

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 12 - Chapters 4 & 5

Because of the substantial volume of unfilled prophecy and mystery that it contains, Revelation is the most challenging book in the New Testament, if not the entire Holy Bible. Therefore I will endeavor to review the previous lesson to start the next, and at other times sum up what we have heard and learned in order to keep us on the most level ground we can find. We'll take some time to do that to begin today's discussion.

Chapter 4 (that we started last week) ushered us into a new vision given by God to John the Apostle, a Jew in exile on the Mediterranean island of Patmos. On this Roman prison island John had the vision not only of the letters of God's judgment upon 7 Believing congregations of Asia but he also received other visions that form all of what we read in the Book of Revelation. These 7 were not the only Believers' assemblies in Asia at that time; but they may have been the largest and/or the most known. Each of the 7 were Jewish synagogues whereby the leadership and the members agreed that Yeshua of Nazareth was indeed the **Mashiach** (Messiah), the anointed one, upon whom the Jewish people had waited for centuries. Many gentiles had joined the Messianic movement by now, but not without struggle as to how these gentiles, considered unclean according to Jewish tradition, could possibly be part of, and fit in with a mostly Jewish congregation without contaminating these devout Jews with their ritual impurity. The matter had been addressed and guidelines were put forth more than 40 years earlier than the writing of Revelation in the famous Jerusalem Council chaired by James the biological brother of Jesus, and attended by Paul the Apostle, the leader of those who evangelized gentiles and Jews who lived outside the Holy Land.

The time of John's visions was probably the early 90's A.D., meaning it had been 2 decades since Rome had put down a Jewish rebellion by besieging Jerusalem, destroying the Temple and much of the city, while killing thousands of Jewish citizens in Judea and the Galilee. John was the only remaining Apostle of the original 12 and due to the horrendously traumatic destruction of the Temple, the scattered persecutions against Believers in Christ, and the continuing occupation of the Jewish national homeland by the Romans, John believed as did Paul that the End Times was upon them; Yeshua was expected to return and rescue Israel and its people from its dismal situation at any moment. This explains the extreme urgency to spread the Good News, and the disdain for their own lives, present among the Apostles and other Jewish evangelists of the mid-1st century A.D.; a disdain that modern Believers would do well to emulate as we too must assume that we are on the event horizon of the return of our Lord and Savior from His heavenly seat at the Father's right hand.

Just as Paul had been certain of it 4 decades earlier. John was also certain that the end could not be more than a few months or years away because of the fulfilled prophecies concerning the ruination of the Temple and what comes thereafter. So it is for us that we can know for certain that the end cannot be too far ahead of us because of the fulfilled prophecies about the rebirth of Israel in but one day, and the control of Jerusalem being wrested away from gentiles

and returned to the Jewish people.

In chapters 1 - 3 God's vision to John was about judging (meaning evaluating) the spiritual temperature and temperament within 7 specifically named assemblies. In each case the Lord either pronounced His commendation upon the assembly, or His condemnation of it, or as in most of the letters a mixture of both. These are neither made-up stories nor general metaphors about churches; these were real Believing congregations and the letters addressed to them were meant to communicate God's assessment of them. That said, there are lessons to be universally learned in all eras by those who call Yeshua Lord and Savior. Therefore we are to consider what God has to say as pertaining to ourselves as individuals and also as a corporate body (that is, the congregation that we belong to) where it applies.

Perhaps one of the most difficult and bothersome outcomes from studying the letters to the 7 congregations is what we find about the One who is narrating the letters to John in his vision. It is that we never get His name or position in the Godhead. While it is nearly universally insisted upon that this is Jesus Christ, the divine figure Himself never says so nor does John. In fact beyond the immutable reality that the person narrating is the God of Israel, John seems to remain somewhat perplexed over who this person is. So rather than a name or a title we get a series of statements that describe this individual only by a set of attributes and characteristics that change letter to letter. The problem is that while some of the attributes and characteristics typify Christ, others more typify the Father. Thus it is my position that while it is tempting to solve the dilemma by simply declaring that this divine narrator is Jesus (because that way the doctrines of several popular Christian denominations are not harmed) the material to this point leaves His precise identity a mystery. Therefore we too shall (at least for now) leave His identity as a mystery as we engage the next recorded vision given to John.

