

# A STORM and a SCROLL from GOD'S THRONE

## Summary and Historical Background

Revelation 4 begins the third major chronological section of the book. The first section revealed **Christ** in an awesome vision that caused John to fall at His feet as dead (chapter 1). The second section reveals the **Churches** and Christ's inspection of them regarding their witness of Him (chapters 2-3). The third section reveals the **Coming Events** that will happen after the rapture of the church saints (chapters 4-22). These future events include the scene in and around God's throne when Christ receives the seven-sealed scroll from God (chapters 4-5); the seven years of Tribulation; and the return of Christ (chapters 6-19). When Christ returns, Satan will be bound for 1000 years while He rules the earth in righteousness and peace. After the thousand years, Satan will be loosed for a short time and he will recruit an army to attack Jerusalem which will fail and he will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Then the present heaven and earth will pass away and all unbelievers will be judged at the Great White Throne (chapter 20); finally, some details are given about the New Jerusalem in the Eternal Kingdom (chapters 21-22).

This lesson begins when John is transported to Heaven to behold the glory of God on His throne. He sees what will happen when God gives His Son the seven-sealed scroll. The hosts of Heaven know that Christ has been given the authority to overthrow Satan's rule of the earth so He can set up His Kingdom on earth for one thousand years and they will erupt in loud praise for Christ and His Father.

Revelation 4 and 5 are a prologue to the rest of the book. They reveal the Lord God as the Sovereign Ruler of His creation and the Lamb as the Savior of His creation. He had His Son create all things according to His plan (Col 1:15-16; Heb 1:2) and He had His Son die to pay the redemption price for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn 2:2), so the world belongs to Him in a double sense. In chapter 5 the Lamb (Christ) is shown to be the only One worthy to claim the scroll (the title deed to the earth) and to open the seven seals that protect it. He will repurchase the earth that has been ruled by Satan since Adam gave it to him by yielding to his temptation in the Garden (cf Lk 4:6). Only Christ is able to evict Satan and his cohorts from the earth because He is the only one that has paid the price for its redemption (5:5-10). The symbolic act of receiving the scroll from His Father's hand indicates He has God's permission to reclaim the earth from Satan and his followers by a holy war. This war will begin when Israel makes a peace covenant with Antichrist. God's days of longsuffering will be past and God's wrath will be unleashed.

Chronologically, the events of these chapters follow the Rapture of the Church (1 Th 4:13-18). Christ will judge the church-age saints, so He can reward them (2 Cor 5:10, 1 Cor 3:9-15). Then Christ will receive the scroll from His Father and the seven-year Tribulation will begin. The Tribulation events (6-19) correlate with Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27). At the end of the Tribulation, Christ will annihilate all of His enemies at the Battle of Armageddon and establish His Kingdom on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem for 1000 years.

Three objects are worthy of notice in these two chapters: the throne of God; the storm of God and the scroll of God. Two major worship scenes are presented: God is worshipped as the Creator (4:9-11) and the Lamb is worshipped as the Savior (5:8-14).

## I. The Throne of God – 4:1-11

### A. Sovereign God in Heaven – 4:1-3

4:1 – After the vision that John received regarding the churches, he was given a vision of a scene in Heaven that would take place near the inception of the Tribulation. It began with a door that was opened in Heaven. This is the third usage of "door" in Revelation. First, a door of witness was opened by the Lord to the church at Philadelphia (3:8); second, Jesus knocks at the door of a person's heart to be

admitted so He can save him now and eat with Him at the marriage supper (3:20); and third, this door that is opened in Heaven.

There are three heavens indicated in Scripture: the atmospheric heaven (Dt. 11:11), the starry heaven (Gen. 1:14); and the third Heaven, which is the dwelling place of God (2 Cor. 12:1-7). The context indicates the dwelling place of God is the Heaven in view here.

John heard the voice as of a trumpet. This voice could be Christ's (cf. 1:10) calling him to Heaven. If so, it could typify the Rapture when Christ calls the Church to Heaven before the Tribulation. John would see the things that would occur after this, that is, after Christ's work with the churches is done (i.e., Rev 2-3). The things, which were revealed to John, will come to pass after the Rapture of the Church (Rev 4-22).

4:2 – John is transported in the spirit to Heaven where he saw a throne with one sitting on it. "Throne" is used 47 times in Revelation and 12 times in chapter 4. It symbolizes authority, power and dignity for the one sitting on it. This throne scene pictures God's sovereignty over all nations (Ps. 103:19). God works all things after the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11) and He actively intervenes in the affairs of earth with judgments to complete His program on earth (Ps. 2:1-6).

