

God's Master Plan In Prophecy

Lesson 6 – The Vision of the Lamb that was Slain

Key Scriptures: Revelation 4:1-5:14

Introduction

Rev 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

In this lesson we will study the first vision that was shown to John and recorded in the Book of Revelation. We have already discussed in our first lesson why I do not believe that this verse represents the Rapture of the Church. This verse does signify a beginning, however, for it is a beginning of John's recording of the visions of the future events. Jesus had commanded John to "write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."¹ In other words, John was commanded to write down his memories from the past, the direction for the church that God had given at the present time, and also the prophetic visions of the future. John fully obeyed all three commands: he wrote the Gospel of John which detailed his memories of the past ministry of Jesus Christ and were things that "he had seen" and he wrote the letters of 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John giving guidance to what was then present circumstances. God also revealed to him the spiritual conditions of seven churches of Asia which John recorded in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation. Now, here in the first verse of the 4th chapter of Revelation, we have the beginning of John writing down the prophetic events.¹ And God began to reveal prophetic events to John by first showing him a wide-sweeping, panoramic view of God's plan from the standpoint of the plan of redemption of mankind.

A Vision of Heaven

Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

John saw a vision of heaven and these verses that follow are the only detailed look given to us in the scriptures as to what heaven is like right now. Notice that there are no streets of gold – it is the New Jerusalem that comes out of the New Heaven that has streets of gold.² This current heaven that John is looking is the heaven that is right now and for the sake of clarity we will refer to it as the "Old Heaven." We will go to this heaven initially at the Catching Away of the Saints, but we will live forever in the "New Jerusalem." We will discuss the "New Jerusalem" in greater detail when we get to the end of the book of Revelation.ⁱⁱ

Also notice that there is only one throne in heaven and one who sat on the throne. As we will see later, the One who sits upon the throne is none other than the lamb of God, Jesus Christ!

Rev 4:3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

What a glorious view heaven is! John, no doubt struggling for adjectives to describe what he had seen, resorted to describing the splendor and glory of the One who sat on the throne as precious gemstones that are highly polished. There also was a rainbow that stretched all of the way around the throne.

Rev 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

Around the throne were twenty-four seats with twenty-four "elders" or leaders sitting in them and they were clothed in white clothing and had crowns of gold. Some people teach that this is the church and that the 24 elders represent the

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See Revelation 1:19.

² See the 21st chapter of Revelation.

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church, and others teach that it is the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples. I think another explanation is very likely, one that we will discuss fully in just a moment.

Rev 4:5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

What a magnificent scene this is, the throne room of heaven! A wonderful throne sits with one on the throne, surrounded by a full rainbow. Then, are the smaller thrones of the twenty-four elders which sit around the throne. And then as John watched, from the throne comes lightning and thunders and power emanates from the One who rules over all of the universe. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which – John says – are the seven Spirits of God.

This reference to the "seven Spirits of God" has caused many people to err in interpretation because of not allowing scripture to interpret scripture and not allowing all of the scripture to come together to harmonize on the subject. Let's take a moment and review some basics: we know that God is a Spirit³ and that there is only one Spirit of Deity⁴ Therefore, if we interpret this verse in light of all of scripture there cannot be seven distinctly different Spirits of God – what then is meant by this passage? A careful study of all of scripture reveals that there are seven ways that we must allow God's Spirit to move in our lives; that is, there are seven different aspects of God's Spirit that He wants to manifest itself in our life. We will take the time to go through one by one:

Isa 11:2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

This scripture is about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ and how the Spirit of God would work through Him. Here we find three aspects of the "Spirit of the Lord:"

1. ***Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding*** – To allow the Holy Spirit complete liberty in our lives, we must allow it to bring "wisdom and understanding." There are many commandments and passages of scripture that do not make sense until a person has received the Holy Ghost.⁵ After a person receives the Holy Spirit, they must allow the Spirit of God to deal with their heart about areas of their life that they need to change. If they do not, then the Holy Ghost cannot fulfill it's purpose for coming into their life! Wisdom is the application of what you understand – by allowing the Holy Ghost to reveal and apply correction to their life, a person allows God's Spirit to perform this work.
2. ***Spirit of Counsel and Strength*** – The words here for "counsel and might" in the original Hebrew are literally "purpose and power." The second work of the Holy Ghost in a person's life is to bring a new sense of purpose and to give them the power to fulfill that purpose – priorities should change in a person who has received the Spirit of God!
3. ***Spirit of Knowledge and of the Fear of the Lord*** – The third work of the Spirit of God in a person's life is to cause them to desire in an increase of knowledge of the Lord. We learn more about the Lord through His word, but also by trusting Him through trials and experiencing deeper moves of God. As a person learns more about God, the more reverence or "fear" that they develop toward Him! Those that "fear the Lord" are those who grow deeper in God.⁶