This next vision begins with the opening words of Revelation chapter 4. It is important to grasp that we have essentially 2 ways to think about how to understand the order of John's visions. Either we are to assume that the order they are given to us within Revelation is the specific order in which John received them; or the order they were received is not the same as the order John wrote them down. And within the context of each of those 2 choices is the matter of whether the many events foretold within each vision unfold in precisely the order they are spoken, or is the order they occur not necessarily the point but rather only that all the listed events are certain to happen in some order or another. Most Christian denominations have made their choices, written them in stone, and declared them as part of their faith doctrines. Thus depending on the denomination the interpretation and meaning of the many mysterious beings and events of Revelation are generally predetermined. We shall take a different approach and do our best to set aside our doctrinal filters and, adding only the hindsight of history and of ancient language and culture, reckon that the words of Revelation mean what they say and say what they mean. And where things are unclear, some may remain unclear. This necessarily implies that we will not be able to provide answers to some of the intriguing mysteries that we wish we could. However, to me, at times no answer is better than pure speculation or the employment of the human imagination because the first way allows us to be open to interpreting current events within the confines of Scripture while the second way limits us to interpreting current events only within the boundaries of manmade doctrines and traditions.

Chapters 4 and 5 work together and probably should not have been later divided into 2 chapters. They are part of the same vision and revolve around the same motif of the throne of God in Heaven. Whereas the prophecies of Ezekiel tend to play a large role in chapters 1 -3, and still have a contributing role in chapter 4, the prophecies of Daniel become dominant in chapters 4 and 5. The heavenly throne room is the setting and the glory of both God and Christ are the emphasis. What gets overlooked nearly universally among Christian commentators is the tight connection between God, Yeshua, and the throne room (that is, the heavenly Temple) as presented by John, and its earthly counterpart represented in the tribes of Israel, the Temple and the Priesthood. In fact without recognizing that tight connection the interpretation of these passages has to resort to allegory. We spoke specifically about that last time as John describes the appearance of God as like jasper and carnelian (also called sardius), with a rainbow of emerald surrounding the throne (it is true that the CJB says diamonds and rubies but that is a poor translation that is neither warranted nor does it agree with other solid translations). Looking to the Torah we find that jasper is the symbol for the 12th tribe of Israel, Benjamin, and carnelian is the symbol for the 1st tribe of Israel, Reuben, and emerald is the symbol for the 4th tribe of Israel, Judah, from which came the Messiah. These stones were arranged and placed in birth order on the Breastplate of the High Priest so that when he went before the Lord, so did the 12 tribes of Israel.

Surrounding God's throne are 24 Elders sitting on their own thrones. By default these can only be Believers, but they must also represent the 24 courses of priests and Levites who served the Lord on earth at the Temple in 2 week increments. Ezekiel chapter 44 tells us explicitly that Levites and priests from the line of Tzadok will serve the Lord in the Millennial Temple (meaning they must be Believers in Christ), and therefore it forms a tight fit that in Heaven these would of course also be **saved** Priests and Levites. In the Book of Acts we read: **Acts 6:7 CJB ⁷ So the word of God continued to spread. The number of talmidim in Yerushalayim increased rapidly, and a large crowd of cohanim were becoming obedient to the faith.** Therefore it was not rare but rather many Priests and Levites became Believers not long after Christ's death. This is who the 24 Elders were surrounding God's throne in Heaven as it connects directly with the reference to the tribes of Israel concerning the appearance of God as like precious stones, which then directly relates to the tribal symbols.

And finally we encountered the strange 4 living creatures that guarded God's throne; beings with faces like a man, Ox, eagle, and lion. This, too, forms a tight connection with the tribes of Israel. We learned in Exodus that the 12 tribes encamped around the Wilderness Tabernacle in 4 assigned groups of 3 tribes each with each grouping having a designated leader tribe. In addition to precious stones as tribal symbols, each Israelite tribe also flew a banner that had sewn onto it a living breathing creature as its symbol. And the 4 leader tribes' symbols exactly match those of the faces of the 4 living creatures in Heaven: those of a man, an Ox, an eagle and a lion.

