

# Do Rev 4-5 and 19:1-10 Refer to the Judgment?

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## Introduction

In a recent paper I claimed that Rev 4-5 is parallel to both Dan 7 and the early verses of Rev 19.<sup>1</sup> What these chapters all have in common was said to be that they deal with the final judgment in heaven.

In his 1985 commentary on Revelation,<sup>2</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell argues that Rev 4-5 and Dan 7:9-14 refer to different sets of events. He concludes by stating:

Inasmuch, then, as the events, the description, the emphases, and the locations of the two scenes are all different, we may conclude that Revelation 4 and 5 and Daniel 7:9-14 describe not the same but different scenes. Only Daniel 7:9-14 portrays the judgment.<sup>3</sup>

## Dan 7:9-14 in Relation to Rev 4-5

Below I restate the case for a parallel between Dan 7:9-14 and Rev 4-5, with Rev 19:1-10 included as well, and argue that all three passages deal with the final judgment.

Two points should be made at the outset. First, my purpose should not be misinterpreted. In a book so large as Maxwell's (573 pp.) there is going to be something for everyone to disagree with if they choose to do so. Here I am not just trying to be perverse, but continue to explore a set of ideas that was brought up for discussion earlier. And second, what I say here is not all that could be said on the topic. By this I do not mean that the present paper could have been made longer. This would be true of any paper. What I mean is that there are other things to say – not just more things and not different or contradictory things, but other things. The topic has not been exhausted.

### The case against a parallel

The main points of Maxwell's argument are as follows: (1) In Dan 7 the thrones referred to are set in place while the prophet looks on, but in Rev 4 the thrones are already in place. (2) In Dan 7 the Son of man is seen arriving at the place of judgment, but in Rev 4 the Son of man is already there. (3) In Dan 7 the books used in judgment are already open, but in Rev 5 the scroll John sees is sealed and needs to be opened. This can only be done by the Lamb at the center of the throne.<sup>4</sup> And finally, (4) the events that take place in Rev 4-5 are not labeled a judgment scene. See table 1.

Table 1  
Proposed Differences Between  
Dan 7:9-14 and Rev 4-5

Dan 7:9-14	Rev 4-5
1	Thrones set in place Thrones already in place
2	Son of man arrives Son of man already there
3	Books already open Scroll closed, then opened
4	No mention Lamb only can open scroll
5	Judgment scene Not labeled a judgment scene

In points 1 to 3 the contrast is between a state of affairs starting and continuing (for points 1 and 2 a given condition starts in Dan 7, for point 3 it starts in Rev 4-5), while in points 4 and 5 it is that between stating and not stating a given fact overtly (on point 4 Dan 7 is silent, on point 5 Rev 4-5 is silent). See table 2.

Table 2  
Nature of the Proposed Differences

Dan 7:9-14	Rev 4-5
1	Initial act Resulting state of affairs
2	Initial act Resulting state of affairs
3	Resulting state of affairs Initial act
4	Specification missing Specification present
5	Specification present Specification missing

The differences Maxwell indicates are not differences in the sense that when one point is accepted the other must be set aside, but instead appear to offer glimpses of a single series of events from contrasting perspectives. Recall that seeing the same physical object from two slightly different points of view is the basis for three-dimensional sight. The contrast between what we see through different eyes at any given time is not such that the various facets of the objects we see are set off against each other, as if by way of opposition, but instead help us to see those objects more clearly than we could have otherwise. In my view Maxwell has carefully listed the very reasons why Dan 7:9-14 and Rev 4-5 must be considered parallel to each other.

What do the passages refer to?

If the passages under discussion are indeed parallel, it is a separate question what events they both refer to. If Dan 7:9-14 describes a judgment scene one would expect to find a judgment in Rev 4-5, but the expectation needs to be confirmed. There must still be careful exegesis of Rev 4-5.

After John's invitation to "Come up here" (vs. 1), Rev 4 can be approached as having three main sections: (a) a description of the throne of God and the general setting (vss. 2-6a), (b) the four living creatures and what they say (vss. 6b-8), and (c) the twenty-four elders and what they say (vss. 9-11).

One of the striking things about Rev 4 is the praise offered to God by the four living creatures and twenty-four elders. Here I discuss only the manner in which it is offered.<sup>5</sup> In vs. 8 the ones praising God are the four living creatures:

Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Rev 4:8)

On a first reading it might appear that no time intervenes between one repetition of these words and the next. But more is involved than that. The activity of the four living creatures is directly linked to that of the twenty-four elders.

