

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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Pastor's Bible Study

A Bible Study Series
Based on the book
"Revelation Four Views" by Steve Gregg

Part II

The Throne Room of Heaven

Revelation 4:1-5

- Revelation 4:1–5 (HCSB)
 - ¹ After this I looked, and there in heaven was an open door. The first voice that I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ² Immediately I was in the Spirit, and a throne was set there in heaven. One was seated on the throne, ³ and the One seated looked like jasper and carnelian stone. A rainbow that looked like an emerald surrounded the throne. ⁴ Around that throne were 24 thrones, and on the thrones sat 24 elders dressed in white clothes, with gold crowns on their heads. ⁵ Flashes of lightning and rumblings of thunder came from the throne. Seven fiery torches were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.
- **Four Views Review**
 - **Preterist**
 - **Preterist** (from Latin *praeter* meaning "past") holds that through the use of symbols and allegory, the Revelation deals with events that were fulfilled in John's time and that it was written primarily to provide hope and comfort to the first century church persecuted by Rome. For example, this view interprets the beasts of ([Rev 13:1, 2, 11-note](#)) as imperial Rome and the imperial priesthood. The **preterist** view is held by many modern scholars, especially liberals and others who deny that the Revelation is predictive of specific future events.
 - **Historicist**
 - The **historicist** approach views the Revelation as a symbolic or allegorical prophetic survey of church history from the first century up to the Second Coming of Christ. This was the view espoused by most of the "reformers" and thus dominated Protestant eschatological teaching for

centuries. This view however has been discounted by many as it does not adequately address the prophecies in the Revelation. The discerning reader needs to be aware that the **historicist** view is reflected in most of the "older" commentaries . Unless you understand their historicist approach to prophecy, you may become very confused when reading these older "classic" commentaries.

- **Idealist**

- This approach argues that the symbols in the Revelation do not relate to historical events but rather to timeless spiritual truths. Idealists feel that Revelation relates primarily to the church between the first and second coming of Christ. They feel Revelation relates to the battle between God and evil and between the church and the world at all times in church history. The seals, trumpets, and bowls are thought to depict God's judgments on sinners at all times, and the beast refers to all the anti-Christian empires and rulers in history. Thus the Revelation is viewed as describing the victory of Christ and His people down through history. The [Millennium](#) in this approach is not a future event but the final cycle of the book describing the church age.
- The weaknesses of this view include the failure to see the futuristic aspects of many of the prophecies or to connect them in any way with history. (Adapted from [Grant Osborne: Revelation. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#)) ([See another discussion of Idealist Interpretation](#))
- This view is variously referred to as the **spiritual** approach, the **idealist** approach or the **symbolic** approach and makes no attempt to find individual fulfillments of John's visions, instead viewing Revelation as a great drama depicting transcendent spiritual realities, such as the spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan, between the saints and the antichristian world powers. Fulfillment is seen either as entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression in historical events throughout the age, rather than in one-time, specific fulfillments. (From [Gregg, S. Revelation, Four views: A Parallel Commentary. Nelson Pub](#))

- **Futurist**

- A literal reading of prophecy will generally lead to a "futurist" interpretation. Thus futurists interpret Revelation 4-22 as predictive of future end time historical events preceding, during and after the return of Jesus Christ, the establishment of His 1000 year (thus futurist are usually "premillennial". Amillennialists spiritualize the 1000 years and postmillennialists spiritualize the resurrection which precedes it), millennial kingdom on earth, followed by the creation of a new heaven and new earth. Variations of this view were held by many of the so-called early church fathers, including men like Justin Martyr (164AD), Irenaeus

(195AD), et al. This futuristic approach has enjoyed a revival since the 19th century and is widely held by many if not most modern evangelicals.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- **Historicist**

- John is given a vision intended to call attention to the sovereignty of God over history and the unique privilege of Christ to unfold the future.
- In the subsequent beginning of the breaking of the seven seals (chs. 6–8), and the events that this action calls forth, the vision gives a glimpse of the conquests of Imperial Rome for three hundred years, culminating in Constantine’s establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire.
- The seven trumpets that follow (chs. 8–11) foretell the fall of the Western, and then the Eastern Roman Empires, to the end of the world. Thus the seals and trumpets give the secular, political history from John’s time forward. At 11:19, however, a new view commences, referring to the internal affairs of the church.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- **Preterist**