4:3 – John's vision of God was like a jasper stone. It was clear as crystal (21:11), probably a sparkling diamond. Could be symbolic of the beauty of His holiness and be the basis of His just and perfect judgments that will be executed during the Tribulation. God also appeared to John like a sardius stone, red like a ruby, and could symbolize His wrath on the rebellious nations during the Tribulation. A better meaning for these stones comes from the high priest's breastplate, which had a different stone for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, indicating that he was representing all twelve tribes before God (Ex. 28:17, 20). The sardius was first (Reuben) and the jasper last (Benjamin). "Reuben" means "behold a son" and "Benjamin" means "son of my right hand." These two stones could be symbolic of God's relationship with Israel, or with His Son, whom He called "Israel" in Isaiah 29:3. This relationship of God with His Son fits with the message of Revelation. "Behold a son" will be experienced when all Heaven is waiting for someone to take the scroll from God's hand and then His Son steps forward to take it and execute His Father's judgments during the Tribulation. "Son of my right hand" is seen when His Son rules the nations in righteousness for Him during the Millennial Kingdom (cf Ps. 2:6-8). It also is seen when they receive worship together (Rev 21:22) and rule together (Rev 22:3) in the New Jerusalem.

Then John says there was a rainbow around the throne. The rainbow was given as the sign of a covenant that God made with Noah (Gen. 9:13-17). It represents God's faithfulness: He keeps His promises. The emerald color of the rainbow points to God's mercy in the midst of judgment.

## **B. Sacred Activities in Heaven – 4:4-11**

4:4 – Surrounding the throne of God, John observed 24 elders who were sitting upon thrones. The fact that they were on thrones and close to the throne of God indicates that they had been given a great amount of authority. They are a special class of heavenly beings, clearly distinguished from the angels (5:11; 7:11). They seem to represent all the church saints, who were taken to Heaven in the Rapture and will reign with Christ on earth after the Tribulation (cf. 3:21). The following facts in this verse support this view:

1. They are "elders." Church elders hold the highest church office and represent the churches over which they preside (Acts 15:6; 20:17, 28).
2. They are robed in white raiment. All church saints will be robed in white garments (3:5; 6:11; 19:8).
3. They have victor's crowns. Church saints will earn victor's crowns for their faithful service to the Lord. They will be given these crowns as rewards after the Rapture at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom 3:9-15; 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Th. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). Later these

elders will give their crowns to God as an act of submission to Him, which symbolizes what the church saints will do (4:10).

4. They are 24 in number. This number has been somewhat of a problem as to what it might signify as a representative of the church saints. It may refer to the priesthood of church saints, reflecting David's division of the Levitical priests into 24 courses or orders (1 Chron. 24:3-5).

More about these elders will be revealed in 4:10; 5:8-12.

4:5 – A storm with lightning and thundering and voices (probably the howling of the wind) arose from the throne of God. This storm depicts the majestic judgment of God and His holy abhorrence of sin (Ex. 19:16-19; Ps. 18:6-14). During the Tribulation the storm from His temple will increase in intensity until all the wicked are defeated and destroyed (cf Rev. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21). Another sign of judgment are the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne of God. Fire is a symbol of judgment. This fiery judgment is related to the Holy Spirit (see Isa 4:4) and He is identified as seven spirits of God (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 5:6; see Zech 4:2, 6, 10). Since the number “seven” refers to something that is full or complete, it must refer to the fullness of the Spirit that is at work in this judgment.

4:6 – Before the throne of God is a sea of glass like crystal. It serves as a reflecting pool to amplify the glory and beauty of God's pure holiness. It is a solid sea on which the victorious saints will stand (Rev. 15:2). A solid sea can symbolize the unwavering state of God's permanent holiness; He has been and always will be holy.

In the midst of God's throne and around it are four living creatures (not beasts). These living beings are full of eyes in front of them and behind them. They are fully aware of everything that is happening around the throne of God. These living beings are similar to the seraphim in Isaiah (Isa 6:2-3) and to the cherubim in Ezekiel (Ezk 1 and 10) but they are different than both of them. There is a great variety of angelic beings that God has created.

