

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will introduce Revelation chapters 4-7. Part 2 of the book of Revelation consists of chapters 4-7.

REVELATION CHAPTERS 4 AND 5 teaches that **God through Christ reigns over the whole universe in the interest of the Christian churches.**

The Spirit of God causes John to see a vision (4:2). To “be in the Spirit” is a state in which John no longer sees with his physical eyes or hears with his physical ears, but in which his soul is drawn away from his physical surroundings and fixed on the spiritual reality God wants him to see and hear. The various objects that John sees, do not exist in physical, material form, yet express spiritual realities and truths.

What he sees is the heavenly tabernacle or temple, with the throne in the temple, all described in biblical *symbolism* (4:1; Isa 6:1; Ez 43:1-7). For example, John does not see a literal physical throne, but he sees the reality that God exists and reigns over everything in the universe and on earth.

First. God on his throne.

God sits on the throne in indescribable majesty and glory. “**The throne**” of God is a symbol of *his sovereign reign and judgement* (1 Ki 22:19; Job 1:6; Isa 24:23; Dan 7:9-10) over all people and all things from the beginning to the end of history. Nothing happens outside his eternal plan or without his sovereign permission. He accomplishes his plan and no one can thwart his purposes (Isa 14:24,27)!

John does not describe **God**, because God cannot be described by any human being (Ex 20:4; Job 11:7-8). John only sees God’s radiance and describes it in terms of shining precious stones and the rainbow (4:3). The first stone is **diamond** white and is a symbol of *God’s glorious and holy being*. The second stone is red and is a symbol of *God’s righteousness in his judgements*. The rainbow is a symbol of *God’s faithfulness in his salvation of those who believe* (Gen 9:12-17).

“**The flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder**” (4:5) are symbols that express *the awesome greatness, power and majesty of God whenever he reveals something about himself* (Ex 19:16; Job 37:2-13; Rev 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

“**The sea of glass, clear as crystal.**” (4:6) refers to the basin for washing hands and feet in Exodus 30:17-21, but is here regarded as filled with blood as a symbol of *washing the clothes of the saints so that they become white* (7:14; Isa 1:18). Or it refers to the Red Sea in Exodus 15:1-2 in which God’s enemies were destroyed, but is here regarded as a symbol of *God’s judgements that are always completely just and transparent as crystal* (15:1-4).

Second. Jesus Christ as the Lamb (5:5-7,9-10).

John sees “**a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain**”. It is a symbol representing the Lord Jesus *Christ who had been slain on the cross and thereafter had been resurrected* from the dead. Through his death on the cross, he has purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (5:9).

The Lamb is depicted as “**the Lion of the tribe of Judah**” (Gen 49:9-10) and “**the Root of David**” (Isa 11:1,10) to make very clear to the readers of the book of Revelation that this is a revelation of Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

The Lamb was “**standing**” in the centre of the throne. Then he “**came and took** the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne” and is now “**seated**” on the throne together with God the Father (22:1). Thus this vision clearly *describes the enthronement of Jesus Christ*. God not only reveals himself through Christ, but also rules the universe through Christ.

The “**seven horns**” of the Lamb are a symbol representing *the power and authority of Jesus Christ* (1 Sam 2:10). The “**seven eyes**, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” are symbols representing *the literal fact that Christ is filled with the Holy Spirit* (Jn 3:34) *and that his Spirit sees everything and is active in every country of the world* (Jn 16:8-10).

Only Christ is worthy to open “**the scroll** with seven seals”. The scroll is a symbol that represents *God’s plan or purpose with respect to the entire universe throughout history*, and God’s purpose with respect to all creatures in all ages and unto all eternity.

The scroll is “closed with **seven seals**”. They are symbols that show that at the time of this vision, *God’s plan or purpose written on the scroll had not yet been revealed and had not yet been executed*. The vision is therefore of the enthronement of Jesus Christ immediately after his resurrection and ascension.

“**The breaking or opening of the seals**” are symbols of *the revelation and the execution of God’s plan or purpose*.