Isaiah has revealed to us three aspects of the Spirit of God but we need seven. Hundreds of years later when the Holy Spirit was about to be poured out and Jesus was readying the disciples for its coming, He told them another aspect of it:

John 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

³ See John 4:24.

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4.

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

⁶ See Psalms 25:12-14.

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4. ***Spirit of Truth*** – This scripture⁷ teaches us the importance of allowing the Spirit of God to bring a "spirit of truth." Many people have a form of "truth" but we must allow the Spirit of God to tear away the traditions of men and make sure that we believe everything like the original Early Church that Jesus Christ established! Unfortunately, some people receive the Holy Spirit but resist it's effort's to lead them into complete truth.

The Apostle Paul revealed some other aspects of what the Spirit of God comes in our lives to be. He mentioned:

2 Cor 4:13a But having the same spirit of faith,

5. ***Spirit of Faith*** – the Holy Ghost also tries to bring a "spirit of faith" into a person's life. The spirit of faith is an attitude that says "any promise written in God's Word is for me and can happen today, so I will speak it and believe it!" We need to allow the Spirit of God to remove the seeds of doubt in our life.

Paul also wrote to the church in Rome and mentioned another "spirit of God:"

Rom 1:4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

6. ***Spirit of Holiness*** – This is a much neglected work of the Spirit of God. If a person will submit themselves completely to God, they will begin to feel the Spirit of God call them to be "holy" or "clean like God" and separated from a worldly lifestyle. Time and space does not allow us to address this subject fully here, but there are two elements to holiness: the outside and the inside – what men see, and what God sees. We must endeavor to be more holy and God-like in our lifestyle, dress, speech, and actions, and also in our thoughts, meditations, and attitudes!

It is John the Revelator who reveals to us the seventh and final aspect of God's Spirit dealing with men:

Rev 19:10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

7. ***Spirit of Prophecy*** – The angel said that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The ultimate work that the Holy Ghost tries to bring about in a person's life is for them to witness to others with the testimony of Jesus. Jesus' testimony is how that He died, was buried, and rose again. The "brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus" are those who have died to their sins in repentance, been "buried with him" in water baptism, and resurrected to a new life through the infilling of the Holy Ghost! When you follow the leading of the Holy Ghost and share the testimony of Jesus Christ with other people, you are actually in the spirit of prophecy because you are prophesying what will happen in their life if they will yield to God's Spirit – when you tell someone that they need to repent, be baptized in Jesus' name, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, you are prophesying about what God will do if they will obey His Word!

And so a better and more Biblically sound view of the "seven spirits of God" are that they represent seven ways of dealing with mankind that the one Spirit of God desires to bring in man's life. As we will see, this vision is about the redemption of man and God's saving mankind, so such an interpretation fits the context of the chapters also. Now let's get back to our study in the 4th chapter of Revelation and John's portrait of the heaven that is now:

Rev 4:6 and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

In front of the throne was something resembling a huge "sea of glass." That is, the floor is made of something like pure crystal – it is certainly hard to fathom but it must be beautiful! There were also very different looking creatures around the throne:

Rev 4:7-9 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY,

⁷ Along with John 8:31-32; 16:13.

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There is another point to all of this: the Jewish Rabbis tell us that each of the four lead tribes had a "standard" or banner which they raised to represent their position. Judah's ensign was a lion, Ephraim's a calf, Reuben's a face of a man, and Dan's an eagle. The arrangement of the tribes of Israel into four groups were the earthly model of these fantastic creatures in heaven, and like the creatures, the tents of the Israelites were to face the throne of God as a constant sign of worship to Him!

Rev 4:10-11 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

The twenty-four elders also worshiped God. We will discuss the twenty-four elders at length in a moment, but realize how perfectly this all matches the arrangement of the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses' leadership. First, around the tabernacle were the Levites, who were those who ministered and led the people in worship and the leaders of Israel and then the tribes. All of their tent flaps faced inward toward the Tabernacle where God dwelt, signifying a constant worship and reliance toward God. All of this was just a physical representation of the heavenly reality!