Let's finish up chapter 4 and then get into chapter 5. Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 4 and we'll read from verses 8 - 11.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 4:8 - 11

Verse 8 tells us that since the glory of God is the emphasis in Heaven then it follows that praising Him and worshipping Him is the order of the day for those most closely surrounding His throne. God is to be glorified because of His sovereignty and His holiness that is unmatched and represents the very core and substance of His existence (if it can be called such). We read from Genesis throughout the Old Testament and then regularly throughout the New that the function of God's creation is to proclaim God's glory. The trees, the hills, the stones; the stars and sun and moon; every living creature that crawls, swims, flies or walks; all were created by God to glorify Him. As created sentient creatures that is especially the fundamental purpose of humanity; but it is an even higher calling than the other creatures who operate mainly on instinct. God has given humans a choice and free will that no other created thing (other, perhaps, than angels) have; the choice to love and glorify Him...or not. And so naturally when we get to Heaven that will also be the purpose of the spirits and souls of everything and everyone that is present with God. Thus for a human being to NOT glorify God (the God of the Bible), that is rebellion of the worst sort and so that human is marked for eternal destruction since he or she refuses to serve his or her fundamental purpose for existing.

The words used by the 4 living beings to praise God are: **"Holy, holy, holy is ADONAI, God of heaven's armies the One who was, who is and who is coming!"** (Rev. 4:8 CJB) This is taken directly from Isaiah 6:1-3, which is Isaiah's vision of God's throne that matches so closely with John's.

^{CJB} **Isaiah 6:1 In the year of King 'Uziah's death I saw Adonai sitting on a high, lofty throne! The hem of his robe filled the temple. ² S'rafim stood over him, each with six wings- two for covering his face, two for covering his feet and two for flying. ³ They were crying out to each other, "More holy than the holiest holiness is ADONAI-Tzva'ot! The whole earth is filled with his glory!"**

Since the reference used by John is to this passage in Isaiah then it behooves us to understand it in the context that Isaiah gave it. When in the CJB version the Seraphim cry out "More holy than the holiest holiness", that can also be legitimately (and probably better) translated as "holy, holy, holy" (the word "holy" repeated 3 times). The object of that supreme holiness is said to be **Adonai Tzva'ot**: the Lord of Heaven's hosts (or army). However that is not quite complete either because the original language does not use the word Adonai; rather it uses YHWH; yud-heh-vav-heh; Yehoveh. Therefore the proper translation is "Yehoveh of Heaven's hosts". And of course Yehoveh, as always in the Bible, is the formal name for the Father (although, admittedly, it might be possible to sometimes speak of Yehoveh as the sum of the Godhead). Therefore that is exactly how we are to take it in Revelation 4:8. The praise is being lavished upon God the Father (or perhaps Yehoveh the Godhead) who sits on the central throne in Heaven.

Notice also how the characterization of God is as He "who was, who is, and who is to come". This matches with the same characterization as we read back in Revelation 1:8, and makes us scratch our heads about the "is to come" part since in nominal Christianity the person of God who is "to come" is Christ. Yet we put that to rest some time ago when we looked at Zechariah 14 that specifically says that YHWH is also coming, and in fact when He steps foot on the Mt.

of Olives it splits in half under the weight of His immense holiness. Thus while with 100% certainty Yeshua Our Messiah is coming back, in some way the Father (or the entire Godhead) is also coming to earth at the End Time.

Verse 10 then explains that whenever the 4 living beings sing out their praise to God it sets off the 24 Elders who also give praise but with a slightly different pronouncement. Why do the Elders pray as they do? Because they express that what makes God so worthy of praise is that the entire creation came about solely by God's will and because God's omniscience is demonstrated by His creation. A wonderful application for modern Believers is that we can be confident that everything that will ever happen to us personally, and everything that has ever happened in both recorded and unrecorded history, plays a role in God's purposes. Whether it is from our abundance or our poverty; from our joy or from our suffering; let us always praise God because nothing He permits truly goes to waste nor is it out of His control. All is happening according to His plan and His plan focuses on redemption and restoration of His creation.

