

Who's In Charge?
Series: Between a Rock and a Hard Place
May 2, 2021
Revelation 4

I. **Structure of Revelation**

A. **Revelation 1:19** (NASB95) — 19 “Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.”

1. **Have seen**

a. Vision of Christ in Chapter 1

2. **Are**

a. Current state of 7 churches

3. **After these things**

a. **Revelation 4:1** (NASB95) — 1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”

b. Chapters 4-22

B. **Prologue**

1. **Revelation 1:1-2**

a. Description of the nature of the book

2. **Revelation 1:3**

a. Blessing for the diligent reader

3. **Revelation 1.4-5a**

a. Greeting

4. **Revelation 1.5b-6**

a. Doxology

5. **Revelation 1.7-8**

a. Theme

b. Jesus Christ is coming

(1) Tribes of earth will mourn over Him

(2) Eschatological triumph of Christ over the anti-Christian forces of evil in the world and in the heavenly realms

c. **Purpose – encourage the churches under great pressure**

(1) Series: Between Rock and a Hard Place

C. How is this purpose accomplished?

1. **Four visions**

a. **“In the Spirit”**

2. **Revelation 1:9-10** (NASB95) — 9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 **I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day**, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet...

- a. First vision
 - (1) The glorified Christ
 - (2) The messages to the seven churches
 - 3. **Revelation 4:1–2** (NASB95) — 1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” 2 Immediately **I was in the Spirit**; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.
 - a. Second vision
 - (1) The heavenly vision
 - (2) The tribulation
 - 4. **Revelation 17:1–3** (NASB95) — 1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” 3 And **he carried me away in the Spirit** into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.
 - a. Third vision
 - (1) The mystery of Babylon
 - (2) Judgment of Babylon
 - (3) Final triumph and consummation
 - 5. **Revelation 21:9–10** (NASB95) — 9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And **he carried me away in the Spirit** to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...
 - a. Fourth vision
 - (1) The New Jerusalem
- D. Each vision has a purpose related to the theme
- 1. Theme – eschatological triumph of Christ over the anti-Christian forces of evil in the world and in the heavenly realms
 - a. Overarching purpose – encourage the churches under great pressure
 - 2. First vision
 - a. **See Christ glorified**
 - b. Encourage to overcome
 - 3. Second vision
 - a. **See majesty of God**
 - b. See tribulation unfolding according to the plan of God
 - 4. Third vision
 - a. **Understand the nature of the enemy**

- b. See judgment of the enemy and God's triumph over evil
- 5. Fourth vision
 - a. **Eternal state**
 - b. See the future for those who persevere and overcome

II. **The Context**

- A. **Small, struggling churches**
 - 1. Wrestling with concrete, earthly challenges
 - 2. Tempted to give up
- B. **More successful churches**
 - 1. Seduced by worldliness
 - 2. Lulled to sleep by affluence
- C. What's going on here?
 - 1. Spiritually vibrant churches are about to be swallowed up by social and political forces
 - 2. More influential churches are spiritually dead
 - 3. Discerning believer has to wonder
 - a. What's going to happen?
 - b. Who's in charge?
- D. The second vision unfolds
 - 1. **Revelation 4** (NASB95) — 1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."
 - 2. 2 Immediately I was **in the Spirit**; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.
 - 3. 3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.
 - 4. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.
 - 5. 5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.
 - 6. 7 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.
 - 7. 8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."
 - 8. 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the

twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

III. **Almighty God**

A. **His location**

1. **In heaven**

- a. Different meanings
 - (1) Anything above the earth
 - (2) Eternal dwelling place of God
- b. Place where the ultimate reality resides
 - (1) This earth seems so real to us
 - (a) Just the stage where the drama is acted out
 - (2) The real action takes place in heaven
- c. Place where the fundamental earthly issues are determined
 - (1) We think everything is determined down here
 - (2) Ultimately everything is determined up there
 - (3) If we understood that, we'd really be a people of prayer!

2. God is in heaven

- a. Psalm 115:3 (NASB95) — 3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.
 - (1) Location = sovereignty
- b. His eternal dwelling place is secure and certain
 - (1) Whatever else may appear to be in flux

3. **Seated on His throne**

- a. Thrones are very important in Revelation
 - (1) NT – 62 times
 - (2) Revelation – 47 times
 - (3) Matthew – 4 times
- b. Place of ultimate authority
 - (1) There are earthly thrones
 - (a) Some of which are oriented to the destruction of the people of God
 - (b) Thrones are of crucial importance to the churches
 - (c) Especially Caesar's throne
 - i) Even to the point of worship
- c. Whatever thrones seem to be calling the shots on earth, there is one ultimate throne in heaven
 - (1) Seat of the determination of every earthly event
- d. God is sitting on that throne
 - (1) Not Caesar
 - (2) Not Trump
 - (3) Not Biden
 - (4) Not Putin