The Vision of the Lamb That Was Slain

Rev 5:1 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

After spending a chapter describing the great splendor and scenes of heaven, John then begins to see a drama acted out in heaven. In the vision, God had a book in His hand that was "sealed up" with seven seals. In Biblical days when a king decreed something or wanted to protect the contents to only be read by a certain someone, they would melt a bit of wax upon the item and then, while the wax was soft and malleable, place their signet ring into the wax, leaving the image of the king for all to clearly see.¹¹ It was a stamp of approval and also so that all could see that it was a decree made by the king's authority.ⁱⁱⁱ When a scroll was sealed, then to open the scroll or book, one had to first remove the seals upon it, so for the contents of this book in God's hand to be revealed, someone had to be able to remove the seven seals upon it.

Rev 5:2-4 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. 4 Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;

The only problem was that there was no man in heaven or earth worthy to open the book or remove the seals. The book represents God's salvation and plan of redemption of the human race, yet no human being was perfect or sinless and thus worthy to open the book and reveal God's grace and salvation to us.

Rev 5:5-6 and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." 6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

The terms "Lion of the tribe of Judah" and "Root of David" are both terms for Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ was from the tribe of Judah and was a kingly descendant of David and He was the one who "prevailed" to open the book. As John looked, a vision of a Lamb "standing as if slain" appeared. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he proclaimed "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world."¹² We can now realize that what John is seeing is a prophetic vision of what had already taken place in the plan of God and is a portrait of God's dealing with mankind from the broadest of views. Obviously there is not a literal bloody sheep in heaven today and John is seeing a symbolic vision of the work of Jesus Christ upon Calvary and so we can be sure that these two chapters are a view of the end-time events from the viewpoint of redemption! John is seeing in a visual "play" what was happening with Christ's coming to earth.

Rev 5:7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

The Lamb that had been slain came and took the book out of the right hand of the one who sat on the throne. Let us realize that this is imagery and is a vision that represents spiritual events and does not prove in any way a duality of the

¹¹ See Matthew 27:66; I Kings 21:8; Esther 8:8; Nehemiah chapters 9-10; Daniel 6:17.

¹² See John 1:29.

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Godhead. For example, the Lamb came from the "middle of the throne"¹³ and that there was only "one" who sat upon the throne.¹⁴ In Revelation 1:8, Jesus said that He was "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." In Revelation 21:5-6, the One who sat upon the throne speaks and says that He is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." The scriptures teach elsewhere that Jesus Christ was God come in flesh and that God bought the church with "his own blood."¹⁵ *Just as there is only one Spirit of God and yet in this vision we have seven different ways that the one Spirit of God reveals itself and works in our lives, so are we seeing here not a duality of persons, but a duality of modes or roles of redemption of God toward man.* Jesus is the only image of the invisible Spirit of God that we will ever see and He is the only one who sits upon the throne!¹⁶ The Lamb refers to God become flesh and when we realize that the Lamb came from the "middle of the throne" we get a beautiful picture of a mighty God of glory who became flesh and died so that we could be redeemed from sin and Satan and have eternal life!

The book that John saw in God's hands, then, was the plan and revelation of God to save man, but it could not be opened and the seals could not be removed until after the Lamb of God had been slain and resurrected! When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He was able to take the plan of God and begin to tear off the seals so that the ultimate plan of God could eventually be revealed to men. This is important, because when we study the seven seals in the next lesson, we will find that they are end-time events and so now we know that they could not be fulfilled until after Calvary and that they are just the preliminary events leading to the ultimate plan of God being revealed to the world! Furthermore this book of these visions that John wrote is not the book of "Revelations" but rather the "book of Revelation of Jesus Christ!" Because the world will only be saved and redeemed, and the ultimate plan of God for our redemption finished when Jesus Christ is fully revealed to this earth!

Rev 5:8-10 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Now we finally get back to the twenty-four elders. They began to praise the Lamb for His work on Calvary.^{iv} You will hear many a varied opinion as to the identity of the twenty-four elders and most of them stem from the fact that they follow the King James Version and the New King James Version for verses 9-10. The King James Version and the New King James Version has for verse 9 "hast redeemed *us* to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." And in verse 10 the twenty-four elders say "hast made *us*." They are the only two major translations that render the verses in this manner and most translators believe that they are incorrect according to the majority of the critical texts. Almost every other major translation in the English language renders these verses in a manner similar to the New American Update that the twenty-four elders said, "you purchased or redeemed *men*." And, in verse 10, "you have made *them*."

