

# IN RESPONSE - THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD (Revelation 4)

by Dennis Prutow

Volume V, Number 2

February, 1996

The book of Revelation impresses us with the majesty and greatness of God. The visions engender deep reverence and awe before the Almighty. They produce assurance regarding the victory of Christ and the gospel. In this exposition, I begin with Revelation 4 where Christ leads us into God's throne room.

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" (verse 1).

In this magnificent vision John sees a door standing open in heaven. We must remember John is granted an extraordinary view of things in the preternatural world. As John sees this open door a voice from heaven beckons him. Only a slice of glory is visible through the door. More is promised.

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne (verse 1).

Through the door John sees a throne, the throne of heaven. There is one sitting on the throne. John instinctively knows who He is. So do we.

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 (verse 2).

No specific description is given of the One who sits on the throne. He is like a jasper stone. Probably a clear and translucent gem representing God's absolute moral purity and holiness. He is also like a the fiery red sardius representing the judgmental side of God's infinitely perfect character. Around the throne we see the emerald glow of a rainbow reminding us of God's covenantal character.

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.

Many expositors think these elders represent the saints throughout the ages. In part, this is a position based upon the translation of late Greek manuscripts of

Revelation 5:9. The four living creatures and the elders sing together:

Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed *us* to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (italics added).

If we follow this reading, the elders must be a representative body of believers in heaven. The better reading excludes *us*.

Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

For this reason and because one of the elders references others as glorified saints (Revelation 7:13-14), I think these elders are a rank in the hierarchy of angels. Compare Colossians 1:16.

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 (verse 5).

Alford observes in connection with Revelation 11:19 this lightning and thunder are "the solemn salvos, so to speak, of the artillery of heaven." Anyone present when a dignitary is given a twenty-one gun salute understands the imagery. Heavenly power salutes its Sovereign.

We also see seven great lights surrounding the throne. This is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of burning Holiness, illuminating heaven with perfect light. Seven being the number of perfection.

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 (verse 6).

The throne sits on a vast sea. This sea is smooth as glass and clear as crystal. The sea in Revelation often represents humanity. It is often a boiling cauldron. Revelation 13:1, 17:15, Daniel 7:2-3 and Isaiah 17:12. The sovereign sway of the Almighty brings calm to the sea of humanity. I emphasize this is a vast sea. It extends to infinity in every direction. God's power sets the cosmos in order.

There are four great and striking creatures around the throne. They have eyes all over, within and without, representing their pervasive vision and knowledge of the things of God. These are great angelic beings attending the throne of God.

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. 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" (verses 7-9).

This scene reminds us of the vision of Isaiah 6 and the song of seraphim. Surely these living beings are the highest rank of angels standing guard before the throne. They have great dignity, the lion, power, the ox, wisdom, prototype man, and swiftness, the eagle. Their threefold song of holiness indicates God is the holiest of all. Their continual singing signifies God's unceasing definitive holiness.

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, 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, "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" (verses 10-11).

The angels acknowledge their authority comes from God; they cast their crowns before the throne. Only God, the Almighty, is worthy to receive all honor and power and glory. Only God is worthy. No other creature in the universe dare make this claim. The majesty of the Almighty makes this abundantly clear.

'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 1996 by Dennis Prutow. Articles may be reproduced for use in church school classes.

# IN RESPONSE - EXALT THE LAMB, EXULT IN THE BOOK (Revelation 5)

by Dennis Prutow

Our central purpose is to come to grips with the majesty of God and the glory of Jesus Christ as we witness the awesome power of Christ to set the plans and purposes of God in motion. John is in God's throne room. "I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals" (verse 1).

The hand of God is outstretched. In His open palm John sees a book. It is sealed with seven seals. This book is a closed book, perfectly sealed. It is the book of God's decrees, His eternal plans and solemn purposes. The book is written inside and out showing the comprehensive character of God's sovereign plans.

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?'" (verse 2). A mighty angel asks all heaven if anyone is able to open the book. Brute strength is not the precondition. Rather, moral purity and ethical integrity are the prime qualifications. Holiness is the prerequisite. John declares this solemn reality. "And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it (verse 3).

No angel, great or small, is *worthy* to open the book. No heavenly being can take his stand before God and make such a claim. No earthly creature is likewise able. Fallen humanity is totally disqualified, *unworthy*. Can the nether world produce someone? Never! The leader of the underworld, Satan himself, does not qualify. That malignant being can act only at the behest of the Almighty. May we all realize this is the case.

John's reaction is startling, "Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it" (verse 4). Because no creature in the universe is found worthy to open the mysteries of God, John weeps. Would more of God's people had such heartfelt conviction concerning the mysteries of God and a desire to know Him.

