

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

STUDY ELEVEN

Standing before God's Awesome Throne

Revelation 4:1–11

Hawaii, Paris, Tahiti. They ain't heaven. Nothing on this earth is anything like heaven. Nothing. Why? Because when you move from the creature comforts and the tangible benefits and the ecstatic pleasures that we have on this earth, nothing will look familiar in that resplendent, glorious place of worship. The word for it is incomprehensible.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

BLINDING lights. Deafening booms. Dancing flames. Frightening beasts. Never-ending shouting. *What do these startling images depict?* Natural disasters? A warzone? The end of the world?

No, these are descriptions of *heaven*.

Such pictures don't exactly match up with the way art historically has portrayed heaven. When we think of heaven, we imagine a palace floating in the clouds, chubby babies flying on white feathered wings and strumming tiny golden harps, a beautiful landscape with a perfectly temperate climate. That may sound like paradise. Yet heaven is more than an idyllic location.

Heaven is God's home. In heaven, His glory shines more brightly than lightning, sings more loudly than thunder, glows more warmly than fire. Those who behold His majesty can do nothing but fall down and worship Him.

In this *Searching this Scriptures* study, we will step into the heavenly throne room to see why He is worthy of our praise—both now and forevermore.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

God invites you to bring your needs and desires to Him in prayer. He wants to hear them! Yet prayer also provides an opportunity to worship—to tell God why you love Him and to express your confidence in Him. Write your own prayer of worship in the space below to prepare your heart for your time in God’s Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The drama of Revelation unfolds in several acts. The opening chapter is the prelude. Then [Revelation 2–3](#) directly addresses seven churches throughout Asia Minor—the original recipients of the book. In [Revelation 4](#), a voice from above guides John through a door into heaven. As he enters God’s presence, John welcomes his readers into the next major act of his grand narrative.

This section of Revelation contains the vivid pictures that make the book famous. These chapters contain movements of “apocalyptic prophecy.” Prophecy offers us a glimpse of the future. Yet the apocalyptic nature of the visions gives us insights into present realities. This unique combination gives readers of Revelation throughout time guidance on how to live in the present in light of the future. Let’s see what timeless lessons we can learn from [4:1–11](#).



Observation: The Heavenly Throne Room

John’s eyes had never seen anything like his vision of God seated on His heavenly throne. John simply didn’t have the language to describe what he saw. So he resorted to using similes—comparisons using “like” or “as”—to explain his mysterious vision. As you observe [Revelation 4:1–11](#), pay special attention to these human descriptions of divine realities.¹

John’s vision begins with him seeing an image of a door open in heaven and hearing a loud voice. According to [4:1](#), what did this voice say to him?

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The voice that called John used the expression “after these things” (*Revelation 4:1* NASB). John highlighted this phrase all throughout Revelation both as a *literary* marker (to signal a transition to the next portion of his narrative) and as a *temporal* marker (to indicate a sequence of events). As you journey through this book, keep an eye out for these words to help you navigate John’s visions.

In this vision, three things drew John’s attention. First—and naturally—John’s eyes fell upon God’s throne. How did John describe what he saw in *4:2–3*? According to *4:5–6a*, what else did John see when he looked at the throne? Imagine yourself in John’s sandals seeing these fantastic sights!

Second, John saw a group of twenty-four elders. How did John describe what he saw in *4:4*? According to *4:10–11*, what did these elders do and say in response to God’s glorious presence?

Third, John beheld four living beasts. How did John describe what he saw in *4:6b–8a*? According to *4:8b*, what did the beasts say to “give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne” (*Revelation 4:9*)?

That’s why we were created. It’s all for His glory, for His purpose. That’s why we live. Our births, our death, our achievements, our failures . . . it’s all about the One who is worthy to receive glory and honor and praise.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Worship in Heaven

Since his mind could hardly fathom what he beheld, John used his limited earthly vocabulary to depict heavenly glory. How does John’s use of language affect the way we think about heaven as we read its descriptions in Revelation?