Whenever Jesus Christ opens a seal, a very important principle begins to function within human history on earth from the first to the second coming. God places all things, all people, all governments in the world and all historical events into Christ’s hands, and he will lead all these to the accomplishment of God’s purposes (Jn 3:35; 5:22). God through Christ is in control of all people and events in world-history. Christ will execute God’s plan until it is fully accomplished and an uncountable multitude of people from every nation in the world will stand before God’s throne (7:9).

Third. The Holy Spirit as the 7 spirits (4:5; 5:6).

John sees “seven blazing lamps” (Ex 37:17-23) immediately before the throne. These are symbols representing *the sevenfold Holy Spirit or the divine fullness of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is God and is full of sanctifying power for the Christians and full of punishing fire for the godless and wicked people (Mt 3:12; 13:30).

Fourth. The four living creatures (4:6-11).

The 4 living creatures form the inner circle around God’s throne (Ezek 1,10) and are symbols of *the heavenly representatives of God’s whole creation*. Because they are distinguished from the other angels (5:11; 7:11), they are a special order of angels, called ‘cherubim’ (Ezek 10:20), that represent God’s reign over God’s creation in the universe. Their task is to guard the holy things of God (Gen 3:24; Ex 25:20) and to enhance God’s glory in his reign and especially in his work of creation in the universe.

The living creatures are “covered with eyes” and symbolise that *they see everything that happens in the universe*. They are described as having the nobility of a lion, the strength of an ox, the intelligence of a man and the swiftness of an eagle. These are not characteristics of God, but of the cherubim (Ps 103:20 -21; Heb 1:14; Dan 9:21; Lk 12:8; 15:10). They dwell in the immediate presence of God and therefore take notice of all God’s attributes like his holiness, power and wisdom. They are able to see better than the people who dwell in this sinful world that world-history is the realisation of God’s sovereign will. Therefore the living creatures constantly praise God (4:6-9; Isa 6:3).

Fifth. The twenty-four elders on their thrones (4:4,9-11).

The 24 elders form the second circle around God’s throne and are symbols of *the heavenly representatives of God’s saved people on earth*. The number 24 points back to the 24 divisions of priests and Levites in the Old Testament. They represented God’s people on earth that serve God every day (1 Chron 24-25). And it points back to the 12 tribes of Israel, who are *representatives of God’s Old Testament people*, and the 12 apostles of the Church, who are *representatives of God’s New Testament people* (21:12-14). “The elders” are always the *representatives* of God’s Old Testament people (Num 11:16-17) and of God’s New Testament people (Act 20:17,28). The 24 elders are thus representatives. Because these elders are distinguished from the uncountable multitude of believers in Revelation 7:9-11, they are a heavenly order of angels that represent God’s reign over God’s people on earth. Their task is to enhance God’s glory in his reign and especially in his work of salvation on earth. Their description points to the reality of God’s saved people. The “white garments” symbolise the holiness of God’s people and the “golden crowns” symbolise *the victory of God’s people* (4:4). The “harp” symbolise *the joy and praises that God’s people sing* and the “golden bowls full of incense” symbolise *the prayers of God’s saved people* (5:8; 8:3-5).

Sixth. The angels in heaven (5:11).

All the other angels form the third circle around God’s throne. They worship God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (4:10; 5:8) by singing in a loud voice, “Worthy is our Lord and God”, and “worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise” (4:11; 5:12-13; 7:11).

Seventh. The other creatures in the universe (5:13).

All other creatures in the universe form the fourth circle around God’s throne. Thus, the vision in Revelation 4-5 is of God’s throne in the centre of the whole universe and of God governing the whole universe through Jesus Christ as Mediator, through the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier and through all the orders of angels as God’s servants on behalf of God’s people (Heb 1:14). *The book of Revelation gives the right perspective of the universe and the only philosophy of world-history, namely, that everything that exists is governed by the God of the Bible!*

REVELATION CHAPTER 6 teaches that **Christ is in complete control throughout the seven seals of persecution and trials**.

