

4. The Throne Room in Heaven

Revelation 4-5

After receiving from Jesus the messages to the seven churches, the interpreting angel (the trumpet-like voice of 1:11) invites John: “Come...I will show you” (δείξω σοι cf. 17:1; 21:9) the things which must happen (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι cf. 1:1, 19; 22:6) after this” (4:1). Again he is “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι cf. 1:10; 17:3; 21:10), this time caught up to heaven. The visions that the interpreting angel shows him in heaven form the central portion of the book (4:1-16:21). The climax is “it has happened (γέγονεν)” (16:17).

This central portion includes the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, each depicting divine judgment upon earth. Each of these is preceded by a vision of the heavenly throne:

Heavenly throne (4:1-5:14)

Seven seals (6:1-17; 8:1)

Heavenly throne room (7:1-17)

Seven trumpets (8:6-21; 11:15-19)

Heavenly throne room (15:1-8)

Seven bowls (16:1-21)

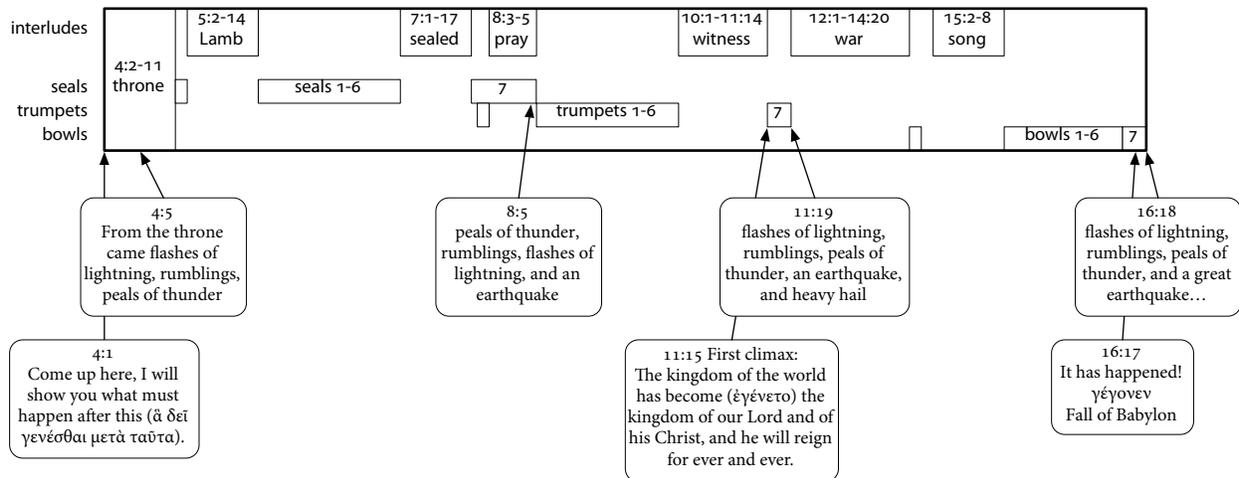


Fig. 4-1: The Structure of the Central Vision (4:1-16:21)

God’s judgments make sense only when seen in the context of his throne.

Dispensationalism places the rapture here in 4:1-2. Christ returns invisibly (the first half of his second coming) and the church is caught up into heaven. Implications:

1. the church is not present on earth during any of the judgments, the 7-year Great Tribulation that begins in chapter 6.
2. the twin throne room visions of chapter 4-5 are future not present.

I. The First Vision (4:1-11)

A. The Throne

John sees a throne with someone seated upon it.

1. **The throne:** 47× in Rev. Of these 40× referring to God's throne in heaven. Everything is defined in relation to this throne (14× in chap. 4): on, around, from, before:
 - a. *on* the throne (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον) one seated (2)
 - b. *around* the throne (κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου) a rainbow (3)
 - c. *around* the throne (κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου) 24 thrones and on the thrones 24 elders seated (4)
 - d. *from* the throne (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου) lightning, rumblings and thunder (5)
 - e. *before* the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) 7 lamps burning = 7 spirits of God (5)
 - f. *before* the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) as it were a sea of glass, clear like crystal (6)
 - g. *in the middle of* the throne (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου) and *around* the throne (κύκλω τοῦ θρόνου) four living creatures (6)
2. **The one seated upon the throne** (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου): the most common title for God (13×); John says more about God by calling him this than if he called him "God." But there is an earthly parody: Babylon is portrayed as "seated on many waters" (17:1, 15) and seated upon a seven-headed scarlet beast (17:3, 9). Furthermore,

John's throne room vision draws on imagery from similar OT visions: Isa 6; Ezek 1-2; esp. Dan 7.

