

December 28

Revelation 4 - 8

Hi, my name is Marty Barnhart, the Director of Ministry Expansion at Christ Community Church. Today we read chapters 4-8 of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John. Chapter 3 concludes the first vision of the book. In this vision, you will remember, we find Jesus walking among the 7 churches of Asia Minor, delivering messages of both encouragement and warning to each of the churches. I believe that the church of Jesus Christ, his bride is now in heaven. They have died or been caught up to be with him forever, (1 Thessalonians 4.13-17; 1 Corinthians 15.50-58).

Now I am sure that you noted the crucial phrase, "I was in the Spirit", at the beginning of chapter 4: "After this I looked and before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first I heard speaking to me said, 'Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.'" This is the second vision of John.

The setting of the second vision is the Throne Room of heaven itself, and the scene is awe-inspiring. You may remember that when we read the Book of Ezekiel that his vision, recorded in chapter 1 bears some very strong resemblances to the one here in Revelation chapter 4.

The living creatures of Revelation chapter 4 are very similar to the cherubim of Ezekiel's vision and the language used to describe the "scenery" of heaven are also very similar.

The really "riveting" thing about these chapters, however, is the focus which it places upon the grand and central activity of heaven: worship. The 24 elders (who, by the way, are never identified - but the #24 ties the Old Testament Israel twelve tribes together with the New Testament church - 12 apostles) - the 24 elders are worshipping God. The 4 living creatures are worshipping God. They are seen by John to be encircling the Lamb of God who is in the center of the scene. He is deserving of all worship. In ever widening concentric circles around the creatures and elders, there are angels numbering thousands upon thousands and 10,000 times 10,000. They are worshipping. In the next rank is every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth. They are also singing.

Next, mark down Revelation chapter 5 on your list of great chapters of the Bible. It is on my list because it reminds me more than anything else of how important worship is to God. Worship is our best that will still be important to all of us in eternity. We will be serving the Lord Jesus in eternity and we will be worshipping!!

Now the scene is set and the action begins. The Lamb of God opens the scroll by breaking each of its seven seals. You will want to make a chart for yourself comparing the seals, with the trumpets and the bowls which will follow. We will see

a sequential arrangement to their opening. The seals come first, followed by the trumpets, which in turn are followed by the bowls.

Remember, the apocalyptic language of the Book of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament. In chapter 6 we see the imagery of the 4 horsemen. We met them in the Book of Zechariah. Six seals or judgments are opened during the tribulation in chapter 6 for God to deal with his nation Israel and then an interlude takes place on earth in chapter 7.

This very same thing will happen in chapter 10 after the 6th trumpet. The interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpets involves the sealing of God's witnesses - the 144,000 from the nation of Israel. Again, the imagery is lifted straight from the Book of Ezekiel. And in both Ezekiel and Revelation the ones marked by the angels believe God and are spared from his judgments that are about to be poured out upon the earth.

The list of the 12 tribes found in chapter 7 is different from all other such lists. Here, in Revelation 7, we see Joseph, Levi, and Manasseh are here though Ephraim is missing. The tribe of Dan is also missing. We don't know why the order, inclusion or deletion.

As I said, the '144,000' are the Israelites on the earth during the Great Tribulation which John sees evangelizing during this age. Next, we are also given a glimpse of those who accepted their message and were martyred. They are from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. They have come out of tribulation and will serve the Lamb Jesus Christ for eternity. The description of heaven at the end of Chapter 7 is very similar to the one we will find at the very end of this book when God will "wipe away every tear".

The 7th seal is opened in chapter 8.1 and there is a half hour of silence. Perhaps the silence comes after the 6th seal as another form of worship through silence and solitude.

The silence of chapter 8 is broken and we start another sequence covering another set of judgments called trumpets. The trumpets are divided into 2 groups of 4 and 3 respectively. The first 4 trumpets here in chapter 8 bring physical judgment upon the earth and its inhabitants. These judgments are neither final nor total. They have the character of warnings - that is, of course, what trumpets do - they warn.

Did you take note of the fact that the trumpets were introduced by one of the angels in heaven who stood at the altar offering incense to accompany the prayer of the saints? It is the prayers of the saints that trigger the movement of God. The saints of all ages in heaven pray for persecuted saints across our world. It is a comfort to know that God hears this great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12.1) and will move at the appropriate time to judge the enemies of Christ's people. God may act in ways we would not imagine but he will act in a way of holiness, mercy and love. Tomorrow, I will explain more.

I don't see the church in these chapters we read today due to being kept from "the hour of trial" (Revelation 3.10). As well, we get a glimpse of worship in eternity (chapter 4), of judgments on earth's unbelievers—Israel and Gentiles (chapters 5-6), many who accept Jesus and are martyred (chapter 7) and the beginnings of the next warnings (chapter 8). Did this help you today? What if we ponder anew what the Almighty can do, Jesus is amazing! Keep reading and I will talk with you again tomorrow, see you then!