

***GOD ON HIS THRONE RULES THE WHOLE UNIVERSE
FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY***

PART 1. THE OPEN DOOR (4:1)

PART 2. THE THRONE AND ITS OCCUPANT (4:2-3)

PART 3. SURROUNDING THE THRONE (4:4-8a)

PART 4. WORSHIP IN HEAVEN (4:8b-11)

PART 1. THE OPEN DOOR (4:1)

a. Explanation of the symbols

4:1 “After these things I saw, and behold.”¹ This expresses that John saw this second vision ‘in time after’ the first vision, ‘next’ in the order of his visions. It does not say that the events seen in the second vision are chronologically after the events described in the first vision! The phrase, ‘after this’,² is used to introduce a new vision (7:1; 18:1; 19:1).

“and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.”³ See ‘door’ in the introduction to chapter 4. By opening the door to heaven, God authorises the revelation of heavenly realities. *God reveals things as they really are and as he views them.* John sees the glory of God on his heavenly throne in heaven (4:1) and hears what the inhabitants of heaven say about God!

“And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you.’”⁴ The voice must be the voice of Christ (cf. 1:8,12), the King. He is the Creator, but also the Mediator between the eternal reality and the created reality. He is God that left the eternal reality, entered creation and time, died and was resurrected in human history, and then re-entered the eternal reality.

“what must take place after these things.”⁵ On the authority of Christ, the angel shows John:
- not what had already happened and existed - a historical description, as *the historicist view* does
- also not what will happen after a long period of time somewhere far in the future - after the so-called removal of the Church from the earth, as *the futurist view* does
- but what will take place *in the near future* - in John’s future as in Revelation 1:19 (cf. 1:1-3).
It must⁶ take place because it will be according to God’s sovereign plan and eternal purpose.

b. Different views about the open door (4:1)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The open door is *literally* an open door into heaven through which John and the whole Church is taken up into heaven. The rapture of John is *a type* of the so-called rapture of the Church (the removal of the Church from the earth).⁷

Second view. (The correct explanation) The open door is *a symbol* of God authorising John to see the revelation of the realities in heaven and to hear the revelation of God’s plan for salvation and judgement!

¹ μετα ταυτα ειδον, και ιδου

² μετα ταυτα ορ μετα τουτο

³ θυρα ηνεωγμενη < ανοιγω (vprp) εν τω ουρανω

⁴ και φ φωνη η πρωτη ηκουσα (vīaa) ως σαλπιγγος λαλουσης (vppa) μετ εμου λεγων (vppa), Ανανβα (vmaa) ωδε, και δειξω (vifa) σοι

⁵ α δει (vīpa--3s) γενεσθαι (vnam) μετα ταυτα

⁶ δει

⁷ Larkin, Revelation pp. 33-34

c. Different views about the words ‘what must take place after this’ (4:1)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) ‘What must take place afterwards’ refers to events *after the removal of the Church (the rapture)*. These events only start at the rapture after a very long delay.

Second view. (The correct explanation) ‘What must take place afterwards’ refers to events *after Christ’s revelation given to John* (1:1,3; 4:1) and therefore refers to events *between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming*. The message of the whole book of Revelation is meant for all Christians living in all the centuries between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming.

PART 2. THE THRONE AND ITS OCCUPANT (4:2-3)

a. Explanation of the symbols

4:2 “At once I was in the Spirit”⁸. This describes an ecstatic state. John no longer sees with his physical eyes nor hears with his physical ears. John sees and hears in a visionary way. His soul is drawn away from all surrounding objects and is wholly fixed on the things that are shown to him in the vision. After his first vision, John must have returned to his normal state for some time, and could have recorded his first vision and could have written down the seven letters which Christ had dictated to him. How long this interval lasted, we do not know. When a person has a vision, he may still be sensible to his surrounding. For example, Stephen was at the same time aware that people were stoning him and that he was seeing Christ in a vision (Acts 7:54-60; Matthew 3:16).

