

The Seven Seal Scroll

Revelation 4-7



The Preterist Approach

The unsealing of the scroll represents the judgment of God upon Jerusalem (66-70AD) where 144,000 Judean Christians escape to Pella.

The four horsemen represent the Roman invasion of Israel to quell the Jewish rebellion and ultimately the fall of Jerusalem.

The Futurist Approach

Chapter 4 begins after the Rapture of the church.

The scroll represents the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

The 144,000 are Jews saved during the end-times.

The Antichrist rides forth conquering on the white horse bringing war, famine, and cosmic disturbances (possibly nuclear war).

The Idealist Approach

The scroll represents God's dealing with mankind in cycles of war, martyrdom, and judgment occurring throughout history.

The visions teach God's sovereignty in the rise and fall of nations and God's protection of his saints amid persecution and political upheavals.

Note that the eclectic approach can cherry pick from these views :)

The Historicist Approach

The unsealing scroll represents the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire.

The seal sequence begins with Domitian (AD 96) and follows the decline of the empire through the invasion of the Goths and Vandals in the 4th and 5th centuries.

See Matthew Henry for example of this approach without the excesses of others in this school of thought.

Indebted to Steve Gregg's parallel commentary on the book of Revelation.

Revelation 4:1-3

^{4:1} After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

V. 1. "after this" see 1:19. I'm still persuaded by 1:1 and 1:3 that these things are coming soon.

Futurists read "after this" as speaking to after the church age. Some even use the language of "come up here" as a reference to the rapture.

Vision of the throne: speaks of power, authority, dominion, and judgment. While there are struggles on earth, God is seated on his throne in heaven, in the unseen realm.

Jasper (cf. 21:11 describing the new Jerusalem, "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal")
Therefore, this gem likely refers to God's glory, purity (like crystal).

Carnelian (or sardius) is red which may call to mind God's wrath.

Emerald describes the rainbow. The green color could be an image of life, mercy, and grace.

Ezekiel 1

1:1, "I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."

1:5, "from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures."

1:16, "their [wheels] appearance was like the gleaming of beryl."

1:22, "Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads."

Scripture is scriptures best interpreter.

Ezekiel 1. He sees a vision of God on his throne.

Parallels:

- vision into heaven and the throne of God.
- Imagery of four living creatures
- Imagery of gems or precious stones (beryl, crystal, sapphire)

Ezekiel 1, cont'd

1:24, "I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty..."

1:26, "there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance."

1:27, "Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around."

Parallels:

- sound of many waters
- Human form sitting on the throne
- A rainbow around the throne.

What's the Connection?

The first half of Ezekiel are prophecies related to the judgment of Jerusalem. This took place in 586 BC by the Babylonians.

The second half of Ezekiel contains prophecies about a new, revived people along with a new temple and new city.

This could be a parallel to Revelation which describes the judgment of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD by the Romans with a new, revived people (the church) who are the new temple and city.

John is clearly using language and imagery from Ezekiel. Perhaps he means more than just borrowing language but the theme is being leveraged to speak about current events in his day.

Revelation 4:4-6a

⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

There is one chief throne, but there are also other thrones.

Options for these elders:

- angels (Mounce, following the 24 priestly and levitical orders, 1 Chron 24:4; 25:9-13).
- 24 ancestors of Christ (Adam through Pharez) (Henry Morris)
- New Testament church raptured into heaven, the royal priesthood clothed in white, ruling as kings with crowns (most dispensationalists)
- 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles representing God's people from OT and NT (most interpreters)

If the theme of judgment is correct (and it certainly appears that way when we get into the seals), then these are also judges.

These judges have clothing and crowns which speak to their righteousness. Perhaps martyrs or at least those who have endured and remained faithful to the end.

The number 24 is meaningful. Representing the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles. God's redeemed people, his saints.

In verse 5, the lightning and thunder are again from Ezekiel 1:4,13. (same with the theme of fire)

7 torches are said to be seven spirits which is likely a reference to the Holy Spirit (7 being the number of perfection or completion).

In verse 6 the sea of glass has been interpreted to be the laver or basin the priests used to wash the sacrifices, but now solid as it is no longer needed. This same image appears in Revelation 15:2 and is similar to Ezekiel 1:22 which says, "Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads."

It is likely a symbol of purity and that all has been revealed or made known. The blackness of the sea is now exposed and all is now revealed.

Revelation 4:6b-8

^{6b} And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

Ezekiel also had 4 living creatures in his vision into the throne room of God.

In Ezekiel's vision, these creatures are cherubim with wings (similar to the cherubim in Isaiah 6). They enhance the majesty and glory of God.

The parallels include:

- Four living creatures (Ezekiel 1)
- Wings (Ezekiel 1)
- Six wings (Isaiah 6)
- Cry of Holy, Holy, Holy (Isaiah 6)

However, in Ezekiel, the creatures have 4 faces each, whereas the creatures in Revelation just have 1 face.

What do the living creatures represent?

- Attributes and qualities of God (Walvoord)
- Four aspects of nature (Ladd, rabbinic interpretation of Ezekiel)
- Four portraits of Christ in the gospels (Lindsey)
- The middle signs in the four quarters of the Zodiac (Chilton)
- Creation, which praises God (Beale)

Beale remarks: The four living beings represent the whole of animate life. They are performing the function that all creation is meant to fulfill. That is, all things were created to praise God for his holiness and glorify him for his work of creation. 5:13 bears out that this is not only the ideal purpose for all creatures but also that some day this purpose will actually be fulfilled, not only in heaven but also on earth, since it is an anticipation of the consummation.⁵

Cited in Revelation: Four Views, Revised and Updated (p. 131). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

The last viewpoint seems most likely.

The challenge of Revelation is that not all the symbols have a 1 to 1 correspondence (e.g., what does the ox face represent?). We can sometimes lose the big picture while straining at the details.

The grand picture is that God's judgment is unfolding and the creation and the saints are actively worshiping (see also Revelation 19).

Revelation 4:9-11

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

The living creatures and the church (saints) worship God because he is the creator and receives all honor and glory and power.

Theme of worship.

This continues the same theme as the cherubim. God's purposes, judgment, and glory is surrounded by worship.

We cannot miss this theme as we go through Revelation. God sits in glory and judgment and all creation and his saints bow down in worship.

We cannot engage in wild speculation and miss out on the main emphasis of what is seen in this vision. God's glory, power, honor, and his absolute rule and authority over the entire created order.

Whether wild animals or domesticated, whether man or bird, everything that has breath ought to praise the Lord.

The saints, with their crowns owing to God, worship him constantly along with creation.

Lessons from Revelation 4

1. God is undiminished in his glory.
2. God is the ultimate authority and judge.
3. All creation will bow before him in worship.
4. The angels, living creatures, and the saints all owe honor and allegiance to him who sits on the throne.
5. Clear allusions to Ezekiel and Isaiah are reminiscent of previous times of judgment against Jerusalem.
6. We ought to remember that in creation, salvation, or judgment, God is to be worshiped and adored.