

Acts 2: Lesson Eight, Jesus' Revelation to John, Part 1 *Revelation 1-4*

Subject: John saw a vision in which Jesus instructed him to record seven letters and in which God was seated on His throne.

Main Idea: The triune God is alive, active, and sovereign in the affairs of heaven and earth.

Principles:

1. *Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever and is intimately involved with His church.*
2. *Jesus knows our greatest spiritual needs.*
3. *God the Father is enthroned in heaven today, just as He has always been.*

Introduction

Based on my personal experience in raising my own children, it is hard for me to imagine any child who hasn't at some point complained, "It's not fair!" Deep in the human heart is a longing for justice. Somewhere on the planet today, a cheated worker is hoping that he will be paid, an abandoned child is longing for a home, a starving widow is praying for assistance, and a falsely accused inmate is pleading for release. Many horrific injustices have taken place in the 2000 years since Jesus promised to return. Skeptics and scoffers mock the Christians' hope (2 Peter 3:4). At the end of the 19th century, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche even concluded that God must be dead, or else He surely would have done something about the state of the world. Even the faithful must admit that we sometimes groan as we wait.

Undoubtedly, the Christians of the first century were just as eager for Christ's return. Some of them had circumstances that were no easier than those of Christians in parts of the world today. Early on, the Jews were the Christians' main persecutors. Then in the middle of the first century, Christians living in Rome suffered under the Roman emperor, Nero. Near the end of the century, the Emperor Domitian persecuted the Christians of Asia Minor. During that time, the apostle John was living in Asia Minor (Ephesus) and was sentenced to exile on the island of Patmos for his Christian testimony. Meanwhile, God the Father had given Jesus a revelation. Jesus, in turn, revealed it to John on Patmos, telling him to write it down and send it to seven churches of Asia Minor "to show His servants what must soon take place" (Revelation 1:1). It is a revelation of the battle between the forces of good and evil and the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ at His return. The book of Revelation assured them, as it assures us, that despite our trials and the seeming triumph of evil, a day of reckoning is coming when all will be set right. God is not dead; He is alive, active, and sovereign in the affairs of heaven and earth. His justice will ultimately prevail and our perseverance will be rewarded. If we get lost in the details of Revelation and miss this, then we fail to see the main point. The suffering saints of the first century needed this encouraging reminder, and so do we.

I. Introduction to Revelation and John's Commissioning

A. Writer and Date

- i. Writer: The writer of Revelation identifies himself as "John" (1:1, 4). Tradition ascribes the book to John the apostle, the writer of the Gospel of John and three shorter epistles. Recently, some have objected to John's authorship on the basis that the Greek of Revelation is of poorer quality than that in John's gospel and epistles. However, since those works were written from Ephesus, John may have used an amanuensis, an advantage that he would not have had on Patmos.
- ii. Date: Only two dates have ever been seriously considered for the book: late in the reign of Nero (AD 67-68) or late in the reign of Domitian (approximately AD 95). They are the two first-century emperors who persecuted Christians. Since Nero's reign was prior to the Temple's destruction, certain scholars prefer that time frame (as will be explained). However, Irenaeus (who knew Polycarp, a disciple of John) claimed that John received the Revelation towards the end of Domitian's reign and most evangelical scholars prefer that later date.

B. Circumstances: Patmos was a small island off the coast of Asia Minor that served as a place of banishment during the time of Roman rule. During the period from Nero to Domitian, emperor worship became the official policy of Rome. Domitian took the title "Lord and God." Christians who refused to worship him were persecuted. This may be why John was in exile. According to Eusebius, an early fourth-century Greek historian of Christianity, John returned to Ephesus after his release from exile following Domitian's death (AD 96).ⁱ

C. Style

- i. Unique in the New Testament: Revelation is unique in more ways than one. First, it promises a special blessing to those who read its words. Second, it is in one sense an epistle (actually containing seven letters) and at the same time, an apocalyptic book of prophecy. "Apokalypsis" is a Greek word that means "revelation." Most apocalyptic literature outside the Bible was written between 200 BC and AD 200. It is a highly symbolic literary style, often mentioning angelic mediators, visions, and bizarre images.ⁱⁱ However, unlike the typical extra-Biblical apocalyptic works, Revelation claims to be prophetic (1:3, 22:7, 10, 18-19). Although we find prophecy contained within other New Testament books, it is the only New Testament book that is primarily (some would say entirely) prophetic.

