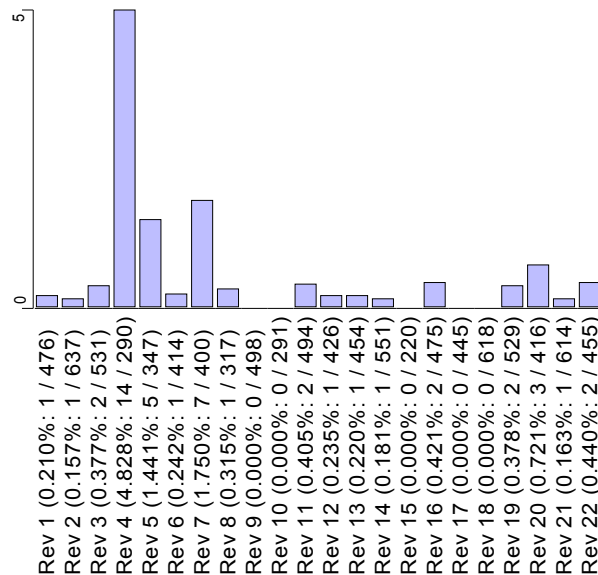


Rev. 4-5, The Heavenly Council

Overview¹

“Throne” in Rev

The section we are entering is characterized by references to "throne" of God or of Christ. The graph shows the occurrences of *tronos* as the % of words in each chapter.



Roles of the Throne in Rev (not in sermon) :

- Heavenly court,
 - marked by worship, 4-5, 7, 8, 14, 19;
 - preservation of the righteous, 12, 14
 - source of judgment, 7:15; 16, 20
- Comes down to the NH/NE, 21-22.

Recall the overall movement of the book

- 1:4, Christ is sent from the heavenly throne of God to speak with John on Patmos, and through him to the churches of Asia. John and church are on earth; God is in heaven; the Lord Jesus comes down as the messenger.

¹ Apr 16, 1994

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- 4:1, John enters into the heavenly throne room, to receive divine perspective on what is to happen. 26/39 uses of "throne" in Rev. are in the Seals section (ch. 4-8)
- 21:2, God's kingdom comes "on earth, as it is in heaven," and with it the throne of God on earth, 22:3.

Development of chapters 4-7

The section begins (ch. 4-5) and ends (7b) in heaven, but the seals themselves concern events on earth.

- 4:1-2a, Invitation into Heaven
- 4:2b-11, The Scene in Heaven
- 5:1-14 (heaven), the drama of the sealed book. Worship for the lamb's worthiness to open the book.
- 6:1-17 (earth), the first six seals and their judgments
- 7:1-8 (earth), the sealed saints
- 7:9-17 (heaven), the worship of the martyrs

8:1ff, opening of the seventh seal; results in the seven trumpets.

The first six seals are all opened in ch. 6. Ch. 7 appears to explain circumstances concurrent with all of the seals:

- the protection of an Israelite remnant on earth (vv. 1-8)
- the worship of believers who are not so protected in heaven (9-17).

The seventh seal, like the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl, forms the introduction to the next series.

Note seven doxologies in this section (I - VII) , distributed in three groups.

- The first two, in ch. 4, are led by the angels, and concern God as the creator of all.
- The next three, in ch. 5, are led by the redeemed, coached by the angels, and concern God as redeemer.
- The final two, in ch. 7, are led by the redeemed and concern the broader salvation that God provides to his children.

Development of chapters 4-5

- 4:1-2a, The angel invites John into heaven.
- 4:2b-11, John describes the background
 - 4:2b-8a, the background scene.
 - 4:8b-11, the background activity: continual worship and praise to God.
- 5:1-14, The drama of the sealed book

4:1-2a, Invitation into Heaven

After these things I saw.--"I saw" or "I looked" (same Greek) is a common paragraph marker in Revelation; John's purpose is to "bear record ... of all things that he saw," 1:2. So he often enumerates them like this.

a door standing open in heaven.--From Ezek. 1:1 on we often read of the heavens being open, so that people can see in or so that something can come down to men (as the Holy Spirit at the Lord's baptism). Here, only a door is open, so that John can enter in.