- We are introduced, most probably, to a heavenly courtroom scene. The Judge sits **on the throne (v. 2)** where, as we shall see in chapter 5, He is about to hand down sentence upon the accused. The plaintiffs are the martyrs of Christ, whose complaint against their persecutors is recorded later in the vision (6:9). The accused (Jerusalem) is about to be condemned.
- Since John was told (in the first century) that these things were “about to take place,” a first-century fulfillment is to be looked for. The seven-sealed book (5:1) is God’s sentence against Jerusalem, and the subsequent breaking of the first six seals depicts the Jewish crisis of a.d. 66–70: the war between the Jews and Rome, issuing in the utter destruction of the Jewish capital, state, and religious system.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- **Futurist**

- This passage marks one of the major turning points in the Book of Revelation. Everything in the previous chapters concerns “things which you have seen” and “the things which are” (1:19). We now come to **things which must take place after this (v. 1)**. To the dispensational view, **after this**, or, more literally, “after these things” [*meta tauta*] means after “the things of the church,” or after the church age. Thus the material in Revelation after this point will be fulfilled after the church is gone.

- Some believe that John’s transportation to heaven may be viewed as a type of the Rapture of the church, and the mention of **a voice ... like a trumpet (v. 1)** here may recall the language of the Rapture passages in 1 Corinthians 15:51–54 (which refers to “the last trumpet”) and 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 (which refers to the “voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God”).
 - Dispensational *futurists note that the church is not seen hereafter on the earth—only in heaven (7:9–17).*
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - **Dispensationalism**
 - Christian Theology belief in a system of historical progression, as revealed in the Bible, consisting of a series of stages in God’s self-revelation and plan of salvation.
 - Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - **Spiritual**
 - To those who divide the book into seven segments, this verse is the beginning of section 2 or Act II. The opening words, **After these things (v. 1)**, do not mean “This is what will happen next,” but rather, “This is the vision I saw next.” The entire church age, depicted from an earthly standpoint in chapters 1 through 3, will now be viewed again—this time from a heavenly viewpoint. John is again said to be in the Spirit (v. 2).
 - His view of God’s **throne (v. 2)** reassured the persecuted churches that, despite their difficulties, God was still (and always is) in ultimate control of the situation. The emphasis on God’s sovereignty in Revelation is seen in the repeated mention of “throne” or “thrones” (forty times in this book; only fifteen times in the rest of the New Testament).
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - The book of Romans is called the "Court Room" of the Bible, but the book of Revelation is called the "Throne Room." The word "throne" occurs at least 37 times in this book. Revelation opens with a throne and closes with one. The throne in this chapter is preparatory to the judgments which begin at chapter six and end in chapter 19.
 - The throne in chapter four is a throne of judgment and justice. The slumbering judgment of God is about to awaken in this book as the third section of Revelation begins. We have seen the things which thou hast seen, the things which are, and now we will begin the section of the things which shall be hereafter ([1:19](#)).

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- Soon the earth will be invaded by a white, red, black, and pale horse. Soon the earth will be quaking and Heaven will be shaking. Soon, hail, fire, and blood will fall from the sky and the mountains will move into the seas that will turn into blood. Soon, man will be petrified by the falling of stars and disturbances of the sun, moon, and stars. But, before all these things take place, the Church will be raptured out of this world. Notice the first verse of this chapter.
- [Revelation 4:1](#)—*After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- John is called up. I believe this is symbolic of the Rapture of the church when we are called up by the Lord when He returns for us.
- Paul tells us in [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) that we shall be *caught up* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This word "caught up" comes from a Greek word, *harpazo*, which means to "seize or snatch up as a robber seizes." The Latin word that forms the word "rapture" is *raptus* which means "to seize by force."

