

Revelation 4: The Church and the Twenty-Four Elders

Revelation 4:6–11 | Sunday, February 22 | Revelation Series

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OVERVIEW

The message opens where the last one stopped, on the question of when the Church began. Hal takes it back to Peter's confession and to the Greek behind "upon this rock" — petros, a little stone, against the petra on which the Church is actually built — and then forward to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came and for the first time took permanent residence in believers. That, he says, is the Church: every believer baptized into union with Christ, bone of his bone. From there he explains the seven spirits of God out of Isaiah 11:2, counting seven characteristics of the Spirit in a prophecy given 750 years before the Messiah was born, and chases a rabbit through Deuteronomy 6:4 and the Hebrew words Elohim and echad — one, but with plurality inside the oneness. Then back to Revelation 4:6. The four living creatures around the throne are, Hal believes, the four Gospels: the lion of Matthew, the ox of Mark, the man of Luke, the flying eagle of John. And the elders fall down and cast their crowns.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Revelation 4:6–8 — The sea of glass; four living creatures full of eyes, crying holy, holy, holy

Revelation 4:9–11 — The twenty-four elders fall down and cast their crowns before the throne

Isaiah 11:1 — A shoot from the stem of Jesse; a branch from his roots will bear fruit

Isaiah 11:2 — The sevenfold Spirit resting on the Messiah — Hal's key to the seven spirits of God

Deuteronomy 6:4 — Hear, O Israel — the Lord our God is one

Genesis — "Let us make man in our image" — plurality inside the one God

Matthew 3:7 — John the Baptist and the brood of vipers who came for baptism

KEY TERMS

Petros — "a little stone" — the masculine Greek word behind Peter's name; Hal says today we would have said "Rocky"

The Church — every believer baptized by the Holy Spirit into union with Christ — bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh

The seven spirits of God — the complete perfection of the Holy Spirit's character; Hal counts seven characteristics in Isaiah 11:2

Echad — the Hebrew word for "one" in Deuteronomy 6:4 — one in essence, with a concept of plurality within that oneness

The four living creatures — the four Gospel accounts of Jesus, living words that constantly remind us of his multifaceted glory

Pros ton theon — “face to face with God” — the phrase at the opening of John’s Gospel that shows the Word’s independent personality

Holy, holy, holy — what the living creatures never cease to say, day and night, before the throne

Baptism — something you do after you have believed and repented — Hal argues the phrase should read “because of repentance,” not “for repentance”

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer from the message itself. Every answer is in the teaching.

1. When and by whom was the Church first mentioned?

2. What is Hal's argument from the Greek about “upon this rock”?

3. When did the Church actually begin, and what created it?

4. What does Hal say about denominations?

5. Where does Hal find the seven spirits of God, and how old is that prophecy?

6. Name the seven characteristics Hal counts, and say what the fifth and sixth emphasize.

7. What does Hal say the mystery of the Trinity is — and what it is not?

8. How does Deuteronomy 6:4 show plurality inside the one God?

9. What are the four living creatures, in Hal's reading?

10. Match each creature to its Gospel, and to what that Gospel emphasizes.

11. What does Hal bring out of the Greek at the opening of John’s Gospel?

12. Why do the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne?

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Hal defines the real Church as every believer baptized by the Spirit into union with Christ. How does that definition sit beside the church you actually attend?

2. Peter gets a commendation and a gentle put-down in the same breath. What does that say about how God uses people who speak before they think?

3. Isaiah described the Spirit resting on the Messiah 750 years before he was born. What does a prophecy that old do to your confidence in the rest of the book?

4. Hal says God is one in essence with plurality inside that oneness, and calls it mind-blowing. Where do you find yourself wanting a doctrine to be simpler than it is?

5. Four accounts were needed to bring out the beauty of one person. Which of the four Gospels has shown you something the others did not?

6. There will be no boasters in heaven. Where does the instinct to take a little of the credit still show up in you?

MEMORY VERSE

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they exist, and were created."

— Revelation 4:11, as Hal reads it in this message