What John saw was *a vision* and not a literal material or physical reality. If it were not a vision, then he saw a material throne surrounded by twenty-four literal and physical thrones and a literal lamb (animal) which had literally and physically seven horns and seven eyes (a kind of monster)(5:6)! But although the various objects which John beholds do not exist in that physical, material form, they nevertheless really exist and express an important, spiritual truth and spiritual reality. For example, Jesus Christ (the Lamb is a symbol) exists as a literal reality! The symbols express a reality that far surpasses the literal reality of the mere symbol! Therefore we should not try to find a deeper meaning when there is none.

“and there before me was a throne in heaven.”⁹ See ‘throne’ in the introduction to chapter 4. God does not have several different thrones, nor can God’s throne be separated into different functions (Matthew 25:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11). God’s reigning throne (4:2) is also God’s judgement throne (20:11). God’s one and only throne is the centre of the universe!

The universe of the Bible is not geocentric (earth centred), heliocentric (sun centred), sagittario-centric (the archer star constellation centred), but Theo-centric (God centred)! The stars only enhance the greatness and power of God (Isaiah 40:25-26). A universe with God in the centre is also the true foundation for astronomy and science!

The throne in the centre of the whole universe pictures the true philosophy of history. Not the events reported on the mass media determine and shape this present world, but the will of God on his throne! Nothing is excluded from his dominion. The throne is definitely based on biblical symbolism (Isaiah 6:1; Jeremiah 3:16-17; 14:21; Ezekiel 1:26; 43:7).

“and on the throne One sitting (on it).”¹⁰ The word ‘sitting’ indicates continuous rest and majesty. There is no haste, no exertion and no panic in heaven. Although the evil powers are seeking to conquer his throne, God is very sure of victory. The scene in heaven is one of complete rest. With God everything is from eternity to eternity under control. He knows all the secrets hidden behind history and nothing ever surprises him. He never lets go of the works of his hands (Psalm 138:8).

⁸ εὐθεὸς ἐγενόμην (viam) ἐν πνεύματι

⁹ καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἐκεῖτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ

¹⁰ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθημένος < καθημαί (vppm)

4:3 “And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow resembling an emerald encircled the throne.”¹¹ What follows is not a description of God, but a description of God’s appearance! What John sees is God’s radiance (Hebrews 1:3). As commanded in the Bible, John makes no visible representation of the invisible God (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 4:15-24; Isaiah 6:1-7; Ezekiel 1). God is Spirit (John 4:24) and cannot be seen and also cannot be described. But God’s appearance, however, can be seen and can be described!

John uses precious stones (cf. Exodus 28:17-20; Ezekiel 28:13) to describe God’s glorious radiance: Jasper is a stone clear as crystal (21:11). Or it is a transparent diamond, symbolising God’s character as it expresses itself in glory and holiness.

Carnelian is a red stone, symbolising life (blood) or God’s character as it expresses itself in the fire of judgement.

Emerald is a sea-green stone, symbolising God’s character as it expresses itself in salvation.

The rainbow symbolises God’s character as it expresses itself in his unchanging faithfulness. For God’s Old Testament and New Testament people the storm of the flood is over (Genesis 9:8-17; Ezekiel 1:28). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). God will faithfully justify everyone who believes. But for all the godless and wicked people the storm is not yet over!

God’s glorious character is symbolised by the clear, transparent colour of jasper. God’s holy indignation against all those who are evil is symbolised by the red colour of carnelian. And God’s loving faithfulness expressed in salvation towards all those who trust in him is symbolised by the green colour of the emerald. Within God’s character these three characteristics cannot be separated!

b. Different views about the throne (4:2)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The throne is the throne of judgement and not the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16)¹², because out of it proceeded lightning and thundering and voices, that remind us of Mt. Sinai. “The throne is the source of judgement”¹³.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The throne is God’s one and only throne, from which he reigns, saves and judges. It is the centre of the universe at all times. God’s throne is always where God is. And God is present everywhere (Psalm 139:6-12).