4:7 – These living beings were likened to a lion, an ox, the face of a man and a flying eagle. These individual features of the living angelic beings have been interpreted in a variety of ways: (1) they represent the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) in a variety of ways; (2) they represent the four points of the zodiac; (3) they represent important attributes of God; (4) they represent the four standards of the tribes of Israel stationed around the tabernacle in the wilderness; plus other views that are less accepted. However, all of these views are arbitrary because none of them are drawn out of the context of this passage of Scripture. Hence, a look at the context is needed to give a better answer to the identity of the living beings. A clue to their identity is found in the worship of God by the 24 elders in this passage. The elders worshipped God immediately after the living beings worshipped God. It was their worship that caused the elders to cast their victor crowns before God and worship Him as the Creator. What did the elders see in the worship of the living beings that caused them to fall before God and praise Him as the Creator? It appears that the elders saw in them all living creatures worshipping God. This sight humbled the hearts of the elders so much that they cast their crowns before Him and worshipped Him as Creator. If this is so, how do the living beings that are like the lion, ox, man and eagle represent all living creatures in God's creation? The living being that was like a lion, the king of all wild beasts, was the representative of all wild animals in God's creation. The living being that was like an ox, the strongest of all domesticated animals, was the representative of tamed animals. The living being that had a face like that of a man represented every person in the human race. And the living being that was like a flying eagle, the king of all birds, was the representative of all birds. All living beings will worship God in the future, including all people of all races.

4:8 – The living beings have six wings like the seraphim in Isaiah 6. The angels in Isaiah's vision used two wings to cover their faces from God's glory, and two wings to cover their feet in humility, and two wings to fly quickly in serving God. John mentions once again that they are full of eyes to behold

everything that occurs around the throne. They are alert guardian angels protecting the throne of God day and night.

While they are guarding the throne, they praise God day and night for His holiness, His almighty power and His eternal existence. The three-fold praise of God for His holiness is reminiscent of Isa. 6:3 and may refer to their praise of the trinity, or it may refer to the absolute holiness of God. The praise of God from the living creatures is the first of twenty hymns sung by various groups in the book of Revelation. Two are given in this chapter God (4:8, 11).

4:9-10 – As already noted, the praise given to God by the four living creatures caused the 24 elders to fall down before God and cast their victory crowns at His feet in recognition that He is the source and supply of all that they accomplished. The crowns are trophies of what His grace has done through them (Eph. 1:12).

4:11 – The 24 elders went on to praise God and confess that He is worthy to receive glory, honor and power for creating all things. God through Jesus Christ is the sovereign Creator of all things (John 1:3). The 24 elders that represent the church saints praise God for creating them. He is their Creator as well as their Savior. Church saints owe everything that they have to Him. God will thoroughly judge His creation during the Tribulation and then all of His creation will praise Him.

## **II. The Scroll of God – 5:1-14**

### **A. Sealed Scroll – 5:1-4**

#### **1. Its description – 5:1**

5:1 – The scene in chapter 5 begins with God on His throne and He has a scroll in His right hand. It is a document of utmost importance, protected by His omnipotent hand and sealed with seven seals so no one could tamper with it. The scroll is the official title deed of the earth and it reveals the rightful owner. Jeremiah wrote about his purchase of property that his uncle owned. The title deed was sealed so it would be kept secure for a long time, which illustrates the significance of sealing a scroll (cf. Jer. 32:6-16). The scroll in God's hand had writing on the outside to identify the content inside the document. The seven seals on the scroll represent the ultimate wrath of God against Satan for usurping the rule of the earth from Adam.

#### **2. Its demand – 5:2-4**

5:2 – A mighty angel called with a loud voice for one who was worthy to claim the scroll and open its seals. To be worthy, he had to be a human that fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about him and has paid the redemption price for the sins of the people.

5:3 – No one could be found in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth to open the scroll. No one could be found that had paid the redemption price for the earth and its people. Without this payment no one could claim the title deed and restore the earth to its original glory. This shows the inability of mighty men, or even angels, to rule the earth and restore it to its original glory. A payment had to be made for the sins of the people first.

5:4 – John was so moved when no one could be found to claim the title deed of the earth that he wept in spiritual despair. He could not bear the thought of having Satan and his cohorts remain in control of the earth and the saints being defeated forever.

The reason for this demand to get the right person to open the seals on the scroll is found in Genesis 1-3. In the beginning God made the earth as a place for humans to live and have fellowship with Him. It

was a place of spectacular glory. He did not make it for angels, and most certainly He did not make it for Satan to rule. God appointed Adam, a man, to rule the earth (Gen 1:26, 28). Satan coveted the earth to make it a kingdom for himself, but to get control of the earth, he had to conquer Adam. Satan did this when he got Adam to obey him instead of God. When Adam obeyed Satan through Eve's encouragement, and ate the fruit of the tree that God had forbidden, he made Satan his master instead of God. Satan conquered Adam and took his kingdom by this simple strategy and he has been its illegal ruler to this day. To resolve this problem a man was needed that had paid the redemption price for the sins of all people in order to free them from Satan's control.