The emphasis of the verbal form is not that John sees the door opening, but that it stands open. It has been there all along, but he has not seen it. Cf. Heb. 10:19-22. We need to recognize the access that we have into God's presence.

the first voice.--I.e., that of 1:10, to be distinguished from the Lord, who has been speaking with a voice like many waters. ("Alpha and Omega" in 1:10 are not in the majority text.) Probably the angelic guide, who is identified (1:1; 22:6) as the agent of Christ's revelation to John, and who also in 17:1 and 21:9 offers to show him things of interest.

Come up hither.--Drawn from Exod. 19:24; 24:12; 34:2, where God calls Moses up into the mount to receive the tables of the law. Now John is being called up into heaven so that he can disclose to God's people another divine writing, the book of judgment. There is no basis for seeing this as the rapture, and good reason to think it is not (the present character of the first five seals). If the voice of the trumpet here makes this the rapture, then 1:10 must be that also. Cf. 11:12, the two witnesses called up to heaven in the same words. This is closer to a rapture scene, but plainly NOT what is happening to John here.

I will show thee things which must be hereafter.--This is the declared subject of the entire book (1:1, "things which must shortly come to pass). There is a contrast here with ch. 2-3, which are addressed to seven churches then current. However, don't overdraw the contrast. The letters to the churches predict events yet come, and we shall see that the first five seals are part of this present age.

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit.--Compare again 1:10. Literally, "I became in the Spirit," a different Gk verb from "be in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9).

- To be in the Spirit (*eimi*) is to be a believer (Rom. 8:9).
- To become in the Spirit (*ginomai*) is a special temporary state of spiritual empowerment, often marked with ecstasy or vision. Cf. Paul in Acts 22:17, with *ginomai*. Perhaps the same as being "filled with" the HS in Luke, which empowers believers in a special way (Acts 4:31).
- For completeness, note "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Same as "full of HS" in Luke, which refers to the constant experience of a mature believer.

The parallels with ch. 1 (same voice addressing him; repeated notice of being "in the Spirit") suggest a major division between these two parts of the book.

The Role of 4:2b-11

This section's role is revealed in verb tenses.

4:1-2a has past tenses (aorists), narrating John's experience.

So does 5:1ff.

In between, there are very few finite verbs, and where they do occur, they are durative. Mostly participles and verbless clauses, giving a timeless impression. E.g., 2-3, "behold a throne was standing there in heaven, and someone sitting on the throne, and the one sitting looking like a jasper and a sardine stone, and a rainbow round about the throne, ..."

- 2b ("was standing") is imperfect, not the aorist usually used for narrative.
- 5, two present tenses, one in a subordinate clause.
- 8, present tense,
- 9, 10, future in a conditional statement intended to lay down a general principle.

That is, 4:2b-11 steps aside from the narrative to paint a backdrop, a stage scene. Chapter 5 will tell us what happens in this scene. Here, we are simply orienting ourselves to the scene itself. When believers pass from this life to be with the Lord, they may not experience the specific events of ch. 5, but the scene from ch. 4 should look very familiar to them.

2b-8a, Description of the Characters

Note the prominence of the throne in this chapter. Each new detail that strikes John's eye is defined with reference to the throne; each new description begins with a different prepositional phrase built on "the throne": upon, around, out of, before, in the midst of. (There are other prepositional phrases with "throne," but they are not sentence-initial.)

2b, A throne was standing in heaven.--What comfort in this single observation! The fundamental creed of the believer is that the world is not an accident, falling out of control; "a throne stands in heaven." Nor is it under the dominion of hell: "a throne stands in heaven." This is the comfort of the Psalmist (11:4; cf. 103:19). The first thing that strikes John's attention, and that which dominates it through this section, is the sovereign rule of God, attested through his throne.

2c-3, and upon the throne: one sitting.--Note the obliqueness of the description of God. John doesn't describe him, but simply says that looking at him is like looking at precious stones, for the light they reflect (1 Tim. 6:16, "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto"). Compare Exod. 24:10 (vision of God described in terms of sapphire); Ezek. 28:13 (Satan's appearance in Eden, before his fall, described as precious stones).

