

Rev. 4:1-11

I. Introduction to the vision (1-2a)

A. After these things I looked (1a)

This transitions from the previous vision – which included the vision of the resurrected Christ and His message to the seven churches (1:9-3:22) – to the next vision – the vision of the heavenly throne room – which will run through the end of chapter 16.

The introduction to each of the visions in Revelation contains 1) a mention of John seeing something, or being shown something, 2) a mention of some heavenly messenger, 3) and a reference to being “in the Spirit,” among other things.

B. And behold – a door having been opened in heaven (1b)

An opening in heaven is a regular symbol to show an intimate connection between heaven and earth – an access to heaven is given, which is not normally experienced (see Matt. 3:16, Acts 7:56). The curtain was pulled back, as it were, and John was given access to experience heavenly realities normally hidden and inaccessible to normal human life. The inaccessibility of heavenly realities does not make them any less real. A major purpose of the book of Revelation is to remind the readers of the impact that these hidden heavenly realities have on our everyday lives, even though we are not always aware of them.

C. The commission to receive the vision (1c-f)

1. And the first Voice which I heard as a trumpet was speaking with me (1c)

This refers back to the voice John heard in his first vision (see 1:10), which turned out to be the voice of the risen Christ. Christ is the authority behind all of John’s visions, even though some of them are mediated by angels and other heavenly beings.

The voice was like the sound of the trumpet, which also refers back to John’s first vision. This may also refer to the loud sounds that accompanied God’s glorious display on Mount Sinai (see Exo. 19:16, 19).

2. The Voice commanded to receive the vision (1d-f)

a. Saying: (1d)

This is just a discourse marker, transitioning and drawing attention to the content of what was said, as will be stated in the following propositions

b. Command to receive the vision (1e-f)

1) Come up here! (1e)

This is obviously an invitation/command to move up to the place where the speaker was. But it is more than just that. It is an invitation to experience the heavenly realities first-hand. In 11:12 of Revelation, the two witnesses are summoned into God’s presence using the exact same language. And this language was used in Exodus 24:12 and 34:2 where God invited/commanded Moses to go up the mountain to receive revelation from God. So, in this proposition, John is commanded to come into God’s presence in heaven, where he would be able to experience and then relate the revelation which would be given, as described in the following proposition.

2) **And I will show you the things which will inevitably happen after these things (1f)**

The promise is that John would be shown things. The word “to show” means to somehow exhibit something in order that it can be truly known. Throughout the book of Revelation, John is shown things, so that he can relate them to his readers (see 17:1, 21:9, 22:1, 6, 8).

In this verse, the promise is that he would be shown “the things that must be after these things.” That is, the things that will necessarily take place at a time subsequent to when John was seeing the vision. In a few other places (1:19 and 22:6, see also Dan. 2:28-29, 45) the heavenly messenger uses this same phrase to speak of the things that will certainly happen. They are said to be under some sort of necessity, whether that is because of the inherent nature of the events or because of some fixed plan of God, we are not told. But it is stressed that these things must, and certainly will come about, though the exact timeline is not specified.

However, the things which will take place in the future are not revealed only to satisfy the curiosity of those interested in the future. The primary purpose for these revelations is to encourage and change the readers who heard of them before they took place, so that they would be prepared and strengthened for whatever may come.

D. And immediately, I was in the Spirit (2a)

The term “immediately” not only tells the time when this happened. But it also emphasized the close cause/effect relation between the command/invitation given to John (1e-f) and the experiences given to him to enable him to fulfill this promise.

“In the Spirit” is a phrase used a number of times in Revelation to signal the beginning of each of the visions (see 1:10, 17:3, 21:10). It means to be in some state where John was closely experiencing God’s Spirit and receiving inspiration. But it cannot be defined more precisely with absolute certainty. This phrase probably refers back to the Book of Ezekiel (e.g. 2:2, 3:12, 3:14, 3:24 etc.) where God’s Spirit lifted Ezekiel up, so that he could experience and receive the revelatory visions.