PART 3. SURROUNDING THE THRONE (4:4-8a)

a. Explanation of the symbols

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

4:4 “Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders”¹⁴ (4:10; 5:6,8,11; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). This picture points to Old Testament descriptions of God’s throne when he reigns or exercises justice and judgement. See ‘twenty-four elders’ in the introduction to chapter 4. In the Old Testament, God’s throne is surrounded by heavenly beings and elders or leaders of the people.

The name elders (Greek: presbyters)¹⁵ points to them as being the *representatives* of the people of God (the Church) and not the people of God themselves. The number 24 points to the twenty-four divisions of priests (1 Chronicles 24:1-19) and the twenty-four divisions of Levites (1 Chronicles 25) in the Old Testament who served in the temple on earth and who thanked and praised God every day (1 Chronicles 23:30-31). The number 24 (2x12) points especially to the people of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The twelve tribes of Israel represent God’s Old Testament people and the twelve apostles represent God’s New Testament people (21:12-14). Thus the number 24 represents the full number of God’s chosen people throughout world history.

¹¹ και ο καθημενος ομοιος ορασει λιθω ιασπιδι και σαρδια, και ιρις κυκλοθεν του θρονου ομοιος ορασει σμαραγδινω

¹² Larkin, Revelation p. 35

¹³ Tenney p. 171

¹⁴ και κυκλοθεν του θρονου θρονους εικοσι τεσσαρες, και επι τους θρονους εικοσι τεσσαρας πρεσβυτερους καθημενους (vppm)

¹⁵ πρεσβυτεροι

In Revelation 5:8-10 the elders are clearly distinguished from the people from every nation that have been purchased with the blood of Christ. And in Revelation 7:11 the elders are clearly distinguished from the uncountable multitude of God's people (7:9,14). Therefore the twenty-four elders are not symbolic of the chosen people of God themselves elevated to this high position, but are the representatives of these chosen people before God's throne in heaven. They are probably heavenly beings who represent the Church directly before God's throne.

Of all the creatures surrounding God's throne in heaven, the twenty-four elders are mentioned first, because they represent the most important creatures in the universe: man (Genesis 1:26; Hebrews 2:8). Their task is to sing the glory and holiness of God and the Lamb and to bring the prayers of the saints (the Christians of the Militant Church) before God's throne (5:8-10). They are represented as the leaders of worship in heaven.

"They were permanently dressed in white and had wreaths of victory of gold on their heads."¹⁶ The elders as representatives of the Church are dressed in a way that symbolises how God has treated the people they represent (the Church). The white dress is a symbol of God's people having been cleansed by the blood of Christ. They do not wear crowns of kings¹⁷, but wreaths of victory¹⁸. The crown or diadem was the sign of royalty among the Persians, a blue band trimmed with white on the tiara. The wreath of victory is a symbol of God's people being certain of victory. The clothes and service of the elders show that they stand in a close relationship to God's redeemed people.

Conclusion. The twenty-four elders are probably *heavenly beings* (cf. Hebrews 1:14) that represent the Church of the Old and the New Testaments directly before God's throne in heaven throughout the history of the Bible. God gathers his Church throughout the history of salvation in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Church is lifted out above the creation and history and is directly represented in heaven with God. The twenty-four elders represent God's Church, but worship God as the Creator, "who created all things by his will" and keeps them in existence (4:11).

The function of the twenty-four elders is to enhance the glory of God's throne and his work as Creator (4:9-11) and Redeemer (5:9-10). The message of the twenty-four elders is that the whole Church (the result of God's history of redemption and salvation) worships God as the God of creation and nature.

THE LIGHTNING AND THUNDER

4:5 "From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings (literally: voices) and peals of thunder."¹⁹ These signs in nature drive terror and awe into people. They are expressions of God's greatness, power and majesty when he reveals his will. See 'lightning and thunder' in the introduction to chapter 4. Here they occur during the revelation of God's reign in the universe. Whenever God reveals his grace or judgements it is accompanied by awesome phenomena in nature!