Revelation 6 pictures the opening of the seals. When the seven seals are opened, then God’s eternal purposes are realised in the whole world. “The scroll with seven seals” is a symbol of *God’s main decrees concerning salvation and judgement*. They include the triumphant course of Christ and his gospel, the persecution by the world, the trials all people suffer and the judgements on the impenitent. The first four seals are God’s means by which he brings the gospel to the hearts of people in the world throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

The 1st seal: “the rider on the white horse” (6:1-2) is a symbol of *Christ the Conqueror going out to conquer* by means of his Word, the gospel, by means of the Spirit, by means of the testimonies and prayers of Christians, by means of the angels in heaven and by means of the trumpets of judgement and the bowls of wrath.

The 2nd seal: “the rider on the red horse” (6:3-4) is a symbol of *religious persecution of Christians by the world*. Whenever Christ appears to conquer with the gospel, Christians are being slaughtered.

The 3rd seal: “the rider on the black horse” (6:5-6) is a symbol of *economic hardship for Christians due to the oppression and injustice of the world*.

The 4th seal: “the rider on the pale horse” (6:7-8) is a symbol of *death through warfare, famine, plague and wild animals*. While the 2nd and 3rd seals symbolise the direct persecution of Christians by the world, the 4th seal symbolises all universal woes that Christians suffer along with the rest of the world, simply because they are also in the world that is passing away (1 Jn 2:17).

The 2nd, 3rd and 4th seals are clearly instruments in the hands of Christ for the sanctification of his Church and the extension of his kingdom, because it is God who gives those riders a sword and authority to accomplish their functions in the history of this world!

The 5th seal (6:9-11) is a symbol and pictures *the souls of the martyrs* slaughtered by the rider on the red horse, because of the Word of God and their testimony. When believers die, their souls are immediately translated into God’s presence (20:4-6; Lk 20:37-38; Jn 11:25-26; 2 Cor 5:1-10; 1 Thes 5:10; 2 Tim 4:18). They are told that the final judgement day will only come when the full number of Christian martyrs had been reached.

The 6th seal (6:12-17) is a symbol and *introduces the final judgement day*. The dread and terror, the awe and consternation of that day is pictured under the twofold symbolism of a crashing universe and a thoroughly frightened human race. God will finally judge all evil people, all people who rejected the gospel and all people who persecuted his people.

The 7th seal of silence (8:1-2) is a symbol of *God’s just rule in history* before the final judgement day. Throughout the Bible there was silence before the storm of God’s judgements (Isa 41:1-2; Zeph 1:7ff; Zech 2:13). It is the silence of awe when people view God’s majesty, holiness and righteousness in his judgements from his point of view (Ps 73:16-20). God will punish every injustice done in history. If the 1st seal of God’s salvation through Christ is rejected, the 7th seal of God’s just judgement will inevitably follow. Throughout the history of this world God will judge all evil people, all people who reject the gospel and all people who persecute his people by means of “the 7 trumpets of judgement”. And at the end of the history of this world God will judge them by means of “the 7 bowls of his final wrath”. The revelation and execution of God’s judgements throughout the history of this world are so terrible that everyone in heaven become silent.

The 6th seal and 7th seal are separated by Revelation 7, because God protects all true Christians by “sealing” them before he executes his judgements on this world. The 1st seal emphasises that Jesus Christ and his message will triumph through *salvation* of all who believe in him. But the 7th seal emphasises that Jesus Christ will judge all the other people with a *judgement* that is absolutely just and which they merit.

REVELATION CHAPTER 7:1-8 teaches **the protection of the Church Militant before the second coming**.

Before the 7 trumpets of God’s judgements are sounded and before the 4 winds of destruction begin to blow, Christ shows John a vision of *how the Church Militant on earth is kept safe throughout these judgements* (cf. Jn 10:27-29). The picture is of 4 good angels holding back the 4 winds of the earth until the 144 000 people from all the tribes of Israel have been sealed on their foreheads. The meaning of the picture is that the *Church Militant is protected while it is still on earth between the first and second coming of Christ*. Before the winds of woes strike to harm, God “seals” all his 144 000 servants. This “sealing” is a symbol of *ownership and protection* and consists of God’s name written on their foreheads (14:1; 22:4).

