures *bless* him, acknowledging his benefits to them.
- The word for “power” is κράτος G2904, which we last saw in 1:6, and which focuses on the power of a ruler. Again, the temporal setting is the final culmination, when the creation is finally subject to the dominion that God gave Adam in Genesis 1.

The chapter closes by directing our attention back to the ones whom we saw gathered around the heavenly throne in ch. 4, the living creatures and the elders. Both endorse the worship that all creation is bringing.

14 And the four beasts said, Amen.—They acknowledge the praise that all creation offers.

And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

—The MT does not restrict their worship to a particular individual. The final phrase in the KJV has been copied over from the description of the one who sits on the throne in 4:9, 10, but is not in the majority text.³⁶ 5:13 has joined together the one on the throne and the Lamb. Both receive the highest titles, and both are now the objects of universal worship.

Revelation 4-5 and God's Historical Program

During our study of these chapters, we have seen numerous parallels with earlier passages of Scripture outlining God's program for the world. If we recall God's overall program for our fallen world (Table 10, chart), we can see that these chapters summarize it. Philippians 2 also covers most of the stages.³⁷

Consider the five stages represented by the rows. First the Messiah must offer the redeeming sacrifice, as predicted by Isaiah and many other prophets, and as Phil 2:8 recalls. Then he is promoted to the Father's right hand, as David predicts in Psalm 110, and Phil 2:9 says:

Psa 110:1 A Psalm of David.

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand,
until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion:
rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.

David expects a delay: the Son must sit, “until” the Father's time. As we have seen in Revelation 2-3, this delay can be painful for the people of God. During this time, they appear to be on the losing side. But then the Father will “send” his son back to subdue his enemies. Finally, as Philippians 2 shows, he will receive the worship of all creation, even those who opposed him.

36 This phrase appears again twice: 10:6 And swear by him **that liveth for ever and ever**, 15:7 the wrath of God, **who liveth for ever and ever**.

37 1 Cor 15:23-28 describes these same stages, though not in strictly linear order.

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	Prophetic Witness	Philippians 2	Revelation 5
Redemption	Is. 53:5 with his stripes we are healed 7 ... he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter ,	8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death , even the death of the cross.	6 a Lamb as it had been slain , ... 9 ... thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood ...
Exaltation	Psa. 110:1a The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand ,	9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him , and given him a name which is above every name:	7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.
Delay	Psa 110:1b ... until I make thine enemies thy footstool.		4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book , neither to look thereon.
Dominion	Psa. 110:2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength δύναμις out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.		12 Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power δύναμις , and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.
Universal Submission	Isa 45:23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear .	10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow , 10b of things in heaven , and things in earth , and things under the earth ; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father .	13 every creature which is in heaven , and on the earth , and under the earth , and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying , Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

Table 10: God's Historical Program

The slain Lamb in 5:6, 9 recalls Isaiah 53. The “until” of Ps 110:1 is reflected in the delay of opening the book of judgment, resulting in the oppressed churches in ch. 2-3.

But the real emphasis of these two chapters is on the fourth row, when the Father sends the Son back to subdue the earth. Half-way between Psalm 110 and John’s vision, God gave Daniel a vision that amplifies the promise of Psalm 110:2, in Daniel 7. Daniel 7 describes the struggles of earthly empires, the rise of the Antichrist, and finally the dominion of the Son of Man, sent by the Ancient of Days. Note the echoes of Daniel 7 in these two chapters (Table 11, charts).³⁸

Daniel 7	Revelation 4-5
9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit , whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.	4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne .
9b his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. 10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him :	4:5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne , which are the seven Spirits of God.

