



The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

SESSION 4. A GLIMPSE THROUGH THE DOOR (4:1–5:14).

I. Behold, a door standing open...

A. Looking for the door.

When Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, the way back home was blocked by an angel with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). Ever since, we have been groping and searching in hopes of finding “the door” that will lead us back to life as it was meant to be.

1. The **tower of Babel** was a noble attempt to reach “the gate of heaven”¹ (Gen. 11:1–11). The dramatic failure was an eternal object lesson that man, in his own strength and piety, can never find the way to heaven.
2. The revelation of **Jacob’s ladder (stairway)** was God’s solution to a problem that man could not fix. There was indeed a “door” between this world and the next but only God could build it and show man how to find it (Gen. 28:12).
3. The Gospel announces that **Jesus** himself is that ladder (John 1:51). He is **the door** that enables a person to come and go into the very presence of God (John 10:7–10).

Conclusion: There is only **one way** to connect with the other world: through Jesus Christ. The door may be narrow (Luke 13:22–30) but it leads to glorious life, vast and abundant. Finding the door is what life is all about!

B. When the door was cracked open.

At key moments in Biblical history, the heavens were **opened** revealing and confirming God’s heavenly purposes for our earthly realities: Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek. 1:1), Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:16), the first martyrdom (Acts 7:56), the Gentiles are welcomed into God’s family (Acts 10:11), and when Christ returns in glory (Rev. 19:11).

C. Revelation has much to say about doors and keys (1:18; 3:7–8, 20; 4:1).

John sees **a door open** in heaven. It is only because of the door that John is able to understand the purposes of God for the church and for the world.

II. What John saw and heard (4:1–5:14).

A. The door (4:1). A voice like a trumpet issues an invitation:

- *Come up here... But **where** is heaven? Is it “up”?*
- *I will show you what must take place after this...*

¹ Babel in Hebrew means “gate of god.”



B. The throne (4:2–11).

1. The One on the throne (4:2–3, 5–6).
 - a. Heaven is not seen as a temple but rather a **throne room** of “the Lord God Almighty” (4:8), who lives forever (4:9–10).
 - b. Rather than attempting to describe the One he saw, John speaks of the bright light reflected from precious stones (jasper, carnelian and emerald) (3).
 - c. The **rainbow** reminds us of God’s covenant with Noah. Though disaster is coming on the earth, God has not forgotten his promise (3).
2. The ones around the throne (4:4–7).
 - a. 24 elders on 24 thrones (4).
 - The number 24 probably signifies 12 tribes and 12 apostles (see 21:12–14).
 - **White** garments connote redemption in the blood of the Lamb (7:14).
 - **Crowns** on their heads (I Cor. 9:25; II Tim. 4:7–8; Jam. 1:12; I Pet. 5:4).
 - b. 4 living creatures (6–7).
 - Full of eyes in front and behind (6)... all around and within (8).
 - A lion, an ox, the face of a man, an eagle in flight (7).
 - Each has six wings (8).
3. What they are doing around the throne (4:8–11).
 - a. **Singing** constantly² (8,11).

*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come! (4:8).*

NOTE: This hymn praises God for **who he is** and mentions 3 attributes:

- His **holiness**.
- His **omnipotence**.
- His **eternity**.

*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 (4:11).*

NOTE: This hymn praises God for **what he has done**, namely in **creation**.

- b. Giving **glory** and **honor** and **thanks** (9)
- c. Falling down in worship (10).
- d. Casting their crowns continually before the throne (10). A crown represents power and **control** as well as wealth, victory and honor. To

² God’s people have always been a singing people. Even in Babylon! There are five hymns in this passage.

cast one's crown before the throne is to be fully and unreservedly surrendered to God.

NOTE: So far, John's vision of heaven could have been written by any Jew. It is only in the next chapter that his vision becomes "Christian." In chapter 4 God is worshiped as sovereign king for his role in **creation** but in chapter 5 God is worshiped as the Lamb for his work of **redemption**.