THE SEVEN LAMPS OF FIRE

"Before the throne seven lamps of fire were continually burning. These are the seven spirits of God."²⁰ See 'the seven spirits' in the introduction to chapter 4. This is an example where a symbol is clearly identified (cf. 1:20) – the symbol 'lamps' represent spirits. It shows that the book of Revelation should not be explained literally, but symbolically.

The number 7 is the number of divine perfection and completion. In chapter 1 to 3 the seven congregations (churches) represented all the congregations on the whole earth. In chapter 4 the seven spirits represent the Holy Spirit living and working in all the congregations on earth. They represent the fullness, functions and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which the Holy Spirit exercises in the Church as fruit of the completed salvation work of Christ. The seven lamps radiate light and warmth. The Holy Spirit is full of blazing fire against the wicked, but full of regenerating and sanctifying power for the godly.

¹⁶ περιβεβλημενους < περιβαλλω (vprfm) εν ιματιοις λευκοις, και επι τας κεφαλαις αυτων στεφανους χρυσους

¹⁷ διαδηματα

¹⁸ στεφανοι

¹⁹ και εκ του θρονου εκπορευονται (vprfm) αστραπαι και φωναι και βρονται

²⁰ και επτα λαμπαδες πυρος καιομεναι (vppp) ενωπιον του θρονου, α εισιν (vira) τα επτα πνευματα του θεου

God's heavenly palace is represented as the Old Testament tabernacle or temple (7:15). The tabernacle and temple had three divisions: the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place and the Court. The seat of the ark in the Holy of Holies behind the curtain pointed to the fact that God is exalted and unapproachable for ordinary people. The seven-armed candlestick in the Holy Place pointed to the fact that the Holy Spirit is spreading the light of salvation everywhere. And the altar of burnt offering in the Court pointed to the fact that without the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ no-one could approach God. The order of these three divisions of the tabernacle and temple is reflected in the order of the Trinity in Revelation 1:4 and in Revelation 4:2,5 and 5:6 – God, the Spirit and Jesus Christ. The Old Testament tabernacle or temple was only an earthly shadow of the heavenly reality (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).

THE SEA OF GLASS

4:6a “Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”²¹

The ‘sea’ has three possible meanings in the Bible. See ‘sea’ in the introduction to chapter 4.

In the Old Testament the brazen sea was a basin of water that stood between the altar of burnt offering and the temple. The Old Testament priests washed their hands and feet in it before they approached the altar or before they entered the temple (Exodus 30:18-21; 1 Kings 7:23-26).

In the New Testament the sea of glass clear as crystal (4:6a) symbolises the blood of Christ in which Christians symbolically wash their clothes and make them white (7:14). It thus symbolises the just and transparent salvation of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by which people may approach him and enter his New Testament community (temple). Thus, in Revelation 4:6a the sea of glass clear as crystal symbolises *God's salvation*. God's reign leads to salvation for Christians from all nations so that they may live in perfect peace and harmony with God in heaven (Romans 5:1).

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

4:6b “In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.”²² See ‘living creatures’ in the introduction to chapter 4. The word ‘living creature’ is different than the word ‘beast’²³ in Revelation 11:7 and 13:1,11. The living creatures served God, but the beasts served Satan. The position of the living creatures is in the centre around the throne, as it were in the middle of the steps leading up to the throne on each side. The fact that they were covered with eyes is symbolic and means that they see everything that is happening in creation. Nothing is excluded.

4:7 “The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.”²⁴ The number 4 is the number of the earth and the world – the creation. See the symbolism of numbers in supplement 2. The living creatures in Revelation (4:6-8) are described in a similar but not the same way as the living creatures in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:5,6,10,18). Both are closely associated with God's throne, but they are nevertheless not the same. In some passages the living creatures are distinguished from the angels (5:11; 7:11) and thus they are not the seraphim of Isaiah 6:2 ff. or the cherubim of Ezekiel 10:20-21, but resemble them. Possibly, just as the twenty-four elders are symbolic heavenly beings that represent God's whole Church before God's throne, so the four living creatures are symbolic heavenly beings that represent God's whole creation with all its creatures before God's throne (4:8; 5:14). Both enhance the significance of God's throne in the centre of the universe!

