

The Worship of God

How Heavenly Worship Becomes Earthly Worship

Rev 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.

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. 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!"

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.”

(Revelation 4:1-11)

Doors

The London Baptist Confession of Faith parallels the Westminster Confession when it talks about “**prayer with thanksgiving**” (LBC 22.3-4), the reading of Scriptures, **preaching** the Word of God, teaching and admonishing and **singing** to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, **baptism** and the **Lord’s Supper** as being “**parts of religious worship of God**” to be performed in faith, reverence, godly fear, and obedience to him (para. 5).

The first century Christian tract called **The Didache**, along with the turn of the century **Letter of Pliny the Younger**, a middle second century work of **Justin Martyr** (First Apology), and the end of the century *Apostolic Traditions* by **Hippolytus** all describe the Eucharist services of the church as including prayer, preaching and reading the Scripture, baptism, singing, and obviously the Lord’s Supper.¹ In other words, **the same things**. Alan Guelzo summarizes what many

¹ See **Richard C. Leonard**, “Worship in the Early Church,” *Laudemont Ministries* (1997), <https://www.laudemont.org/a-witec.htm>.

others have said, “The early Christians, since so many of them were Jews, simply carried over these principles into their own worship. The use of the temple, the synagogue, and the home as sacred locations for worship all show up in Acts, along with the appointment of an authorized leadership (the apostles and elders) and the use of the traditional forms of worship (with a few additions of their own, such as the Lord’s Supper, baptism, and the Lord’s Prayer) ... Christian worship retained a good deal of its Jewish look and feel.”²

But why? Why would they care to continue the practices of the Jews? Why not invent totally different and new things? Some, of course, have done that. The Reformation was one attempt at a corrective to this, to bring the church back in line with, as he puts it, “forms of worship which would give living shape to biblical teaching.” They returned the service to the national languages of the people, so they could understand it. They brought back the word of God as now sharing space on the central pedestal with the Supper. They simplified and condensed the services to take back the “elaborate stage-play for the priests” and “long distances from the people down the immense lengths of medieval cathedrals” in order to return

² Allen C. Guelzo, “The Archaeology of Worship,” ed. Robert F. Ingram, *Tabletalk Magazine*, December 1991: *Worship: Heralding His Glory* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1991), 8. He has a nice little summary of Justin right after this.

worship to the all the people of God. This is something that each generation needs to learn anew.

The Reformers had a central belief that drove them in all this. They condensed it into perhaps the most famous Question and Answer in all of their many catechisms. *The Shorter Catechism* begins, “What is the chief end of man?” “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” In other words, God created us to be worshipping beings. We are created to worship because we are created in the image of the Godhead whose Persons always selflessly give honor and glory to the other two. Our very lives are a form of worship. Our souls long for worship. Our bodies engage in worship. This is unavoidable and inevitable. It is our purpose for being.

The difference between one man and another not therefore *that* one worships and the other doesn't; it is *what and who* they worship, and there are plenty of candidates for those. Many these days worship themselves. They are the highest goal and end of their own life. For others, their worship may be more altruistic, they may worship a family member by serving them or perhaps they dedicate their lives to the poor or those in need. But they still say they believe in no God. Still others may worship stuff—money, sex, power, fame, entertainment, and so on. These things are the reason they

live, move, and have their being. Without them, their life seems miserable and worthless.

Increasingly in the West (it never died away in the East), people are returning to the darker days as they literally [worship the gods](#). A friend of mine was asked to speak on the unseen realm on a podcast called The Voice of Olympus, hosted by a fellow named Hercules Invictus, a follower of the gods of Olympus. Another friend of mine told me that his children went to a new Middle School in Suburban California and they came home with new friends—who worshipped Odin in their home. And there are rumors of dark satanic worship of Molech and Baphomet, who increasingly see statues honoring them.

As we mentioned in a previous sermon, a lot of people make a [sharp distinction](#) between the worship of “things” and the worship of “gods.” Today we call someone who lives entirely for himself a [narcissist](#). But such distinctions would have been much blurrier in days gone by. They would probably say that you were actually [worshiping Narcissus](#), the beautiful young god who fell in love with his own reflection in a mirror. We’ve seen that the striving after of food, sex, money, and so many other things were viewed not merely as naturalistic excesses, but as having their origin in the divine

realm (stomach-demons, Eros, Mammon, etc.). They understood that all **worship is at its heart a divine and supernatural activity**. The question is, **who or what will you worship?**

The Bible does something remarkable in this regard. Revelation 4 is a core component of it. It **teaches us about heavenly worship**. This in turn teaches us a couple of other things. First, it orients our thinking rightly, towards **the only proper object of worship**—the Triune God. This is **the “who” of worship**. The heavenly beings understand who to worship and in so doing are the grounding for everything else in the universe, quite literally, to emulate. Therefore, we will spend the first part of our time on this.

Second, once the who is understood, then **the “how” becomes much more meaningful**. The “how” is *the way* that worship unfolds here. This begins to answer why the Jews worshiped as they did, why the Christians basically just continued the same practices but in light of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah, and why the Reformers were so concerned to reclaim, as they put it, that **“the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself”** as **“prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”** (LBC 22.1). This biblical truth assumes what everyone should already know, but too

often seem to forget. **God is the one who establishes his own worship.** It is for him after all. He knows how he wants to be worshiped. He knows the right way to go about it. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures get this. To help us get at why worship has been so similar for so many thousands of years (when Christians bother to care about such things that is), we will supplement the root of Revelation 4 with other related and applicable passages after we ground ourselves in the “who” of worship.