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- **There are several reasons why verse one is a reference to the rapture of the church.**
- **1. The location in the book is right.**
 - In chapters two and three of Revelation we find the church is addressed.
 - In chapters four and five we have a vision of Heaven and in chapter six the beginning of the Tribulation period.
 - We are told that we will be kept from the hour of temptation in [Revelation 3:10](#) meaning that the church will not go through the Tribulation period.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- **2. Reason two is the absence of any mention of the Church after chapter three is an indication that it is not on the Earth during the Tribulation period.**
 - There are sixteen references to the church in the first three chapters. In chapters 6-18 there is no mention of the Church. Why? It has been raptured off the planet.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- **3. The extensive use of Old Testament language and symbols in chapters four through eighteen indicate that God is dealing with the nation of Israel, not the Church.**
 - The Tribulation is the time of Jacob's Trouble, the 70th week of Daniel's vision. Symbols include the tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, altar, elders, censers, cherubims, seals, trumpets, and plagues.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - **4. The similarity of events in [Revelation 4:1, 2](#) and [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#) indicate that chapter [4:1](#) of Revelation is a reference to the rapture of the Church.**
 - Man says the world is getting better, but God says it will get increasingly worse.
 - Man says that peace among nations is close at hand, but God says there will be wars, rumors of war, and nation will rise against nation.
 - Man predicts in the years to come that he will win the battle against disease, famine, and hardship. God says there is to be a fearful looking forward to the judgments of disease, famine, hardship, and death.
 - Liberals shun the book of Revelation. Like the Pharaoh of Egypt, they won't face it, but instead scoff at the judgments to come. Let's continue our journey through this chapter and see what happens in the throne room of Heaven.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - John records here a door was opened in Heaven. In Revelation there are four doors.
 - **1. The Door of Opportunity** for serving Christ by soul-winning and missionary work.
 - [Revelation 3:8](#)—*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast¹¹⁸ kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*
 - **2. The Door of a Person's Heart** for fellowship and service.
 - [Revelation 3:20](#)—*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*
 - The Throne Room of Heaven

- **3. The Door of Heaven for the Rapture of the Saints.**
- [Revelation 4:1](#)—*After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*
- **4. The Door of Heaven for the Second Coming of Christ to Earth.**
- [Revelation 19:11](#)—*And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - **“I will shew thee things which must be hereafter”**
 - *Comments*—Note that the heavenly, unseen reality controls the visible reality. Things on earth are not out of control. God has planned history to fulfill his purpose and His sovereign plan.
 - The phrase “which must be hereafter” that John uses in Revelation 4:1 is literally translated in the Greek as “what things are necessary to be after these things (take place).” This phrase implies that the letters to the seven churches refer to a period of time that is to precede the Rapture of the Church. That is, chapter four tells of the events that are to take place “after” the events in the seven letters take place.
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - Revelation 4:2–3 (HCSB)
 - ² Immediately I was in the Spirit, and a throne was set there in heaven. One was seated on the throne, ³ and the One seated looked like jasper and carnelian stone. A rainbow that looked like an emerald surrounded the throne.
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - The central theme of John's vision is the throne of God, mentioned eleven times in this chapter. All the features of the chapter can be outlined based on how they relate to that throne of divine glory.
 - After describing the throne, John tells us who is on the throne, what is going on around the throne, what comes from the throne, what stands before the throne, who is in the center and around the throne, and what is directed toward the throne.
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - The cause of John's amazement was the **throne** of God that he saw **standing in heaven**. This was not a piece of furniture, but a symbol of God's sovereign rule

and authority (cf. [Pss. 11:4](#); [103:19](#); [Isa. 66:1](#)) located in the temple in heaven (cf. [7:15](#); [11:19](#); [14:15](#), [17](#); [15:6-8](#); [16:17](#)).