The living creatures are not identified with four earthly beings, but are like or resemble earthly beings. The lion represents the wild animals on earth and courage. The ox represents the domestic animals on earth and strength. The face of man represents all mankind on earth and intelligence. And the eagle represents the birds on earth and observance. Whoever is the most courageous, the strongest, the most intelligent (wisest) and the swiftest among God's heavenly beings are called to praise God continually.

In the Bible the whole animate (4:8; 5:8,14; 7:11; 19:4; Psalm 148 1-2,7a,9-14; Isaiah 43:7) and inanimate (Psalm 19:1-6; 148:3-6,7b-9; Isaiah 55:12; Romans 1:19-20) creation was created by Christ and for Christ (Colossians 1:16).

²¹ και ενωπιον του θρονου ως θαλασσα υαλινη ομοια κρυσταλλω

²² Και εν μεσω του θρονου και κυκλω του θρονου τεσσαρα ζωα γεμοντα (νρρα) οφθαλμων εμπροσθεν και οπισθεν

²³ το θηριον

²⁴ και το ζων το πρωτον ομοιον λεοντι, και το δευτερον ζων ομοιον μοσχω, και το τριτον ζων εχων (νρρα) το προσωπον ως ανθρωπου, και το τεταρτον ζων ομοιον αετω πετομενω (νρρμ)

The four living creatures are heavenly beings that *represent God's whole creation before God's throne and that worship God who reigns over all history and especially the history of salvation.*²⁵ The four living creatures represent the stars, the winds, the seasons, the plants, the animals and man – in short, *all of creation that forms the background of history* with all its bloody wars and glorious discoveries! Thus, the four living creatures represent God's creation as the backdrop for God's history of salvation.

The creation or nature is much more interested in the events of history than we might think:

- A star points the way to the Saviour born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:9)
- The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:19)!
- Not only the uncountable number of angels in heaven, but the mountains and trees in creation (Isaiah 55:12) and every creature on earth (5:11-14) joins in and gives equal praise to God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb who was slain (cf. John 5:23)!

The whole creation worships the God who reigns over all history and especially the history of salvation within creation. The living creatures look at God and worship him as he realises his history of salvation in the past, present and future!

The message of the four living creatures is that the whole creation worships God as the God who controls history and the history of salvation and judgement. God "who was, and is, and is to come" was before creation and history, he now controls creation and history, and he will bring everything in creation and history to the goal he purposed for it! He will bring everything in creation and history to a meaningful end!

4:8a "Each of the living creatures had six wings." Wings symbolise mobility and quick movement in every direction (Ezekiel 1:12,17). There is nowhere in creation they cannot fly (cf. Psalm 139:5-10).

"and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings." This is possibly a picture of the night sky with its innumerable shining stars, which here signifies that the living creatures (and thus the whole creation) observe everything (cf. Psalm 148:3). Nothing escapes their notice, even when they move about in the universe (cf. Psalm 139:1-4; Hebrews 4:13).

b. Different views about the twenty-four elders (4:4)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The twenty-four elders *figuratively represent* redeemed mankind, *all the saints from both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period.*

Second view. (The correct explanation) The twenty-four elders are not a symbol of the Church, but are *heavenly beings that represent the Church of the Old and the New Testaments in heaven.*²⁶

c. Different views about the four living creatures (4:6b-8a)

There are three views.

