

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Revelation 4:1-11

Topic

John sees twenty-five thrones being set in Heaven and is given further revelation about the End Times

Title

“Endgame of Thrones”

They're called war rooms or situation rooms:

📖 During the Second World War, a group of basement offices served as the center of Britain's war effort. They were known as the Cabinet War Rooms.

📖 JFK created the White House Situation Room in 1961 in the basement of the West Wing.

Heaven has a war room.

The apostle John sees “a door standing open in Heaven.” He is taken up through it to witness the execution of Operation 7year Great Tribulation.

It is an unusual war room. Before God declares wrath, the parties in Heaven gather for worship.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You'll Be Safe From The Wrath Of God**, and **#2 You'll Be Surrounded By The Worship Of God**.

#1 - You Will Be Safe From The Wrath Of God (v1)

In verse nineteen of chapter one, Jesus provided us with the outline of His Revelation: "Write **1** the things which you have seen, and **2** the things which are, and **3** the things which will take place after this." Follow this outline and the Revelation makes sense.

📖 Chapter one was "the things [John had] seen," a vision of the risen Jesus. It is in the *past*.

📖 Chapters two and three were "the things which are," the churches on the earth during the Church Age. They are the *present*.

📖 Chapters four through the end are "the things which will take place after this" in the *future*.

The bulk of this book is its detailed description of the Great Tribulation. It occupies chapters six through eighteen, from the release of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (6:2) to Jesus returning on His great white steed in His Second Coming (19:11).

Chapters four and five reveal maneuvering in Heaven prior to the launch of God's measured campaign of wrath.

Jesus made the church a strong promise that we would *not* be left on the earth to experience the wrath of God:

"I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (3:10)

The words were carefully chosen by Jesus so there would be no confusion. He will keep His church out of the entire period of global trial. We won't be kept safe going through it; we will not be in it.

The church will be removed from earth to Heaven. Chapter four begins with a figure, a type, of that removal.

Rev 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me,

saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

"After [the] things" of chapters one, two and three, John "looked" and noticed a "door standing open in Heaven." It was a special door, a mystery door, opened just for John to be received into Heaven.

The "first voice" John heard, back in chapter one, was that of Jesus. John compared Jesus' voice to a "trumpet" that preceded his being taken through the door into Heaven.

It sounds similar to the apostle Paul's description of the church's resurrection and rapture in his letters to Corinth and Thessalonica.

John is a type of the church removed from the earth before the Great Tribulation.

🔍 The apostle Peter likened the Great Tribulation to "a thief in the night" (First Peter 3:10). The apostle Paul told the believers in Thessalonica that the Great Tribulation would **not overtake us [the church] like a thief** (First Thessalonians 5:4).

🔍 Paul sounded exactly like Jesus when he said to the Thessalonians, "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (First Thessalonians 5:9).

🔍 The words "church" or "churches" are used some twenty times in the first three chapters, but not at all as the Great Tribulation is described.

🔍 Beginning in chapter four of the Revelation the church is conspicuously absent from the earth. The church won't be seen again until we return with Jesus to end the Great Tribulation at Armageddon.

🔍 All seven letters to the churches in the Revelation end with the familiar words, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

We encounter a similar phrase during the seven years, but it reads, "if anyone has an ear, let him hear" (13:9). There is no mention of "the churches."

🔑 The New Testament teaches *imminence*. The Lord's coming for His church could occur *at any moment*. No signs precede it. The only way for the rapture to be imminent is for it to happen sometime *before* the Great Tribulation. Every other theory of the timing of the rapture undermines imminence.

These observations are strengthened by Jesus' promise to remove us. This typical 'rapture' of John to Heaven is consistent with the pretribulation rapture of the church. He represents the experience of all the believers of the Church Age before the Day of God's Wrath.

I came across this bit of history in my research:

The British government during World War II relocated citizens out of urban centers to locations where the risk of bombing attacks was low or non-existent. Called Operation Pied Piper, millions of people, most of them children, were shipped to rural areas in Britain and overseas to Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Almost 3 million people were evacuated during the first four days of the operation, making it the most significant and most concentrated [evacuation] in British history.

Before declaring His wrath, the Lord will conduct a global evacuation & relocation of His church.

#2 - You'll Be Surrounded By The Worship Of God (v2-11)

Have you seen those, *If you remember this* memes on Facebook? One of my favorites is the picture of the speakers at the drive-in theater.

Something else I vividly remember: The Cuban Missile Crisis. I was seven years old and it seemed certain I'd never see my 8th birthday. Khrushchev & Castro would disintegrate me while I ducked & covered under my desk at school.