38 This analysis is due largely to G.K. Beale, *John’s Use of the OT*, 88ff.

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Daniel 7	Revelation 4-5
10b thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him:	5:11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;
10c the judgment was set, and the books were opened .	5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? ... 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.
13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days , and they brought him near before him. 14a And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom,	5:7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.
14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages , should serve him:	5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
15 I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.	5:4 And I wept much , because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.
16 I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me , and made me know the interpretation of the things.	5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me , Weep not:
18 But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. ... 27 And the kingdom and dominion , and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High ,	5:10 And thou hast made them unto our God kings and priests: and they shall reign on the earth.
27b ... the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom , and all dominions shall serve and obey him.	5:13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

Table 11: Daniel 7 and Revelation 4-5

Thus Revelation 4-5 give us, not simply events leading up to the judgments of chapters 6ff, but a survey of God’s entire redemptive program. The seven churches, facing the realities of earthly society, must labor to overcome. But heaven’s program is already in place, extending from the cross to the final subjection of all things to our Savior, and these chapters give us a glimpse of that entire process, including the Lord’s return in ch. 19 and the submission of all things to him. Whatever challenges we may face, we must remember that God is carrying out his plan.

Notes

4:1 Things which must be hereafter

Beale (*Novum Testamentum XXXIV*, 4 (1992) 360-387) argues that this phrase does not indicate a futuristic semantics for the rest of the book, but is an allusion to Dan 2:28-29, 45. LXX translates the expressions in 2:28 יִמְרִית יוֹמֵיָהּ, and 29, 45 הַיָּמִים יִקְרָא as ἐπὶ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, describing a latter day period that Daniel saw as far future, but John now presents as imminent. Beale suggests that μετὰ ταῦτα has the same reference, Daniel's "after this" period.

His argument include two points that deserve comment.

First, though LXX does not use μετὰ ταῦτα in these passages, Theodotion does. But Theodotion produced his version of the Greek OT about AD 150, a generation or more after John wrote. While it is possible that this rendering was circulating earlier among Greek-speaking populations interested in the OT, we have no evidence of this.

Second, he argues concerning μετὰ ταῦτα, "Throughout the book the phrase refers to the temporal order of visions coming one after another from the seer's perspective and not to the chronological order of events to be fulfilled in the future." This is certainly true when the phrase modifies a verb of seeing or hearing, as for example in its first occurrence in 4:1:

Rev. 4:1 **After this** I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven

But it can modify other verbs as well, and then it indicates a sequence in them, as shown by the transition from "past" to "there come":

Rev. 9:12 One woe is **past**; and, behold, **there come** two woes more hereafter (μετὰ ταῦτα).

This verse clearly indicates temporal sequence among the trumpets.

Rev. 20:3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that (μετὰ ταῦτα) he must be loosed a little season.

Again, chronological sequence is clearly in view.

In its second occurrence in 4:1, the phrase modifies γίνομαι "come to be," and is most naturally taken to emphasize that this coming to be extends in the future beyond when John writes.

I conclude that 4:1 is telling us that what John can expect to see in heaven, recorded in the following chapters, concerns events that lie in the future with reference to his own time.

Seraphim, Cherubim, and the Living Creatures of Rev 4-5

Eze 1:6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.

Eze 10:15 And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar.

Eze 10:20 This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims. 21 Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings.

Isa 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

Psa. 18:9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet.

18:10 And he **rode upon a cherub**, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. (cf. Ps 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16, “enthroned upon the cherubim”)

Lord of Hosts/Almighty

The seraphim praise the holiness of יהוה צבאות; the living creatures in Isaiah 6:3; in Revelation 4, of κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ. This is the most common LXX counterpart of the Hebrew original, but not the one used in LXX Isa 6:3, which is σαβαωτ.

	צבאות	שדי		Total Gk
παντοψρατωρ	119	15		181
σαβαωτ	51			64
δυναμις	50			563
Total Heb	315	48		

Glory, Honor, Thanksgiving, Strength

The living creatures give δοξα και τιμη και ευχαριστια to the Father (4:9); the elders ascribe to him η δοξα και η τιμη και το δυναμις. How might these echo the LXX?

Focus on the first two terms. The arthrous phrase appears only here and in 21:26. The anarthrous one appears only five times in the LXX, and only three of these reflect two Hebrew words. The table shows the correspondences with LXX. “Glory and honor” can reflect either כבוד והדר

(which reflects our English intuition) or כבוד ועז. This latter rendering could also yield δοξα και δυναμις, which may explain the form of the utterance given by the elders. The parallel between Ps 29 and Ps 96, angels and kindreds of the peoples, suggests that δοξα και τιμη in the two instances in Revelation 4 is inspired by כבוד ועז in these Psalms.