First view. The four living creatures are *a high order of angels* guarding and enhancing God's holiness.²⁷ In other passages the living creatures in heaven are distinguished from all the creatures on earth (5:13-14) and thus they are to be identified with the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10:20, or the seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-4. They are one of the highest orders of angels guarding the holy things of God (Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:20). They stand ready to serve God in any of the four directions of the compass, that is, in any part of the universe. They have courage, strength, intelligence and swiftness, which in the Bible are ascribed to *angels* (Psalm 103:20-21; Hebrew 1:14; Daniel 9:21; Luke 12:8; 15:10). They speak and sing and serve. Like the twenty-four elders, they enhance the significance of God's throne in the centre of the universe! Their task is to promote God's glory in his reign on earth and especially in his work of salvation and judgement.

Second view. The four living creatures are *angel-like beings* that represent the totality of God's creation.²⁸ They are the most important created beings and represent whatever is the noblest, strongest, wisest and

²⁵ Bavinck, pp. 127-131, Greijdanus pp. 96-97

²⁶ Greijdanus p. 94; Hendriksen pp. 104-105; Groenewald p. 76

²⁷ Hendriksen pp. 105-108

²⁸ Groenewald p. 78

swiftest in animate nature. Their task is to lead the praising of God (4:8; 5:8,14; 7:11; 19:4) and to execute God's will, also in judgement (6:1-7; 15:7).

Third view. (The best explanation) See the explanation of the symbols above. The four living creatures are *heavenly beings that represent God's whole creation* before God's throne and that worships God who reigns over all history and especially the history of salvation.²⁹

PART 4. WORSHIP IN HEAVEN (4:8b-11)

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES WORSHIP

4:8b "Day and night they never stop saying:" The whole creation stands in service of God, is ready to do his will and praise his glorious reality. They praise God's glory, day and night. In earthly terms 'day and night' means continually or forever. God's unending worthiness must be praised and worshipped by all beings and by all creation!

The worship of the God of the Bible is not a religious event for an hour a week or even through religious ceremonies a couple of times a day. It is a never-ending attitude of awe, adoration, submission and dedication to God, which is expressed in different kinds of prayer and in daily life and life-style.

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty"³⁰ (Isaiah 6:3). Because the whole creation was created before the creation of man, the four living creatures take the lead in praising God in heaven. They proclaim with awe his majesty, greatness, holiness. The word 'holy' has two important aspects: it means *separated from* sin and worldliness and *devoted to* all God's attributes. The God of the Bible is opposed to all sin and evil. He burns in holy and righteous anger against every form of sin and is determined to punish sin and root out all evil. But the God of the Bible is at the same time perfectly dedicated to holiness and righteousness. His heart yearns to bestow his mercy and love on everyone that repents and turns to him (Exodus 34:6-7; cf. Matthew 11:28-30). Three times means in superlative degree, the highest degree: God's holiness has its origin in eternity, is carried through the ages, and points to the coming judgement and eternity.

"who was, and is, and is to come."³¹ God existed from all eternity (John 1:1) and is the Creator of everything. God is real in the present and is the Ruler of everything in the present. God has come to us in creation through Christ, is coming to us continually through Christ's Spirit and will come to us in Christ's second coming. The four living creatures proclaim without stopping not only the existence and reality of God, but also that he is coming and that we should expect his coming!

They are *heavenly beings that represent God's creation* in all its fullness directly before God's throne throughout the history of the Bible. They represent *God's creation*, but worship God as the *God of history*. God has created everything and everyone and has set history into motion. God now controls everyone and everything in creation and in history, And God will bring everyone and everything in creation and history to the goal he purposed for it! He will bring everyone and everything in creation and history to a meaningful end!

THE 24 ELDERS WORSHIP

4:9 "Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever."³² God has always been sitting on the throne in the universe (including the earth) and he is forever the Living One. The words: 'to give glory' means to adore God's reality, presence and attributes. The words: 'to give honour' means to feel awe and a deep reverence for God. The words: 'to give thanks' means to gratefully appreciate that God is the Origin, Source and Destiny of everyone and everything (Romans 11:36).