- ii. Prophetic: In 1:19, Jesus told John, “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.” The things he had seen most naturally refer to the vision of Christ in chapter 1. The things that are “now” seem to be the circumstances of the seven churches, described in chapters 2-3. At the beginning of chapter 4, John was told he would be shown “what must take place *after this*” (4:1). Thus, chapters 4-22 seem to foretell the future events that “will take place later.” However, we are still left to wonder how near or distant these future events would be in relation to John’s generation, how geographically broad the scope of the events, and which details and events are symbolic and which are literal.

D. Four Interpretive Approaches: Four interpretative views of Revelation have developed through the centuries and each is supported today by a number of evangelical scholars.

- i. Historicism: The first view is that of historicism. Since the Reformation, many renowned scholars, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Isaac Newton, John Wycliffe, and John Wesley have taken this view. However, of the four views, it is probably the one that is least preferred by evangelicals today.
 1. According to this approach, the events of Revelation reflect the course of church history. Since the approach was widely advocated in the Reformation, the events are primarily viewed as concerning the Middle Ages. For example, the breaking of the seven seals in chapters 6-7 are usually identified with the barbarian invasions that brought down the Western Roman Empire, while the trumpets foretell the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire. Little is said about events after 1500. The seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor are said to portray the Church at seven different periods in church history. The church at Ephesus represents the church in John’s day while the church of Laodicea represents the church in the end-times.
 2. Common among all who take this approach is that the Antichrist and Babylon are connected with Rome and the papacy and that the time frames given are exact but symbolic in that one day represents one year. With these as exceptions, seldom do any two historicists find the same meaning in a given passage. For example, one symbol in Revelation is interpreted to represent the Reformation. This same symbol is said by someone else to represent the invention of the printing press!ⁱⁱⁱ
- ii. Preterism: The Latin word “preter” means “past.” Preterism is increasingly popular among scholars today (especially *but not exclusively* among liberal scholars). Preterists believe that since Jesus said the

predicted events would occur “soon” (1:1), they must foretell events that occurred not long after John received the revelation. Some believe they extend as far as the AD 476 fall of Rome, but most preterists see them as being fulfilled in the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish state, the Temple, and the religious system by Rome. They point out that Jesus foretold God’s judgment on Jerusalem for rejecting Him as Messiah (Matthew 23:37 through parts of Matthew 24). An advantage to this view is that John’s prophecies would have been very relevant to his original readers. Secondly, many of Revelation’s prophecies closely correspond to the historical details of the fall of Jerusalem, as recorded by the non-Christian eyewitness and historian Josephus. One objection to this view is its dependence on a pre-AD 70 writing date.

- iii. Futurism: Futurism is the most commonly taught view among contemporary evangelical writers and teachers. Early teachers, such as Justin Martyr (AD 165), Irenaeus (AD 195) and Hippolytus (AD 236) held variations of this view.^{iv} While acknowledging that Christ spoke to seven churches of Asia Minor about issues in their first-century churches, futurists see chapters 4-22 as foretelling events that have still not occurred to date.
1. The best-known form of futurism is called “dispensationalism.” Dispensationalists strongly prefer to interpret the events of Revelation as literally as possible. They believe the rapture of the church is foretold in Revelation 4:1 and chapters 4-19 describe a seven-year period of Tribulation that will immediately follow the rapture and end with the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19) and the establishment of His millennial (1000-year) reign on earth (Revelation 20).
 2. However, another camp of futurism places the rapture later in the end-times Tribulation and does not feel compelled to interpret the events quite so literally. Many of these futurists “temper their futurism with a touch of Preterism and/or Idealism. They remain futurists, however, in that they anticipate a future Antichrist arising to persecute the saints in a future tribulation period, and they do anticipate a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.”^v
- iv. Idealism (also known as the Spiritual, Timeless, or Symbolic Approach): According to Idealists, John’s visions can be divorced from specific historical events because they were meant to teach transcendent principles of the triumph of good over evil, the vindication of the saints, and the sovereignty of God. Like non-dispensational futurists, many evangelical idealists merge their views with one of the other approaches.

