

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 8,

Chapter 4 as an Introduction

6-Min. Video Overview

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Welcome to The Explainer. Today, we are jumping straight into the heart of one of the Bible's most intense books, Revelation. We're heading right for the theological control room in chapters 4 and 5 to really get a grip on what this whole vision is about.

You've definitely heard this hymn before, right? It's a classic! But here's something that might surprise you. Those powerful words? They're lifted directly from the very chapters we're about to unpack. You know, when most people hear the word revelation, their minds jump to complicated charts and confusing timelines about the end of the world.

But that's a massive misunderstanding. Chapters 4 and 5 give us a totally different and, honestly, a much more essential perspective. Okay, let's dive right in.

Chapter 4 is a huge pivot point in the book. See, the first three chapters are letters to seven real churches on the ground. But right here, the camera suddenly pans from earth up to heaven and BAM! We are launched into the main apocalyptic vision that drives the rest of the story.

Think of it this way. A lot of scholars call these two chapters the book's fulcrum. You know, like the pivot point on a seesaw? Everything that comes after this- all the judgments, all the chaos, all the final promises from chapter 6 to the end- it all rests on and flows directly from the scene that's established right here in heaven.

So what exactly is this scene? And what's it for? Well, it's not just a nice little picture of heaven. It's way more than that. It's like we're getting a peek inside the control room of the entire universe.

The rest of Revelation, with all its seals and trumpets and bowls of judgment, it can feel like being on a really turbulent flight. From our perspective down in the cabin, things look chaotic, scary, and frankly, completely out of control. And this is just a brilliant way to frame it.

Before John, the author, shows us any of that turbulence on earth, he first takes us into the cockpit. He shows us that God is firmly on his throne, totally sovereign, and in complete control of everything that's about to go down. And this is so crucial.

This means Revelation isn't a story about some 50-50 nail-biter battle between good and evil where we don't know who's going to win. No! The vision starts by saying there's no contest. God's total and complete sovereignty is the starting point, the fundamental reality.

The outcome is never in doubt. It's a done deal from the very beginning. So once this picture of heaven's reality is firmly established, it immediately sets up the central problem that fuels the rest of the book.

There's this huge disconnect, right? In the vision of heaven, God's rule is absolute. Everyone and everything worships him. The problem, the whole conflict of the book, is that back on planet Earth, that reality is being challenged.

Powerful empires, especially the Roman Empire for the original audience, are claiming that power for themselves and demanding worship. And that raises the central dramatic question for the whole book. How is the reality of heaven, where God is in charge, going to become the reality on an earth that's actively fighting against it? The rest of the book, from chapter 6 all the way to 22, is the epic, sprawling answer to that exact question.

In a way, you can think of the entire book of Revelation as this massive visionary explosion of that one line from the Lord's prayer. It's the story of how God's will, which is already perfect in heaven, finally gets put into place right here on earth. All right, so let's actually look at the vision itself and see how it builds.

John gets invited up through this open door in heaven to see things from God's point of view. The very first thing he sees is a throne, and that is not an accident. The word throne shows up 13 times in this chapter alone.

I mean, it's clear John is hammering this point home. In a world where Caesar sat on a throne in Rome, this vision immediately throws down a challenge. And John doesn't even try to describe God with human features.

Instead, he uses these images of brilliant, dazzling jewels. The feeling you get isn't of a person, but of this overwhelmingly glorious, beautiful, and powerful presence. Then the vision kind of widens out.

It's not just one throne in an empty room. It's an entire heavenly court. Around that main throne are 24 other thrones, with these figures called elders sitting on them.

And then right up close to the throne are these four mysterious living creatures. They're described with features like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. And they're covered in eyes, which is a symbol of their constant, never-ending focus on the one who sits on the throne.

Okay, now we're getting to the real heart of it. People have debated for centuries about who exactly these 24 elders, or these four creatures, are supposed to be. But their identity is way less important than their function.

And their function is crystal clear. Their whole job is to offer non-stop, around-the-clock worship, constantly declaring God's holiness and power. And this intense focus on worship brings us to the ultimate takeaway from this incredible heavenly vision.

So, if you remember one thing, make it this. Revelation is not a book designed to help us make charts about the future. At its core, it's a book about worship.

It's a book that asks one piercing question. Who is truly worthy of our ultimate allegiance? For the first century folks reading this under the rule of the Roman Empire, this was a direct and pretty dangerous political statement. Caesar sat on a throne.

Caesar demanded allegiance. This vision says, nope, there is another throne, a higher throne, and only the one sitting on it is truly in charge and worthy of worship. You just can't serve two ultimate thrones.

And so that ancient question echoes right into our own time, doesn't it? It forces us to look around and ask, what are the thrones of power in our world that demand our loyalty? What systems or ideas or ambitions are competing for the worship that this vision claims belongs to God alone? That is the timeless challenge of Revelation's control room.