Let's move on to Revelation chapter 5.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 5 all

While chapter 5 is connected to chapter 4 and the two chapters really shouldn't be divided, chapter 5 does provide a kind of transition from the ideal perfection exhibited in Heaven by the 4 living beings, the 24 Elders, the glorious design of the throne and the throne room and the order and sinless condition of all involved, to the earthly realm with all the chaos, immorality, suffering and pain, and rebelliousness in humanity that has been the world order since Adam and Eve fell from grace.

But what we also are witness to from here forward is the inauguration of God's sovereignty in its fullest, and at its most awful, over His creation in the End Times. This fallen world is about to suffer what has been foretold and threatened by the Prophets for millennia: God's judgment and wrath that brings history to a close, and also brings into reality manifest redemption to a degree that mankind has never known. So here in chapter 5 begins the unavoidable process that Believers must at once dread and welcome; a process with the happiest outcome, but also one that may well cost us, and those we love, our physical lives.

I said in an earlier lesson that when we back away and take the far view of the Bible, what we find is that in the Old Testament God brought deliverance for those who were His own from oppression, death and suffering by defeating enemies and giving Israel supernatural strength often under miraculous conditions. However in the New Testament, upon the advent of Christ, we find that deliverance for His people (Believers) from oppression and suffering is often by means of our physical death. The Believers' deliverance, then, is not from a life of misery and troubles on earth to a life of abundance and peace on earth. Rather it is that through our suffering and death, which is bound to our faith in God and identifies with the sufferings of Christ, that we will have a true and perfect life in Paradise where peace and abundance abound for eternity.

One of my deep concerns among the Church as we know it today is not only the false teaching of the Prosperity Doctrine, but also the false teaching that in the End Times those who trust Christ can expect to avoid discomfort, tribulation and death as is prophesied to be coming for all of earth's inhabitants. I'm not only speaking of when the Rapture may occur, but of all the destructive events leading up to it. It fascinates me how some Believing people seem to actually be looking forward to the devastating events of the End Times as they joyfully sing "come Jesus, come" without seeming to realize that the two events arrive together. We are regularly told in the New Testament to be faithful even unto death; this is not referring to dying peacefully in our sleep. It is by no means that the New Testament glorifies death; rather it is that because of Yeshua's death and resurrection that prefigures our own, we need not fear it. Death is not the end for the Believer; it is but a transition to the Heaven that we saw described for us in chapter 4.

I'm quite aware that some of this is not the message that most Christians want to hear. Christians of the West, especially, have been conditioned to believe that salvation is a universal get-out-jail-free card. Trust in Christ and all our troubles are over. Have enough faith and that BMW and house with a swimming pool is as good as yours. Believe in Jesus, go to Church, and before the big trouble that is somewhere ahead of us begins, you'll be painlessly whisked away and avoid it all. That is a dangerous mindset because first of all it's not biblical and it's not true. But second this is why so many seem to come to Christ only to fall away later; they are sold a bill of goods, believe these false doctrines of men promised in God's name, and when trouble inevitably comes, or perhaps when they aren't overwhelmed with the promised abundance of material pleasures, they fall away because they think God has failed them. Don't let this happen to you or to those you know. Believe the Word, understand that our hope is in Christ and the joy we can have in the midst of troubles here in this present life; and for the glorious future that comes after He returns and sets up God's Kingdom.

Verse 1 of chapter 5 continues what we were witnessing at the end of chapter 4; there is no break or pause in the action. The One seated on the throne is the Father and what is about to take place is but the fulfillment of the prophecy given to Daniel in chapter 7 of his book. It is incumbent upon us to take the time to read the prophecy to which John is alluding so that we can see the full picture. Open your Bibles to Daniel chapter 7.

READ DANIEL CHAPTER 7 all

In Daniel 7:13-15 he explains that he sees in his vision one like a son of man approaching the Ancient One, and that the son of man was given rulership and a kingdom by the Ancient One, and that His rulership would never pass away. This, along with the rest of the vision, gave Daniel a sizeable headache as it troubled him deeply. Not just because it was so frightening but also because he couldn't make sense of it.