Daniel 7: After a vision of 4 beasts emerging from the sea each representing four successive earthly kingdoms, Daniel sees the Ancient of Days seated on his throne, surrounded by the heavenly court. One like a son of man comes into his presence and is granted an eternal kingdom in which all the saints also share.

But there are counterfeits of this heavenly throne:

1. Satan also has a throne (2:13; 13:2) which he has given to the beast (13:2; 16:10). The false prophet deceives the whole world into worshiping the beast on this throne (13:12). But this is not a throne equal to God's. It is a Satanic counterfeit and the one seated on it is an imposter. How will God take back this throne of the world's kingdom?
2. there is another, unspoken throne room in mind: that of the Roman emperor.
3. In parody, Babylon is portrayed as "seated on many waters" (17:1, 15) and seated upon a seven-headed scarlet beast (17:3, 9). Her seat will prove unstable.

B. Around the Throne

Around (incl. *from* and *before*) the throne are many things:

1. *around*: a rainbow (cf. Ezek 1:28).
2. *around*: 24 thrones, occupied by 24 elders; cf. the heavenly council of OT visions. Twelve usually signifies the people of God: 12 for OT Israel, 12 for NT Church. Robed in white (another important motif of Rev).
3. *from*: lightning and thunder, signifying God's presence (theophany, cf. Exod 19:16-19). These will reappear with growing intensity at the seventh seal (8:5), seventh trumpet (11:19), and seventh bowl (16:18). Thunder, earthquake and noise would accompany the Lord's visitation in judgment (Isa 29:6).
4. *before*: seven lamps, representing the seven-fold Spirit of God (or the seven spirits of God)—before the throne (cf. Zech 4).

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5. *before*: the crystal sea (*like* a sea of glass, clear *as* crystal): brilliance surrounding God (cf. Exod 24:10; Ezek 1:22).
6. *in the middle* and *around*: cherubim (the four living creatures; lion, ox, man, eagle; cf. Ezek 1:5; 10:20): God's throne attendants and sanctuary guardians. Previously present in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:24) and symbolically in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and temple (God's earthly throne room). Now seen in the true sanctuary. Six wings, like the seraphim (Isa 6:2; Ezekiel's cherubim had four wings, 1:5-14). Full of eyes (cf. the wheels beside the cherubim, Ezek 1:18; 10:12).

C. Worship

1. The cherubim continually praise God as *holy* (ἅγιος, Heb שׁוֹדֵף, Lat. *sanctus*).
 - a. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty": the first half of the seraphim's song (Isa 6:3).
 - b. "who was, and is, and is to come": cf. the self-description of the Lord God Almighty (OT LORD of Hosts, 1:8).
2. The 24 elders respond to the lead of the cherubim, by removing their crowns, falling down, and worshipping. They proclaim that God is *worthy* for he is the Creator. This is the first of three songs that begin "Worthy" (cf. 5:9, 12). Domitian referred to himself as *dominus et deus noster*, "our lord and God." But it is God to whom this title properly belongs. It is God and the Lamb who are worthy to receive glory, etc., not Caesar. The only thing God's enemies are worthy of is judgment (16:6).

II. The Second Vision (5:1-14)

A. The Scroll

A double-sided scroll (cf. Ezek 2:9-10), sealed with seven seals (cf. Dan 12; Isa 29). How God's kingdom will come on earth. Who is able to unseal this? Who can bring about God's purposes.

B. The Lion and the Lamb

John *hears* one of the elders announce two messianic titles:

1. The Lion of the tribe of Judah: Gen 49:9.
2. The Root of David: Isa 11:1,10.

John *sees* a Lamb.

- the usual title for Jesus in Rev (28×)
- standing in the center of the throne: alongside God
- as though slain
- seven horns: power
- seven eyes = seven-fold Spirit of God

This juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory images is key to understanding history: the Lion has conquered by being the slain Lamb.