II. The Vision of the Throne-room of God (2b-11)

The point of the vision of God’s throne room is that God is great beyond our imagination. He is completely separate – completely different than any part of creation. He is in a class by Himself. He is Holy, completely sovereign and perfect in every way. This vision purposely obscures as much as it reveals, to show the transcendence of God – that He is beyond our ability to understand (even though we can truly understand what He has revealed about Himself, even if only in part). He is God and we are not.

A. The Throne of God (2b-8)

1. The Throne (2b-3a)

a And behold – a throne was situated in heaven (2b)

The first thing John described was a throne. And the throne is described as being in heaven, which is the dwelling place of God Himself – the transcendent place separated from, and somehow above our normal earthly experience. The throne is symbolic for authority, power and sovereign rule of a king. Therefore, this throne is above all of heaven, which is above all of the universe. John’s vision begins with the symbol of the highest authority in existence. It represents absolute sovereignty. There is nothing above, nothing more powerful or influential than the reality which John first described.

And everything else throughout the rest of this vision is described in relation to this throne. Things are “around the throne” or “before the throne,” and God and the Lamb are “on the throne.” In fact, throughout the rest of Revelation, God is rarely referred to as “God.” He is usually referred to as “the One sitting on the throne.”

b Non-description of the One seated on the throne (2c-3a)

I have called this a “non-description” because there is relatively little information given to directly describe the One sitting on the throne. And the description given is highly symbolic and a number of steps removed from the full reality. Every word written is completely true, and we cannot deny the veracity of anything in these visions just because they are written in symbolic terms. But the words are inadequate to fully describe the reality. This is because the full reality of the God on the throne is far beyond description. He is depicted as so transcendent, so Holy and separate from our experience and ability to comprehend, as to defy description. We cannot in our current state comprehend God as He is in Himself. We can only understand God from His actions and interaction with His creation by which He has chosen to reveal Himself. That is why most of this vision describes the things around the throne, rather than the One on the throne. And it assumes all the previous Biblical revelation for the reader to understand this as referring to God. This book will add to this revelation of God by the actions coming from the throne throughout.

1) And there was One seated upon the throne (2c)

This obviously refers to God, the absolutely Sovereign One. There is plenty of prior reference in the Bible to God as sitting on a throne (see Isa. 6:1, Ezek. 1:26-28, 10:1, Dan. 7:9, 1 Kgs. 22:19, Psa. 47:8). This emphasizes His complete sovereignty, authority and power over all that exists. God does not get His sovereignty from the fact that He is seated on this throne. But this throne is the symbol of all the sovereignty and authority inherent in God Himself.

The One on the throne is the central focus of all of the Book of Revelation. Everything that happens in Revelation (and indeed everything that happens in all of history) has its source from the throne of God, i.e. from the One sitting on the throne. This would have been a tremendous comfort to the first readers who were suffering under various temporal authorities – to learn that these authorities did not have ultimate power. And the One on the throne is described as transcendent above all other reality, and only able to be known by what proceeds from His throne.

2) And the One seated had the likeness similar in appearance to a jewel of Jasper and Carnelian (3a)

The One sitting on the throne is described by connecting His appearance to Jasper and Carnelian. They are connected with two separate words: “similar to” and “appearance of.” These terms connect but also separate by two degrees. God is like these things, but only in a similarity of appearance. There is something about the appearance of these jewels that describes something about the appearance of God. And the appearance is similar in some way, but this also means that it is different in other ways. So, this description does say something real about God. But at the same time, it shows that God is beyond description, and what it represents is only a small fraction of the reality of the One sitting on the throne. As Paul wrote, God dwells in “unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16). And in Psalm 104:2, it says that God is “clothed with light, as a garment.”

“Jasper” and “carnelian” are precious stones – jewels (probably greenish and reddish, respectively). The emphasis is probably on reflecting or displaying light and splendor – being dazzling in appearance. In chapter 21, the holy city of God is said to have this same kind or radiant appearance (see vv. 11, 19-20). The vision of God in Ezekiel also described God in terms of this kind of radiance.