In *Revelation 4:10*, John explained that he saw the elders laying their crowns before the throne. The New Testament authors used several different Greek terms that we translate as “crown.” The crowns on the heads of these elders do not signify rule or authority—like a royal crown. Rather, the term John used was *stephanos*.

Look up *stephanos* in the Greek lexicon, available for free at billmounce.com, and summarize what this kind of crown represents. Why is it significant that these elders wore this kind of crown? What does their willingness to lay these crowns at God’s feet reveal?

Central to this heavenly scene is the refrain from the angelic beasts: “Holy, Holy, Holy!” Though God’s goodness, mercy, grace, love, and righteousness make up essential components of His character, the heavenly host worships Him because He is, above all else, *holy*.

Using your Bible-study tools (like *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*) do some research on the term *holy*. Record what you learn in the space below. Why does God’s holiness make Him worthy of our praise?

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Much of this scene may still feel a bit confusing. For example, many have speculated about the identity of the twenty-four elders noted in [Revelation 4:4](#). Are they angels or humans? Old Testament saints or New Testament martyrs? Some combination of the above? Yet John never tries to identify them! He simply wrote down what he saw—even if he didn’t totally understand what it was.

Now, as John looked around Jesus’ heavenly throne room, he *did* see something remarkably familiar, though strange . . . the quartet of mismatched beings worshiping Jesus.



Correlation: A Vision of Heaven

John had never seen anything like the creatures that worshiped God. But he had *read* about them in an account from another man who received a vision of heaven. Read about this vision in [Ezekiel 1:4–14, 22–28](#). Then record the ways Ezekiel’s and John’s visions overlap.

Why is it significant that these two accounts share so much in common? What does this consistency reveal about God and heaven? For some help wrestling with these questions, feel free to consult a commentary, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.² Or, for a free resource, check out [Constable’s Notes](#), which are available online at netbible.org.

This myriad of angels ceaselessly give praise to Him who is worthy of honor and glory and blessing and majesty. And we fiddle around on this earth worried about our plans and our disappointments and our future and our money and our hopes and our dreams, when in the final analysis, all of that fades before the throne of Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Worship on Earth

To apply the truths of *Revelation 4:1–11*, we must consider both the present and the future. Focusing on one while ignoring the other will produce a Christian faith that lacks depth. Consider the following application points as you reflect on your life.

- If you tend to ignore the future, recognize that certain end-times events must take place.
- If you tend to oversimplify what's ahead, realize that most of the scenes of heaven are nearly incomprehensible.
- If you tend to think it's all about you, remember that, in the end, it will be all about our God.

As you consider your own life, do your thoughts, worries, and fears fall more so on the present or the future? What would it practically look like for you to live a life of faith in the present based on the future hope you have in Jesus Christ?

The heavenly throne room can be summarized in one word: *worship*. The beasts cried, “Holy!” The elders shouted, “Worthy!” What would it look like for you to practice expressive worship in your own life? Perhaps you can set aside a time each day to verbally state your love, gratitude, and praise to God. Write down some other ideas in the space below.

Worship involves more than just singing songs of praise. This is why the elders laid their crowns at God's feet. What “crowns” has He given you? What steps can you take to give these crowns back to Him as a sacrificial act of worship?

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Only God is holy. Only He is worthy. To Him, we give *all* glory and honor and thanks. Such power is so great that we, like John, often fail to comprehend it. Yet John's lack of understanding didn't stop him from joining the chorus of worship to God in His eternal throne room. And if He is going to be worshiped for eternity, why not lift your voice up now?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I worship You because You are the holy and worthy creator. I worship You because You sent Your Son Jesus to die in my place. I worship You because You brought Him back to life. May my life be a fragrant offering to You in all that I think, say, and do. In Jesus' holy name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