The “Who” of Worship

We saw last time that **the structure of Revelation 4** leads us inevitably to a central verse. This is **Rev 4:8** which tells us about **a song** that the four living creatures sing. Singing is a central element of worship. **“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”**

- A) The glory of the Lord + of His throne (Rev 4:2-3)
- B) The thrones of the 24 elders / the glory of the throne room (4:4-6a)
- C) The 4 living creatures in the midst of the throne (4:6b-8a)
- D) *And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” (4:8b)***
- C¹) When the living creatures give glory to Him who sits on the throne (Rev 4:9)
- B¹) The 24 elders worship Him + cast their crowns before the throne (4:10)
- A¹) Extolling the glory of the Lord + His majesty (4:11)

We can break the chorus into **three basic components** each made of **three parts**. These sets of three help us understand that singing is also, as the Apostle tells us, “**teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God**” (**Col 3:16**) ... “**giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (**Eph 5:18-19**).

There is basic doctrine here. Vital doctrine. The song is about God. This God is *thrice holy*. He has **three titles**: *Lord*, *God*, and *Almighty*. He has **three expressions** of existence. He *was* and *is* and *is to come*. Together, they describe **three perfections**: Holiness, omnipotence, and eternity, which are three of the great attributes of God. And the entire creation, no matter how glorious, how powerful, or how long they have existed stand in awe of him.

The song itself is composed of **portions of Isaiah 6:3** and that passage itself shows us what I mean by the awe. Isaiah saw the seraphim, each with six wings (**Isa 6:2**). With two they covered their faces. They **could not look upon this God**. He was too dazzling in the brightness of his appearance. With two they covered their feet. **They dare not tread carelessly here**. His presence makes the whole heavenly throne room

completely other. With two they flew. These guardian light-bearers of fire and splendor **move to and fro** watching over and attending to God's palace like angelic priests.

As they do it, one calls out to the other, “**Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory**” (3). **Holiness** is a word that signifies “**otherness.**” It is otherness from a pure and incorruptible source—from God himself. When we say that God is holy, we are saying that God is not like us, **he is “other” than us.**³

In other parts of the Scripture, holiness does things to people. In Leviticus, the book of Holiness, things become holy merely by being touched or coming into proximity to something that is holy. We can call it **contagious holiness.** This is not always a good thing. A terrifying example is when the sons of Aaron, **Nadab and Abihu,** went into the Holy Place with “**unauthorized fire.**” Fire itself is an image of holiness. In the previous verse, fire came **down from heaven** and lit altar and consumed the burnt offering and everyone fell on their faces in fear (**Lev 9:24**). In **Lev 10:1**, the brothers put their own

³ Bullinger, in his discussion of the number “three” says, “**There is nothing real in man or of man. Everything ‘under the sun’ and apart from God is ‘vanity.’ ‘Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity’** (Psa 139:5,11, 62:9, 144:4; Eccl 1:2,4, 2:11,17,26, 3:19, 4:4, 11:8, 12:8; Rom 8:20).” **E. W. Bullinger**, *Number in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967; 1894), 108. Bullinger was an Anglican preacher and Ultra-Dispensationalist. While I find his eschatology deeply troubling, I've always enjoyed this particular book.

fire on their censers and went brazenly into the Holy Place with fire “**which he had not commanded them.**” It was fire from a human source, not from God. In the next verse, fire again **came out from before the LORD.** And it again consumed something. This time, it consumed the two priests and they died. The holiness of God spread so quickly, so fiercely, so completely, that they were burned alive. This is why the seraphim cover their faces. Too many people today are like these priests rather than like these holy heavenly beings and they do not understand the kind of Deity they are provoking.

This God is not just once holy, not even twice holy. He is **three-times holy.** Now, modern scholars will say things like, “**The threefold title expresses an idea of divine infinity and sovereignty over history,**”⁴ or a superlative way of saying, “**HOLY, EXCEEDING HOLY**”⁵ But our Fathers in the Church were more courageous speaking of “**the Tri-hypostatic Divinity ... [it] means the Holy Trinity.**”⁶ I see no

⁴ **G. K. Beale**, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 332.

⁵ **Robert H. Mounce**, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 125. He cites the article, **Norman Walker**, “The Origin of the ‘Thrice-Holy,’” *NTS* 5 [1958–59]: 132–33.

⁶ **Andrew of Caesarea**, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ed. David G. Hunter, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, vol. 123, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 84. Athanasius likewise said, “... **glorifying the divine and**

reason why it can't be all of these things, but I especially believe that this **three-fold use of the word refers to his Triune nature**. God is in fact One and Three and God knows that he is Triune. Furthermore, so do the heavenly beings. And, in fact, Revelation 4-5 reveals the Father (sitting on this throne), the Holy Spirit (the seven-fold Spirit), and the Son of God (one like a Lamb who is alone worthy to open the scrolls). This is a fundamental proclamation that the three Persons, as **Athanasius** tells us, are perfectly holy, indistinguishable in holiness one from another.⁷

The second part of the song teaches us about **the power of God**. Not coincidentally, it does it using **three titles**. It calls him **Lord**. Lords have great power. It calls him **God**. Gods have greater power. It calls him **Almighty**. This is his omnipotence—total power. Together, the phrase gives us the Triadic rule of God. It seems to come from a common title in

ineffable nature with the Trisagion.... For the Triad, praised, revered and adored, is one and indivisible and without degrees. It is united without confusion, just as the Monad also is distinguished without separation. For the fact of those venerable living creatures offering their praises three times, saying 'Holy, holy, holy,' proves that the three Subsistences are perfect, just as in saying 'Lord,' they declare the one Essence" (**Athanasius**, *On Luke* 10:22).