The point is that this brilliant radiance says something about the greatness, splendor, and power of the One sitting on the throne. Throughout human literature, things that are supernatural are often described as having a kind of glow and radiance. And the One Who is the ultimate supernatural splendor is described in this way to emphasize His transcendent greatness.

2. Around the Throne (3b-8)

The rest of this vision describes the things around the throne of God. They are described by their relation to the throne (and to the One sitting on the throne), because they all get their existence and purpose only from their relation to the One sitting on the throne. They represent, in essence, the intermediaries of God. Just like human leaders have their underlings and representatives, who carry out their directives and, in some ways, reflect back to their leader. In the same way, the character and purposes of God are partly shown in the description of the things and activities that surround His throne.

John seems to describe the area around God's throne in a series of concentric circles. First, and closest, is the rainbow (3b), then, farther outward, are the 24 elders (4) and then are the four living creatures (6b-8).

a And a circle of light around the throne had the likeness similar in appearance to an emerald (3b)

This circle of light can be translated either as "halo" or "rainbow," depending on whether it is thought of as being horizontal or vertical. Though it also may be depicted as a sphere surrounding God in all three dimensions. It completely surrounded His throne. The phrase "around the throne" is early in this sentence for emphasis, showing that this circle of light is defined only in relation to the throne and the One sitting upon it.

This kind of entity is also described in 10:1, and in Ezekiel 1:28. It represents an outward manifestation of the glory and radiance of God (depicted in the previous proposition), shown in light surrounding His presence. This may also be a reference to the rainbow in Genesis ch. 9, which is a symbol of God's mercy and promise.

Its appearance is compared to emerald, using the same two terms ("similar to" and "appearance of") that were used in 3a. John was describing to the best of his ability, within the limits of human language, a reality that surpasses description. Emeralds are greenish in color, but the exact significance of this stone in this proposition is debated.

b Around the Throne – 24 elders on 24 thrones (4)

1) And around the throne [I saw] twenty-four thrones (4a)

The phrase "around the throne" is first in this sentence, again emphasizing that these thrones exist and have their authority only in relation to the main throne in the center (and the One sitting on the throne). These are thrones, and therefore, they symbolize authority and power. The underlings of God are also powerful and sovereign. But their authority and power are only derivative, and come ultimately from God, and remain under His absolute sovereignty. The number of thrones is likely symbolic (though also accurately describing the actual number of thrones). The number 24 is obviously twice of twelve, which is also the number of the tribes of Israel and of the disciples of Christ.

2) And [I saw] twenty-four elders sitting upon the thrones, clothed in white garments (4b)

Just like in v. 2, the thrones were described first, and then the ones seated on the thrones. They are called “elders.” This term did not primarily refer to age, but rather, to a position of trusted leadership and authority, based on the acquired wisdom and experience (that usually comes with age). They were somehow entrusted with delegated authority over certain aspects of God’s creation.

The identity and nature of the elders is debated. Some think that this refers to glorified human beings. This is primarily based on the number 24. It is argued that this represents the 12 patriarchs of Israel and the 12 disciples of Christ (who were promised that they would sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel, see Matt. 19:28 and Luke 22:30). However, this interpretation is awkward in the fact that one of the 12 disciples is also the one receiving this vision. So, if the elders represent the 12 disciples, John would have been seeing a vision of himself.

Others think that the 24 elders represent a category of supernatural angelic beings. This explanation seems to fit best with the context, including later references in Revelation (see v. 10, 5:8, 14, 7:11, 11:16 and 19:4). In addition, in other passages (such as Isaiah ch. 6), God’s throne is surrounded by seraphim and cherubim (which are types of angelic beings).

And the elders are clothed in white garments (not necessarily robes, but that is the kind of garment that John’s readers would have pictured). This is typically a symbol of purity and moral uprightness (see 3:4, 5, 6:11, 7:9, 13, 14, and 19:14).