- E. Opening Words – 1:1-8:** The first verses contain the prologue and greeting, and John obviously added them after he saw and recorded the Revelation.
- i. “Soon” and “Near”: Verses 1 and 4 indicate that what is about to be revealed must “soon” take place, “because the time is near.” Preterists have the advantage of understanding these phrases in the most natural sense, since they believe the foretold prophecies were fulfilled in the first century. However, in apocalyptic and eschatological literature, the future is always viewed as imminent.^{vi} Therefore, the words *soon* and *near* do not necessarily require a near-term fulfillment in John’s day.
 - ii. The Eternal God (1:4): God is called the One “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (1:4), and “the Alpha and Omega” (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet [1:8]). The sevenfold Spirit is before His Throne (1:4). Most interpreters understand the sevenfold Spirit to represent the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2). The numbers “seven” and “twelve” are repeated throughout the book and represent wholeness, perfection, or completeness. Verses 4-5 move from the Father to the Holy Spirit to the Son: Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Our triune God is very much alive. His perfection assures us of His utter trustworthiness.
 - iii. Jesus’ Coming: 1:7 says, “He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him.” Revelation repeatedly references Jesus’ “coming.” Futurists believe the term refers to Christ’s Second Coming at the end of human history, and historicists and idealists are likely to see the term the same way. However, Preterists understand this to mean “coming in Judgment (on Israel).”
- F. John’s Vision of Jesus – 1:9-20:** The remainder of chapter 1 describes John’s commissioning by the Lord Jesus to write down what he saw.
- i. Someone Like a Son of Man: When John heard the “loud voice like a trumpet,” he turned and saw someone “like a son of man.” “Son of man” was one of Jesus’ favorite titles for Himself during His earthly ministry. He is God’s representative and also man’s representative. The specific phrase “one like a son of man” comes from Daniel 7:13, where Jesus is the one to whom the kingdom of the world is given. Daniel and John were challenged with describing Someone who was too awesome for human language. They could only see what He was “like.” The sight of Him was so glorious that John fell prostrate, “as though dead” (1:17).

- ii. Seven Lampstands and Seven Stars: John wrote that Jesus stood among seven lampstands and had seven stars in His hand. In His mouth He had a sharp, double-edged sword, depicting judgment. Jesus identified the stars as the “angels” of the seven churches and told John to write to them (2:1, 8, 12, etc.). “Angel” is the word “messenger.” It could refer to a heavenly messenger or an earthly one, such as a pastor or bishop, or perhaps even to the churches themselves, as Christ’s messengers to the world. In any case, it is the congregations to whom the messages were actually spoken. These churches were “lampstands.” Just as a lampstand exists for the purpose of casting light, the Church is to cast the light of Jesus, God’s revelation to the world. As High Priest over His church, Jesus moved among the lampstands, “checking the oil” (evaluating the purity and brightness) of each one.

Summary Statement: The opening chapter of John describes Jesus Christ as eternal and active in His church.

Principle: *Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever and is intimately involved with His church.*

Application: Christ’s involvement with His church includes intimate involvement in our own lives. Have you recently experienced His nearness? From time to time, every believer feels spiritually dry and distanced from God for unknown reasons. Sin always leaves us feeling alienated, but there are times when we have prayed and searched ourselves and not found anything unconfessed.

Illustration: In the last few years, I have had two particularly long runs in which I didn’t feel a sense of His nearness. I looked deep within myself wondering what was wrong. Then one day, He spoke to me clearly: *“Stop looking for me inside your own state of mind. I’m out here! I am not a prisoner of your state of being. Nothing has changed between us. I promised never to leave you and I haven’t. If you are not aware of any need to confess sin, stop considering yourself so seriously and just think on Me.”* When I stopped trying to find intimacy with God *within* my own state and saw that He was waiting for me *beyond* my own state, my joy in Him quickly returned. Some of us are just too introspective for our own good.

On the other hand, those whose focus is dominantly outward may make the mistake of judging Christ’s nearness and involvement based on their circumstances. When things aren’t going well, they may assume that He is no longer intimately involved.