- jasper: crystal clear; perhaps a diamond?
- sardine: blood-red
- The "rainbow" is like a halo around him--a complete circle, not just an arc. Emerald--brilliant green.

Like other aspects of creation, precious stones reflect their creator's glory, but only imperfectly. Illus: I'm sorting out pebbles to polish. Some I reject; they will be dull or uninteresting, in comparison with others. When we see the Lord, the most brilliant gemstones we have ever seen will seem like mere pebbles in comparison. Earthly kings wear their crown jewels; the King of Heaven shines himself with light like a jewel.

4, and around the throne: 24 thrones.--The next thing that captures John's attention is that the Lord is not alone. There are others reigning with him. "Seats" is the same Greek word as that used for the Lord's throne. The words of the hymn in 5:9 ("redeemed us") identify them as redeemed humans, perhaps 12 each for Israel and the church.

- Seated: angels in the various heavenly scenes (OT and NT) are always standing, ready to do the Lord's will. The believers here are represented as sitting enthroned with the Lord (cf. 3:21), sharing his authority, higher than the angels (1 Cor. 6:3). We see them again in this position in 20:4, where they are expressly said to execute judgment.
- White garments: imputed righteousness, given them as a gift and donned as an article of clothing. Emphasizes the gift of salvation (but 3:5, given to overcomes).
 - 6:11, a gift for the martyrs
 - 7:14, result of washing garments in the blood of the Lamb.
 - 19:8, fine linen is righteousness of saints.
- Crowns: the wreath for the victor in the games (1 Cor. 9:25). Reward for endurance (cf. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:8). Emphasizes the importance of obedience and holy walk before the Lord.

Summary: the church's standing in heaven:

- In a position of honor and responsibility, seated in the heavenly court.
- Clothed in garments of salvation, reminding them of the gift of salvation.
- Crowned as victors for their endurance in the contest.

5 and out of the throne.--Two manifestations here, lightning and lamps. Appear to be grouped together, since the prepositional throne phrase with "lamps" is not clause-initial, cf. the rainbow in v.3. "lightenings and thunderings and voices," a depiction of a thunderstorm. In Exod. 19:16; 20:18, these marked the giving of the law at Sinai, and they are a regular feature of theophany in the OT.

Repeated throughout Rev, at the conclusion of each seven (which in turn forms the basis for what follows in each case)

- Seals, 8:5 (cf. 8:1)
- Trumpets, 11:19 (cf. 11:15)
- Bowls, 16:18 (cf. 16:17)

Depicts God as lawgiver and judge, bringing vengeance for his people (1 Sam. 2:10; Psa. 18:9ff).

"seven spirits of God," depicted in various ways:

- here depicted as lamps
- in 5:6, depicted as "eyes ... sent forth into all the earth."

These are drawn from Zech. 4:1-10.

Thus the emphasis is on God's perfect knowledge. His Spirit penetrates all secrets (Psa. 139); nothing is dark before him.

6a, and before the throne: something like a sea of glass.--John is describing an appearance; what he sees is like a sea, clear and transparent. It is not said to BE a sea.

OT theophanies depict the Lord's throne (Ezek. 1:22, 26) or feet (Exod. 24:10) as resting on a transparent, crystalline "firmament."

John appears to be attempting to describe the same phenomenon here. He can't see under the throne (unlike Ezekiel, who sees the throne borne up by cherubim), and thus describes the portion of the pavement that lies before the throne. Not even the ground on which God stands can withstand the penetrating brightness of his glory.

6b-8a, and in the midst of the throne and round about the throne: four living creatures.--

Correspondences with cherubim in Ezek. 1:

- Their position "in the midst and round about" may suggest the position of Ezekiel's angels as they bear the throne. Sort of merged with it as in Ezekiel.
- Beasts: 1:5, living creatures.
- Full of eyes: 1:18, the wheels of the chariot.
- Four faces: 1:10 (though there, all on each beast).
- Six wings: contrast 1:6 (four). This number, and the song they repeat in Rev. 4:8 ("Holy, Holy, Holy"), suggest the Seraphim in Isa. 6.