- According to [Revelation 21:22](#) the heavenly temple is not an actual building: "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" are the temple. The use of the term *temple* symbolizes God's presence.
- The throne was said to be **standing** because God's sovereign rule is fixed, permanent, and unshakable. A vision of God's immovable throne reveals He is in permanent, unchanging, and complete control of the universe. That is a comforting realization in light of the horror and trauma of the end-time events about to be revealed ([chaps. 6-19](#)). In much the same way, Isaiah was comforted during a traumatic time in Israel's history by his vision of God's glory ([Isa. 6](#)).
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - The whimsical, mindless, purposeless forces of random chance do not, as many foolishly believe, govern the universe. Instead, the sovereign, omnipotent Creator of the universe is **sitting on His throne** as its ruler.
 - Unlike its use in Hebrews (cf. [Heb. 1:3](#); [10:12](#); [12:2](#)), where it depicts Christ's posture of rest, the term **sitting** here indicates the posture of reigning. The thought is not resting because the work of redemption has been accomplished, but reigning because judgment is about to take place.
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - **"Jasper."** This was a clear, crystal-like gem, a translucent rock, perhaps even a diamond. It portrays the purity and brilliance of God's holiness.
 - Since such a stone picks up and reflect light, it calls our attention to the fact that God is light, a holy God who reveals, and unmask the darkness.
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - **"Sardius (carnelian)."** This stone was blood red undoubtedly portraying God's wrath and justice, but it would also look at His redemptive work of love and grace in the person of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world through His death on the cross.
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - To the Jews, they would recall that these stones were the first and last ones in the breastplate of the High Priest ([Ex. 28:17-20](#)). These stones bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the first one representing Reuben which means, "Behold a son" and the last stone representing Benjamin which means, "Son of my right hand."
 - The person on the throne is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God who is about to reign in power and judgment. He is the Alpha, the first,

and the Omega, the last. What the Lord has started He is now about to finish. These stones remind us that the Lord Jesus Christ is our High Priest.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- “And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.” As a part of the majesty of the scene of the sovereign Lord, John also saw a beautiful rainbow of emerald green. But, unlike the partial rainbows we generally see on earth, this one completely encircled the throne.
- This too is significant in calling our attention to the person and work of God on behalf of man, the one who rebelled against God’s grace. In Scripture the rainbow is a sign of God’s faithfulness to His word and covenants. It is also a sign of God’s mercy, grace and long-suffering.
- The fact the rainbow completely encircles the throne emphatically stresses this. Green portrays fruitfulness; what proceeds from the throne will be infinitely effective.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- The **rainbow** provides a comforting balance to the fiery flashings of judgment earlier seen emanating from God's throne. According to [Genesis 9:13-17](#), a rainbow symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy, and grace.
- God's attributes always operate in perfect harmony.
 - His wrath never operates at the expense of His faithfulness;
 - His judgments never abrogate His promises.
 - God's power and holiness would cause us to live in abject terror were it not for His faithfulness and mercy.
 - God said of the faithful remnant of Israel who feared being swept away in His judgment of the nation, "They will be Mine... on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" ([Mal. 3:17](#)).

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- Revelation 4:4 (HCSB)
 - ⁴ Around that throne were 24 thrones, and on the thrones sat 24 elders dressed in white clothes, with gold crowns on their heads.
- John also saw around the throne **twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones he saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.** The identity of the **twenty-four elders** has been much debated. While some see them as an order of angelic beings, it seems best to view them

as human representatives of the church. Several lines of evidence point to that conclusion.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- First, the reference to the **twenty-four thrones** on which the **twenty-four elders** sat indicates that they reign with Christ. Nowhere in Scripture do angels sit on thrones, nor are they pictured ruling or reigning. Their role is to serve as "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" ([Heb. 1:14](#); cf. [Matt. 18:10](#)). The church, on the other hand, is repeatedly promised a co-regency with Christ ([2:26-27](#); [3:21](#); [5:10](#); [20:4](#); [Matt. 19:28](#); [Luke 22:30](#); [1 Cor. 6:2-3](#); [2 Tim. 2:12](#)).

