

THE VISION OF THE HEAVENLY THRONE (Revelation 4)

Read Revelation 4:1-11 (NIV)

This vision opens with a description of God in heaven being worshiped by twenty-four elders and four living creatures. God's appearance is described, as is that of the living creatures. The vision provides the setting for the scroll that God holds in his right hand, a scroll sealed with seven seals. The Lamb takes the scroll from God and proceeds to break the seals one by one (Rev 6:1). As each seal is broken, a new vision takes place. After the vision following the breaking of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17), there are two other visions (Rev. 7). The breaking of the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1) introduces another series: the seven trumpets that are blown by seven angels. Chapter 4, then, is the beginning of a longer section which goes to Rev. 8:1.

REV 4:[1] After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

What Scholars Say

THE INVITATION

Rev. 4:1. *After this I looked* ... This opening phrase closes one event (the messages to the seven churches) and begins another event (the vision of the heavenly throne). John saw the vision of the heavenly throne after he heard the revelation of the messages to the seven churches.

And there before me was a door standing open in heaven. The emphasis is not on who opened the door or when it was opened, but the fact that it was open when John looked at it.

And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said,... The voice issues out of heaven, through the open door. It is the same voice that John had heard before (Rev 1:10), the voice of Christ.

Like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (that is, in the future). This does not specify whether it will be soon or much later. However, it is reasonable to suppose that the time for these things to happen will be soon.

Rev. 4: [2] At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. [3] And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and a sardine stone. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

THE HEAVENLY THRONE

Rev. 4:2-3. John stated that immediately he was **in the Spirit** (Rev.17:3) meaning that experientially he was taken up to heaven though his body was actually still on the island of Patmos. In heaven he saw a great throne with One sitting on it who had the appearance of **jasper and a sardine stone**. This jasper (cf. 21:18) is a clear stone that may have resembled a diamond. The sardine stone was also known as ruby (the NIV translation, it "ruby" in the OT), a ruby-red color. The jasper and the sardine stone were the first and last of the 12 gemstones worn on the high priest's breast in Exodus 28:17-21.

The **throne's** overall appearance was one of great beauty and color, enhanced by a **rainbow**, resembling an emerald. The one sitting on the throne is God the Father. Christ is pictured before the throne in Rev. 5:6. The seven Spirits of God is pictured before the throne in Rev. 4:5. The picture of God is only symbolic. These stones point to God's glorious presence. Even though John gives quite a description of the Throne, he does not attempt to describe the appearance of the Almighty (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18; Ps. 47:8; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26-28). The throne of God depicts the majesty of God, the King of the universe (Dan. 7:9; Ps. 9:7-8; 103:19).

The description of God's throne room stretches the imagination. It builds on the visions of Isa. 6:1-4, Ezek. 1:4-28, and Dan. 7:9-10, where God is seen enthroned in power and majesty. God's throne dominates Revelation, and the worship in the rest of the book flows from this scene.

Rev. 4: [4] 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.

THE 24 ELDERS

Rev. 4:4. Around the principal throne were 24 lesser thrones on which were seated... 24 elders. They were dressed in white and were wearing crowns of gold on their heads. The crowns were similar to those given victors in Greek games, in contrast with the crown of a sovereign Ruler. The crowns seem to indicate that the elders had been judged and rewarded.

There has been much speculation on the identity of the elders. The two major views are (1) that they represent the church or the saints in general (of all ages), or (2) that they are angels who have been given large responsibilities. The number 24 is the number of representation, illustrated in the fact that in the Law of Moses there were 24 orders of the priesthood.

They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. The white garments and their golden crowns all seem to indicate that these 24 elders represent the redeemed. The 24 elders show us that all the redeemed of the Lord (both Old and New Testament saints) are worshipping Him.

Rev. 4: [5] From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD

Rev. 4:5. The impressive scene of heaven was enhanced by **flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder.** **Thunder** is mentioned eight times in Revelation (4:5; 6:1; 8:5; 11:19; 14:2; 16:18; 19:6).