3) And [I saw] crowns of gold upon their heads (4c)

Crowns are another sign of royal authority and power. But they are also a symbol of reward for faithful service and victory (see 2:10, 2 Tim. 4:8, Psa. 21:3). And gold is a symbol of wealth, value and preciousness. The elders are crowned with the symbol of highest value, authority and victory.

The underlings around God’s throne are described as having authority and power, and also as being pure and morally upright, and also as displaying victory and value. All of these things are derived from God Himself, Who is the source of all authority and goodness. And so, the elders represent the greatness of God in various ways.

c And from the throne went out lightnings and roars and thunders (5a)

The phrase “from the throne” is emphasized in this sentence. Like the other items, this phenomenon is defined by its relation to God. These things go out from God’s throne. He is the source of these spectacles.

At this time, a lightning storm was the most powerful force of nature experienced by humanity, and so, lightning and thunder were associated with many gods. In this vision, the One True God is seen as the source of all of the power of nature. And this is a symbolic demonstration of the awesome power of God. This all points back to Exo. 19:16, where these same kinds of displays of power accompanied God’s appearance on Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic covenant.

The terms for lightning and thunder are self-explanatory to anyone who has experienced a thunderstorm. An additional term “noises” is included. It is ambiguous, and may refer to any kind of noise which accompanied the thunder and lightning. It may also refer to the loud trumpet blast that accompanied the appearance at Sinai (Exo. 19:16). All three terms are plural, and the verb “go out” is in present tense, so this likely refers to a continual occurrence of these phenomena. Lightning (8:5, 11:19, 16:18), thunder (6:1, 8:5, 10:3, 11:19, 14:2, 16:18, 19:6), and a loud noise/roar (8:5, 11:19, 16:18) are all used throughout Revelation to symbolically display the overwhelming power of God.

d Before the Throne – Seven Torches (5b-c)

1) And seven torches of fire were burning before the throne (5b)

The Old Testament tabernacle, and then later the temple (both built according to God's design), contained a lampstand with seven lamps before the presence of God (Exo. 37:23, 2 Chron. 4:20). These served the practical function of giving light inside the tabernacle. But they also served to symbolize that God is the One Who gives spiritual light to His people. Torches are a regular symbol for searching and enlightening. And in Gen. 15:17, God's presence is symbolized by a burning torch passing through the rows of sacrifice in ratifying a covenant. And the number seven often signifies completeness and/or perfection. So, the seven torches signify that God's throne has, and provides, perfect and complete enlightenment.

2) Which are the seven Spirits of God (5c)

There is debate over the nature of the "seven spirits of God." Some think they are seven archangels mentioned in Jewish tradition. Some think this is a way to refer to the Holy Spirit, based on the sevenfold description of the Spirit of the Lord in Isa. 11:2.

The "seven Spirits before God's throne" are mentioned in 1:4 without any other detail that would help us determine their nature or identity. Likewise, in 3:1, Jesus said that He holds "the seven Spirits of God" in His hand, without further elaboration. Revelation 5:6 is much more helpful for this question, because it equates the "seven eyes" of the Lamb with the "seven Spirits of God." Having seven eyes is always a symbol for having complete and perfect knowledge. That fits well with this verse, which equates the seven Spirits with the seven burning torches before the throne. Torches, as we saw, are a symbol for searching and enlightening. This is reinforced by Zech. 4:10, which speaks of "the seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth."

So, the seven Spirits symbolize the all-searching, all-seeing, and therefore, all-knowing character of God's throne. That is the purpose of this symbolism regardless of whether it refers to God's Holy Spirit, or to seven angelic beings. If it does refer to angelic beings, they are all-searching and all-seeing only because they serve as representatives and agents of the all-seeing God.

e And before the throne there was something like a sea of glass similar in appearance to crystal (6a)

The first words in this sentence are "before the throne." As typical in this passage, this phenomenon is defined primarily in its relation to God's throne. And "before" shows a place in the sight of, and therefore, under the supervision of, the One sitting on the throne.