⁷ Bullinger is again interesting here as he reflects the older idea. He says, "Three ... stands for that which is solid, real, substantial, complete, and entire. All things that are especially complete are stamped with this number three ... When we turn to the Scriptures, this completion becomes Divine, and marks Divine completeness or perfection ... Three is the number associated with the Godhead, for there are 'three persons in one God. Three times the Seraphim cry, 'Holy, Holy, Holy'—one for each of the three persons in the Trinity (Isa 6:3). The living creatures also in Revelation 4:8." **Bullinger**, 108.

the LXX which translates *Adonai Yahweh Elohe ha-sabaoth* (Lord GOD, the God of Hosts; cf. [Amos 3:13](#); etc.). This is fitting, given what and who are around his throne! Remember, these heavenly hosts are of great power themselves. Ladd says they “execut[e] his rule and his divine will in all the orders of [God’s] creation” and “mediat[e] the divine energy and power in all the world.”⁸ And yet God is the one with *all power*, not them. This God, while Three, is also One. It isn’t the “Lord’s of Hosts” or the “God’s of hosts.” The Three Persons simply are One God, perfect in power, rule, and might.

Finally, God is described temporally with [three verbs](#) of being. *He was. He is. He is to come.* This is the totality of [time](#). There is no other time than this. “[Was](#)” is the past. To say that God “was” is to say that God existed in the past. How far back in the past? All of it.

“Is” is [the present](#). Another way of saying it is “[I AM.](#)” “Am” is a present verb. This is God’s name in [Exodus 3:14](#). The expression is often on the lips of the Lord Jesus, in his seven “I AMs” in John’s Gospel ([John 6:35-48; 8:12; 10:7, 11-](#)

⁸ [George Eldon Ladd](#), *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 77.

14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1-5). To be I AM is to be always present at every time.

“Is to come” is *the future*. But not only is it a statement that he is eternal into the future. It is also a statement that *he is coming* in the future. This means that at the very least, the Lord Jesus Christ is the object of this worship. We also know this because we have seen the statement twice already, both times in the first chapter. The first time was in **Rev 1:4** where it speaks of *the Father* “*who is and who was and who is to come.*” He is distinguished there from the Holy Spirit (“*the seven spirits*”) and “*from Jesus Christ the faithful witness*” (5). However, *Jesus* calls himself “*the Alpha and the Omega ... the Lord God who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” in **vs. 8**, thereby showing that he and the Father are One. We also know it because it is Christ who is coming again and this idea would and should “*enable the suffering readers to perceive his eternal purpose and so motivate them to persevere faithfully through tribulation.*”⁹ *He hasn't forgotten his people.*

A final thing to show you is *what happens in Isaiah's vision* at the sound of this song of the seraphim. When the prophet heard the song, “*All the foundations of the thresholds shook*

⁹ *Beale*, 333.

at the voice” (Isa 6:4) of the seraphim. They sang so loudly, so seriously, so meaningfully, so gloriously that the very temple of heaven began to shake. Their voices reverberated at the perfect frequency, resonating in harmony at a kind of spiritual-molecular level with the temple and Isaiah immediately said, “Woe is me! For I am undone.” In the presence of God, surrounded by the beings singing this song, his first thought was, “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (5).

It is therefore beholding the right God, seeing what he is like, understanding what the very heavens themselves get, that becomes the first and deepest cause of why Christians have always sought to worship in such similar manners for thousands of years. But when they have taken their eyes off of him or have changed him into something that he is not through their imaginative theologies or man-made doctrines or wishful thinking, suddenly the worship experienced by Isaiah and John begin to seem not familiar but alien, archaic, and absurd. Knowing who he is becomes the only corrective for a worshipless or falsely worshiping people.

All this from a song that is only just 16 Greek words long (and five of those are “the”). But this is only the *first* of five

songs in these two chapters. The second is the last one we will look at today. We arrive at it in **vv. 9-10**.

“And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks” (**Rev 4:9**). We have just learned that “whenever” they do this just happens to be “day and night” (**vs. 8**). They are constantly praising “him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever” (**9**). That sounds **repetitious** for two reasons. First, it reinforces the point yet again of who this God is. Second, the structure is now paralleling itself so that we can truly know that the first song is the center of the chapter.

It’s interesting that the only other time that “glory” and “honor” and “thanks” (another triad) appear in the span of one-two verses in the rest of the Bible also deals with worship. But this time, it is **corrupted worship**. Paul charges the entire earth, “Although they knew God, they did not *honor* him as God or give *thanks* to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the *glory* of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (**Rom 1:21-23**). We will return to the verse immediately preceding this one in a moment. For now, do you see how if you will not worship the true God **you nevertheless will give honor, thanks, and**

glory to something and/or someone else? Like I said, this is inevitable. Therefore, you must come to see the One whom this is properly and lawfully given.

Whenever the four living creatures do this, the **twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever (Rev 4:10)**. We saw last time the parallel in John's Gospel that when Jesus said, "**I am he,**" the men with their torches on their way to put Jesus on trial "fell down." They could not take even the tiniest glimpse of the glory of Jesus. Just his Name alone terrified them. The only reason they were able to arrest him is because he allowed them to do it.

When they fall down, they **cast their crowns before the throne (10b)**. Remember, crowns are a **symbol of royalty** and royalty only belongs to those in the family of the King. Here, they are acknowledging that the only one who truly deserves any kind of royal title is God Almighty, the Lord of Hosts. He is their Lord.

