

Alpha & Omega

Bible Studies in the Book of Revelation

Study #4: Revelation 4

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

ABOUT “Alpha & Omega”

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

~ Revelation 1:8

Alpha & Omega is the second series of Bible Studies especially written so that you can do them alone at home, or with others in a group. They don't depend on a leader or someone affirming the right answer. The title of this series comes from the introduction of John's letter to God's people, preparing them for the persecution and difficulty the Church of Christ was about to face. But it gives them (and us) two views of this: the seen reality of what God's people experience, and the unseen reality of God's glorious and gracious rule in Christ over all these events. They suffered, and we will suffer, but Christ rules even over the suffering ... and he is returning soon with saving victory for his Church!

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION 4

Today's passage begins with “After this ...” which is a typical way in which John introduces a new section in the revelation unfolding before him. We might use the term “next” in the same way. But note that each time these words are used is the next episode in the vision, not the next episode in history.

THE ANGELS OF THE CHURCHES

The seven letters to the Asian churches are addressed to each church's “angel.” What are they, and how does that work?

1. Don't be misled by translating the “angel” too narrowly as only “messenger.” Angels are spiritual beings who worship God [Heb 12:22], proclaim God's glory [Lk 2:13,14], witnesses to God's work [Job 38:7], can take human form [Gen 18:1ff; Heb 13:2], carry out God's commands [Ps 103:20], wage war on earth [2 Ki 19:35], protect God's people [Mk 13:27; Act 5:19; 12:7], bring God's judgement [2 Thes 1:7], minister to God's people [Heb 1:14], ministered to Christ on earth [Ps 91:11,12 cf Lk 4:10,11], and, yes, reveal messages from God [Matt 1:20; 4:11; Lk 1:30; 24:33] ... and more!

2. Revelation 2 & 3 reveals that each of the seven churches had an angel through which Christ's message was to be mediated [cf Heb 2:2]. What other roles these angels played is not made known; we might reasonably take it that they cared for the churches in the service of Christ (not unlike being mediators of Christ's message via John). But we cannot take from this that every church has such an angel or that we have personal guardian angels. (While both are possible, our call is to trust Christ, rather than look for help from angels, even if that is how he might send help.)

IMAGES, NOT PHOTOGRAPHS!

It Goes without saying that when John saw a door open into heaven, there was no actual door. This is a “vision” in which images of things he can recognise or describe represent what he cannot see or describe. This ongoing revelation is not a photographic exhibition of the reality of heaven ... or of anything. *John is recording a vision of images, not photographs.*

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GETTING STARTED

Please remember that this is God's Word. God used John to write God's words in God's way for us. So

1. Pray, asking God to give you his Spirit so that you will honour him, understand his word, and learn how to live better for Jesus.
 2. Read the passage listed above for this study. What is it mainly about?
 3. Now discuss/think about/answer the questions that follow.
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THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

Please read Revelation 4:1-6

1. **Verse 1:** John very specifically links the voice he hears with chapter 1:19. **Compare and contrast the instructions of 1:19 with this verse.**
2. **Verse 1:** John now looks and sees a door standing open in heaven. Heaven has been opened before in the New Testament: Matthew 3:16, John 1:51; Acts 7:56; and Acts 10:11. These events are more than a "window" open through which heaven could be seen, but an opening through which the barrier between heaven and earth is removed. **What moves/is communicated between heaven and earth through this opening?**
3. **Verses 1 & 2:** In the Greek, John writes, "I looked, and behold ..." (v1) and "I was in the Spirit, and behold ..." (v2) Not all translations include the word "behold" as it is not one we use today as an interjection like this! Read these two verses aloud in a version that includes "behold." **What is the impact of the word "behold" on the flow of the story and on the reader?**
4. Caesar's throne was, for these 1st Century people, the ultimate symbol of Rome's might and rule, and especially for the emperor of the time, Domitian, who declared himself to be "god" (the first Roman Emperor to acquire that title while still living) and brought new cruelty to the persecution of Christians. Another throne features in this book (see Revelation 13:2) – it too will be overthrown. But in heaven John sees the throne that offers real encouragement to those about to suffer. **In what ways does this throne excel Caesar's throne? Satan's throne?**
5. Twenty four elders surround the throne. As always in this book, the key question is not "who are they?" (which we aren't told), or "what are they?" but *what do they symbolise?* Consider:
 - a. **What is their character/what are their attributes?** v4
 - b. **What do they do?** v10; and 5:5; 7:13; 11:16; 19:4
 - c. **What do they represent?** Compare Revelation 21:12-14 with Ephesians 2:20

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WORSHIP AT THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

Please read Revelation 4:6-10

6. Once again, looking at the four living creatures, the question is not “who are they?” (which we aren’t told), or “what are they?” but *what do they symbolise?* Since this vision of the four creatures varies slightly with that in other accounts (compare and contrast this vision of the four creatures with Isaiah 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1:4-14; Ezekiel 10:14) their significance cannot be in the detail but in what is revealed:
 - a. What do their wings do?

 - b. What do their eyes do?

 - c. What do *they* do?

 - d. Why do they do this?

7. In response, the 24 elders also worship
 - a. In what two ways do they worship?

 - b. When do they do this?

PRAISE AT THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

Please read Revelation 4:11

8. God receives praise because he is “worthy” of it.
 - a. How does that compare with the other “thrones” alluded to in this book?

 - b. What is God worthy to receive by way of praise?

 - c. Since these things already belong to God, how can he receive them?

 - d. According to this text, why is he worthy of such praise? (Compare this with John 1:1-4 & Hebrews 1:2,3)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Why is the doctrine of creation so important and so often attacked or undermined?

9. In the light of this passage: What can you thank God for? What can you pray for others? What can you trust God for?

10. In the light of this passage, what changes do you need to make: In your faith? In your worship? In your attitude? In your life?