

Revelation as Trilogy
The Fellowship of the King
Chapter 4: Meeting the King

Introduction: The early Christians had begun to understand themselves as belonging to a very different kingdom. This kingdom had a new king (Jesus Christ). This kingdom was eternal (God was alpha and omega). This kingdom possessed power (God is the Almighty). So now in order to help these new kingdom people deepen their faith and confidence in God, they are invited to see for themselves the very throne room of God. In this way they gain a perspective on who it is that they worship and that God's glory and majesty are greater than that of Caesar.

The Story: As with any good king, there are attendants who bow down and worship the king. These attendants are represented by the 24 elders who are seated on the 24 thrones. As with much of Apocalyptic literature, numbers are significant. In this case 24 has been interpreted to represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles. We can be fairly certain about these references because Revelation makes hundreds of references to the Jewish scriptures, in which the twelve tribes play a significant role, and the tradition of twelve Apostles, meaning Jesus' inner circle of disciples as representing the entire church, was well understood within the late first-century Christian community. What these twenty-four elders offer us is a reminder that Revelation and its visions are intended to connect with the entire history of the people of God and not merely the church. The thunder and lightning coming from the thrones tell us that much of God's power has been given to the community, meaning that they are not powerless to stand against the powers and principalities of the world.

The final two images are of the seven flaming torches/spirits of God and the four living creatures. Again, we need to be aware that the number seven is the number of completeness. What this implies then is that there are not actually seven flaming torches or seven spirits. Instead there is one complete spirit who burns like the flames of fire that hovered over the heads of the disciples on Pentecost. This image offers hope to the readers because the unquenchable Spirit is alive and well. Finally, there is the image of the four living creatures. Each of these creatures is a representation of an aspect of God's character. The lion represents royalty, the eagle represents swiftness, the ox represents strength and the human represents intelligence. The wings and eyes tell us that God can go anywhere and see what is taking place. Nothing is hidden from God.

The chapter concludes with the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures all offering glory and honor to God and casting their crowns before the throne. This offering of praise is appropriate because God is the one who lives forever and ever (unlike any human tyrant) and is the one who is the real king of kings (thus the casting of the crowns).

Reflection During the church's past and present, Christians have often found themselves under the thumb of regimes that have oppressed them. Believers are intimidated, jailed and executed. For all of those, and others, hearing that God is present and on the throne is of critical importance. It is important because it says that God is still in charge of the universe and is ruling and reigning from heaven. If God were not present, it would mean that God had been dethroned by the lesser gods and that the cause of the faithful followers of Jesus would be futile. This chapter offers a message then of hope for all those who find themselves in tough times.

Questions:

1. What intrigues you the most about this chapter?
2. Where do you find hope in these images?
3. Where have you seen the Spirit at work this week?