When they fall, they sing, "**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**" (11). It is interesting that "**our Lord and God**" was a title that **Emperor Domitian** forced people to use for him, and perhaps

there is a nod here to the same Romans who exiled the Apostle on the isle of Patmos that he was never going to bow to their Caesar.¹⁰ But more to the point I believe is that John hears the same things heard by OT saints. God's worship never changes, because God never changes. The Psalmist says, "*Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, my God and my Lord!*" (Ps 35:23). David sings, "*Yours, I LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours*" (1Ch 29:11). And Nebuchadnezzar cries out, "*to the one creating ... all things*" and "*according to his will he acts in the power of heaven and in the habitation of the earth*" (Dan 4:37 [LXX], 35 [Θ]). It's more than interesting that the saints on earth mirror the language of the saints in heaven.

Let's finish "the who" of worship by simply thinking about the content of these songs. All the songs of worship in Revelation 4-5 have as their objective content the works and attributes of God. They are not subjective feelings about how someone might want him to be. Nor is their content focused

¹⁰ Some have used this to prove a late date for Revelation, saying that it was only Domitian who used this title. Others have argued that this title does not come from the OT. Parker has demonstrated that both are flawed ideas. See Floyd O. Parker, "Our Lord and God' in Rev 4,11: Evidence for the Late Date of Revelation?" *Biblica* 82 (2001): 207-231. <https://www.bsw.org/biblica/vol-82-2001/our-lord-and-god-in-rev-4-11-evidence-for-the-late-date-of-revelation/259/article-p207.html>.

on our response to him. The former never has a place; the latter often comes out in the Psalms. But if we do not root our worship in who God actually is, our worship will almost immediately become corrupted by the imaginations of our hearts and we will turn quickly inward and begin to give that glory, honor, and thanks **to the creation rather than the Creator** who is forever praised. This is a lesson **Christians of each generation have to relearn**, because our natural tendency is to focus in our ourselves. You must each be gripped personally with who the God is you have come to worship today. Only then can there be any kind of an appropriate response—a response that, as we have seen with Isaiah, begins with repentance and acknowledgement that we have fallen short of his glory; an acceptance that through Christ he extends mercy and forgiveness, and a response of thankfulness that arises out of these objective truths of the Gospel. In fact, that’s the very lesson of Chapter 5, which we will look at next time.

The “How” of Worship

For the remainder of our time in Chapter 4, I want to do something I did not have time to do last week. Given that the

four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are still before our attention, it is still quite appropriate. I want to show you in a way not many think about just why it is that worship has remained so consistent throughout the centuries, even through various cultures and tastes and habits. Revelation 4 is impressing upon the church not only who to worship, but what worship is like in the heavenly temple. And this becomes the reason why Christian worship on earth has remained so consistent.

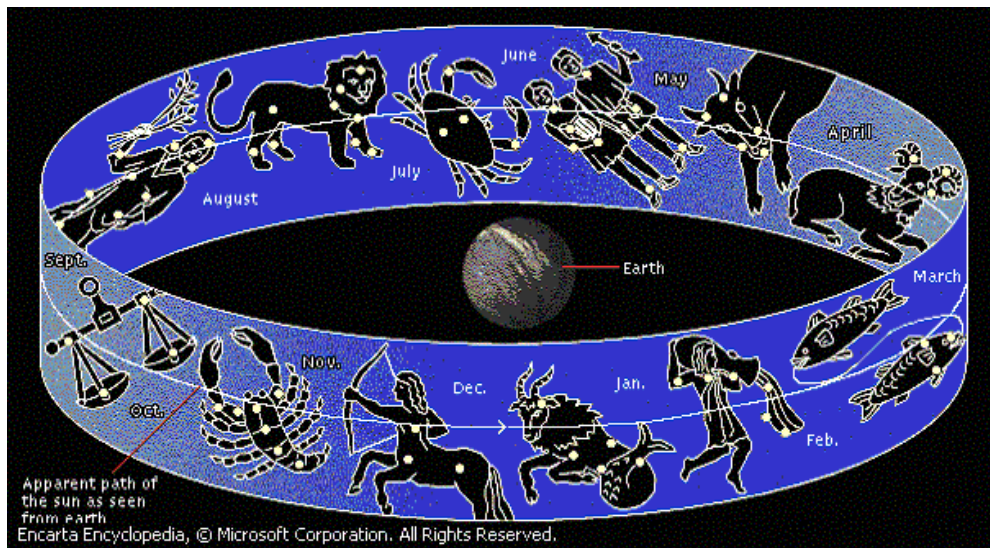
To get at this, I want you to recall that we are in the heavenly temple. There is the seven-fold spirit of God here who is represented earlier in the book by the candlestick. There is the great glassy sea here, which is represented in Solomon's Sea which itself was a mega-sized washing laver of the tabernacle. Finally, God is on his throne, which is represented by the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. God did something through Moses which a lot of people don't seem to understand.

Over and over and over again we are told, "Moses did; according to all that the LORD commanded him, so he did" (Ex 40:16; cf. 32:28; 39:42; Num 3:16; 8:4; etc.). This happened because God had told him, "See that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the

mountain” (Ex 25:40). “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” (Ex 25:9). Why was this so important? Why couldn’t he fudge a little? Why couldn’t he add his own interesting suggestions to the way the tabernacle and the camp of Israel and the armies and so many other things were to be?

Hebrews explains the reason. Moses was making “copies of the heavenly things” (Heb 9:23; 8:5). In other words, God was making earthly worship to mirror heavenly worship. The copies extended far and wide, to the sanctuary, its furnishings, its precinct and precise locations, and even beyond.

Let’s return to the elders and the living creatures. What did I suggest that they are? The four living creatures, with their heads of a bull, a lion, a man, and an eagle are four indescribable creatures that surround and guard the invisible throne of God in heaven. However, they are represented in the creation in the four cardinal constellations of the zodiac: Taurus, Leo, Aquarius, and Scorpio (which in ancient days was often an eagle). The eyes all around them are represented especially in the eight other constellations (eyes = stars) of the zodiac which together encircle the globe.