"And one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals'" (verse 5). This elder reminds us of two ancient prophecies concerning Christ.

When Jacob blessed his twelve sons, he said, "Judah is a lion's whelp.... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet (Genesis 49:9-10). Jesus Christ is the Lion of Judah. He is the One of whom it is written, "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1). The Root of David is worthy.

And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. Literally John sees the Lamb in the middle of the throne. Hardly another book in the New Testament emphasizes the deity of Christ the way Revelation does. Christ is in the throne with God the Father. He is equal with Him in glory and honor.

The Lion who is a Lamb is startling in appearance. The lamb was slain yet He lives. He stands in triumph. He has seven horns. The horn represents power. This Lamb's power is *perfect* and *comprehensive*. The Lamb also has seven eyes. He has perfect sight and perfect knowledge. Again, we meet the seven Spirits of God. God does not actually have seven Spirits. The Spirit of Christ is the *perfect* Spirit of the Almighty and Holy God.

Because of the worthiness of His life and death, John says of the Lamb, "And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne" (verse 7). The Lamb within the throne relieves the Father of the book and prepares to disclose the purposes of God.

What is the result of this seemingly simple action?

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (verse 8).

The Lamb takes the book and the highest courts of heaven prostrate themselves in worship. The incense of prayer rises before the throne. The melody of praise, symbolized by the harps, comes before the Lamb in the middle of the throne.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and

to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (verses 9-10).

The angels were at a loss concerning the full purposes of God set forth by the prophets. What the prophets spoke represented "things into which angels long to look" (1 Peter 1:12). When the angels begin to see the magnificent works of God, they sing the old song of redemption with *new* vigor born of *new* understanding. They see the Christ about to erect His kingdom with the power of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16).

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (verses 11-12).

All the heavenly angelic echelons join in a sevenfold paean of praise giving worship to God and to the Lamb. All of creation joins in adoration.

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshipped (verses 12-14).

Once again this worship equates God the Father and God the Son. As all the created order honors Jesus Christ as God, we must do likewise. We must exalt the Lamb with the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and all the angels of heaven. We must exult in the sovereign plans and purposes of God with all angels and every created thing. This is our place as we stand on the periphery of heaven.

'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 1996 by Dennis Prutow.

## IN RESPONSE - THE FOUR HORSEMEN (Revelation 6:1-8)

by Dennis Prutow

The scenes in God's throne room set the stage. We must now grasp the grand sweep of history controlled by God and set in motion by Jesus Christ. The four horsemen of the apocalypse ride forth to play out this history, God's story.

Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come" (verse 1).

Christ begins to open the book by breaking the series of seven seals which hold it closed. John is in rapt attention and full of amazement. He actually sees the Lamb begin His task of unfolding history. When Christ breaks the first seal one of the four angelic creatures thunders, "Come." The authorized version reads, "Come up here." The words appear to be directed at John. The better manuscripts simply say, "Come." The exhortation is directed to the first horseman. In response, John exclaims,

I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, he went out conquering & to conquer (verse 2).

Although the commentators disagree on who or what this horseman represents, I think he is a symbol of the gospel riding forth to victory. This is not Christ himself but the power of the gospel riding through history. The bow fires gospel arrows into the hearts of men and women subduing them to Christ. The words conquering and to conquer mean this rider goes forth being victorious for the purpose of victory. Psalm 45:3-5, a messianic Psalm, gives us a similar picture.

Gird Your sword on Your thigh, O Mighty One, In Your splendor and Your majesty! And in Your majesty ride on victoriously, for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let Your right hand teach You awesome things. Your arrows are sharp; The peoples fall under You; Your arrows are in the heart of the King's enemies.

We cannot avoid the similarity. The first force of history with which we reckon is the gospel. The gospel will be victorious.

"When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come" (verse 3). A second angel calls an

engine of history into action as Christ unfolds the purposes of God.

And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him (verse 4).

One of the great forces of history is war, physical and spiritual. The former portrays and pictures the latter. The force and power of warfare is at once both a manifestation of the evil one and a judgment of God. God permits Satan to rage. Yet, war is a judgment coming from the hand of God. Fallen humanity left to its own devices is bent on self destruction. The deeds of the flesh are manifest as Paul tells us in Galatians 5:19-21.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Those who will not inherit the kingdom instinctively battle the kingdom. This is God's design. He originally told Satan,

I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel (Genesis 3:15).

Conflict on both the physical and spiritual levels is inevitable.

The unavoidable consequence of war is famine, a third force in world history.

When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine" (verses 5-6).

