

Revelation
Lesson IV
Revelation 4:1-6:17

The Throne, The Lamb, and The Book

Introduction:

1. Chapter four begins a new section of the book of Revelation.
 - a. Rev. 1-3 has dealt with scenes on earth.
 - b. Now John is invited to look behind the scenes at what is happening in heaven.
Rev. 4:1
2. John will be allowed to share in the mind of God and to glimpse the future.
3. From the vantage point of eternity, John saw a different perspective on the troublesome events causing such anxiety among the churches.
 - a. He was allowed to write what he saw.
 - b. These visions were to reassure and encourage the persecuted church of John's day.
4. In this lesson we shall witness an impressive scene in heaven.
 - a. The Father is enthroned securely in heaven and receives constant worship from creation.
 - b. A book containing the destiny of mankind lies in his right hand.
 - c. The Lamb of God is worthy and willing to take that book and make its contents known.
5. The impact of such a vision is not difficult to imagine.

Body of Lesson:

I. The Throne Almighty:

A. John saw that God's throne was intact in spite of Rome's railings and Caesar's claims.

1. Many had tried before to displace the sovereign Ruler of the Universe.
2. Only one throne is permanent amidst the passing glories of frail men.

B. The one seated on the throne is clearly identified as God the Father. Rev. 4:8b

1. John was unable to describe him in precise terms.
2. Rainbow around the throne emphasizes covenant-keeping quality of our Father.

C. The 24 elders surround the throne. Rev. 4:4

1. This likely represents the redeemed of God's two great covenants with mankind.
2. They have crowns and victory robes.

D. "Four living creatures" were also seen around the throne. Rev. 4:6-8

1. These represent the totality of animate things.
2. Creation worships God rather than Caesar.

E. All nature and all the redeemed are represented as joining together to praise the one on the throne.

II. The Book of Human Destiny

A. John's attention is caught by a scroll held in the Father's right hand.

1. Sealed securely with seven seals.
2. Its contents were desired by John.

B. This is the book of the destiny of mankind.

1. The fate of suffering saints is told in it.
2. The outcome of Rome's machinations against the church is revealed.

C. Great sadness was caused by the unworthiness of anyone to open the scroll.

Rev. 5:3-4

1. Would the promised revelation of "things to come to pass shortly" be ended abruptly?
2. God does not tease and taunt.

D. A hero is about to appear who can open the scroll and complete the revelation process.

III. The Lamb Who is Worthy:

A. "A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" comes on the scene. Rev. 5:5-7

1. "Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Cf. John 1:29"
2. He has power (i.e. seven horns) and knowledge (i.e. seven eyes).
3. He is worthy (in holiness and authority) to receive and open the scroll.

B. He receives it from the Father without struggle, for the two are united in purpose and action.

C. Upon the prospect of his opening the scroll, all things in the universe begin to praise the Lamb. Rev. 5:9-10

1. Both the Father and the Lamb deserve worship.
2. The Lamb is praised with seven (i.e. perfect) expressions. Rev. 5:12

D. The scene is set for the opening of the seals.

IV. The Opening of the Seals:

A. The first four seals are opened in a set pattern.

1. The seal is opened, and someone calls "come".
2. A horse and rider appear.

B. How shall we interpret these horses and riders?

1. Most students see them as woes sent upon Rome by the Almighty.
 - a. This is a plausible view.
 - b. But if these are initial judgments of Rome, why do the martyrs who appear with the fifth seal ask God to begin avenging his cause?
2. Perhaps it is best to see the first four seals in terms of a prediction of increased perils yet to come upon the Christians.
 - a. The Lord is always honest about what faces his people.
 - b. The question of the martyrs makes better sense against this background.

C. The first four seals. Rev. 6:1-8

1. White horse and conqueror: War.

2. Red horse and rider who causes men to slay one another: Bloodshed.
3. Black horse ridden by someone with scale for measuring foodstuffs: Famine.
4. Pale Horse with rider named Death: Death.

D. The fifth seal. Rev. 6:9-10

1. Martyrs under the heavenly altar cry “How long?” and look for God to act.
2. This is a cry for vindication of God’s cause on earth and not one for personal revenge.
3. A two-part answer was given them.
 - a. Given white victory robes to wear.
 - b. Told that God would take action in his own good time.
4. This is a case of the problem of evil being pressed in Scripture.
5. The “How long?” question is answered fully only at Rev. 19:2

E. The sixth seal: prediction of Rome’s fate.

1. Earthquake, black sun, and blood moon are not to be fulfilled literally. Cf. Acts 2:20
2. This is common apocalyptic symbolism to signify social and political chaos.
3. Reference is not to final Judgment but to God’s judgment of Rome in the events of history.
4. The judgment of Rome will bring great terror to the hearts of those who witness it.

Conclusion:

1. Chapter six ends with the question “Who will be able to stand” (in the face of the impending judgment of Rome)?
2. This question is answered in chapter seven.
3. After God secures his people (Rev. 7) for the sake of their protection and security, the seventh seal will be opened.
 - a. It will reveal seven warning trumpets which will, in turn, reveal seven bowls of divine wrath.
 - b. The saints will be protected from destruction from this judgment.
4. God is in control of history, and his people are under his watchful providence at all times.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT LESSON:

Read Rev. 7:1-17 very carefully. Who are the 144,000 of the passage? Why are they “sealed” (i.e. marked) by the Lord?