

b) Heavenly worship - 4:1-5:14

After John has written his letters to the seven churches, he now shares with those churches the visions that God gave him. In Chapter 4 and 5 we begin with a view of heaven.

Chapter 4

1. Central in heaven is the throne of God. Before the throne we see the seven-armed candlestick that we find in the temple before the throne, and the 'sea of glass' - I think, the heavenly equivalent to the copper basin for washings in the temple. The 'throne of God' is the equivalent to the ark of the covenant in the temple.
2. The 24 elders around the throne - dressed in white and with golden crowns (promised to the seven churches, see 2.10 and 3.5) seem to represent all the people of God (12 tribes, 12 apostles)
3. Those people of God before the throne of God in heaven: Are they those who have died as martyrs and have 'arrived' after persecutions? Maybe. Or: are they all the people of God - including those still on earth? If you are being persecuted, it is encouraging to realise your actual spiritual place: you are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. (Ephesians 2.6)
4. Four angelic creatures - lion, ox, man, eagle - praise God. A reference to Ezekiel 1.5-18 and Isaiah 6.2-3. They worship God in his heavenly temple and they focus on God as Creator in chapter 4. Do the angelic creatures represent everything that is created by God? The persecuted church has the powerful Creator on its side! No wonder the 24 elders join all of creation in the worship of God.

Chapter 5

1. In chapter 5 the focus shifts to God as the Redeemer. God has a scroll in his hand and Jesus takes that scroll. Compare with Ezekiel 2.9, Daniel 8.26, 12.4, and Isaiah 29.11 The scroll has seven seals - the seals that are opened in the remainder of the book of revelation. What does the scroll signify?
2. The reason why Jesus can take the scroll and open the seals is because he has conquered (5.5) and because he was killed and has ransomed people from all nations by his blood and he made them a kingdom and priests for God. (5.9-10) I assume this means that the scroll has to do with the change from Old Covenant to New Covenant, and with the ownership issue. Christ owns his church. So he is entitled and powerful to act on behalf of and for his church.
3. Notice the trinitarian focus on chapter 5. It is about God on the throne, the Lamb, and the Seven Spirits of God. And the angelic beings and the 24 elders worship the Lamb by falling down before him (5.8) and by singing a song for him (5.9-10). Also notice how the Lamb is worshipped with similar words as God (5.12-13). This is heresy and idolatry except if Jesus has indeed the same divine character as God.
4. The encouragement for the persecuted church is clear. While they may suffer on earth now, they are a kingdom and priests for God who already worship him in his heavenly temple. And they shall one day reign on earth (5.10). This means the reversal of roles. Those who are being persecuted shall become the rulers.
5. Notice another utensil from the temple: the golden bowls full of incense. (5.8). These signify the prayers of the saints - the persecuted church. Their prayers reach God and therefore, the persecuted church plays a role in heaven with its prayers on earth.
6. Notice how 'liturgical' heavenly worship is. The temple service of Israel was a reflection of what goes on in the spiritual sphere. See Hebrews 8.5.