In the picture the horseman has scales with which to measure out food for humankind. The voice of God emanating from the throne directs the horseman. A

denarius was a days wages. The dry measure of wheat was a days supply. Imagine spending all you have each day for food. The cheaper grain was barley. A laborer could scarcely support his family with this daily supply. Essential oil and wine are not touched.

The deeper famine is that of the Word of God. When men and women are denied the privilege of hearing the Word, eternal death follows. This is a serious judgment of God. While the gospel is going forth in victory, some are providentially denied because of location or spiritual insensitivity. In addition, physical war is a diversionary tactic. It so consumes men and women they hardly have time to contemplate the eternal. This is a warning. The forces of war and famine currently affect our world.

John hears the fourth horseman called to action, Death and Hell.

When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth (verses 7-8).

War often brings famine and death follows closely. This horseman is the color of death. He carries a green pallor. His footman running along side is Hades. Death and Hades are companions for those who do not know Christ. This is the final Word of God for fallen rebels.

These are the great forces at work in history, the gospel, war, famine and death. The four horsemen are ever present. As the gospel goes forth, God's enemies arise. God perfects His saints in this crucible. Yet we have assurance. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. World history is His story. Nothing is out of His sovereign control. All things do work together for good in this history for the perfection of God's people. This means the gospel is and will be victorious.

'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 1996 by Dennis Prutow.

## IN RESPONSE - HOW LONG O LORD? (Revelation 6:9-17)

by Dennis Prutow

Gospel proclamation proceeds as designed by God. The enemies of the gospel, war, famine and death, distract the world from essential spiritual truth. We witness these engines of history today. Ultimately God fuels and directs them. Now we see the response of saints in heaven and of the God of heaven to this warfare directed against the gospel. Christ opens the fifth seal of the book of God's decrees.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained (verse 9).

The altar is the altar of sacrifice. The vision presents a picture of martyrs. Remember, this is a picture of reality not the reality itself. The word for *witness* in the New Testament is *μαρτυρ*, *martus*. It is the word standing behind our English word martyr. Here we have a picture of those who *bear witness* to Christ and are under the blood of His sacrifice. They are crucified to the world. I therefore think this picture portrays all saints in heaven. Anyone who names the Name of Christ must count the cost of discipleship.

These glorified saints are praying.

And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (verse 10).

In the vision, the saints pose a question. How long before the true Sovereign rights the scales of justice? How long before the holy God avenges the cruelty of those who war against the gospel?

There is no unrest in heaven. This is a picture. When the justice of God is meted out, heaven rejoices. When will this be? This is the question of saints on earth.

And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also (verse 11).

Glorified saints receive robes of actual righteousness and holiness from God through Christ. The posture of heaven is rest. This is the genius of the Sabbath. It

should be a foretaste of the rest of heaven. What is God's posture?

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19).

How long? The answer is simple. Again, I think the vision refers to all glorified saints. Upon what do they wait? When the final member of God's elect comes to glory, final, decisive, inescapable judgment strikes the reprobate.

This brings us to the sixth seal of the book of God's sovereign decrees.

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places (verses 12-14).

We readily leap to the conclusion this vision pictures the final demise of planet earth. Remember, this is a word picture. What does it represent? The picture does represent final judgment *spiritually* but not necessarily temporally.

The language reminds us of Joel 2:28-32. Peter quotes this passage on the Day of Pentecost to explain the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14-21). The passage also reminds us of Haggai 2:6 as interpreted in Hebrews 12:26-29.

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

God's voice shook the earth at Sinai. God promises another more profound shaking. This shaking separates faith in the temporal from the eternal. When Christ dies and

returns to life, the foundations of heaven quake. All is altered. Satan is defeated. The sacrifices and ceremonies of ancient Israel cease. The cataclysm of 70 AD, when Roman armies destroyed the temple, *confirms* this shaking. The language of Matthew 24 fits our picture. The physical shaking of Jerusalem portends final spiritual shaking of all things.

The Bible has wonderful words for those who trust in the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus Himself says,

He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (John 5:24).

Such people enter a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

Christ also warns, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already" (John 3:18). Those rejecting the gospel are under judgment. They are part of the kingdom which is presently being shaken down and ultimately will be broken.

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (verses 15-17).

There is no escape for the small or the great. There is no hiding place. No one is able to stand before the wrath of the Lamb. When unrepentant sinners enter eternity, their fate is sealed. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Physical death is terrible. Final spiritual death is cataclysmic. It is ultimate judgment.

Christians trust in the God of history knowing there is final rest in heaven and final judgment of all evil.

'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 1996 by Dennis Prutow. Articles may be reproduced for use in church school classes.