The change is subtle but vastly different in meaning; if the word is "us" then the twenty-four elders were themselves redeemed from the earth and thus ordinary men who have been saved. That rendering is why so many preachers say that the twenty-four elders are the church. But if the term is "men" and that God saved "them" from the earth, then the twenty-four elders are not the ones who were saved, but are talking about humans that were. That is, the twenty-four elders are not necessarily humans themselves.

A much more Biblically sound view that takes all of this into account and causes the rest of scripture to harmonize is that the twenty-four elders are created angelic beings in heaven that form the "government of heaven." This is not so far-fetched when we take into account that everything on earth is a model of a heavenly reality and that 12 and 24 are the numbers always associated with Godly government.¹⁷ In Moses' tabernacle, there were 24 courses of the priests in the earthly temple that were the leaders of worship on earth¹⁸ and it was these very priest who were the ones who camped the closest to the Tabernacle each night. That they were the earthly representation of a heavenly leaders that John saw as the twenty-four elders is further strengthened by the crowns that the twenty-four elders wore, crowns signifying authority and position. There is, of course, no way to prove any of the theories of the twenty-four elders, but this latter one makes much more sense to me and given how that everything found in this vision has been the heavenly reality after which

¹³ See Revelation 7:17.

¹⁴ See Revelation 4:2.

¹⁵ See Colossians 2:8-10; 1 Timothy 3:16; Acts 20:28.

¹⁶ See Colossians 1:15; John 1:18.

¹⁷ That is, there were twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples, etc...

¹⁸ See the 23rd through 27th chapters of 1 Chronicles.

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everything on earth was patterned, it seems that this theory would be more probable than some of the others that have been given.

In all of this, let us not lose sight of what the twenty-four elders said: Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, was the only man worthy to take the book of redemption and open it. He is the only man who was ever sinless and thus could pay the price of sin for us. And such was the plan of God from the beginning: to come in flesh Himself and let that flesh pay the price of our sins and redeem humanity from death, hell, and the grace!

Rev 5:11-12 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

Stretching out from the throne of God, John saw literally millions of angels worshiping the One who sat upon it. Truly the image on earth of the children of Israel stretching forth from Tabernacle was only a small representation of what the reality in heaven is; what a truly wonderful and magnificent scene!

Rev 5:13-14 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

After mentioning the "angels," John also mentions that "every created thing which is in heaven" also began to praise God. This certainly seems to point to the accuracy of the theory that God created a great diversity of creatures throughout the heavens as well as earth and no matter where God's creations might live, they all were created to worship God!

John's Vision of the Lamb that was Slain is really a grand introduction to the prophecies of the unveiling of the seven seals. In our next lesson we will study these "seals" that have to come to pass in order for the perfect plan of God to be revealed to the world and that could only be opened after Jesus Christ died at Calvary.

Endnotes

Some people have taught that the seven churches of Asia prophetically represented seven “church ages,” but to believe that is to believe that the present age is one of apathy and lukewarmness! I believe that those seven churches of Asia are representative of types of churches found in every period of time but were actual messages to seven actual churches during John's life.

ⁱⁱ This points out a very common fallacy among Christian funeral speakers because there has been many a time that it was said, “so and so is not here today, they are shouting on streets of gold.” While so and so may have been saved and died right with God, they cannot be at the moment of that funeral actually dancing on streets of gold because they are in the grave awaiting the catching away of the Saints and the resurrection and heaven doesn't have streets of gold right now – only when the old heavens and the old earth passes away will we get a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem with streets of gold.

ⁱⁱⁱ In similar manner, the Holy Ghost is the "seal of God" in that when a person receives the Holy Ghost, they are stamped with the image of the King while they are soft and malleable and all can clearly see that they are under the control of the King's authority (see Ephesians 1:12-14)!

^{iv} An interesting side note is that this is the first reference in the Bible to angels singing since the fall of Lucifer in the beginning. Go search your Bible carefully and you will find that angels don't sing after the fall of mankind, until here when the plan of redemption is finally unfolded and fulfilled. Sin put a hiatus on songs in heaven!