C. Worship

Three rounds of worship:

1. Four cherubim and 24 elders: Lamb is worthy to open scroll.
 - a. slain lamb has redeemed for God a people from every tribe, etc.
 - b. made this people to be kings and priests (cf. Exod 19:5-6; 1 Pet 2:9).
2. Many angels (thousands of thousands, myriads of myriads, cf. Dan 7:10): worthy is the Lamb to

receive praise.

3. Every creature in every realm: praise to both the one seated on the throne and the Lamb.

III. Worship in the Book of Revelation

A. The Worshiped

1. The One who sits upon the throne. Heaven is portrayed as a throne room, with the throne and the one seated upon it as the focal point.
2. The Lamb. He is not upon the throne, and is always referred to distinctly from “the One who sits upon the throne” (but in 22:3 the throne is of both God and the Lamb). Nevertheless, the Lamb is worshiped rather than being one of the worshipers.

B. The Worshipers

1. **The four living creatures.** John draws the imagery from Ezek 1:5-25. These are the cherubim (Ezek 10:20). They are God’s throne attendants. They lead the heavenly worship (4:8; 5:14).
2. **The twenty-four elders.** Probably represent the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles, i.e. God’s people in OT and NT.
3. **Multitudes of angels.**
4. **The martyrs.** Those who refused to worship the beast on earth, and are killed for that refusal, join the heavenly choir, worshiping around the true throne.
5. **All creation.**

C. The Worship

1. Responsive: always in response to something that is seen or heard.
2. Antiphonal: the worshipers sing back and forth to one another.
3. Maintains distance. The opening song proclaims Holy, holy, holy: the *qedushah* (Heb. “holy”), *trisagion* (Gk. “thrice-holy”), *sanctus* (Lat. “holy”), *tersanctus* (Lat. “thrice-holy”), cf. Isa 6:3. Worship leaves the worshipers flat on their face (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4).
4. Affirms both God and the Lamb as worthy. Domitian referred to himself as *dominus et deus noster*, “our Lord and God.” But it is God alone who is worthy to be called “our Lord and God” (4:11). God is worthy as Creator; the Lamb as Redeemer.
5. Ascribes to both God and the Lamb: power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and praise. 7-fold in 5:12; 7:12.

D. What Worship Does

Eugene Peterson identifies five things that worship does:¹

1. Centers: “worship is a meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically.”
2. Gathers: all God’s people gather around the throne.
3. Reveals: worship reveals God and invites sinners to participate.

1. Peterson, “Reversed Thunder,” 59..

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4. Sings:

5. Affirms: “the worshiping affirmation to the God who affirms us.”

IV. The Hymns of Revelation

A. The Worship of God in the Heavenly Throne Room

1. The four living creatures (4:8) #1

ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος
κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,
ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος

*Holy, holy, holy,
Lord, God Almighty
Who was and is and comes*

2. Antiphonal response by the twenty-four elders (4:11) #2

ἄξιός εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν,
λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν,
ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα
καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
To receive glory and honor and power,
For you created all things,
and by your will they existed,
yea, were created.

B. The Worship of the Lamb in the Heavenly Throne Room

1. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (5:9) #3

ἄξιός εἶ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας
αὐτοῦ,
ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου
ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους
καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς,
καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Worthy are you to take the scroll,
and to open its seals,
because you were slaughtered and you purchased
for God with your blood
from every tribe and language and people and
nation,
and made them for our God a kingdom and priests,
and they will reign upon the earth.

2. Response of myriads of angels (5:12) #4

ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν
τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν
καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive
power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing.

3. Response of every creature (5:13) #5

τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἄρνιῳ
ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος
εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

To the one seated upon the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and power
for ever and ever.

4. Response of the four living creatures (5:14)

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ἀμήν.

Amen!

C. Interlude between Sixth and Seventh Seals

1. Great multitude (7:10) #6

ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ
καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ.

Salvation belongs to our God,
the one seated upon the throne,
and to the Lamb.

2. Response of all the angels (7:12) #7

ἀμήν, ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ
εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἰσχύς τῷ θεῷ
ἡμῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν.

Amen.
Praise and glory and wisdom and praise
and honor and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.