A lot has been written about what went on in the aforementioned White House Situation Room during those tense days in October 1962. *I don't remember anyone reporting that worship was the first priority.* It is first and foremost in Heaven.

Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in Heaven, and *One* sat on the throne.

It's unproductive to be dogmatic about what John meant by "in the Spirit." The apostle Paul is an *I've Been to Heaven* alumni. He said he was "caught up to the third Heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows" (Second Corinthians 12:2). God knows the mechanics of it.

If repetition is something we ought to pay attention to, note that the words "throne" or "thrones" occur 14 times in these 11 verses

We're not told directly, but the first Person we see on His throne is God the Father. He will be distinguished from God the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

Rev 4:3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

Commentators cannot definitively identify the "jasper and... sardius." We therefore cannot read anything much into them as symbols.

A pregnant woman seems to glow. It's a real thing, with a biological basis.

God the Father glows in His glory.

If you took Earth Science, you met ROY G BIV. It's how to remember the colors of the rainbow. The Wrath Room rainbow is circular and is different shades of green. One commentator said of the rainbow:

It is a reminder that God's mercy is as great as His majesty, *i.e.*, that there will be no triumph of God's sovereignty at the expense of His mercy. The disasters portrayed in the following pages cannot be interpreted as meaning that God has forgotten His promise to Noah.

Why so much green? I looked at the meaning of colors in the Bible. There may be a few things we would agree on, but it is mostly subjective.

We futurists who take the Bible literally whenever possible too often make the same mistake non-literalists do. We insist on assigning symbolic meaning to everything.

Sigmund Freud once famously admitted, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

Rev 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

News flash: I have changed my mind about who these guys are.

I used to think they were human beings who represented the church. They could be, for sure, and if you take that position it's OK.

1. Who or what these are has nothing to do with believing in the church's pretribulation resurrection and rapture. It doesn't have any affect on our premillennialism.
2. The scholars agree that no one knows who or what these guys are because we are never told. Any position you take is a best guess.

My best guess is that they are created supernatural beings, probably an order of angels. God has supernatural beings around Him.

The Old Testament describes what some call a "Divine Council" or "Divine Assembly" of supernatural beings.

📖 Psalm 82:1 says that "God takes His stand in the **divine assembly**; among the **divine beings** He renders judgment" (ISV).

🔍 Psalm 89 asks, “Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? In the **council of the holy ones** God is greatly feared.”

🔍 One translation of Deuteronomy 32:8 reads, “When the High God gave the nations their stake, gave them their place on Earth, He put each of the peoples within boundaries under the care of **divine guardians**” (MSG).

But aren't these twenty-four called “elders,” and don't they have crowns and white robes?

🔍 “Elder” is a general title for leaders not just in the church.

🔍 There is nothing in the Bible to prove that white robes and crowns are unique to humans.

One of the commentaries gave two solid reasons to think they are probably not human:

1. “Throughout the [Revelation] they are distinguished from the saints” (7:13-14; 14:3; 19:4-8).
2. “They are seated on their thrones *already*, but humans will not be so positioned until some point in the future” (20:4).

It makes more biblical sense that these thrones are occupied by some type of Divine Council or Assembly that God convenes.

Rev 4:5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

“Lightnings and thunderings” are typical of a storm. The storm of biblical proportions... The storm of the centuries... the perfecting storm... Is coming.

There were also “voices.” A scene in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* portrays voices in a storm. The nine members of the fellowship are attempting to climb Mount Caradhras. A diabolical snowstorm breaks upon them.

They discern a fell voice in the storm. It's the voice of their enemy, the White Wizard, Saruman.

The voices in the storm of God's wrath are not fell, but full of compassion as God calls upon mankind to repent of their sin and be saved.

1. We will see Him calling to men through two incredible human witnesses. They appear in chapter eleven to preach the Gospel with power for one-thousand two hundred sixty days.
2. We will see God calling to men through 144,000 Jewish evangelists. They are sealed to serve then sent out as His voices.
3. In chapter fourteen an angel flies through the atmospheric heavens having the everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people who dwell on the earth.

We have discussed the "seven spirits of God" several times in our studies already. It is a descriptive way to recognize the perfect working of God the Holy Spirit. His presence in this scene is represented as "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne."

The Holy Spirit is always invisible and must be represented in some way:

1. At the baptism of Jesus He was represented in the form of a dove descending upon the Lord.
2. Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to wind.
3. At the church's birth He was represented by tongues of fire resting above the believers gathered in the upper room.