Brenton Translation	MT
2Chr. 32:33 And Ezekias [Hezekiah] slept with his fathers, and they buried him in a high place among the sepulchres of the sons of David; and all Juda and the dwellers in Jerusalem gave him glory and honour at his death.	כבוד עשר-לו
Psa. 8:5 Thou madest him a little less than angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour ;	כבוד והדר
Psa. 28:1 Bring to the Lord, ye sons of God, bring to the Lord young rams; bring to the Lord glory and honour . (MT 29)	כבוד ועז
Psa. 95:7 Bring to the Lord, ye families of the Gentiles, bring to the Lord glory and honour . (MT 96)	כבוד ועז
Job 37:22 [Elihu] From the north come the clouds shining like gold: in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty;	נורא הוד

	כבוד	עז	הדר	כח	צבא	ערך	Total Gk
δοξα	177	2	8	0	0	0	438
τιμη	5	3	3	0	0	19	71
δυναμις	0	20	0	7	131	0	563
ισχυς	0	24	0	98	0	0	326
Total Heb	200	79	31	126	486	33	

θελω vs βουλω (4:11)

The table shows no clear distinction:

	v אבה	v חפח	חפח	רצון	Total
θελω	33	37			152
βουλω	16	21			121
θελημα	0	2	18	9	44
βουλημα	0	0	0	0	2 (apoc.)
Total	54	73			

Ezekiel 2 and Revelation 5, 10

Ezekiel	Revelation 5	Revelation 10
2:8 But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee .		9 ... And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up;
2:9 And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; 10 And he spread it before me ; and it was written within and without : and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.	5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside , sealed with seven seals.	2 And he had in his hand a little book open :
3:1 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll , and go speak unto the house of Israel. 2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness 14 So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness , in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.		9 ... And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up ; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. 10 And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey : and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter . 11 And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

Who Overcomes in the Revelation:

Believers 10x

2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that **overcometh** will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that **overcometh** shall not be hurt of the second death.

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2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that **overcometh** will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

2:26 And he that **overcometh**, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

3:5 He that **overcometh**, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

3:12 Him that **overcometh** will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

3:21a To him that **overcometh** will I grant to sit with me in my throne,

12:11 And they **overcame** him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

15:2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had **gotten the victory** over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

21:7 He that **overcometh** shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

The Lord Jesus 3x

3:21b even as I also **overcame**, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath **prevailed** to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall **overcome** them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

The Forces of Evil 4x

6:2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth **conquering**, and to **conquer**.

11:7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall **overcome** them, and kill them.

13:7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to **overcome** them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

Incense vs. Frankincense

Our word in 5:8 is θυμίαμα. Here are its Hebrew antecedents:

	קטרת	לבנה	לבנון	Total
θυμίαμα	51	0		78
λίβανος	0	20	66	102
Total	60	21	71	

Hebrew and Greek Vocabulary for Singing

Though AV sometimes translates רנן as “sing,” LXX sees it as quite distinct.

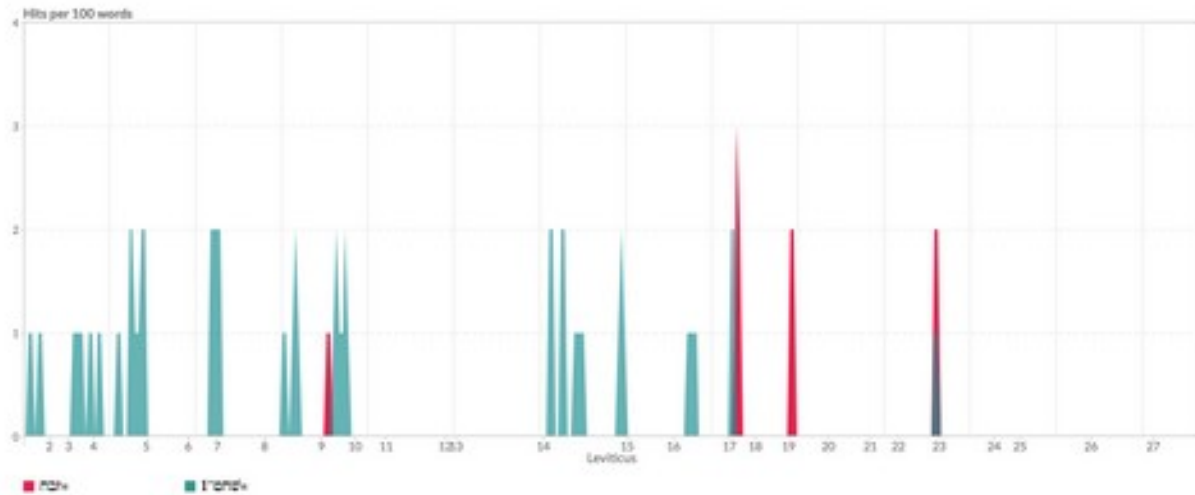
	ו שיר	ח שיר שירה	רנן	שמח	Total
αδω	63	5	0	0	75
ασμα	5	13	0	0	16
ωδη	6	54	0	0	67
εὐφραίνω	0	1	14	124	245
ἀγαλλιά*	0	0	24	0	113
Total	88	91	53	157	