The Revelation is a reminder that feelings and circumstances do not always reflect reality. Jesus' heavenly enthronement in no way distances Him from us. His Spirit lives within every believer and nothing can separate us from Him (Psalm 139:7-10, Romans 8:35-39, Hebrews 13:5). Will you thank Him for His continual presence and for the faith-building opportunities that come through times of perceived distance?

Transition: The glorious, living Jesus had some important words of encouragement and warning for His Church.

II. Jesus' Message to Seven Churches – Revelation 2-3

A. Introduction to the Seven Letters

- i. Geography: The seven churches of Asia Minor that Jesus addressed are presented in an order that is somewhat circular on a map. In fact, a roughly circular Roman road from Ephesus to Laodicea connected all seven cities. These were not the only churches in Asia, but since seven is the number of completion, these historical churches were representative of the Church at large.
- ii. Interpretation: To the historicist, each of the seven churches represents a successive epoch in church history. For example, "...Ephesus seems to characterize the apostolic church as a whole, and Smyrna seems to depict the church in its early persecutions. However, the Scriptures do not expressly authorize this interpretation, and it should be applied only where it fits naturally. After all, these churches all existed simultaneously in the first century."^{vii} We should read the letters as we read the other New Testament epistles: aware that they addressed specific problems in historical churches but with an eye toward applying them to our present lives.
- iii. Structure: The letters follow a consistent pattern.
 1. All of them begin with the naming of the church and a description of Christ, most of which are repeated from 1:9-20.
 2. This description is followed by "I know your works." Nothing can be hidden from the penetrating eyes of Jesus. He sees our motives, as well as our actions. Five of the seven churches received words of criticism (Smyrna and Philadelphia did not). All of the churches receive some commendation except Laodicea.
 3. Each letter promises reward to those who are faithful and victorious (those who "overcome"). The promises of reward are the most symbolic portions of the letters and in some cases hard to interpret. They correspond to some of the descriptions of heaven given in Revelation 21-22 and they also take us back to the Garden of Eden and the idea that what was lost in the Fall will be regained in heaven. Each may represent a specific heavenly reward or they

may all be taken together as referring to the state believers will enjoy in Heaven. The “overcomers” who receive these rewards are not a special class of Christians but all true Christians.

4. The letters conclude with the phrase, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” The phrase “whoever has ears” indicates relevance for believers today.

B. Ephesus – 2:1-7 Ephesus was John’s home church. According to tradition, Jesus’ mother Mary was also part of that congregation.

- i. Commendation: The church in Ephesus is commended for their hard work, perseverance, and intolerance of false teachers. Among these were the Nicolaitans. The church fathers identify Nicolas as one of the seven men chosen to serve the early church in Jerusalem after some of the Grecian widows claimed they were being overlooked in food distribution (Acts 6:1-5). Some believe Nicolas fell under the influence of the heretical, Gnostic teacher Cerinthus.^{viii} Gnostics sometimes taught that what one did with one’s body was irrelevant.
- ii. Criticism: Despite their good works and testing of false teachers, Jesus criticized the church at Ephesus for forsaking the love they had at first. Whether the problem was with their love for God or for one another is not specified. John’s first epistle indicates that the two are closely related (1 John 2:9-10, 3:14-18, 4:7-12). “No amount of religious orthodoxy, labor, or loyalty can make up for a deficit in Christian love (1 Corinthians 13:2-3).”^{ix} Do we love our *works* for God and for the people of God more than we love God and His people themselves?

C. Smyrna – 2:8-11

- i. Those Who Say They are Jews but are Not: Smyrna is the only city of the seven still in existence today (modern Izmir). Later in history, the church father Polycarp served as the bishop of Smyrna. In John’s day, the city had a very large Jewish population. The church was being slandered by “those who say they are Jews and are not” (2:9). The New Testament distinguishes literal Israel (the Jewish people) and spiritual Israel (the Church [Romans 2:28-29]). The Jews who persecuted the Christians in Smyrna were Jews by physical descent but not Abraham’s spiritual children.
- ii. Ten Days of Suffering: The “ten days” of suffering (2:10) may refer to ten waves of persecution, ten emperors who persecuted the church during the first three centuries, or it may mean that their suffering would go on for awhile but not forever. This church received no rebuke.
- iii. A Promised Crown: The crown promised to those who overcome may be an actual crown or a symbol of eternal life.