The **twenty-four** are the eldest of God’s invisible family represented by the remaining “decans” or twelve constellations above the zodiac and twelve below it (giving us thirty-six) that allowed ancient peoples to calculate a year and thus create a calendar system.

Recall that from the perspective of earth, there is one star in the entire night sky that never appears to move. This is the fixed “**north star.**” All other constellations appear to be spinning around it like a wheel spins around an axis. Curiously, this week I was reading that just above the north star is the constellation **Cepheus**. He was the king of mythical Ethiopia in the stories. But he is always depicted as a crowned king who appears to be sitting on a throne (sometimes Ursa Minor, the Little Dipper, was viewed as the throne or a chariot),¹¹ and he

¹¹ See Nuttall, 473; MacKenzie, 330.

has holds a staff or a [scroll \(think Rev 5\)](#).¹² With him at the center of the universe, you can go to astronomical software and take a screen shot that looks basically identical to the description of the throne scene in Rev 4.



Cepheus, Urania's Mirror, 1825



Screenshots taken in Stellarium.¹³

¹² Curiously, three of his stars were known in Arabia as Alderamin (“Right Arm”), Alfirk (“A Flock”), and Errai (the “Shepherd”). These are all ideas circulating around Revelation 5. On the names and a fascinating discussion of Cepheus see [William Tyler Olcott](#), *Star Lore of All Ages: A Collection of Myths, Legends, and Facts Concerning the Constellations of the Northern Hemisphere* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1911), esp. 139.

¹³ Per last sermon, I’ve [changed Scorpio to the ancient eagle](#). I also [turned Ursa Minor](#), usually the “Little Bear” (sometimes, interestingly, a throne or a chariot) [into a mountain range](#). Why? [Isaiah 14:13-14](#) has Lucifer, sometimes called the Dragon, but here called the Morning Star ascending “[above the stars of God](#)” and setting his “[throne on high on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north](#).” The Babylonians called [Polaris](#) (the *North Star*) Anshar, “[Star of Height](#)” (Mackenzie, 330). The Finns called it Tahti, “[The star at the top of the heavenly mountain](#)” (Nuttall, 473). Polaris was “[situated at the summit of the celestial mountain](#)” (332). “[The old German manuscript ... Ursa Minor under the North Pole ... is called by another name Tramontane](#) (i.e. because on one side [of the Mons Coelius](#) [Mountain of Heaven or Mount of the Universe], [whereon sits the Pole Star](#)” (Hinkley, 451). Nuttall writes, “[Thor’s hammer symbolizes the union of the Above and Below, the heaven represented by the horizontal line resting on the perpendicular support, symbolizing the sacred pole, column, mountain and tree intimately associated with Polaris, the world axis](#)” (474). [Donald A. Mackenzie](#), *Mythology of the Babylonian People* (London: The Gresham Publishing Company, 1915). [Zeilia Nuttall](#), *The Fundamental Principles of Old and New World Civilizations: A Comparative Research Based on a Study of the Ancient Mexican Religious, Sociological and Calendrical Systems*, Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum Harvard University Vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Agents for the Museum Publications, 1901). [Richard Hinkley](#)

The point of reviewing this is to help us see that God patterned into the very heavens something of what the invisible realm is like. And, indeed, in some way that I do not fully understand, there is a real and true connection between those invisible heavenly creatures and the physical starry host counterparts. Hence, angels are often called stars. And in fact, these stars say things. This is precisely what the OT also teaches us.

For example, Psalm 19, which begins as a short reflection upon Genesis 1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of god, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Ps 19:1-4a). Notice: “declare,” “proclaim,” “speech,” “knowledge,” “speech,” “words,” “voice,” “voice,” “words.” The heavens are saying something. This is

Allen, *Star-Names and their Meanings* (New York: G. E. Stechert, 1899). Also John O’Neill, *The Night of the Gods: An Inquiry into Cosmic and Cosmogonic Mythology and Symbolism* Volume 1 (London: Harrison & Sons, 1893), 507-08.

Notice also that the Milky Way looks like a rainbow (Rev 4:3) over the throne and the glassy sea (4:6) is the starry heaven. As Exodus says, “and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Ex 24:10). On many astronomical interpretations of Revelation, including this, see Harold Hemenway, *European History Foretold: A Fascinating Account Proving God’s Hand in History. Fulfilled Bible Prophecies from the First Century until Today* (Xulon Press, 2007). Note: This book is obviously an Historicist reading of Revelation. Seems like a Seventh Day Adventist. But his astronomical connections are fascinating.

exactly why it is important to see how the constellations exactly depict the throne-room scene of Revelation 4. They are saying something, singing, praising God.

But they say more. **Genesis 1:14** tells us, “God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for *signs* and seasons, and for days and years.” **Signs say things**. But what exactly are they saying? At the very least, they are telling us about God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature” which are “clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world” (**Rom 1:20**). This leaves all men, the Apostle Paul says, without excuse. They know these things about the true God. Everyone does.

But in fact, the Apostle says more. Later in the book, he starts talking about **the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ for salvation** (**Rom 10:9-10**). But to believe in him, people have to first *hear* about him. But someone objects that not everyone has heard about Jesus (**Rom 10:18**). To answer the question, the Apostle quotes the OT. “I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’” (**18**). The astounding thing is that **Paul is quoting from Psalm 19:4** which isn’t about human preachers, but about the starry

heavens. In the context of Romans, he can only mean that they have told all people *about Christ*.