### **B. Slain Lamb – 5:5-7**

5:5 – One of the elders told John to stop weeping because the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David was found worthy to receive the scroll and to open it. He had prevailed over all others to gain this privilege. Christ alone has the authority to open the seals and bring judgments upon Satan and his followers. He is the Lion (the King) that was born of the tribe Judah and He will sit on His throne forever, so the scepter will never depart from Judah (cf. Gen 49:9-10). He also is of the Root of David. That title is based on Isaiah 11:10, which says the Messiah would come from the root of Jesse, David's father. God had made a covenant with David to establish his throne forever. For this to be possible, he would need a son that would live forever and that would be the Messiah. To show that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus had to be born in the family of David. Jesus' genealogy is traced back to David through both Joseph and Mary (cf. Mt. 1:1ff; Luke 3:23ff). Joseph adopted Jesus to give Him His political right to rule from the throne of David, but Mary gave Him the genealogical right to throne of David. He is the Root of David. So Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Mt 1:1, 16; Lk 1:30-33).

5:6 – When John looked to the throne, he saw a slain Lamb rather than a sovereign Lion. Nations portray their power with a fierce animal (Russia has the bear; Britain has the lion; France has the tiger), but the power of God's Kingdom is portrayed by a slain Lamb. It is the slain Lamb of God that is destroying Satan and it is the slain Lamb that is delivering believers from the fear of death and from slavery to Satan (Heb 2:14-15). The slain Lamb paid the price of redemption for all believers (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). But the work of salvation was not finished until Jesus Christ was raised victoriously from the grave three days later (Eph. 1:20ff; 1 Cor. 15). It was on the day of Jesus' resurrection that the Father decreed that the heathen (Gentile nations) would be His inheritance. This decree was recorded by David (Ps 2:5-9), declared by Paul (Act 13:33-34) and cited three times by John in Revelation (2:27; 12:5; 19:15). The slain Lamb speaks of Christ at His first coming; the sovereign Lion speaks of Christ at His second coming. The slain Lamb makes it possible for Christ to make sinners righteous and bring them into His Kingdom. The sovereign Lion indicates His power to rule the earth to the glory of His Father.

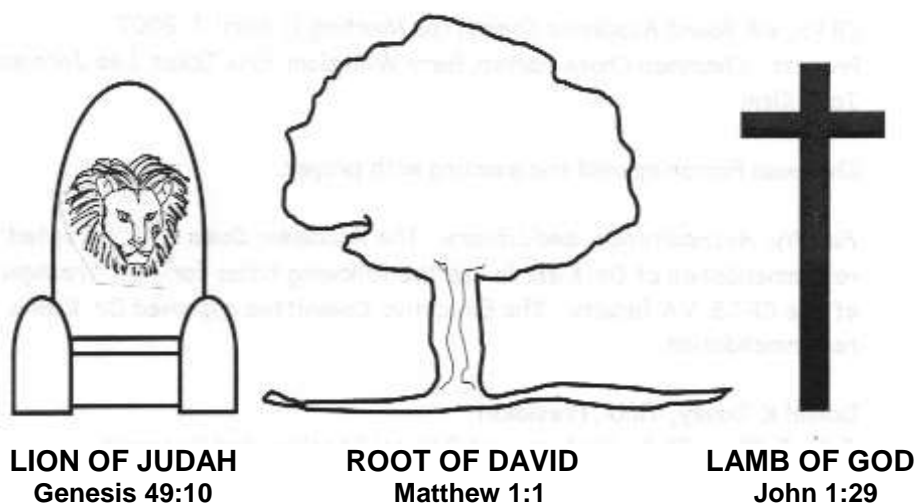
The only person worthy to take the scroll from God's hand and open the seals of scroll would be His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only one that has purchased the redemption of earth's population by His death on the cross. His Father showed that He was fully satisfied with His Son's payment when He raised Him from the dead. Psalm 2 tells us that Jesus was "begotten," which speaks of His resurrection, not His birth (Acts 13:30-33). He was resurrected by the Father after He fully paid for the sins of everyone (1 Jn 2:1-2). It was on the **day** of Christ's resurrection that His Father made the decree to give His Son the nations of the world as His inheritance to rule them with absolute authority. It is conceivable that the words of Psalm 2:7-9 are written in the scroll that He was about to receive from His Father.

The Lamb had seven horns: horns are a symbol of strength (cf 1 Kgs. 22:11) and seven is a symbolic number for completeness or fullness (like the seven days of a week). So the Lamb will have complete strength to rule the whole world as King. The Lamb also has seven eyes, which indicates complete insight into all things happening in His Kingdom and the wisdom to deal with it correctly. This symbolizes the full work of the seven Spirits in His ministry as King (see Rev 1:4).