The Slain Lamb

The verb is σφάζω G4969, which matches both זבח and שחט. The more specific sacrificial word, θυσιάζω, is not used in the NT, though its cognates are. σφάζω is in Isa 53:7, “lamb πρόβατον to the slaughter.”

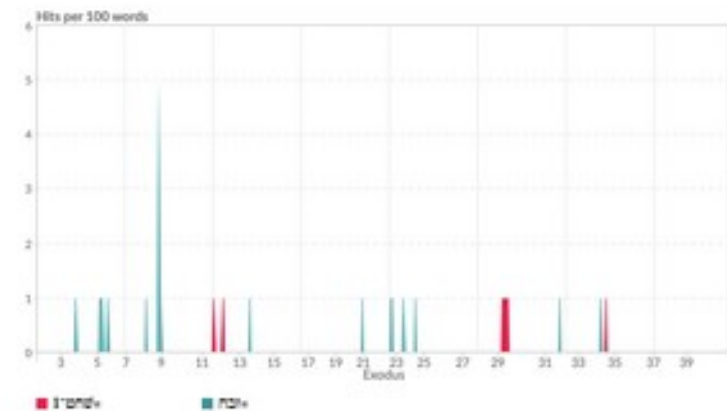
Note distribution of the underlying Hebrew words in Leviticus. שחט (and thus σφάζω) overwhelmingly describes the Levitical sacrifices. It is the only verb used for killing a sacrifice in the classes of sacrifice in ch. 1-7 and the rituals of the day of atonement in ch. 16. זבח appears only five times (Lev. 9:4; 17:5;

	זבח	שחט	Total	NT
σφάζω	2	66	84	10
θυσιάζω	24	0	38	0
θύω	94	11	134	14
Total	134	80		



7; 19:5; 22:29), later in the book. It emphasizes the *purpose* of the offering, but not the *manner*.

When Moses (Ex 12:6, 21) tells the children of Israel to “kill the passover,” he uses שחט, but LXX renders θύω, probably explaining Paul’s use of that root in 1 Cor 5:7. Exodus also uses שחט for the sacrifices at the consecration of the priests in Exod 29. In particular, שחט emphasizes the shedding of blood:



Ex. 34:25 Thou shalt not offer חַטָּאת the blood of my sacrifice חֶזֶק with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice חֶזֶק of the feast of the passover be left unto the morning.

This emphasis probably accounts for the use of the verb to describe the Lamb in Revelation.

5:9 ἀγοράζω G59 and other words for Redeem

The word appears 32x in the NT, the most common of the words for redemption (λυτρόω G3084 3x, Luke 24:21; 1 Pet. 1:18; Titus 2:14; ἐξαγοράζω G1805 4x, Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). λυτρόω always refers to spiritual redemption (Lk, to the redemption of Israel), and ἐξαγοράζω refers twice to spiritual redemption (in Galatians) and twice metaphorically to redeeming the time (Eph, Col, based no doubt on the one OT use of the verb in the LXX at Dan 2:8), but ἀγοράζω is overwhelmingly used commercially, always so in the gospels, only once so (1 Cor 7:30) in the epistles, and 3x in the Revelation. Here is the alignment with LXX:

In the LXX, ἀγοράζω is always commercial.