- D. Pergamum** – 2:12-17: The church in Pergamum also endured suffering. A man named Antipas was martyred there. It was the city where “Satan has his throne,” perhaps referring to Roman authorities or to demonic practices of some kind.
- i. Teachings of Balaam: Some of the church members followed the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. According to Numbers 31:14-16, Balaam advised the Moabites to weaken Israel by luring them into idolatry and sexual immorality. 2 Peter 2:15-16 and Jude 11 also warn Christians against “the way of Balaam.” By the time John recorded Revelation, the Ephesians had already tried and rejected such Gnostic teachings (2:6), but apparently, the believers in Pergamum had not.
 - ii. Hidden Manna and a White Stone: “Hidden manna” is promised to those who are victorious. Some rabbis taught that Jeremiah had taken the Ark of the Covenant containing a bowl of manna with him to Egypt when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and that at the beginning of the kingdom age, he would return and serve a feast of the manna that he had hidden centuries earlier.^x The white stone may represent a token of vindication or acquittal (as used in the Roman courts) or an admission ticket into heaven (as used for admission to feasts).
- E. Thyatira** – 2:18-28: The church at Thyatira had four signs of spiritual health: love, faith, service, and perseverance. Jesus’ exhortation to most of the church was simply to hold on to what they had until He comes.
- i. Jezebel: However, some church members tolerated the prophetess Jezebel, who led people into sexual immorality and idolatry through “so-called deep secrets.” Jezebel was the name of the wife of Old Testament king of Israel, Ahab. She was a Canaanite whose father was a priest of Baal. She led Israel into great idolatry and immorality. There may have been a woman in Thyatira whose actual name was “Jezebel” or the name may symbolize a heretical group or individual. Jesus said He was about to punish this woman and her “children.”
 - ii. Authority and the Bright and Morning Star: To the overcomers in Thyatira, Jesus promised authority over the nations and the morning star. 22:16 calls Jesus the Bright and Morning Star. The authority He promised may refer to reigning with Christ during the future millennium or in heaven.

F. Sardis – 3:1-6

- i. Wake Up: The church in Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but Jesus said it was actually dead. Although the setting of this city (on the northern slope of a mountain with a river at its base) rendered it almost impregnable, Sardis was conquered twice in its history because its watchmen failed to remain alert. Similarly, the church in Sardis had stopped being watchful. Their deeds were incomplete. They were riding on a reputation they had established and (like the church in Ephesus) had forgotten what first motivated them. Jesus warned them to “wake up” or He would come like a thief without their knowledge.
- ii. The Book of Life: Those who were victorious were promised good things: to walk with Jesus; be acknowledged by Him, His Father, and the angels; and to never be blotted out of the book of life. Since true believers cannot lose their salvation, the warning must be hypothetical or the “book” is not the list of the redeemed but rather, the names of all living people at a given time (some of whom would be blotted out by death).

G. Philadelphia – 3:7-13: The church at Philadelphia is the second church that did not receive any condemnation.

- i. The Key and the Open Door: Jesus is said to be holding the “key of David” (3:7 [a reference to Isaiah 22:22]). In Revelation 1:18, the keys that Jesus holds are the keys of death and Hades; that is, He has the power over judgment and salvation. Thus, the open door He placed before the church in Philadelphia probably refers to entrance into His kingdom, rather than to other opportunities. Jesus said that He would make liars of those who claim to be Jews but are not, so that they would be forced to acknowledge God’s love for the believers in Philadelphia. Perhaps this refers to Jewish opposition to the inclusion of Gentiles among God’s people. Jesus made sure the door of salvation was open to Gentiles.
- ii. Kept from the Coming Hour of Trial: Jesus promised to keep this church from the coming hour of trial that the world would face. Obviously, this trial was more than regional. Some believe it is a reference to the hour of trial that is described in the remainder of Revelation and being “kept” from it is a reference to the rapture of the church. Others interpret it as being preserved *in* the trial, whether it refers to the end-times Tribulation or simply the various trials that Christians have endured throughout history. Overcomers are promised that they will have Jesus’ name written on them (that is, the Holy Spirit, God’s seal of ownership [Ephesians 1:13]) and will be pillars in the heavenly house of God.