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- Presbuteroi (**elders**) is never used in Scripture to refer to angels, but always to men. It is used to speak of older men in general, and the rulers of both Israel and the church. There is no indisputable use of presbuteroi outside of Revelation to refer to angels. (Some believe that "elders" in [Isaiah 24:23](#) refers to angels, but it could as well refer to humans.) Further, "elder" would be an inappropriate term to describe angels, who do not age.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- While angels do appear in white (e.g., [John 20:12](#); [Acts 1:10](#)), **white garments** more commonly are the dress of believers. That is particularly true in the immediate context of Revelation.
 - Christ promised the believers at Sardis that they would "be clothed in white garments" ([3:5](#)). He advised the apostate Laodiceans to "buy from Me... white garments so that you may clothe yourself" ([3:18](#)).
 - At the marriage supper of the Lamb, His bride will "clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean" ([19:8](#)).
 - **White garments** symbolize Christ's righteousness imputed to believers at salvation.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- That the elders wore **golden crowns on their heads** provides further evidence that they were humans. Crowns are never promised in Scripture to angels, nor are angels ever seen wearing them. *Stephanos* (**crowns**) is the victor's crown, worn by those who successfully endured the trial, those who competed and won the victory. Christ promised such a crown to the loyal believers at Smyrna: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" ([2:10](#)).
- "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things," wrote Paul. "They then do it to receive a perishable wreath [stephanos], but we an imperishable" ([1 Cor. 9:25](#)). He wrote of that imperishable crown again in [2](#)

[Timothy 4:8](#): "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- James wrote of "the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" ([James 1:12](#)), and Peter of "the unfading crown of glory" ([1 Pet. 5:4](#)).
- Holy angels do not personally struggle with and triumph over sin; thus, the overcomer's crown, the crown of those who successfully ran the race and finished victorious, would not be appropriate for them.
- It is unlikely, then, that the twenty-four elders are angels, or that they represent Israel, the Tribulation saints, or a combination of Israel and the church.
- That leaves one most acceptable possibility, that they represent the raptured, glorified, coronated church, which sings the song of redemption ([5:8-10](#)). They have their crowns and live in the place prepared for them, where they have gone to be with Jesus (cf. [John 14:1-4](#)).

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- Revelation 4:5 (HCSB)
 - ⁵ Flashes of lightning and rumblings of thunder came from the throne. Seven fiery torches were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- Flowing out from God's presence, symbolized by the **throne**, John saw a precursor to the firestorm of divine fury about to burst on the sinful world. **Flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder** are associated with God's presence in [Exodus 19:16](#) and [Ezekiel 1:13](#).
- They are also associated with God's judgment during the Tribulation. In [Revelation 8:5](#) "the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning."
- In [Revelation 11:19](#) "the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder." When the seventh angel pours out his bowl there will be "flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder" ([16:18](#)).
- John saw a preview of the divine wrath that will be poured out on the earth, described in [chapters 6-19](#).

- **The Throne Room of Heaven**

- As he looked at the scene in heaven John saw two things **before the throne**.
- First **were seven lamps of fire**. Unlike the lampstands mentioned in [1:12-13](#), these were outdoor torches, giving off not the soft, gentle light of an indoor lamp, but the fierce, blazing light of a fiery torch. John identifies them as **the seven Spirits of God**.
- As noted in the discussion of [1:4](#) in [chapter 1](#) of this volume, that phrase describes the Holy Spirit in all His fullness (cf. [Isa. 11:2](#); [Zech. 4:1-10](#)).
- **The Throne Room of Heaven**
 - The sevenfold representation of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah speaks of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, reverence, and deity; in Zechariah of power; in [Revelation 1:4](#) of grace and peace; and here of fiery judgment.
 - Torches are associated with war in [Judges 7:16, 20](#) and [Nahum 2:3-4](#). John's vision depicts God as ready to make war on sinful, rebellious mankind and the Holy Spirit as His war torch.
 - Our world does not like to think of God as a God of judgment. They prefer to look at the rainbow around the throne and ignore the lightning and thunder out of the throne. He certainly is a God of grace, but His grace reigns *through righteousness* ([Rom. 5:21](#)). This was made clear at the cross where God manifested both His love for sinners and His wrath against sin.
 - The Comforter of those who love Christ will be the Consumer of those who reject Him.