Spiritual redemption is always λυτρόω:

Still, there remain six places where it refers to our spiritual redemption, and three of these are in the Revelation:

2Pet. 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers

among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that **bought** them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

1 Cor. 6:20 For ye are **bought** with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1Cor. 7:23 Ye are **bought** with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

Rev. 5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast **redeemed** us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Rev. 14:3 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were **redeemed** from the earth.

Rev. 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were **redeemed** from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

	לאג	פדה	שבר (grain)	קנה	זבן	נצל	Total
ἀγοράζω	0	0	9	4	0		22
ἐξαγοράζω	0	0	0	0	1		1
λυτρόω	44	42	0	0	0		108
πρίαομαι	0	0	5	0	0		6
ῥύομαι	12	4				78	180
ἀγγιστεύω	27	0					32
ἀφαιρέω						5	165
ἐξαιρέω						76	140
Total	104	59	21	85	1	213	

See Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, on these words. He concludes that in NT usage (backed by Deissmann), ἀγοράζω refers to the purchase of a slave, and focuses on our subsequent responsibility to serve the Lord, while λυτρόω emphasizes substitution.

Vocabulary for Strength, Power, Might

	צבא	חיל	עז	כח	ממשלה	שלט* ³⁹		Total
δύναμις	131	153	22	7	0	0		563
ἐξουσία	0	0	0	0	4	10 ³⁹		66
κράτος	0	0	5	0	0	0		47
ἰσχύς	0	27	32	98	0	0		326
σαβαώθ	51	0	0	0	0	0		64
Total	486	316	101	126	17	41		

The alignment of δύναμις and חיל shows the broad applicability of the Greek word—recall that חיל can mean “excellence” or “ability” as well as “strength.” This corresponds to the dominant frequency of the term: the most common word is typically the generic one, subsuming the less common words. ἰσχύς focuses on brute force. The LXX gives us less guidance on κράτος. While it appears 47x, the Tov parallel text identifies only 18 parallels, with a variety of Hebrew expressions, the most common of which is עז. (Thus Abbott-Smith.)

Trench passes over this set of words. TDNT on κράτος links it more closely with ἰσχύς than with δύναμις, “thus denoting the presence and significance of force or strength rather than its exercise.” It is used specifically of political power: “When applied politically, κράτος almost always denotes the legal and valid superior power which confers supremacy and legally, politically and physically turns the scale.”⁴⁰ 1 Pet 4:11; 5:11 translate it “dominion.” Thus we have “demo-cracy, theo-cracy,” etc. The word appears 12x in the NT: never of man, only once (Heb 2:14) of Satan, and otherwise of God. The political sense is particularly relevant in its application to the Lord Jesus in the Revelation (1:6; 5:13).

Doxologies in the NT

Matt. 6:13 For thine is the kingdom, and the power δύναμις, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Rom. 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Rom. 16:27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

Gal. 1:5 To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

39 Eccl, Dan

40 Michaelis, W. (1964–). κράτος (θεοκρατία), κρατέω, κραταιός, κραταιώω, κοσμοκράτωρ, παντοκράτωρ. In G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 905). Eerdmans.

Introduction to the Second Vision

Eph. 3:21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Phil. 4:20 Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1Tim. 1:17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1Ti 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour τιμή and power κράτος everlasting. Amen.

2Tim. 4:18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Heb. 13:21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1Pe 4:11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise δόξα and dominion κράτος for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Pet. 5:11 To him be glory δόξα and dominion κράτος for ever and ever. Amen.

2Pet. 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Jude 25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

		Kingdom	Power δύναμις	Glory	Honor τιμή	Majesty μεγαλωσύνη	Dominion κράτος	Power ἐξουσία
Matt 6:13	God	1	2	3				
Rom 11:36	God			X				
Rom 16:27	God			X				
Gal 1:5	God			X				
Eph 3:21	God			X				
Phil 4:20	God			X				
1 Tim 1:17	God			2	1			
1 Tim 6:16	God				1		2	
2 Tim 4:18	Lord			X				
Heb 13:21	Jesus Christ			X				
1 Pet 4:11	Jesus Christ			1			2	
1 Pet 5:11	God			1			2	
2 Pet 3:18	Jesus Christ			X				
Jude 25	God			1		2	3	4