(9) Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, (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 and say: (11) "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Rev 4:9-11)

Verses 9-11 are linked in turn to vs. 4. In the one case the elders are prostrate, while in the other they are seated. This distinction is important because of what it can tell us about the praise of both the elders and the living creatures.

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. (Rev 4:4)

It is clear so far that the twenty-four elders have thrones and wear crowns (vs. 4). Whenever the living creatures praise, the elders also praise (vs. 8). Whenever the elders praise God they get up from their thrones, remove their crowns, fall down from a seated position to a prostrate position, and lay their crowns on the floor (vss. 9-10). If the elders leave their thrones each time they speak out in this way it is necessary to assume that when they are finished speaking they go back to their thrones and sit down. There is more in the chapter than a record of what the living creatures and elders say. There is also a record of what they do. The two sets of facts must be taken together. When they are, an extended sequence of events emerges which involves both speech and physical activity and I would suggest that the entire cycle is what vs. 8 speaks of as being repeated day and night without stopping. The words of vss. 8 and 11 are only one aspect of what is repeated.

There is a reason for making the above point. We know what happens while the four living creatures and twenty-four elders are speaking. The chapter tells us that. But one might ask what happens while they are not speaking. Whatever it is has to do with the central throne, because that is where all attention is directed within the chapter, and as exegetes we must adopt a similar point of view.

I suggest that when the living creatures and elders are not speaking they are listening. The attention of everyone seated in the great assembly hall is fixed on the One who occupies the central throne and close attention is paid to everything He says. When He finishes speaking those in attendance break out into heartfelt praise, and those who have crowns cast them down before Him to express their admiration and love. Again and again these events are repeated.

Everyone's attention is directed to the central throne, and then everyone breaks out into praise. Praise is by nature a response to something, and here only the response is described, but an effect must have a cause. What causes such loud outpourings of praise to God must be something done or said by Him from the central throne.

If what John is describing in Rev 4-5 is the heavenly court in session, then the events have a natural explanation. Every court has a docket. In the present example a case is announced and the bases for the decision God has always known would be necessary are discussed and fully explained. When both the decision and the reasons for it are complete the onlookers can only marvel at God's wise and gracious handling of the matter before them. The only appropriate response is to praise the One who has shown such wisdom and love in dealing with His subjects, and everyone does so. Then another case is announced, and the court proceeds with its business. There are no recesses. Here is the meaning of the clause quoted earlier from vs. 8, "Day and night they never stop saying: . . ." and the process begun in chap. 4 does not come to an end until chap. 19.<sup>6</sup> We now consider the relationship between Rev 4-5 and 19:1-10.

## Rev 4-5 in Relation to Rev 19:1-10

Comparison with the work of  
Kenneth A. Strand

It is one of the strengths of Maxwell's commentary on Revelation that it takes the literary structure of the book fully into account. The structural theory on which Maxwell proceeds is that of Kenneth A. Strand.<sup>7</sup> As applied by Maxwell, it would appear that Strand's well received work and the structure of the book itself argues forcefully against drawing Rev 19:1-10 into any series of parallels that includes Rev 4-5. Actually, however, Maxwell's treatment of Rev 19:1-10 is slightly different from Strand's.

The material in the book of Revelation is arranged in a number of sections chiastically. Thus, the book divides in two, with sections from the first half parallel to those in the second. Major blocs of text isolated by Strand within Revelation are now summarized in fig. 1.<sup>8</sup>

C(b)		11:19-14:20	15:1-16:21	C(b)'
C(a)		8:2-11:18	17:1-18:24	C(a)'
B		4:1-8:1	19:1-21:4	B'
A		1:12-3:22	21:5-22:5	A'
Prologue	1:1-11		22:6-21	Epilogue

Fig. 1. Overview of the literary structure of the book of Revelation as proposed by Kenneth A. Strand. (Section labels are supplied.)

According to Maxwell, the major blocs are those summarized in fig. 2.<sup>9</sup>

C(b)		11:19-14:20	15:1-16:21	C(b)'
C(a)		8:2-11:18	17:1-19:10	C(a)'
B		4:1-8:1	19:11-21:8	B'
A		1:9-3:22	21:9-22:8	A'
Prologue	1:1-8		22:9-21	Epilogue

Fig. 2. Overview of the literary structure of the book of Revelation as proposed by C. Mervyn Maxwell. (Section labels are supplied.)

The few differences between figs. 1 and 2, most of which have minor importance, are summarized in table 3.