This is, again, not a precise description, but only a comparison. John did not see a sea of glass, but he saw something *like* a sea of glass (see 15:2). This probably has reference to the expanse on which was placed God's throne, as described in Ezek. 1:22 and Exo. 24:10. This may also have reference to the expanse stretched between heaven and earth (Gen. 1:6-8). This sea was like glass. Glass in that day was not smooth and flat and was only partly see-through. And so, it let in light, but also partly obscured view (kind of like the smoky glass used for privacy). But John emphasized that this glass was clear like crystal (see 21:11, 22:1). This may have the idea of purity. But it also had the connotation that it sparkled with the reflected light of the glory surrounding the throne.

The overall picture of this expanse like a sea of glass was something that separated God from creation, but also gave a view of His glorious greatness. God is completely inaccessible to creation on our own, but we cannot help knowing how marvelous He truly is.

f Around the throne – Four Living Creatures (6b-8)

1) And in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures, full of eyes on the front and on the back (6b)

As usual, the emphasis about the living creatures is their relation to God's throne. They are said to be in the midst of the throne, and around the throne. "In the midst" may mean that they are in the immediate vicinity, kind of an inner circle around the throne. Or this may look back to the symbolism of the cherubim making up part of the cover of the ark of the covenant, known as the "mercy seat," because it was thought to be part of God's throne. If this is the case, the four living creatures would be symbolized as being a living part of God's throne itself.

The main characteristic of these four creatures is that they are living. They are literally called "the four livings..." and in English, we need to add "living *ones*" or "living *things*" or living *creatures*" for it to make sense. These creatures are characterized as having life – being truly alive in some elevated sense. But, as with everything else, their life is derived and dependent on the One sitting on the throne. But because they are so near to the One Who is the source of all life, they are characterized by living.

These creatures are reminiscent of the creatures, sometimes called seraphim and cherubim, mentioned in Old Testament visions in relation to God's throne (see Ezek. 1:4-5, 10:14). And these living creatures are mentioned throughout the rest of Revelation (see vv. 8-9, 5:14, 7:11, 14:3, 19:4).

And John described them as being full of eyes. This is a standard symbol for being all-knowing. And John emphasized that they had eyes on their front and on their back. This is another way to emphasize that they see and know everything, similar to saying that someone "has eyes on the back of their head."

The underlings of God are characterized by life, and by seeing everything and having all knowledge. Therefore, God Himself is characterized by an even higher degree of inherent life and an even higher degree of complete knowledge.

2) Specifically – their appearance and activity: (7-8)

a) Description of the four creatures: (7-8a)

(1) Distinctive description of each of the four creatures: (7)

The description of these creatures is similar and different from the descriptions of comparable creatures in Ezek. ch. 1 and Isa. ch. 6. There is no reason to doubt that these are all accurate descriptions. But we are told that these are approximations of the creatures' appearance – as close as John could describe from a human standpoint. The first creature was *not* a lion. It was *similar in appearance* to a lion. The point is primarily about what the creatures' characteristics symbolize about them and about the God they serve.

(a) And the first living creature was similar in appearance to a lion (7a)

A lion is typically symbolic of royalty and strength. A lion is the "king of the jungle" and therefore represents rulership and authority (see 9:8, 17, 10:3, 13:2).

(b) And the second living creature was similar in appearance to a young bull (7b)

A bull or ox is typically symbolic of brute strength (see Ezek. 1:10).

(c) And the third living creature was having a face like of a human (7c)

A human face is typically symbolic of intelligence (believe it or not).

- (d) And the fourth living creature was similar in appearance to an eagle flying (7d)

An eagle is typically symbolic either of speed or possibly of compassionate care (see 8:13, 12:14).

- (2) And each one of the four living creatures, having six wings apiece, were covered with eyes all around and within (8a)

This proposition describes some characteristics that were common to each one of the four living creatures. They each had six wings, just like the living creatures described in Isa. 6:2. And, for the second time (repeating for emphasis), John mentioned that they were covered with eyes, probably focusing on the fact that all six wings were covered with eyes both on the outside and on the underside of each of the wings. This is to reinforce the all-seeing and all-knowing nature of these creatures, even as they swiftly move in the service of God. In Isaiah chapter 6, it says that the creatures cover their faces with their wings, because God is too pure to look upon. Even pure beings can't look at God's holiness. There may be a reference to the same dynamic here, based on the quote from Isaiah 6 in 8d proclaiming God's holiness.