D. The Seventh Trumpet

1. Loud voices in heaven (11:15) #8

ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν
καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ,
καὶ βασιλεύσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

The kingdom of the world has become our Lord's,
and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever.

2. Antiphonal response of the twenty-four elders (11:17-18) #9

εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,
ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν,
ὅτι εἴληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην
καὶ ἐβασίλευσας.
καὶ τὰ ἔθνη ὠργίσθησαν,
καὶ ἦλθεν ἡ ὀργή σου
καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι
καὶ δοῦναι τὸν μισθὸν τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις
καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου,
τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους,
καὶ διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν.

We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and was,
because you have taken your great power,
and became king.
The nations were wrathful,
but your wrath has come
and the time to judge the dead,
and to give the reward to your servants the prophets
and to the saints and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and to destroy those who destroy the earth.

E. Dragon thrown out of heaven

1. Loud voice in heaven (12:10-12) #10

ἄρτι ἐγένετο ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις
καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν
καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ,
ὅτι ἐβλήθη ὁ κατήγωρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν,
ὁ κατηγορῶν αὐτούς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν
ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός.
καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου
καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν
καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου.
διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε, [οἱ] οὐρανοὶ
καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες,
οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν,
ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς
ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν,
εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει.

Now has come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ,
For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown out
who accuses them before our God day and night.
They conquered him through the blood of the Lamb
and through the word of their testimony
and they did not love their lives until death.
Therefore, rejoice, O heavens,
and those who dwell in them.
Woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone down to you
having great fury,
knowing that he has a little time.

F. Appearance of seven angels with seven last plagues

1. Those who had conquered the beast and his image (15:3-4) #11

μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου,
κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ·
δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου,
ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν·
τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε,
καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;
ὅτι μόνος ὄσιος,
ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν
καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου,
ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

Great and wonderful are your works,
Lord God Almighty;
Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations;
Who does not fear you, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy
for all nations will come
and will worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.

G. Third Bowl

1. Angel in charge of the waters (16:5-6) #12

δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὄσιος,
ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας,
ὅτι αἷμα ἀγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν
καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν,
ἄξιόι εἰσιν.

Just you are, who is and was, the Holy One,
because you judged these things,
because they have shed the blood of the saints and
the prophets,
and blood you have given them to drink,
they are worthy.

2. Antiphonal response by altar (16:7) #13

ναὶ κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,
ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαιαι αἱ κρίσεις σου.

Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments.

H. After Overthrow of Babylon

1. Roar of great multitude in heaven (19:1-3) #14

ἀλληλουϊά·
ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν,
ὅτι ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ·
ὅτι ἔκρινεν τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην
ἣτις ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς,
καὶ ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς
αὐτῆς.

ἀλληλουϊά·
καὶ ὁ καπνὸς αὐτῆς ἀναβαίνει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν
αἰώνων.

Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for true and just are his judgments;
for he has judged the great whore
who corrupted the earth with her whoring,
and he avenged the blood of his servants
from her hand.

.....
Hallelujah!
Her smoke goes up for ever and ever.

2. Antiphonal response of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures (19:4) #15

ἀμὴν ἀλληλουϊά.

Amen. Hallelujah!

3. Voice from throne (19:5) #16

αἰνεῖτε τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν
πάντες οἱ δούλοι αὐτοῦ
[καὶ] οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν,
οἱ μικροὶ καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι.

Praise our God
all his servants
those who fear him,
both small and great.

4. Antiphonal response of great multitude (19:6-8) #17

ἀλληλουϊά,
ὅτι ἐβασίλευσεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς [ἡμῶν] ὁ παντοκράτωρ.
χαίρωμεν καὶ ἀγαλλιῶμεν καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν
αὐτῷ,
ὅτι ἦλθεν ὁ γάμος τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ
ἠτοιμάσεν ἑαυτήν
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῇ ἵνα περιβάληται βύσσινον λαμπρὸν
καθαρόν·

Hallelujah!
For the Lord reigns
our God Almighty.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give glory to him,
for the wedding of the Lamb has come
and his bride has prepared herself
and it was given her that she might be clothed
fine linen, bright and clean.