Here in Revelation chapter 5 John is attaching the identity of the person who is the one like the son of man in Daniel to the Lamb that appears to have been slaughtered. That is, they are one in the same. So while Daniel had no concept of who this one like a son of man is, John identifies Him as the Messiah. Mystery solved. I'll repeat so that we can get the players in John's vision properly labeled. The Ancient one in Daniel 7 is the One sitting on the throne in

Revelation 5. The one like a son of man in Daniel 7 is the Lamb that appears to have been slaughtered in Revelation 5. We know from the Old Testament that the Ancient One is God the Father. And we know from the several descriptions of Messiah in earlier passages of the New Testament, and from Old Testament prophecies, that the Lamb is Yeshua, the Son of God.

So God the Father is sitting on His heavenly throne with a scroll in His right hand; the scroll was written upon on both sides of the paper. Further the document was sealed with 7 seals. Although the CJB and other Bible versions call the document a scroll, it may be a book. The Greek word being translated is **biblion** and it refers to writing material. Thus it could be most any form. It actually seems more logical that it is a book because by this time books were more in use than scrolls. Be that as it may, part of the reason that Bible scholars even debate what seems to be a small point is because of the use of the 7 seals. As we'll read later, after each seal is broken some of what is written is revealed. But how, if it is a scroll sealed with 7 seals, can someone view any of its contents until all 7 seals are broken? After all, only one seal is sufficient enough to keep the contents of a scroll closed up. Therefore some think it is a book with a certain amount of pages sealed by 1 seal, then another certain amount of pages sealed by another seal, and so on such that each opening of a seal can reveal the contents of additional pages.

In Daniel 12:4, Daniel is given this instruction by God: ⁴ **"But you, Dani'el, keep these words secret, and seal up the book until the time of the end. Many will rush here and there as knowledge increases." (Dan. 12:4 CJB)** So when we hear "seal up the book until the time of the end", we realize that what John sees happening is that this sealed-up book mentioned in Daniel is about to be opened. Mysteries that were known to Daniel....mysteries he was not allowed to share....are about to be revealed. Saying that Daniel should "seal up" the book is referring to placing a seal on the book so that no one can gain knowledge of its content. And we see from Revelation 5 that in fact 7 seals were placed on this book. We should also note that even though as we study Revelation that it feels as though we are the first to get a peak into it and learn what awaits humankind at the end, in fact God revealed it all in the late first century through John. So this same information has been available to Believers for 1900 years. But even more, since Daniel was told that this book would not be unsealed until the time of end, and in John's day the book was unsealed, then you can imagine why John and the first readers of the Book of Revelation had to assume that they were indeed living at the time of the end. As we now know, however, John's day was not the end. Therefore what God must have intended by telling Daniel to seal up the book until the time of the end more meant when the events foretold within the book actually begin to happen rather than when the contents of what was in the book were merely revealed. So it is a two-step process: first the unveiling of the contents, and then later the actual carrying out of what the contents reveal.

Because 7 is a sacred and ideal number, and is regularly associated with the work of the divine, then it is appropriate that the book or scroll would have 7 seals on it because the book is kept by God and exists only in Heaven. But it also applies to the fact that the book reveals 7 judgments; one for each seal that is broken. So next an angel appears and shouts out "who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" Notice that it is not a matter of who is "able" but rather who is "worthy". There is only one person who is worthy: Yeshua. He is worthy because of His willingness to go to the cross, and then His subsequent resurrection....all fulfillments of

OT prophecy.....that merits Him that worthiness.

There is an interesting backdrop that adds to the reason that only Yeshua was worthy to open the scroll; it occurs in Genesis 1. There were read:

Genesis 1:26-28 CJB ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth." ²⁷ So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them: God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth."

So Adam was given rule over the earth, but then threw away his opportunity to act upon it when he was deceived by Satan and rebelled against God. Yeshua rescued the divine promise for mankind to have dominion over the earth. The promise had been given to a man and so a man had to be the one to open the seals to the book and appropriate what God had promised to Adam. However because we have all descended from Adam, we have all inherited his sin, which deprives us of the right to rule over the dominion God intended for us. How to solve this dilemma? God sent His Son to be born in sinless human form to suffer the punishment, and provide atonement, for the sins of mankind. Christ did not back down from this duty and in doing so became the only one worthy to redeem God's people and to execute judgment and redemption upon planet earth. Thus Messiah Yeshua will rule over the earth, and over God's Kingdom, forever. And He is most worthy to do so.

We'll continue with chapter 5 next time.