- b) They continually proclaim God's Holiness and greatness (8b-d)

The previous propositions described the appearance of the living creatures. This section describes their activities. We learn about them by noticing what they are, and also by what they do – their function in serving around God's throne.

- (1) And they never had a pause, day and night (8b)

This simply means that they never stopped doing what will be described in the next propositions. All the time, night and day, they continued. There is no sense of anything negative in this statement, like they needed a rest but were unable to do so. Rather, their nature and character (and delight) is to continually praise God without interruption. There is nothing they would rather do, and so they always do this. They are analogous to the Energizer Bunny in that they keep going without ever stopping.

- (2) Proclaiming Holy, Holy, Holy (8c-d)

- (a) Saying: (8c)

This is just a discourse marker, introducing the next proposition. See on 1d. In this context, it might be better translated as "proclaiming" because there is a sense that they are uttering these things for all of heaven to hear.

- (b) Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord, the God, the Almighty, the One Who was, and the One Who is, and the One Who is coming (8d)

First, God is called "holy," and this word is repeated three times. This is the same refrain used by the creatures in Isa. 6:3 (see also Exo. 15:11). And in Rev. 3:7, Jesus is called the "Holy One." The repetition of the word three times signifies that He is wholly and completely holy – that He is the epitome of holiness.

The word "holy" both in the New Testament and in the Old, means to be completely separate, to be in a class by itself. There is nothing else like God. He is completely unique in His nature and character. His creation can be in conformity with Him in some of His attributes, but only in a derivative and watered-down way. Nothing can ever truly be like Him. And because God is completely morally perfect, the word "holy" also has a secondary connotation of moral uprightness. God is perfect in every way, and there is nothing like Him

And then He is addressed with three terms: “Lord,” “the God,” and “the Almighty.” The words “Lord” and “Almighty” are a continuation of the quote from Isaiah ch. 6. And the term “God” is implicitly included in the term “LORD” as used in that context. The term “Lord” is a translation of the Old Testament name “Yahweh/The LORD” with all that means, based on the OT revelation. But the term John used also emphasized authority and sovereignty – Lordship. God is in charge of everything. And the second term “the God” emphasizes His deity. He is divine. He is God. And He is divine in a way that all the man-made gods were not. He is truly divine. He is the One True God, and all the pagan gods are not. And the third term “the Almighty” obviously stresses that He is all powerful. He is omnipotent. There is nothing that He wills to do that He cannot do. He is infinitely more powerful than any creature in heaven or on earth (see 1:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7, 21:22, Gen. 17:1, Psa. 91:1). And finally, the four creatures proclaim His eternal nature. He is the One Who was, and the One Who is, and the One Who is to come. This is similar to the way both God and Christ are called the “first and last” (see 1:4, 8, 16:5). This also references back to God’s revelation of His Name as “I AM” – the One Who exists (Exo. 3:14, see also Isa. 41:4). God has always existed and will always exist. God is above time, because time is His creation. God interacts with us in time, but He is not in time the same way that we are. John’s grammar in this proposition is awkward. But he broke the grammar rules in order to describe God in a way that tells of His eternal existence (past, present, and future) without giving any hint that God changes through time, or is under time.

God is the Eternal, All Powerful, Holy One, Lord over all time and space. And the four living creatures spend all their time praising Him and proclaiming His greatness in all these ways.

B. The continual worship of God, because He is worthy (9-11)

1. And when the living creatures gave glory and honor and blessing to the One sitting upon the throne – the One living forever and ever (9)

This verse is a transition from describing the throne of God to describing the activity around the throne. In one sense, it gives the time context for the statements to follow: the following actions took place whenever this action took place. But, in another sense, this elaborates and interprets what the living creatures were doing when they proclaimed “Holy, Holy, Holy...” By proclaiming God’s holiness, His sovereign character and His eternal nature, they were giving Him glory and honor and blessing. And also, from the previous verse, we learn that they were doing this constantly, night and day. Therefore, we are to understand that the activities described in this and the following verses are also constantly happening. They are not occasional or sporadic. Worship is continual around God’s throne, and in all of heaven. And it should be this way on earth, as it is in heaven.