John also saw **seven lamps** which **were blazing.** These seven lamps were said to be the seven spirits of God. These seven spirits belong to God and serve God. These seven spirits can also be understood to represent the concept of the sevenfold character of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3. With God the Father seated on the throne and the Holy Spirit represented by the seven lamps, the stage was then set for the revelation of Christ Himself as the slain Lamb in Rev. 5.

Rev. 4: [6] Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. [7] The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. [8] Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

**"Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
Who was, and is, and is to come."**

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (4:6-8)

Rev.4:6-8. A sea of glass, clear as crystal, was **before the throne** and reflected all the brilliant colors of the entire heavenly scene (cf. 15:2). **In the center** of the picture **four living creatures** were compared **to a lion...an ox...a man and a flying eagle.** **Each of the... creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around.** They were said to be continually praising God as the holy...**Lord God Almighty** (cf. 1:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:6,15; 21:22), the eternal One (who was, and is, and is to come; cf. 1:8; 11:17). This is the first of 14 doxologies in the Book of Revelation.

Many interpretations have been given of the **four living creatures.** As the Holy Spirit was seen symbolically in the seven lamps, probably the four living creatures symbolically represent the attributes of God including His omniscience and omnipresence (indicated by the creatures being full of eyes) - with the four animals bringing out other attributes of God: the lion indicating majesty and omnipotence; the ox, typical of faithful labor and patience; man, indicating intelligence; and the eagle, the greatest bird, representing supreme sovereignty.

Another possible view is that they represent Christ as revealed in the four Gospels: in Matthew, the lion of the tribe of Judah; in Mark, the ox as the servant of Yahweh; in Luke, the incarnate human Jesus; and in John, the eagle as the divine Son of God.

Another alternative is that the **four living creatures** are angels (cf. Isa 6:2-3), who extol the attributes of God.

Rev. 4:[8b] Day and night they never stop saying:

***"Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
Who was, and is, and is to come."***

The phrase, **Day and night they never stop saying**, proclaims the fact that these beings are *spirit* and not *flesh*. They never grow tired, they never stop and they never sleep. They worship God day and night endlessly!

REV 4:[9] Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, [10] the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

**REV 4:[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."(KJV – for Thy pleasure they are and were created).**

WORSHIP IN HEAVEN

Rev. 4:9-11. The worship by the four **living creatures** is attended by **the 24 elders** also worshipping the One **on the throne** and attributing to God **glory** (proclaiming God as glorious, majestic and wonderful) **and honor** (to proclaim God is great, worthy of all praise) **and thanks** (to declare one's gratitude for benefits received) **and power** (to give God praise for His power) (Cf. 5:12-13) and acknowledging that He is the Creator all and it was for His pleasure that we are and were created. The 24 elders then **lay their crowns before the throne** in ascribing all glory, praise, honor and worship to the True and living God the Sovereign Ruler of All.

In closing this lesson, I couldn't help but think of the 24 elders (the redeemed people of God) giving God praise and thanksgiving for His power. On Dec. 14, 1981 my wife and I received a miracle.

All praise to Him for His power!

****Questions****

1. After receiving messages for the seven churches, what did John see? (4:1)
2. What kind of voice did John hear? (4:1)
3. What did the voice John heard say to him? (4:1)
4. What incredible sights did John see? (4:2-11)
5. How did John describe the one sitting on a throne? (4:3)
6. How did John describe what he saw? (4:3)
7. What encircled or surrounded the throne? (4:3-4)
8. How were the twenty-four elders dressed? (4:4)
9. What came from the throne? (4:5)
10. What did John see in front of the throne? (4:5-6)
11. What kind of creatures were "in the center, around the throne"? (4:6-7)
12. How were the four living creatures around the throne similar? (4:8)
13. What attribute of God did the four living creatures praise again and again? (4:8)
14. How did the twenty-four elders worship the Lord God? (4:9-10)
15. Why did the elders say God was worthy of their worship? (4:11)
16. What does it mean to worship God?

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