There have been many attempts by Christians in the last 100 or so years to tell us how the Zodiac teaches about the “**Gospel in the Stars**.”¹⁴ Many of these have been met with serious skepticism, and sometimes, rightly so.¹⁵ My own current opinion is that in some places we see **imaginative** ideas at work. Sometimes there is **special pleading** for older signs that end up stretching the argument too thin, and too much should not be made of them. However, I do think that Paul’s comments here necessitate some kind of a kernel of truth going on here. Perhaps even more than most of us are comfortable accepting.

¹⁴ Here is an incomplete bibliography. **Frances Rolleston**, *Mazzaroth—The Constellations* (London: Rivingtons, 1862), http://iapsop.com/ssoc/1862_rolleston_mazzaroth.pdf; **Joseph A. Seiss**, *The Gospel in the Stars* (Philadelphia: United Lutehran Publication House, 1884), https://archive.org/details/gospelinstarsorp00seis_0; **E. W. Bullinger**, *Witness of the Stars* (London: 1893), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/49018/49018-h/49018-h.html>; **William D. Banks**, *The Heavens Declare: Jesus Christ Prophesied in the Stars* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1985, 2013); **D. James Kennedy**, *The Real Meaning of the Zodiac* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: CRM, 1989); **Christopher L. Pepler**, *The Book of Revelation: In the Light of the Stars* (South African Theological Seminary Press, 2019); **Rav Sha’ul**, *Creation Cries Out: The Book of the Mazzaroth*, third edition (2015), <https://docplayer.net/docview/67/57574634/#file=/storage/67/57574634/57574634.pdf>. On specifics in Revelation see **Jacques M. Chevalier**, *A Postmodern Revelation: Signs of Astrology and the Apocalypse* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1997); **Bruce J. Malina** and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000); **Ernest L. Martin**, *The Star that Astonished the World* (Academy for Scriptural Knowledge, 1991): chapter 5, <https://www.askelm.com/star/>.

¹⁵ Seiss and Bullinger were both heavily Dispensationalists. Sha’ul is an outright heretic who denies the Trinity. Pepler’s work is quite interesting and he is a solid Evangelical, as was Kennedy. But their works are all interesting, so long as they are read with discernment.

This is easily seen in the zodiacal comment made immediately after this in **Psalm 19:4**. “In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man, runs its course with joy” (**Ps 19:4b-5**). In the very verse Paul quotes as telling us about Christ, commentators have long known that this deals with the Zodiac, especially with the way the sun traverses its “line” through the twelve during the course of the year.¹⁶ Spurgeon doesn’t go too far and puts it only as he can when he says,

As the material sun, through the twelve signs of the Zodiac, goes forth from the uttermost parts of the heaven, and run[s] about to the end of it again: in like sort, the spiritual *Sun of Righteousness*, by the twelve apostles, as by twelve signs, has been born round about the world, that he might be not only “the glory of his people Israel,” but

¹⁶ **Adam Clarke** writes, “Which is as a bridegroom, etc. - This is a reference to the rising of the sun, as the following verse is to the setting. He makes his appearance above the horizon with splendor and majesty; every creature seems to rejoice at his approach; and during the whole of his course, through his whole circuit, his apparent revolution from east to west, and from one tropic to the same again, no part of the earth is deprived of its proper proportion of light and heat. The sun is compared to a bridegroom in his ornaments, because of the glory and splendour of his rays; and to a giant or strong man running a race, because of the power of his light and heat. The apparent motion of the sun, in his diurnal and annual progress, are here both referred to ... The apparent revolution of the sun through the twelve constellations of the zodiac in a sidereal year, is caused by the earth’s making one complete revolution in its orbit in the same time ...” (*Clarke’s Commentary* on Psalm 19:5). More recently, see **Stuart S. Miller**, “Epigraphical’ Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94.1 (2004): 27–76; **Michael S. Heiser**, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers & The Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 56-58 (Heiser does not hold to the Gospel in the Stars idea, but rather that the stars foretold the arrival of the divine king ala Rev 12).

also “a light to lighten the Gentiles;” and that all, “*all* the ends of the earth might see the salvation of our God.”¹⁷

In summary, the visible heavens are speaking to us about the worship going on in the invisible realm. They are saying something to us about Christ and our Triune God. They are praising him and indeed causing us to praise him. But it is this last thought that makes its way to us in a most remarkable mirror between heaven and earth. For this last point today, we need to go back to the camp of Israel in the desert.

It isn't only the tabernacle and its furnishings that had to be made in precisely the way God wanted it. It was also the way Israel was to camp around this great tabernacle, this home of God on earth. “The people,” that is the Israelites whom God told Abraham would be as numerous as “the stars of the sky” (Gen 15:5), “shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their father's houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side” (Num 2:2). On the east, it tells us, “toward the sunrise shall be the standard of the camp of Judah” (3-4). Issachar and Zebulun are next to him (5-9). They are to set out first. On the south side “shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben” (10-11). Simeon and Gad are next to