Table 3  
Differences Between Figs. 1 and 2

Strand	Maxwell
1	1:1-11; 1:12-3:22 1:1-8; 1:10-3:22
2	17:1-18:24; 19:1-21:4 17:1-19:10; 19:11-21:8
3	21:5-22:5; 22:6-21 21:9-22:9; 22:8-17

Both Maxwell and Strand place Rev 4-5 in section B, as the various sections are labeled here. The point to notice is that while Maxwell places Rev 19:1-10 in C(a)', Strand places it in B' along with the rest of chap. 19.<sup>10</sup> Within a chiasmic framework of this sort two passages must occur in corresponding sections before any possibility of establishing a parallel between them can arise. Thus, for Maxwell a connection between Rev 4-5 and 19:1-10 is ruled out on structural grounds, while for Strand, on the same basis, it is not only available but required.

#### Comparison with the work of William H. Shea

In the Summer 1984 issue of *Andrews University Seminary Studies* William H. Shea published a paper entitled, "Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals."<sup>11</sup> The question posed in this paper was whether the four hymns contained in the first ten verses of Rev 19 are more closely related to material that comes immediately before them or immediately after.

If these four hymns of Rev 19 were added to the seven in Rev 18, we would have a total of eleven hymnic statements to outline and organize by form and content. Do all eleven of these belong together, or should the latter four be separated off from the previous seven as a separate literary unit? Several considerations suggest that the four hymns of Rev 19 belong together as a separate literary unit.<sup>12</sup>

According to Shea the seven hymns of judgment found in Rev 18 are balanced by the seven seals.

Strand has labeled this general section of Rev 19:1-21:4 as the "Judgmental Finale by God." The balancing intermediate section in the first half of the book (Rev 4:1-8:1) he has identified as the "Ongoing Activity of God." Within these intermediate sections I have previously

suggested that the seven seals can be seen as balanced by the seven hymns of judgment in Rev 18.<sup>13</sup>

The four hymns of praise of Rev 19, by contrast, are balanced by four earlier hymns of praise found in Rev 5, and are therefore unrelated to those in chap. 18. Shea points out in detail what the structural similarities between chaps. 5 and 19 are and then closes with the following statement:

. . . it seems reasonable to conclude that the four hymns of Rev 19:1-8 constitute a literary unit of their own – one that is separate from Rev 18 – and that they belong more directly to those elements of the literary structure of the book of Revelation which involve the rest of chap. 19. These relations also suggest that chap. 19 may tell us something more about the nature of what is described in the interesting and important scene of Rev 4-5, which itself is a topic that deserves further investigation.<sup>14</sup>

### The relationship between Rev 4 and 5

One final question that should be raised is whether the relationship Shea points out between Rev 5 and 19 precludes the relationship I have proposed between Rev 4 and 19. It does not.

Shea compares Rev 5 with Rev 19:1-10 on a very rigorous structural basis. The problem is to determine how Rev 4 can be brought into essentially the same comparison with material from the early verses of chap. 19 if verses within sections are related to each other chiastically. Shea's argument that within chap. 19 a major section break occurs at vs. 1 instead of vs. 11 assumes that (reversing the assumptions) if such a comparison is to be made, the verses within chaps. 4-5 are not related to those in chap. 19 chiastically.

Strand provides independent confirmation for the latter approach by showing in detail that the individual verses of Rev 4-5 are in fact not related to those in Rev 19:1-10 chiastically. Only blocs of text taken as a whole figure in the chiasm at this point, and not the individual verses contained within them.<sup>15</sup> See table 4.

Table 4  
Revelation 4:1-7:17 and 19:1-21:4

Work Progressing	Description	Work Completed
4:2	throne	19:4; 20:11
4:4 24	elders	19:4
4:6 4	living creatures	19:4
4:9-11; 5:8-10	praise given by 4 living creatures and 24 elders	19:4
5:13	every creature (much people) giving praise	19:1, 6
5:6; 7:10, 17	the Lamb	19:7, 9
6:2	rider on white horse	19:11
6:4	sword	19:15, 21
6:10	judging and avenging	19:2
6:15	distress of great men, kings, etc.	19:17, 18
7:9; 6:11	white raiment	19:8
7:9, 10	multitude sings praise to God	19:6, 7
7:15	God dwelling with His people	21:3
7:15	temple or tabernacle with men	21:3
7:17	tears wiped away	21:4

The lines of table 3 that deal with chaps. 4-5 are those that have special interest here. Notice that significant parallels for Rev 4:2, 4, 6, and 9-11 are all found within Rev 19:4. Thus, Rev 4-5 can be taken as a single bloc of text and a close parallel between chaps. 5 and 19 does not preclude a similarly close parallel between chaps. 4 and 19.