There is much we do not understand about the different races of angels. The point here is that the Lord has surrounded himself with created intelligences of the most diverse kinds, all to bring praise and glory to himself.

Summary: What will we see in heaven?

- God reigning in glory on his throne, resting on a crystalline foundation, and exercising forever his judgment and omniscience.
- Believers of all ages associated with him in his rule
- The angelic host serving him

8-11, Background Activity in Heaven²

After introducing the characters (vv. 2-8), John records the response of the angels and people (8-11). Remember that this is still stage setting; continuous background activity.

8b-9, Praise from the Living Creatures

Note the continuing background nature of their praise: "they rest not day and night, saying"

Their praise is first quoted (8b), then described (9).

Quotation: 8b is built on the "Trishagion" of Isa. 6:3, expanded by the OT teaching of how God transcends time. Emphasizes three characteristics of the Lord:

- He is holy, separate, "other." Some texts in fact have the angels say this nine times, not just three. "God created man in his own image, and man has been returning the favor ever since,"

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but in fact God is separate and distinct. One of the hardest things for moderns to do is recognize this other-ness of God.

- He is the "Lord God Almighty."
 - "Almighty" by itself means "all-powerful," certainly a true statement about God, but probably not the point here.
 - Throughout the Greek OT, this term is the most common single translation for the Hebrew term *tsebaot* "[Lord] of hosts." The Greek translators didn't understand the point of this word, which describes the armies that the Lord leads. His complete power is manifested in the myriads of angelic beings whom he has created and who are constantly at his beck and call. This is perhaps why this is an angelic doxology here--the heavenly host praising the Lord of hosts.
- He is eternal. "Was, is, is to come" is the title introduced in 1:4,8. Describes God's eternity; cf. Exod. 3:14, the eternal "I Am." Most of our great philosophical and practical problems arise because we are constrained by time; not so the one who sits on the throne.

Description: the living beasts "give glory and honor and thanks" to the one upon the throne. How can creatures give anything to such a God?

- Glory: brightness shining forth. We can advertise him, publicize him, proclaim how wonderful he is. He could certainly glorify himself independent of us, but that's not how he has chosen to do it. He wants to shine through us.
- Honor: value. We honor something if we value it. We proclaim that it has worth to us. Not just an academic declaration of his perfection, but a personal statement about what it means to us. I can glorify the architecture of the temples in Japan, but hardly honor their pagan sentiments.
- Thanks: our dependency upon him. One king can honor another, but through pride might not give thanks. The angels here thank him: they are dependent on him for their existence.

9-11, Praise from the 24 Elders

Again, this is continual. 9 can be better translated, "Whenever the living creatures give ... then the 24 elders shall fall down" Our constant, ongoing occupation in heaven.

Three **actions** accompany their words:

- Fall down and worship (lit. "prostrate oneself"): cf. 1 Sam. 25:23, of Abigail before David (these very words in LXX). Position of utter submission. Cf. what police do with dangerous criminals. You're helpless in this position. This is the posture we are to assume before God: complete submission to him, recognizing his authority over us and our complete dependence. NO RESERVATIONS, no bargaining, no "gentleman's agreements."
- Throw crowns before the throne. These are the crowns of victors, not of kings; representative of their accomplishments during life. But they take no credit for their ministries. Instead, they return the crowns to the one through whom alone they were able to conquer, recognizing that it is all of his grace and power.

Their **words** emphasize their personal relation to the Lord. In the MT (not TR) he is not only "o Lord,"

but also "our God, the Holy One." Angels cannot say "our God." This expression describes a personal relation that the angels can only observe. Thus they speak TO the Lord; the angels speak only ABOUT him.

Glory and honor and power.--literally "the glory and the honor and the power." The article forces us to ask, "which glory and honor and power?" The only one in the context is that ascribed to the Lord by the living creatures in the previous verses ("power" from "Almighty"?)