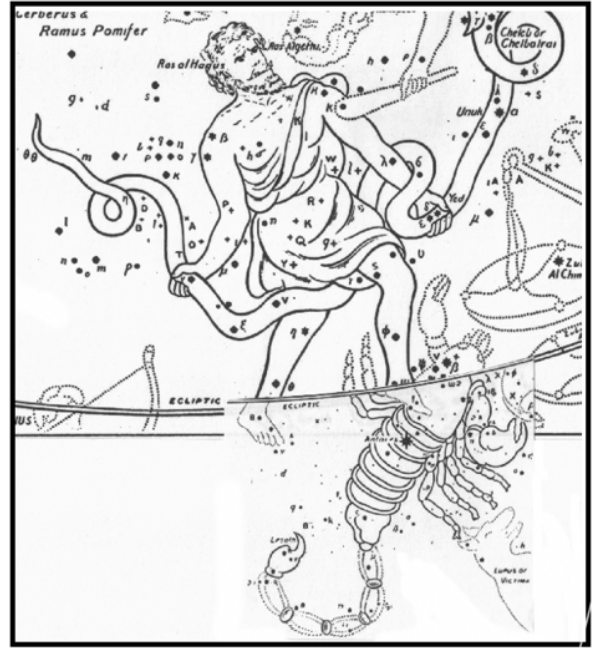
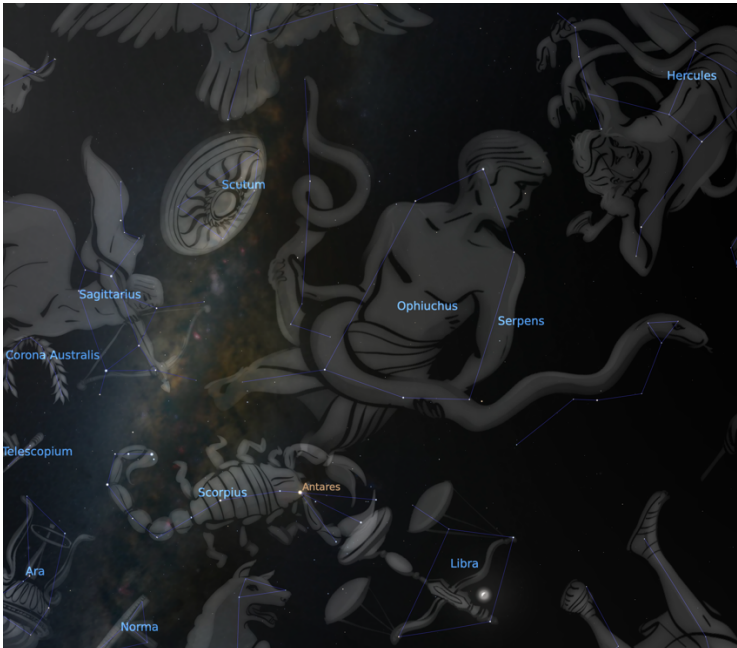
¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 282.

him (12-16). They set out second. Then the tent of meeting sets out with all the Levites (17). On the west is Ephraim (18-19). Manasseh and Benjamin are next to him (20-24). They set out third on the march. On the north is Dan (25-26). Asher and Naphtali are next to him (27-31).

But what does it mean “their banner?” Well, each tribe was assigned a symbol. This reaches all the way back to Jacob in his last will and testament to his twelve sons in Genesis 49. It is an extremely ancient and bizarre chapter to read, until you understand what’s going on. We’ll only look at four of the banners here.

He calls Reuben “my firstborn [son]” (Gen 49:3) who is “unstable as water” (4). Judah is a lion (Gen 49:9). Dan is a serpent (17). Joseph is likened to an ox or a bull (6, see Jerusalem Targum and Dt 33:13, 17). Of course, Joseph gets two tribes around the camp while the Levites are spread out. This means Manasseh is a bull. I’m sure you recognize three of the four. The lion, man, and bull are identical to three of the four living creatures which are represented in heaven by Leo, Aquarius (the water-man!), and Taurus. The serpent is different from the eagle. But recall that the eagle was another way of thinking about Scorpio. Sometimes, rather than Scorpio being used, the constellation that overlaps it,

Ophiuchus, replaced it. And what is that? It is a man holding a serpent.¹⁸



What you end up with here is essentially an earthly counterpart of the zodiac, all revolving around the central throne of God. And in fact, the Israelites later depicted

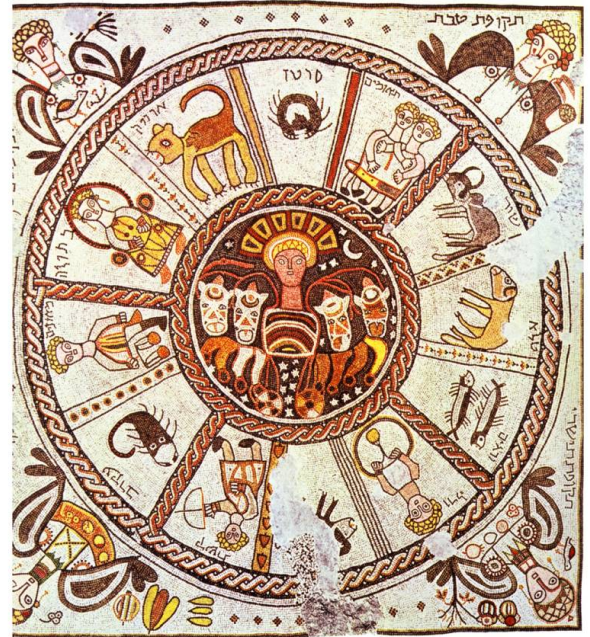
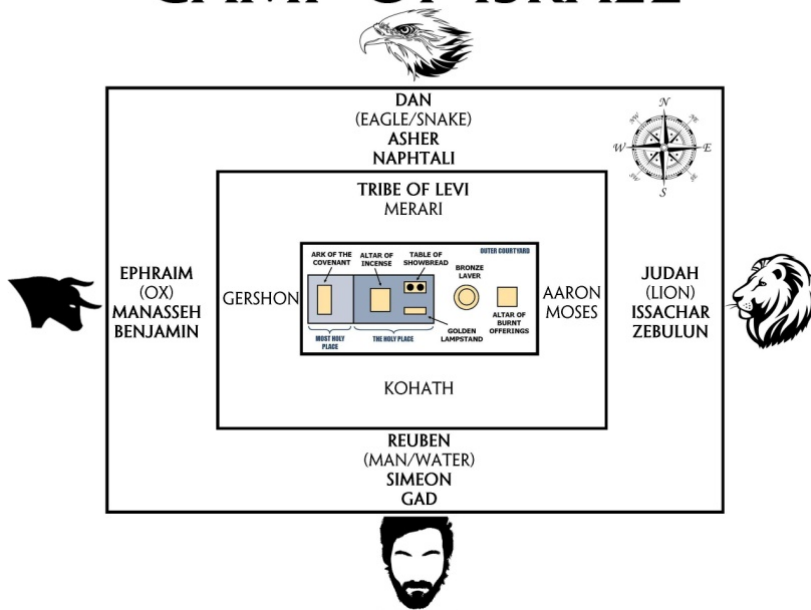
18