H. Laodicea – 3:14-22

- i. Lukewarmness: Jesus did not have one positive thing to say about the church in Laodicea. The city’s water supply was six miles outside the city. By the time water arrived in the city, it was tepid. Like their water, the church was neither cold nor hot. It was complacent. Jesus apparently finds lukewarm, professing Christians even more offensive than cold-hearted people who oppose Him. “The one who neither opposes nor serves offers Christ the ultimate insult – affirming His existence, but not taking Him seriously.”^{xi}
- ii. Gold, White Clothes and Salve: In John’s day, Laodicea was a wealthy banking center and a producer of black wool used in clothing and a powder used to treat eye trouble. The church members thought of themselves as rich, but Jesus said they were “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.” In irony of the wealth and products of their city, Jesus counseled them to buy from Him gold, white clothes, and salve to fix their poor eyesight. Jesus said He stood at the door of the church knocking and waiting to be invited in. Although this verse is often used in evangelism, in context, it refers to a believer’s communion (fellowship) with Christ.
- iii. Sit on His Throne: Victors were promised the right to sit with Jesus on His throne. This may occur in the millennium, in heaven, or in a spiritual sense, in this life.

Summary Statement: 1 Peter 4:17 says, “It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God.” Revelation appropriately begins with Christ’s letters to seven churches. Jesus is among the “lampstands,” actively involved in His church, guarding the flame from extinction and purging it of impurities.

Principle: *Jesus knows our greatest spiritual needs.*

Application: It is not difficult to be blinded to our own spiritual problems. Take the church at Ephesus as an example. They were serving the Lord tirelessly, persevering under hardships, and guarding the truth. Outwardly, they did everything right, but in all of their diligence, they had lost their passionate love for Christ and for one another. I imagine Jesus’ words came as quite a surprise.

Will you ask Jesus to show you your greatest spiritual need? Notice that only those with “ears to hear” can benefit from His warnings and encouragement. Are you willing to “hear” if He says you need to “wake up,” to love Him and others more deeply, to look to Him rather than to the world for security, and to stop associating with professing Christians who encourage worldliness?

Although Christ's return seems overdue from our point of view and we may suffer while we wait, we can be certain that our triune God is alive, active, and sovereign in the affairs of heaven and earth. Jesus stands among the lampstands. He is among us, at the center of His Church, seeing everything. His evaluation never misses the mark.

Transition: Revelation begins with Christ's assessment of His church, but chapter 4 indicates that God is also ready to judge the nations.

III. The Throne of God – Revelation 4

A. "What Must Take Place After This": Chapter 4 begins with John being called up to heaven where he would be shown "what must take place after this." Some interpreters understand this phrase to mean that what follows is simply what John saw next. Others believe the phrase indicates that the events that follow were future to the time of the seven historical churches of Asia. Dispensationalists interpret "after this" to mean "after the Church Age," and on that basis, they believe that 4:1 indicates the rapture of the church.

B. An Introduction to the Remainder of the Book:

- i. Meaning of God's Throne: Chapters 4-7 are all part of one vision, but chapter 4 is covered separately in this lesson to introduce us to the remainder of the book (when we take up the remainder of the scene in the next lesson, chapter 4 will be briefly revisited). John's writing fluctuates in its perspective, between heaven and earth. The drama continually fluctuates between the two. It begins in chapter 4 with God seated on His heavenly throne. A king's throne symbolizes his majesty and his role as judge of the land. All the subsequent chapters of Revelation are written with this in mind. God's sovereignty and judgment is the story of chapters 4-19. A day of God's wrath is coming in which God will bring all to justice.
- ii. Perspectives on Judgment: To the preterist, Revelation foretells the AD 70 judgment of God on Israel. To the historicist, the judgment pertains to the fall of the Roman Empire and the papacy. To the futurist, the judgment of chapters 4-19 refers to what will happen at the end-times Tribulation period. To the idealist, God's judgments are past, present, and future.