Thou art worthy.--Superior to the angels: they pass judgment on the appropriateness of what the living creatures have just said! 1 Cor. 6:3, we shall judge angels.

The reason for this evaluation: God as the creator of all things. This is what makes him "holy," other, separate. "Were and are created": they were (in his eternal counsels), and then at a point in time they became created.

Summary of the Scene

The business of heaven is continual preoccupation with the Lord and his glory. The unbeliever wants no part of such activity, but one of the sure products of the HS's work in our hearts is that more and more this is what we long for even in this life.

Ch. 5, A Specific Event in Heaven³

From the verbless clauses and progressive tenses of ch. 4, we move into the narrative aorists; this section describes a specific event in heaven. The basic punctuation is the phrase "I saw," *eidon*, at 5:1, 2, 6, and 11. (Would like to be able to divide ch. 4-7 on the basis of seven "I saw"'s. Can get to eight by subordinating a bunch within the first six seals. Or perhaps the *eidon* in 4:1 is to be seen as setting for the entire section.)

Scene 1, 5:1, The Sealed Book

The source of this image is Ezek. 2:7-3:5,

Written within and without,--full to the brim. As the bearer of God's word, this book defines and causes what shall be. Cf. Gen. 1; Isa. 55:11. The reading of this book will unleash God's purposes.

lamentations and mourning and woe.--The contents of the book (Ezek. 2:10): It describes God's coming judgment. Cf. ch. 6; as each seal is open, successive judgments fall on the earth.

Contrast with Ezek: his book was accessible to him, and in fact he was to eat it and reveal its contents. This book is sealed, and no one is worthy to open it.

Scene 2, 5:2-5, The Need for an Opener

2, The Challenge

2a, Strong angel.--Compare 10:1; 18:21. Poses a challenge. You're less likely to stand up and proclaim

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your worthiness when the challenger is so strong.

2b, worthy to open the book.--Keep in mind that this is the book of judgment.

Matt. 7:1-5, need to purge ourselves before we can judge others. Natural sense of insecurity whenever we presume to speak for God to men.

Recall the reluctance of OT prophets:

- Jeremiah, 1:5-8--his ineloquence and immaturity
- Isaiah, 6:5--his sinfulness
- Moses, Exod 3:10-14; 4:1-3, 10-17 . His arguments are particularly detailed:
 - 3:11 Who am I? His personal insignificance
 - 3:13 Who are you? Does not know God
 - 4:1 They will not believe
 - 4:10 I am not eloquent
 - 4:13 Send someone else

3-4, No one found.

Scope of the search, cf. Phil. 2: all creation, including angels, living humans, and the dead.

John's response, v.4. He longs for the fulfillment of God's purposes, and mourns that no one is worthy to move them ahead. Prototype of our frustration--the world is jammed; who can free it up and move along God's purposes? *Application:*

- Recognize that the world is stuck. Don't let the rhetoric of politicians lull you into complacency.
- Weep over it. Allow God to rule your emotions as well as your mind.

5, Introduction of the Lamb

Literally, "Behold, he has overcome--the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David--that he might open the book and its seven seals." Note the subject, the verb, and the complement.

Subject: two OT allusions, both to the kingly Messiah

- Lion of the tribe of Judah. From Jacob's blessing on Judah, Gen. 49:8-12. Cf. Prov. 30:30 for the preeminent strength of the Lion.
- Root of David, Isaiah 11:1.

Verb: "he has overcome." Same verb as at the end of each of the seven letters, the promises to the overcomers. God expects us to overcome, to conquer, to face the enemy and be victorious, and has equipped us to this end. There is never any need to surrender or declare defeat. In his other writings, John both declares and explains the key to victory.

- John 16:33, "I have overcome the world." Our Lord is the first and greatest victor, as we see here. The world is not only defeatable, it is essentially defeated. The struggles we face are like the hold-out Japanese soldiers in the Pacific 20 years after the nation surrendered: vigorous and

hostile, but in fact already defeated.