When the living creatures give glory and honor, etc. to God, they are not giving Him something that He did not have before. They are “giving” in the sense of recognizing, acknowledging, and rendering those things that are already inherently His. “Glory” is a recognition of status and prestige. It is the deserved fame and admiration of which God is worthy. It is also clearly tied to the inherent glory of God. He is glorious and has infinite splendor, and so, the living creatures recognize, delight in, and proclaim that glory. “Honor,” similarly, is an expression of esteem and reverence as the appropriate response to the God Who is infinitely honorable, in all senses of the word. It is to acknowledge and celebrate God’s infinite greatness and status as Lord and God over all. And “blessing” is the expression of gratitude and thankfulness for all that God is and all that He has done. It is to proclaim, to brag about how wonderful God is. These and similar terms are used later in Revelation to describe similar scenes of praise to God (see 5:13, 14, 7:11-12).

And finally, notice the two ways that God is described in this verse. They are typical phrases by which God is referred throughout Revelation: He is the One sitting on the throne (see v. 2, 10, 5:1, 7, 13, 6:16, 7:10, 15, 19:4, 20:11, 21:5) with all that conveys about His sovereign authority and power. And He is the One living forever (see 1:18, 10:6, 15:7, Exo. 15:18, Dan. 4:34, 6:26). He is the sovereign authority over all, and He is eternal. Because He has these two highlighted characteristics, He was able to be the creator of all, which is celebrated in the following verses.

2. The elders worshipped God in deeds and words (10-11)

a The elders fell and gave worship to God (10a-c)

In this section, John listed three actions the elders (see 4b) did in response to the proclamation and praise of the living creatures. These are all different activities which express submission and worship in various ways. The elders constantly express the greatness of the One sitting on the throne, and their own dependence and submission to Him in heartfelt devotion and praise.

1) The twenty-four elders fell before the One sitting upon the throne (10a)

“To fall” is a generic word for falling down. But in this context, it means to purposely throw oneself down as an act of devotion and/or humility. This response happens throughout Revelation (see 5:8, 7:11, 19:10, Psa. 72:11). And it is before the One sitting on the throne. God is once again referred to by the fact that He is in the position of sovereign authority over all. Notice the repetition of this phrase from v. 9.

2) And they worshipped the One living forever and ever (10b)

The word “worshipped” literally means that they bowed down, they prostrated themselves before God (see v. 9, 7:11, 22:9, 2 Chron. 7:3, Psa. 95:6). This bodily posture is an outward expression of an inward attitude – the attitude that God is greater, and deserves submission and devotion. And, in repetition from v. 9, God is called the One Who is living forever and ever. God is worthy of our worship and submission because He sits on the throne, and because He is the eternal, creator God.

3) And they placed the crowns before the throne (10c)

In 4c, John mentioned that the elders were crowned with gold crowns, symbolizing their royalty, value, authority and victory. Now we are told that in humility before the One sitting on the throne, the elders signify that their own royalty, value, authority, and victory pales in comparison to the royalty, value, authority, and victory of the One on the throne. This is also an acknowledgement that their own royalty, value, authority, and victory are derivative, and totally dependent on God. Without God, they would not have anything. In our culture, we tend to resist or reject the idea of hierarchies. We rightly resist the idea that some people are inherently better than others (though we are always in danger of taking this too far into the kind of nonsense that believes that everyone can and should be as good as everyone else in everything). We humans are all created equal in terms of our human dignity and rights. We all bear God’s image. However, we need to avoid applying that equality idea to our relationship with God. He is inherently better than we are. There is a hierarchy of being in this case, and He is above us. He is above every creature. And so, the elders rightly acknowledge their complete dependence on Him, and reverence for Him, and thankfulness toward Him. If the highest of heavenly creatures rightly display these kinds of attitudes of devotion and submission, how much more should we sinful humans.

b Declaring the infinite worthiness of God because He is Creator (10d-11)

1) Saying: (10d)

This, again, is just a discourse marker, introducing the next proposition. See on 1d. Like in 8c, it might be better translated as “proclaiming” because there is a sense that they are uttering these things for all of heaven to hear.