Oil, fire, water, breath, rain, wine, and clothing are other ways God the Holy Spirit is represented.

When God the Holy Spirit is performing His perfect work He brings glory to Jesus Christ. If He is at work in and through us we will *not* bring attention to ourselves.

We should be invisible as we serve.

Rev 4:6 Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal...

John reported what he saw. I think we take it as an accurate description, with no symbolic ramblings about what "a sea of glass like crystal" represents.

Rev 4:6 ... And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

Rev 4:7 The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle.

"Creature" is an unfortunate translation. The word means *Living Ones*. They resemble the Cherubim that the prophet Ezekiel saw in his vision of God's throne (Ezekiel 1:4-14; 10:20-22), and their praise reminds us of the Seraphim Isaiah saw in his vision of God's throne (Isaiah 6).

Here is a non-exhaustive list of some supernatural beings we encounter in the Bible: Archangels, Angels, Seraphim, Cherubim, Hosts, and Authorities. Then there is the devil and his fallen Angels, Principalities, Powers, and the Rulers of the darkness of this age. There were wicked supernatural Princes in Persia and in Greece.

John saw the Living Ones positioned one on either side, one behind and one in front, of God's throne.

This *does* remind us of something from the Old Testament. In the Book of Numbers, God told the nation of Israel how they were to set up camp around His presence in the wilderness Tabernacle. One on either side, one behind and one in front, of God's Tabernacle. Each of the four sides were to be encamped by three tribes:

🔑 The tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were to camp on the east and were collectively called the camp of Judah. What was the symbol on the flag of Judah? **A lion.**

📖 The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were to camp on the west side and were collectively called the camp of Ephraim. What was the symbol on the flag of Ephraim? **An ox.**

📖 The tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to camp on the south side and were collectively called the camp of Reuben. What was the symbol on the flag of Reuben? **A man.**

📖 The tribes of Dan, Naphtali, and Asher were to camp on the north side and were collectively called the camp of Dan. What was the symbol on the flag of Dan? **An eagle.**

There is a deliberate emphasis in chapters six through eighteen on the nation of Israel. All living Israelites on the earth will recognize Jesus as their Messiah and be saved.

The Tribulation, or the Great Tribulation, are the popular titles among Gentiles. That's OK, as long as we don't overlook the facts that ground zero in those seven years is Jerusalem and the Jews.

📖 In His Olivet Discourse on the End Times Jesus said, "For then there will be great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). Later in the Revelation we will be introduced to martyrs who are described as "the ones who come out of the great tribulation" (7:14).

📖 The prophet Jeremiah called the Great Tribulation the Time of Jacob's Trouble (30:7). It is called Daniel's 70th Week (Daniel 9:27).

Rev 4:8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

If you are a massive fan of some book, you will either be *delighted* or *disappointed* at how your beloved characters are portrayed on film. Ben Affleck is mostly panned as both Daredevil and Batman. Sometimes a studio reveals an actor it almost cast in an iconic role who would have been

disastrous. Al Pacino, Jack Nicholson, Chevy Chase, and Bill Murray were considered for the role of Han Solo.

The four supers around the throne are perfectly cast. They seem monstrous and creepy, but we know that everything in Heaven will be beautiful beyond our imaginings.

If you think modern worship choruses are too repetitious, they are preparing you for worship in Heaven. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" is repeated and repeated and repeated and Pete & RePeated.

Rev 4:9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,

These angels have other responsibilities during the Great Tribulation, e.g., they release the Four Horsemen in chapter six. When they are not on some particular assignment, they worship giving "glory and honor and thanks" to God.

We have full, immediate access to God's throne. Our default position in all things is to give Him glory, honor, and thanks. Those are to become characteristic of our belief and behavior.

Rev 4:10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

The popular Christian band, *Casting Crowns*, is a cover band. The original "casting crowns" are these twenty-four elders.

The casting of crowns indicates total submission to the authority of the One Who sat on the throne. They are ready to do His bidding.

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

The Great Tribulation is not just a show of God's wrath. It is an important part of his plan to redeem and restore what was forfeited in the Garden of Eden. Mankind's sin ruined His creation. At once God revealed His plan to redeem mankind and restore creation. He's been sustaining His creation these few centuries while providentially working out His plan. When all is ready, He will assemble in the SitRoom, and a major spiritual offensive in God's plan of redemption and restoration will be flawlessly executed.

A shout from the Lord... A Trumpet blast... A door opened to Heaven...
"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (First Corinthians 15:51-52).

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen" (Revelation 22:20-21).