- How our victory follows from Christ's. 1 John helps here; take the points in reverse order to that in which John mentions them.
 - 1 John 5:5, recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, the victorious one.
 - 1 John 5:4, the new birth. Not just mental assent to Christ's victory, but becoming a new creature in him.
 - 1 John 4:4, the Holy Spirit in our fellowship together (note plural pronouns)

Complement: "to open the book and its seven seals." The infinitive here indicates the result of his victory. Because he has overcome, he is able to open the book.

Scene 3, 5:6-10, The Lamb is Worthy to Open the Book

6, From Lion to Lamb

Christ is announced as a royal lion, but appears as a slain lamb. The two aspects of Messiah that the Jews could never reconcile. His attributes here recall the royal aspect.

Seven horns.--a symbol of power and authority: 1 Sam. 2:1, 10.

Seven is the most clearly symbolic number in the Bible--some would say the only one. Even in cuneiform literature, has the significance of totality, "all." Speaking of horns, does it perhaps indicate "all authority," Matt. 28:18? The Beast has ten horns (Dan. 7:7; Rev. 13:1). Ten has a less clear usage, but it is widely used (including in Hebrew and Greek) as the base of the number system, deriving from the two hands, and often seems to suggest "many." By the time you have ten of anything, you have both hands full. Man grabs for all that he can, but it is the Lamb who has all authority.

Thus the slain lamb has all authority.

Seven eyes.--recall discussion of 4:5 and Zech. 4:1-10. The slain lamb has not only all authority, but also all knowledge, through the omniscient Spirit of God.

7, He claims his due.

Walks up to the throne and takes (not "receives") the book.

8-10, Heavenly praise.

Two sets of speakers: the beasts and the elders; angels and men.

Two kinds of activity: harps and prayers, worship and petition. Sounds Roman Catholic to have heavenly beings presenting our prayers before God, but nothing is said about these prayers being addressed to them.

Their song can be divided into two parts in two ways.

Grammatically, the song has two movements:

- The Lamb is worthy to take and open the book.

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- Four Reasons that he is worthy:
 - Thou wast slain. Only John uses this term of the Lord Jesus, and only in Rev. Probably drawn here from Isa. 53:7, "led as a lamb to the slaughter." But the manner of death is confirmed in Heb. 9:22, "without shedding of blood is no forgiveness of sin." The expression "shedding of blood" refers to violent outpouring of human blood, not to animal sacrifice or to a natural peaceful death. Christ's death must be violent to reflect God's wrath against sinners. That is, Christ is worthy to open the book of judgment because he himself has suffered judgment. No one can say of him, "You don't know what it's like." He has borne God's wrath himself, and so can fairly administer it to others.
 - Thou hast redeemed us to God. His death is not just a declaration of God's wrath against sin or a picture of the wickedness of those who crucified him; it is a substitution for his people. He is savior before he is judge, and he is worthy to judge because he has first of all provided salvation for all who will receive it.
 - Thou hast made them kings and priests to our God.
 - They shall reign on the earth. These last two reasons lead us to the objective for the judgments; to overcome evil so that the believers can assume their rightful position as God's servants over the earth.

In the MT, there is a **shift in pronoun** (from "we" to "they") between vv. 9 and 10. AV normalizes both verses to "we" and the gnostic mss to "they," but probably the MT is correct. The first half is by the elders, the second by the beasts. Not only do the pronouns bear this out, but the emphases are appropriate.

- The believers focus on the redemption that they alone have experienced and (as in ch. 4) declare the worthiness of the Lord.
- The angels make factual statements about the governmental role of the elect, which will involve them.

In all, this scene is a parallel to Isa. 59:16-21. There, God could find no savior, so he came himself. Here, he can find no judge, so he provides one himself. In both cases, the Lord Jesus fills the gap when no man is available.

Scene 4, 5:11-14, The Lamb is Worthy of All Praise

This scene expands the circle of praise-givers, and moves beyond the Lamb's worthiness as judge to his praiseworthiness in general.

First, the beasts and elders are joined by myriads of other angels in heaven, declaring the Lamb's worthiness to receive every honor that exists.

Then they are joined by the entire creation, including even those under the earth--the dead, and the fallen angels.