Revelation 5:5-6 suggests three aspects of Christ's work for His Father on earth. First, He is the slain Lamb to discipline and bless the churches (Rev 1-3). Second, He is the Lion of Judah to judge the nations and remove rebellion from the earth (Rev 6-19). Third, He is the Root of David to establish His Kingdom in righteousness on the earth in Zion for 1000 years (Rev 20).

5:7 – Christ went to His Father and took the scroll out of His right hand. Now He could begin to destroy Satan's Kingdom on earth, which he has ruled since Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, and finish it in seven years. Even though Satan was defeated at the cross for the salvation of believers (Heb. 2:14), he now must be defeated in his rule over unbelievers. When Christ breaks the seals to open the scroll, the seven-year Tribulation on earth begins. When all the seals are broken, He opens the scroll for all to read that He is the owner of the earth and has the right to reclaim it, which is a fulfillment of Psalm 2:8! Daniel portrayed a similar scene of judgment (Dan 7:9-12), and at the end of the Tribulation after Antichrist has been judged, Christ receives the Kingdom from His Father, the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13-14).



### C. Singing Worshipers – 5:8-14

#### 1. The elders and living beings – 5:8-10

5:8 – The actual possession of the scroll by Christ is so glorious that the living beings and elders will fall down before Him and praise Him with harps to accompany their worship of Him. They also will have golden bowls full of fragrance that represent the prayers of faithful saints (Ps. 141:2). Many of those prayers have been, “Thy kingdom come” (Mt. 6:10). Other prayers include the judgment of the wicked and His righteousness to rule the earth.

5:9 – The living beings and 24 elders will sing a new song. “New” has the idea of fresh rather than recent. The song is fresh in the sense that victory over evil will be accomplished soon (cf. Ps. 40:3). They tell Christ that He is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll because He redeemed sinners to God from all nations of the earth by His death on Calvary.

5:10 – Church saints will reign with Christ, ruling the nations in His Millennial Kingdom (2:26-27; 3:21). They also will have access to His throne as priests (Rev 20:6) to worship Him and to intercede on behalf of those living in their natural bodies. Those born during the 1000 years will need to trust Christ for salvation from the penalty of their sin and for success in living godly lives that please Him (Zech 14:9-19).

## 2. The angels – 5:11-12

5:11-12 – A great multitude of angels will join the singing of the living beings and 24 elders. They will sing praise to the worth of Christ for His willingness to be slain. It was His sacrifice that gave Him the seven blessings for which this gigantic choir will praise Him. Since there is one article for the seven blessings ascribed to Christ, they should be treated as a unit. He is praised for these seven reasons:

1. He has sufficient power to defeat Satan and rule the nations of the earth effectively for 1000 years.
2. He has both the spiritual and physical riches to care for the needs of all the people in His Kingdom.
3. He has the wisdom to defeat Satan and to solve all problems that will arise in His Kingdom (Col. 2:3).
4. He has honor from believers for paying the price of their redemption so they can be in His Kingdom.
5. He has the glory of God that will set Him apart in His Kingdom (Mt 17:1-2; 1 Tim. 6:16).
6. He has the blessing of respect from Kingdom believers and they will bow the knee to Him (Phil 2:10).  
This is a preview of the praises that will be sung to Christ after the Battle of Armageddon when the Tribulation judgments have been completed and He is crowned King of kings.
7. He has the strength to finish every task that needs to be done in His Kingdom to do His Father's will.

## 3. All creation – 5:13-14

5:13-14 – Every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth and every creature on the sea and in the sea will join in the worship and adoration of the Father who sits on the throne and of the Lamb. All nature joins in the worship of the Father and Son over the prospect of being delivered from its curse. It was cursed when Adam sinned and it has been groaning in pain since that time, awaiting its redemption (Rom. 8:21-22). After Christ regains control of the earth, this curse will be lifted and all creation will worship Him during the Millennial Kingdom. Christ will be the recipient of all glory. Although the Tribulation had not yet begun, the victory was certain. Christ has already defeated Satan when He died on the cross and arose from the grave. The only thing that remains is the removal of him and his followers from the earth. That will be done through a series of judgments during the Tribulation and will be finished at the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns from Heaven (Rev 19:11-20:3; Mt 25:41-46).



**CHRIST RECEIVES THE SCROLL FROM HIS FATHER  
SO HE CAN INHERIT THE EARTH AS HIS KINGDOM**