

The Book of Revelation

Session 3 - Heaven and Earth United (Chapters 4-5)

Course Overview

The Book of Revelation can be divided into five sections:

1. Introduction: Establishing Context and Conflict (Revelation 1-5)
2. Action: The Main Story - Focus on God's Perspective (Revelation 6-11)
3. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Satan's Schemes (Revelation 12-14)
4. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Mankind's Sinfulness (Revelation 15-19)
5. Ending: Resolution (Revelation 20-22)

Chapters 4-5 establish the nature and goal of the one at the heart of this story. They reveal the crisis that needs resolving - that God's name is not being worshipped as it deserves.

Chapter Overview

These two chapters can be divided into two sections:

1. The Great Injustice (Revelation 4)
2. God's Cosmic Masterplan (Revelation 5)

These chapters give us a broad and beautiful overview not just of the whole of this book, but of the entire gospel story from start to finish. God's beauty moves all of heaven to extravagant worship, and so a deep, unified cry arises for God's name to be worshipped across all of earth and heaven. This cry of worship moves God to set into motion a plan that revolves around His son Jesus, that will result in His name being known across all of creation.

The Great Injustice (Revelation 4)

Verse 1:

"Come up here" - God wants us to see things from His perspective.

"I will show you what must take place after this" - Just as it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross, these events are necessary to bring forth the fullness of the kingdom of God on the earth (Matthew 16:21,24:6, Revelation 1:1).

Verse 2:

"There before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it" - Everything revolves around the incomparable worth and majesty of God. The more we understand who God is, the more we will understand the whole storyline.

Verse 3:

“A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne” - God is utterly beautiful and completely faithful.

Verse 4:

“Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones” - God is completely secure in his power and authority. He gladly shares it with us. He wants to reign with us, not over us.

“They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads” - These elders have attained all the promises of God to the churches (Revelation 1:10,2:26,3:5,3:11,3:21).

Verse 5:

“From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder” - God is beautiful and glorious in his power.

Verse 6:

“What looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal” - Just as man was made in the image of God, so was the earth made in the image of heaven. The earth will not be at peace until heaven's complete likeness is found in it. (Matthew 6:10)

“In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures” - The living creatures are more than just ornaments in heaven - they are burning with zeal and passion to see God's name honoured among the nations (Ezekiel 1, Revelation 6).

Verse 7:

“The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle” - These living creatures are the glory of God (Ezekiel 3:12). They reflect who He is as revealed in Jesus. The lion speaks of kingship; the ox of humility; the man of humanity; the eagle of sovereignty. He is all of these things - there is no contradiction.

Verse 8:

“Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” - Heaven is a place of worship. Heaven cannot exist without worship.

Verse 9-10:

“Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him” - This unending worship of God unites all of heaven. There is no conflict in heaven because every creature there is in agreement that God is worthy of unending praise.

Verse 11:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” - God is worthy to receive all power and dominion, not just in heaven but across all of the universe (Psalm 148). The prayer room in heaven burns with a deep sense of injustice that God is not being worshipped rightly.

They will not stop until the earth looks like heaven and God's name is honoured across every nation.

God's Cosmic Masterplan (Revelation 5)

Verse 1:

"Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals" - This scroll is God's battle plan, his response to the great injustice that grieves heaven, to establish His kingdom on earth.

"With writing on both sides" - This message is complete and final. It cannot and does not need to be added to.

Verse 2:

"Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" - God will only give this scroll to one who is utterly pure and upright. He will not compromise and so requires someone completely surrendered who will partner with Him in this plan.

Verse 3:

"But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside" - From all of human history, not a single ruler is deemed worthy of this task and responsibility.

Verse 4:

"I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside" - John also is now swept up in heaven's cry and burning sense of injustice. Our witness and influence on the earth as God's people will only reach as far as our longing for His name to be honoured.

Verse 5:

"See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed" - John is introduced to heaven's champion, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is worthy to open the scroll.

"Lion" - This champion is fierce. He is a king who is destined to rule.

"Of the tribe of Judah" - This champion is a man, born into royal lineage. His earthly birthright is to rule and reign (1 Chronicles 28:4, 2 Samuel 7:12-16).

"The Root of David" - This champion is not just descended from Judah, but he is the very root from which David and the tribe of Judah are descended from. He is God Himself - appointed by God to rule and reign and bring justice to the earth (Isaiah 11:10, Romans 15:12, Psalm 110).

Verse 6:

"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain" - Heaven's champion is qualified for this task not primarily because of His power or strength - or even His birthright - but because of His humility and meekness. He has proven His character by laying down His very life for us.

"The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth" - John explains the symbolic language to us. Horns represent power and eyes speak of wisdom. This champion has been anointed by God to rule and reign (Psalm 2:6).

Verse 7-8:

"The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb" - Heaven recognises the Lamb as God and Lord.

"They were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people" - God's kingdom on the earth - the church - joins in, declaring the worth of Jesus. Through our worship on the earth we partner with heaven in bringing forth God's purposes to the earth. It is vital we partner with the deep longing in heaven for God's name to be known.

Verse 9:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals" - Heaven and earth come together in powerful agreement declaring the worth of Jesus (Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:20).

"Because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation" - Jesus' sacrifice qualifies Him for this task. He died not for His own gain, but for our gain and for God's glory. He is not power-hungry. He can be trusted with ultimate power and authority, and trusted to give back to God everything God has given Him. God will glorify Jesus so that Jesus brings glory to God (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:24, John 17:1-5).

Verse 10:

"They will reign on the earth" - We were purchased for God for a purpose - to be His kingdom. Our calling and destiny is to rule and reign with Him on this very earth.

Verse 11-12:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise" - On earth as in heaven. It is not enough for Jesus to be honoured only in heaven. He is worthy of all the praise from all of creation.

Verse 13:

"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them" - All of creation joins as one in their worship. The worth and beauty of Jesus has brought unity to all of heaven and earth (Ephesians 1:10).

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" - Through Jesus, He and the Father are honoured in all creation. This is God's plan to eventually return to the earth and dwell with His creation - to bring all of creation together in love and adoration of His son.

Verse 14:

"The four living creatures said 'Amen', and the elders fell down and worshipped" - Earth has now become part of this eternal cycle of worship in heaven.

Summary

These chapters highlight four key truths about the worship in heaven:

1. The worship in heaven is a response to the beauty of God (Revelation 4:8)
2. The worship in heaven is sustained by the eternal nature of God (Revelation 4:9-10)
3. The worship in heaven is jealous for the glory of God (Revelation 4:11)
4. The worship in heaven will one day fill the earth and bring unity to all creation (Revelation 5:11-14)

These chapters reveal three ways God will respond to the worship of heaven:

1. God will give His son Jesus authority over the nations (Revelation 5:1-2, 6-7)
2. God will receive for Himself a kingdom on the earth (Revelation 5:10)
3. God's name will be honoured across all of creation (Revelation 5:13)

These chapters also reveal three key truths about Jesus:

1. Jesus is qualified to be king by earthly birthright (Revelation 5:5)
2. Jesus is qualified to be king by heavenly appointment (Revelation 5:5)
3. Jesus is qualified to be king by His love demonstrated on the cross (Revelation 5:6)

These chapters show us four ways we are to respond to the worship of heaven:

1. We behold God's majesty and make this a priority in our lives (Revelation 4:8)
2. We let God's beauty fill our hearts and cause us to grow in love (Revelation 4:10)
3. We allow this love to mature into a deep longing for God's name to be known (Revelation 4:11)
4. We bring this deep longing to God in prayer, joining with heaven in crying out for Jesus to bring forth God's purposes (Revelation 5:4,8)