The number “144 000” is a symbol and represents *the entire Church Militant, that is, all God’s people that live on earth before the second coming of Christ*. The number 3 is a symbol and represents *the Triune God*. The number 4 is a symbol and represents *the earth with its four wind directions*. Thus, 3 x 4 represents *the work of salvation of the Triune God everywhere in the world*. The number 12 is a symbol and represents the 12 tribes of Israel of the Old Testament period or the 12 apostles of the New Testament period (21:12-14). Thus, 12 x 12 represents all God’s saved people from both the Old and New Testament periods. The number 10 is a symbol and represents the number of completeness. Thus, 10x10x10 represents the absolute complete number. Therefore, the number 144 000 is a symbol and represents *the absolute complete number of saved people from the creation to the re-creation of the earth!* It does not comprise only of Jews or only of a small portion of Christians.

The term “Israel” does not refer to the physical nation of Israel. Just like the number 144 000, also the term “all the tribes of Israel” has to be understood as a symbol, because the tribes of Ephraim and Dan are literally omitted, Joseph is included but after his son Manasseh, and Judah is mentioned before the oldest son Reuben. Moreover, the Old Testament people of God are called with the New Testament name: “the Church” in Judges 20:2. And the New Testament people of God are called with the Old Testament names: “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (Js

1:1), “the sojourners in the dispersion” (1 Pet 1:1), “a kingdom of priests” (Ex 19:5-6; 1 Pet 2:9) or “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). God’s Old and New Testament people together form “the one flock of the shepherd”, Jesus Christ (Jn 10:16), “the one new man” created out of the two peoples: the Israelite and Gentile believers (Gal 3:6-9; Eph 2:15), “heirs together with Israel”, “members together of one Body”, the one Body of Christ and “sharers together of the promise in Jesus Christ (Eph 3:6; cf. 2 Cor 1:20). Although the description here uses Old Testament terms, “all the tribes of Israel” is a symbol and represents *all God’s people during the entire world-history*. According to Revelation 14:1-5, they are all believers in Jesus Christ, because they are all redeemed by Christ’s death, they all have Christ’s name on their foreheads and they all follow Christ wherever he goes.

REVELATION CHAPTER 7:9-17 teaches **the glory of the Church Triumphant after the second coming.**

Before the 7 trumpets of God’s judgements are sounded and before the 4 winds of destruction begin to blow, Christ shows John another vision. It is about *the final goal of all God’s people: namely, the glory of the Church Triumphant on the new earth after the second coming of Christ* (cf. ch 21-22).

The uncountable multitude of people consists of God’s people “from every nation” in the world, including from the nation of Israel. They are the uncountable number of Abraham’s spiritual descendents (Gen 15:5). They are the result of the preaching of the gospel of grace and God’s kingship throughout the history of the world (Gal 3:6-9; Mt 24:14). They consist of *the final condition of the 144 000* in Revelation 14:1-7. Then “the number of their fellow servants and brothers” was absolutely complete (6:11).

They “stand around God’s throne”, which means, they *fellowship* with God, *serve* God and *share* in all the glory of God. “The white robes” they wear are symbols of *their righteousness and holiness as well as festivity*. “The palm branches” they hold in their hands are symbols of *salvation*.

They have come out of “the great tribulation”, which in this context does not refer to the final great tribulation described in Matthew 24 and 1 Timothy 3:1 just before the second coming of Christ. The Church Militant in the previous paragraph is the Church Militant that is passing through the great tribulation of trials and persecution throughout history. It is the Church suffering the seals of persecution described in Revelation 6. Nevertheless, the members of the Church will not forever remain the Church Militant, because God will bring them out of the great tribulation they suffer on earth into heaven and finally onto the new earth, where they will become the Church Triumphant.

There on the new earth they will *serve* God day and night in his “temple”, which is a symbol of *God’s direct presence*. “God will spread his tent over them” means that *God will treat them like his own children*. They have been saved from every form of suffering! And they have been saved to enjoy “the springs of eternal water”, which are a symbol of *the fullness of eternal life*. God will wipe the tears out of their eyes, which means that they can *only experience perfect joy and blessing forever*.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Read Revelation 8-11. Tomorrow we will introduce Revelation 8-11.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.