- (5) Not Xi
- 4. We would do well to understand that
 - a. We may not have Caesar
 - (1) But we have an increasingly pervasive state that seeks to control us
 - (2) Many Christians have far worse states than ours
 - b. We may wonder what's going on down here
 - (1) Is there any hope for us?
 - c. All of us need to understand that there is one ultimate throne
 - (1) God is on that throne
 - (2) Nothing on earth will happen apart from His ordination
- B. **His Character**
 - 1. God is described
 - a. Unlike other descriptions of God
 - (1) Daniel – Ancient of Days, head and hair white like wool, etc.
 - (2) Ezekiel – described as man
 - (3) Both with anthropomorphic features
 - b. Not described in such terms – nothing human about Him here
 - (1) John is overwhelmed by God's majesty and holiness
 - 2. Stones – difficult to understand meaning
 - a. Like jasper
 - (1) Revelation 21.11 – clear as crystal
 - (a) **Purity and holiness**
 - b. Like sardius (carnelian)
 - (1) Various forms are red
 - (a) **Judgment**
 - c. Certainly very precious stones indicating His **glory**
 - 3. Rainbow around the throne, like emerald
 - a. **Ezekiel 1.28** – rainbow is how he describes the radiance of the glory of God
 - b. Perhaps the mercy of God is in view?
 - (1) Green – color of mercy
 - (2) Rainbow of Noah promising not to destroy the earth again by flood
 - 4. Extraordinary combination of attributes
 - a. Holiness
 - b. Purity
 - c. Judgment
 - d. Glory
 - e. Mercy
 - 5. Flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, from the throne
 - a. Extraordinary **power** of God
 - 6. **Holy Spirit** represented by 7 lamps of **burning fire**
 - a. Searching, penetrating, destroying judgment of God

7. Sea of glass like crystal
 - a. Adding to the **majesty** of God
 - (1) **Exodus 24.10** – vision given to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, 70 elders of Israel – pavement of sapphire, clear as sky
 - (2) **Revelation 15.2-4** – sea is mixed with fire
 - (a) Place where victorious martyrs sing a song of worship
 8. **Revelation 4.8** – Four Living Creatures call attention to His nature and character
 - a. **Holy, holy, holy**
 - b. **The Almighty**
 - c. **Eternal Character**
 9. All these attributes stand in sharp contrast to Caesar
 - a. Not to mention Trump or Biden!
- C. **The response to God – worship**
1. Who worships?
 - a. Elders
 - b. Living Creatures
 - c. Much discussion about who these creatures are
 2. **Living creatures**
 - a. Clearly angelic in description
 - (1) Cf Isaiah 6 – Seraphim, six wings
 - (2) Cf Ezekiel 10 – Cherubim, each with four faces
 - (3) These were a little different
 - (a) Eyes all around
 - b. Represent four orders of living things
 - (1) Lion – wild animals
 - (2) Calf – domesticated animals
 - (3) Man – human
 - (4) Eagle – birds
 - c. Angelic beings who represent every aspect of the created order
 3. **Elders**
 - a. Some would believe these are the raptured church
 - b. But they are distinguished from the redeemed in Revelation
 - (1) Revelation 5:10 (NASB95) — 10 “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”
 - (2) Song sung by living creatures and elders about the redeemed
 - c. **Angelic Council** – in Isaiah 24.23 called His elders
 - (1) They carry out the decrees of the Almighty
 - d. Function as angels in the rest of Revelation
 - e. Including in the lists of angelic beings in several places in Revelation

- f. No clear reference to them being the church
- 4. Assuming these are angelic beings
 - a. Extraordinary beings, the kind John has the tendency to worship himself in Revelation!
 - b. But they are worshipping
- 5. **The worship of Living Creatures**
 - a. **4.8b-9** – call attention to who God is (not what He has done)
 - (1) Holiness
 - (2) Power
 - (3) Eternal nature
 - (4) Sovereignty
 - b. If God never did anything, He alone is worthy of worship
 - c. Creatures give glory and honor
 - (1) And even thanks!
 - d. Cf **Romans 1.18ff**
 - (1) Chief sin of humanity is to fail to give God glory and give Him thanks, even though His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen through what has been made
- 6. **Worship of the Elders**
 - a. Fall down before Him
 - (1) Humility before God
 - b. Cast their crowns
 - (1) Submit their authority to His rule
 - c. Worship Him for His creative acts (deeds)
 - (1) All things exist by His will
- 7. The outline of true worship
 - a. For who God is
 - b. For what He has done

IV. Summary

- A. In world overrun by evil
 - 1. Need to see God
- B. He's in heaven
 - 1. Where all the ultimate decisions about life are made
- C. He's on the throne
 - 1. The only seat of authority that counts
- D. His character distinguishes Him from all the other two-bit, God-belittling tyrants this world offers
- E. He alone is worthy of our worship