- 2) You are worthy of all because You are Creator of all (11)
a) O, our Lord and God, You are worthy to receive the glory and the honor and the power (11a)

In this passage, the elders (heavenly beings) address the One sitting on the throne as “our Lord and God.” He is the One with all authority over them, and He is divine, the object of their Worship. They rightly relate to Him as their Master and Creator. And they proclaim that He is worthy (see 5:2, 4, 9, 12). He abundantly meets the standard of deserving all acclaim and glory. It is fitting and right to worship Him and ascribe to Him all the honor and greatness. In fact, He is worthy of infinitely more than His creatures could ever give, or even imagine. And, conversely, there is something completely twisted and wrong to not recognize and acknowledge His greatness. Something is perverted and broken in the minds and hearts of those who refuse to give God His due honor.

He is worthy to receive – not that His creatures can give Him something that He does not already have, but, like above (see v. 9), it is recognizing, acknowledging, and rendering those things that are already inherently His.

“Glory” is the same word used in v. 9. See the note on that verse. See also Psa. 29:2, 96:7.

“Honor” is the same word used in v. 9. See the note on that verse.

“Power” means the ability to do something, strength, and capability. This is acknowledging God’s omnipotence – His unlimited capability and power to do anything He wills to do. Again, God does not actually receive strength (because He already has it all), but His infinite strength is recognized and celebrated.

- b) Because You are the source and creator of all things (11b-d)

This section describes a reason that God is worthy to receive this kind of praise, recognition, and adulation. It is common (see throughout the Psalms) to describe the reasons God is worthy of praise as part of the activity of giving Him praise. This is not the only reason He is worthy, but it is a significant reason, which is highlighted in reference to His being the One on the throne with authority over all the universe.

- (1) Because You created all things (11b)

God is the creator, the source of everything. He is the authority over everything because He is the cause of everything. He is worthy of recognition and honor by everything created, because it all owes its very existence to Him. God is exalted as creator throughout the Bible (see 10:6, Exo. 20:11, Isa. 40:26, 28, Jer. 32:17, Acts 17:24, Col. 1:16-17, Rom. 11:36, among others). All heaven celebrates the One sitting on the throne, because He is the One Who created all of heaven and earth.

- (2) And because of Your will, they exist and were created (11c-d)

The last two propositions are similar in reference and meaning to the previous proposition. But the emphasis in the last two is on the phrase “because of Your will.” The purposeful decision of God is the reason why any of His creation came into being. God did not have to create. He was not lonely. He did not, and still does not, need anything from creation. But because of His gracious, good, loving purposes, He planned and decided to create all that exists for His glorious purposes, and for His glory. Therefore, all creation should give Him glory.

(a) **And because of Your will, they exist (11c)**

This proposition states the reason “because of Your will” and then just states that they are – they exist. “They” clearly refers back to “all things” in 11b. All things have bare existence of any kind because of God’s choice. There is nothing that exists by accident. He created everything out of nothing, and without His purpose, nothing would exist.

(b) **And they were created [because of Your will] (11d)**

And the last proposition echoes the previous ones, but with the emphasis on all things coming into being through an act of God’s creation. This is implied to come from the same reason “because of God’s purposeful will” stated in the previous proposition.

All things owe their existence and creation (and all else that we have and experience) to God alone. And therefore, He is worthy of our honor and worship as Creator and Lord. He is the only uncreated being. All else depends on Him and finds its meaning in Him. God is King over all the universe. I am not. You are not. Caesar is not. No pretender that claims to be ultimate authority really is the ultimate authority, because God is the only One on the throne as true King of the universe.