I believe the reason Dan becomes a serpent rather than an eagle or a scorpion is because that tribe also ended up settling in the north, just like he did around the Tabernacle. This happens to be the land of Bashan, which in Ugarit is *Batan*, which means “serpent,” named after the serpentine-seraphim watchers who came down on Mt. Hermon (Dan is in Hermon’s shadow) and celebrated in the serpent mound right next to the Wheel of the giants. Dan is north. In one sense, Reuben is south and Judah is east (only the Philistines are “east” of Judah). Ephraim, however, is not west. God did let the tribes choose where they would settle.



themselves as the Zodiac.¹⁹ The Levites (priests) become the guardian cherubim, and curiously, David later organized the temple servants into **twenty-four orders of Levites** who were “**to prophesy in giving thanks and praising the Lord**” (1Ch 25:6-31; Josephus, *Antiquities* 7.363-67). **Earth is mirroring heaven.** Most specifically, earthly *worship*, for this is the people of God around the sanctuary of God, is mirroring heavenly worship.

CAMP OF ISRAEL



To put it into **Hebrews language** again, **Israel became a kind of copy** of the heavens. So much of that book is about worship, and we learn from it that Jesus had to enter into the

¹⁹ For much more on this, including how Christians would later do the same thing, see my sermon, “Genesis 49: A Boot to the Head.” (May 24, 2015), <https://www.rbcnc.com/Genesis%2049.1-28%20A%20Boot%20to%20the%20Head.pdf>.

heavenly places to make a final atonement for them which was only copied in the sacrifices of Israel. And this was so that Jesus would be all-in-all, not copies. **Worship is about God**: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To them alone it belongs. Since the beginning of creation, the sons of God have been praising God for his works (**Job 38:1-7**). Then God made man after his image and set it in our hearts to worship the Creator. But we fell into great sin and began exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images of man and birds and animals and reptiles. But God did not leave us in darkness.

He came to Abraham and covenanted with him, telling him he would have descendants **as numerous as the stars**. This wasn't just a point about having a lot of descendants. It was a point that they would in fact mirror the heavenly worshiping living creatures and twenty-four elders. The worship of the one would become the worship of the other. God heavenly and earthly families would be one in their worship. There would be no changes in this basic worship, for any change would corrupt what we are to know and learn about God from it.

That tabernacle camp, however, was only a very small part of this world. And the Psalms predicted that Jesus would inherit the whole earth. They tell us that the whole creation

would sing forth the praises of God. This begins in [the expanding of the church from one tribe to all tribes](#), from one nation to all nations, from twelve sons of Jacob to the twelve Apostles of Jesus who spread out to the four corners of the earth to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

As we will even in chapter 5, this worship is expanding throughout the whole world! Christian worship simply takes over as the true Jewish worship. It is [the same worship](#) as it ever was, because it is [the same God](#) as always. Thus, understanding the heavenly worship of Revelation 4 and how God then patterns this into Israel and the church, helps you understand why tampering with God's worship was chief among all the reasons there even was a Reformation.

Those simple elements of worship: [singing](#) and [thanksgiving](#), [proclaiming](#) and [teaching](#), [baptizing](#) and [communing](#) around the objective truth that God is holy, holy, holy, and that to him alone belong glory, honor, and power are what unites our praises down through the centuries. To remove them is to remove the [candlestick](#) or the [showbread](#) or the [washing laver](#) or the [priestly singers](#), or [the word of God](#) itself. Christians have always known this. But when these are present, we may know that God is as near "as his word" as Paul goes on to say in Romans 10. And that Word is the living

Christ, to whom we will turn our gaze in Revelation 5, and to whom we now lift up our voices in praise as we prepare to eat together in heavenly places in the Lord's Supper.

Do not leave this place until you know for certain that you are fulfilling your chief end, not in the worship of yourself or some created thing, or even the stars of heaven who have corrupted themselves and will one day roll away like a scroll ([Isa 34:4](#)). Consider the ironic contrast between the worship of the elders and living creatures vs. that which Jesus received in the parallel in John. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive honor ... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive ... honor" ([Rev 4:11; 5:12](#)). On the other hand, "Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country" ([John 4:44](#)). Do not be consumed by the holiness of God in your rejection of him.

Leave this place knowing that you have trusted in Holy Jesus alone to save you by his Holy Spirit. And consider a second parallel in the same chapter of John. The heavenly creatures fell down and worshiped him who sits on the throne ([Rev 4:9-10](#)). Jesus told the woman at the well, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" ([John 4:23](#)). That hour is now. This is what we've been talking about. And so

in the church, or wherever you are, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the Glory of God (1Co 10:3). For this is the chief end that God created you. Fulfill that end by praising him.

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