- C. The One on the Throne:** The “Someone” John saw seated on the throne of heaven was too awesome to describe. What John wrote pertains more to what surrounded God than to God Himself. He described an appearance of precious gems encircled by an emerald rainbow. Unlike John’s description of Jesus, he did not allude to any human features (no face, hands, feet, etc.) when describing God. God’s awesome power and authority are depicted by the lighting and thunder that came from the throne. In front of the throne were seven blazing lamps, which are said to be the seven spirits (sevenfold spirit) of God. A mirror-like sea of glass adds to the magnificence of the scene.
- D. The Twenty-Four Elders:** Ideas abound regarding the identity of the twenty-four elders around the throne. Some are specific, such as the twelve patriarchs of Israel and Jesus’ twelve apostles, the first twenty-four ancestors of Christ, the New Testament raptured saints, or celestial representatives of the redeemed of all time. This last view may be supported by the fact that in chapter 5, they are holding golden bowls of incense, “which are the prayers of God’s people” (5:8). Other interpreters skip over any specific identification by merely identifying the elders as “the Jury”^{xii} of God’s courtroom. In addition to indicating completeness, the number “twelve” is used in the Old Testament with regard to government (twelve patriarchs, twelve judges, twelve sons of Ishmael that became tribal rulers, etc.) Regardless of their identity, the twenty-four elders seated around God’s throne are actively engaged in worship.
- E. The Four Living Creatures:** The “cherubim” and “seraphim” described by Ezekiel (chapter 1, 10) and Isaiah (chapter 6) closely correspond to John’s “four living creatures.” In fact, Ezekiel also referred to them as “four living creatures” (1:5). Three of the creatures resembled powerful animals. The fourth had the face of a man. Each is the highest of its order. All of them had wings and many eyes. The wings may be symbolic of unlimited mobility in fulfilling God’s purposes, the eyes, the tremendous knowledge of God, and the various faces, the endowment of some of God’s own qualities, such as spirituality, strength, and swiftness. These four living creatures worship God without ceasing.
- F. Two Worship Hymns:** The remainder of chapter 4 describes the worship that goes on endlessly around the throne.
- i. Hymn of the Four Living Creatures: The four living creatures’ ongoing hymn declares that the Lord God Almighty is “holy, holy, holy.” In the Bible, when something is said twice, it is for impact. When repeated three times, it indicates a superlative quality or truth. God is eternally present: He was, He is, and He will always be.

- ii. Hymn of the Twenty-Four Elders: The twenty-four elders responded to the refrain with a worship hymn of their own. Their hymn speaks of God's worthiness to receive the worship of all creatures, for by His will, we were all created and have our being.

Summary Statement: The view of God's throne room assured persecuted believers of God's sovereignty. He was and always is in ultimate control of every situation.

Principle: *God the Father is enthroned in heaven today, just as He has always been.*

Conclusion

Do you feel God has forgotten you, beloved? Do your trials go on and on with no end in sight? May the words of Revelation give you confidence that God is not dead or overlooking the evil and injustice that touch your life. He has not abandoned you. He is very much alive, seated on His throne, and sovereign over the affairs of heaven and earth. Nothing escapes His notice. He may not be acting as quickly as you wish He would, but God knows what He is doing. The day is coming when all evil and injustice will be finally and completely overthrown. Let us accept this assurance from the book of Revelation and receive God's peace, so that we may worship Him worthily (despite our circumstances) and remain faithful to Him at any cost.

ⁱ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 727). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Johnson, Alan F. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament* p. 1125. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament (792–793)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{iv} Johnson, Alan F. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament* p. 1128. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

^v Gregg, Steve (2013). *Revelation: Four Views, Revised and Updated* (p. 67). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing.

^{vi} Johnson, Alan F. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament* p. 1131. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

^{vii} Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Re 1:19–20)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{viii} Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition (4th ed.) (Re 2:12–17)*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

^{ix} Gregg, Steve (2013). *Revelation: Four Views, Revised and Updated* (p. 95). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing.

^x Gregg, Steve (2013). *Revelation: Four Views, Revised and Updated* (p. 101). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing.

^{xi} Gregg, Steve (2013). *Revelation: Four Views, Revised and Updated* (p. 114). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing.

^{xiii} Mears, Henrietta. *What the Bible is All About*, p. 655. Minneapolis, MN: Gospel Light Publications, 1966.