C. The scroll (5:1–5).

1. The description of the scroll (1).

The scroll apparently contains the full and detailed account of what God is about to do. It is the record of the destiny of the world. It is **history** written in **advance**. Unless the scroll is opened God's purposes for the future will be thwarted. John weeps because human existence is now meaningless. Perhaps Shakespeare was right:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage
and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot,
full of sound and fury signifying nothing. —Macbeth*

2. But who can open the seals? (2–5).

It takes more than power and authority to open the seals. It takes someone who is **worthy**. John is told that the Lion of Judah is worthy to open the scroll. When he looks, John sees a **Lamb**.

D. The Lamb (5:6–14).

1. Who he is and what he does (6–7).

The Lion is the Lamb! The Lamb has 7 horns³ and 7 eyes and bears the wounds of **sacrificial slaughter**. Note it well: the one who is going to preside over the Last Judgment is "the Lamb, the crucified, the stripped, the annihilated, the weakest of all men, the one who has neither beauty, nor honor, nor power" (Ellul, p. 117).

2. The response of heaven and earth (8–14).

The 4 creatures and the 24 elders fall down before the Lamb in worship each having a harp and bowls of incense (prayers). They sing a **new** song⁴ (8–9).

*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth. (5:9–10).*

NOTE: No longer are the angelic beings praising Almighty God for his work in creation. Now they are praising **the Lamb** for his work in redemption.

Myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of angels⁵ begin to sing (11):

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom
and might and honor and glory and blessing! (5:12).*

³ In the Old Testament, the horn stands for both power and honor.

⁴ The song is "new" not only in terms of time. It is new also in terms of quality.

⁵ A myriad is 10,000. Therefore, 10,000 times 10,000 then multiplied by 1,000 times 1,000, comes to 100 trillion.

Every creature in **heaven** and on **earth** and in **the sea** began to sing:

*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
Be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! (5:13).
And the four living creatures said, “**Amen!**” (5:14).*

III. Worship 101.

When we look through the door to see what is going on in that other world, we see worship! The worship of heaven is the prototype and **model** for every worship service on earth. In recent “worship wars” the focus generally is on things like screens vs hymn books, guitars vs organs, choirs vs worship teams, etc. But if the following three elements are absent, worship is not authentically worship, regardless what **style** it claims to be.

- A. Seeing God **truly**. “If your concept of God is wrong, then the more religious you become the more dangerous you become to yourself and to others.” (William Temple). This passage tells us that the One we worship is holy, majestic, eternal, the Creator, triune, and that worship is centered on the Lamb.
- B. Praising God **passionately**. In the heavenly worship service there is weeping, bowing, and lots of singing. No one slept during that worship service! Worship is a verb (Robert Webber). Most people think that in worship the congregation is the audience, the people on the platform are the performers, and God is the prompter. No! God is **the audience!** The people on the platform are the prompters and the people in the pews are the performers (Kierkegaard).
- C. Offering ourselves **completely**. The worshipers in heaven cast their crowns continuously before the throne. To worship is to surrender everything to the Lamb. “I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual **act of worship**” (Rom. 12:1). And all God’s people said, “**Amen!**”

TABLE TALK

1. Describe what a typical worship service is like in your church. How is it similar to the worship of heaven? How is it different?
2. Christianity has been called a “singing religion.” Why? Is this still true? Is there a song in your heart?
3. Revelation 4–5 speaks of worshiping God for his work in creation and worshiping the Lamb for his work in redemption. Are both realities supposed to be present in every worship service?
4. Did you notice the Trinity in our Scripture today? God is one and yet three. How does this impact worship?
5. Have you been involved in the “worship wars” of recent years? What did you learn? Has this study confirmed your ideas about worship or changed them?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ellul, Jacques. Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation. New York: Seabury Press, 1977.