4:10 "the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne."³³ God's glory is praised then by one group, then by

²⁹ Bavinck, pp. 127-131, Greijdanus pp. 96-97

³⁰ Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ

³¹ ὁ ἦν (vīia) καὶ ὁ ὢν (vīpa) καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (vīpm)

³² καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν (vīfa) τὰ ζῶα δοξάν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθημένῳ (vīpm) ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ, τῷ ζῶντι (vīpa) εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων

³³ πέσονται (vīfm) οἱ εἰκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου (vīpm) ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν (vīfa) τῷ ζῶντι (vīpa) εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων, καὶ βαλοῦσιν (vīfa) τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου

another group: they sing alternatively or in response to one another. The heavenly living creatures and the representatives of the Church take turns to glorify, honour, thank and worship God in his greatness and glory!

The picture of the elders falling down in prostration in the sight of God on the throne, casting their wreaths of victory before him symbolises that the entire host of the redeemed acknowledge that they owe everything to God – their existence, salvation and ultimate victory are only by God's grace!

From Revelation 1:4-5 and 5:9-14 it is clear that they worship the Triune God. As in Revelation 1:4-5, Revelation 4:3,5 and 5:6 the description of the Triune God is in terms of the tabernacle or temple symbolism (the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the Court).

4:11 “and say: You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.”³⁴ That is what the emperor Domitian demanded when he entered a city triumphantly. The people had to shout, “You are worthy. Caesar is dominus et deus” (You are worthy. Caesar is lord and god!) But Christ reveals that the kings and princes and governors of this present world (represented by the beast out of the sea) are all the time trying to usurp God's throne and its glory. They will fail, because not they, but the Triune God is on the throne! He only is worthy of all glory, honour, thanks and power (Isaiah 42:8). He only is to be called ‘Lord and God’ (1 Corinthians 12:3)!

‘Glory’ is the radiation of God's majestic attributes; the glory which results when the splendour of God's attributes (sovereignty, righteousness, love, grace, etc.) is revealed (made present) and recognised. ‘Honour’ is the acknowledgement of his greatness and power with awe and reverence. ‘Thanksgiving’ is the grateful appreciation of his goodness and gracious mercy towards all the works of his hands. ‘Power’ is God's inner ability. He alone is truly almighty, the source of all abilities outside himself, shown in creation and salvation.

“for you *once for all* created all things, and by your will they *continually* have their being and were created.”

³⁵ This reveals that all creation (all things as to their origin, their being and their destination) are founded on God's will! All things that ever existed in the past or exist in the present or will exist in the future were already part of God's will from the very beginning of God's counsel. They were planned and already had ideal existence in the mind of God. Consequently they continually are (have existence) and will so certainly be created that they are already seen as having been created. All the events in God's plan will certainly happen within the history of this world! Everything happens either by his decision or by his permission. This is another way of saying, “The God of the Bible is on the throne and he rules! The whole wide world is in his hands”

While the four living creatures representing creation look at God's history of salvation resulting in the Church (4:8; cf. Romans 8:19), the twenty-four elders representing the Church look at God's creation as the reality within which God realises his plan within the history of salvation (4:11). They worship God as the One who willed everything (including the Church) he created (4:11).

The Church throughout the history of salvation responds to the praises of creation, praising God that he realises his purpose, plan and will within creation and one day will bring it to perfect completion! Through its representatives the Church is as it were lifted out above creation because her God is the Almighty Ruler of the whole creation. When the Church is brought to final completion she will no longer feel the struggle and misery of the present earth. But in anticipation of her final perfection she feels her priceless calling to worshipfully dedicate everything she received from God to God. She casts her crowns of victory before God's throne and falls down to worship God.

³⁴ λεγοντες (vppa): Αξιως ει (vira), ο κυριος και ο θεος ημων, λαβειν (vnaa) την δοξαν και την τιμην και την δυναμιν

³⁵ οτι συ εκτισας > κτιζω (viaa) τα παντα, και δια το θελημα σου ησαν (viia) και εκτισθησαν (viap)