## Conclusion

Volume 2 of *God Cares* is conservative in the sense that Maxwell's treatment of problems does not generally consist of redefining them, but within a conservative framework it is boldly conceived and innovative. For example, the volume is a commentary but does not offer verse-by-verse comments. Instead it consists of brief papers on topics related directly to the text and showing how the one passage is related to others. Perhaps the most significant characteristic of Maxwell's work on Revelation is the amount and quality of attention he has given to literary structure. Let no one be deceived by the readable style and the attempt to speak to a wide readership. Here is a major piece of scholarly work.

In my view the evidence indicates that Daniel 7:9-14, Rev 4-5, and Rev 19:1-10 all do in fact refer to the judgment in heaven. But while in the present case Maxwell would have done well to accept the published insights of his colleagues Strand and Shea without modifying them, his originality sometimes helps free him from positions that have long outlived their usefulness. A chapter that becomes dramatically clearer and more understandable under Maxwell's fresh approach is Rev 17, discussed in the next issue of *Historicism*.

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Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

<sup>1</sup>Frank W. Hardy, " *w<sup>e</sup>niṣdaq* in Dan 8:14, Part 2: The Context of Judgment," *Historicism* No. 4/Oct 85, pp. 2-15.

<sup>2</sup>*God Cares*, 2 vols. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1981), vol. 2: *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, pp. 170-173.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>The Greek of Rev 5:6 (*en mesō tou thronou kai tōn tessarōn zōōn kai en mesō tōn presbuterōn arnion hestēkos hōs esphagmenon*) is such that responsible translators can have an honest difference of opinion about its meaning. In RSV this verse reads, "And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." Here the Lamb is not on the throne but before it. By contrast NIV has, "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders." Here the Lamb is not before the throne but on it. There are reasons to prefer the NIV interpretation of this verse. My basis for saying so is Rev 19:5, which reads: "Then a voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!'" (NIV), or equivalently, "And from the throne I heard a voice crying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great'" (RSV). As I point out in "*w<sup>e</sup>niṣdaq*, Part 2" (p. 12), "This voice comes not from before the throne but from the throne itself and gives the command to praise 'our God.' There is only one Being in the universe who can simultaneously speak from the throne and call God 'our God' and that Being is Christ." Thus, John hears Christ's voice in chap. 19 and sees Christ represented as a Lamb in chap. 5. In Rev 19:5 translators are agreed that the voice comes "from the throne" (RSV, NIV). In Rev 5:6 there is disagreement about whether the Lamb is standing "between the throne and the four living creatures" (RSV) or "in the center of the throne" (NIV). I would argue that Rev 5:6 should be interpreted in light of Rev 19:5 and that Christ's position in both cases is at the center of the throne.

<sup>5</sup>See Hardy, "*w<sup>e</sup>niṣdaq*, Part 2," pp. 8-12.

<sup>6</sup>A question raised by this suggestion is how much of the book of Revelation is cast in the setting of the judgment. In my opinion most of it is, but whether such a claim can be successfully defended remains to be seen.

<sup>7</sup>Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1979).

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 52. Along with the chart Strand offers a disclaimer, "(Note: The exact divisions of the text are somewhat tentative.)" The only change, however, in a recent statement of the theory for a general readership involves the division between sections C(a)' and C(b)' (Kenneth A. Strand, "A Fresh Look at Revelation: Helping You to Understand the Mysteries of this Fascinating Book," *Adventist Review*, N.A.D. edition, April 3, 1986, pp. 11-13). Instead of 15:1-16:21 and 17:1-18:24 he now suggests 15:1-16:17 and 16:18-18:24. But the treatment of Rev 19:1-10 remains unchanged.

<sup>9</sup>See *God Cares* 2:60-61. For Maxwell the Prologue ends at vs. 8 (p. 56) and the first main section begins at vs. 10 (pp. 57, 60, 92, and so on through the book). Verse 9 does not figure in the outline.

<sup>10</sup>Elsewhere verse divisions have been represented exactly as Maxwell has them. Thus, 1:1-8 is followed by 1:10-3:22 (omitting vs. 9) and 21:9-22:9 is followed by 22:8-17 (giving vss. 8-9 twice). It may be that these are printing errors.

<sup>11</sup>Volume 22, pp. 249-57.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 251. Shea's reference is to his earlier paper, "Chiasm in Theme and by Form in Revelation 18," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20 (1982):250.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>15</sup>*Interpreting Revelation*, p. 46.