

# Revelation 4: Heaven and the Throne of God

## The Vision of Heaven

### **Revelation 4:1**

*4 After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, (a voice) as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up here, and I will show you the things which must come to pass hereafter.*

This begins the third main section of the Revelation. John's attention moves away from what is happening in the church as it exists and survives on earth and focuses on heaven and what is and will happen there. The voice that John first heard expresses the purpose of this part of the Revelation: "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must come to pass hereafter." John, at once, is in the spirit—not an attitude or frame of mind but the becoming of an actual part of the vision. The voice commanded, "Come up here." The place where John was going was up. The vision itself unfolds before John. Paul expressed a similar experience for himself or another in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4:

12 I must needs glory, though it is not expedient; but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knows), such a one caught up even to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man (whether in the body, or apart from the body, I know not; God knows), 4 how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

"After this" indicates events—the main of which will have their consummation at the revelation of the Lord in the last day. It is not general events in sequence that follow, but rather a series of visions, the events of which parallel one another. For example, the vision turns immediately to a view of heaven and the "Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. (Revelation 4:8)"

## The Throne in Heaven

### **Revelation 4:2-6**

*2 Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne; 3 and he that sat (was) to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius: and (there was) a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon. 4 And round about the throne (were) four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones (I saw) four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their*

*heads crowns of gold. 5 And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And (there were) seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like a crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.*

John saw the throne and someone sitting on it. We will arrive at the revelation of the Lord to the sound of a trumpet:

Matthew 24:30-31: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

1 Corinthians 15:52: In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; 17 then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

At that last trump, the unveiling of the throne in heaven will be upon us. And we too will see that throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. At the end of the previous chapter, the Lord spoke of God's throne in Revelation 3:2:

21 He that overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.

The one who sat had the appearance of jasper and sardius (carnelian)—stones that represent the brilliance of God. These stones were the first and last stones of the high priest breastplate (Exodus 39:8-13); however, a clearer understanding is in the description of the bride of the Lamb where the brightness of the gems directly connects to the brilliance of God in Revelation 21:9-11:

9 And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spoke with me, saying, Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

A rainbow encircled the throne. The rainbow is used twice in the Bible to describe God and once to describe the Son of God. Ezekiel 1:28 related the rainbow to the likeness of the glory of God:

28 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke.

Of the son of God, John wrote, in Revelation 10:1:

And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.

The scene is one of beauty, majesty, and power: lightning, rumblings, and thunder. The seven lamps are the sevenfold spirit of God as in Rev 1:4:

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne.

These are not lamps as in *lampstands*. These lamps are blazing. Luke described the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as tongues of fire in Acts 2:3. In Acts 2:16, Peter related this event directly to the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Therefore, here we have God on his throne and his Holy Spirit blazing before his throne. Revelation 5:6 will reveal the Lamb in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9):

6 And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth.

## The Four Living Creatures

### **Revelation 4:6-8**

*6 and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like a crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.<sup>7</sup> And the first creature (was) like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature (was) like a flying eagle.<sup>8</sup> and the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, (is) the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.*

All of this is set on what looked like a sea of glass. They were covered with eyes and could see all around. Other passages or visions where the Lord appeared confirm the meaning of this expanse, called here the sea of glass:

Exodus 24:9-10: Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. 10 And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness.

Ezekiel 1:22: And over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of a firmament, like the terrible crystal to look upon, stretched forth over their heads above.

Revelation 21:21: And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

In the center around the throne were four living creatures. These living creatures were like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. Jewish secular history alleges that the four leading tribes of Israel each had one of these figures on the standard as they marched forth:

The Jewish writers tell us, that the standard of each tribe of Israel took the color of the stone which represented it in the high priest's breastplate, and that there was worked upon each a particular figure—a lion for Judah, a young ox for Ephraim, a man for Reuben, and an eagle for Dan. (from *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1998 by BibleSoft)

Numbers 2 describes the arrangement of the tribes for battle. In Ezekiel 1:10-11, Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw four living creatures before the throne of God:

10 As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. 11 And their faces and their wings were separate above; two (wings) of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.

In Ezek 10:15-16, Ezekiel clearly identified the living creatures as cherubim:

15 And the cherubim mounted up: this is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar. 16 And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels also turned not from beside them. 17 When they stood, these stood; and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them: for the spirit of the living creature was in them.

Cherubim are winged, heavenly creatures ordinarily described as worshiping and serving God. In verse 8, they are worshiping God:

The angels of heaven are thus included in the revealing of the Lamb. Our god is their God; our Lord is their Lord. The adverse is also true; their enemy is our enemy. Therefore, they worship our God as Lord God Almighty. The elders lay their crowns aside (humility before the Almighty) and join the worship.

## The Twenty-four Elders

### **Revelation 4:9-11**

*9 And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sits on the throne, to him that lives for ever and ever, 10 the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sits on the throne, and shall worship him that lives for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*

*11 Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for you did create all things, and because of your will they were, and were created.*

The twenty-four elders sitting on thrones indicate a responsibility of governance. Jesus promised a throne to his immediate followers in Matt 19:28-29:

28 And Jesus said unto them, “Truly I say unto you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Holy Spirit of God made elders in the church overseers in Acts 20:28-31:

28 Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Wherefore watch, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears.

Paul gave special importance to certain elders in 1 Tim 5:17:

17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching.

They were dressed in white, which agrees with the commands to the seven churches in Revelation 3:4:

4 But you have a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. 5 He that overcomes shall thus

be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Also, in Revelation 3:18:

18 I counsel you to buy of me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich; and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and (that) the shame of your nakedness be not made manifest; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

Peter promised elders crowns when the Chief Shepherd appears in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

5 The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to (the will of) God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, you shall receive the crown of glory that fades not away.

Whoever the elders are, they are by definition older—perhaps the first appointed to serve. Paul described the early church as the first fruits in Romans 8:22-23:

22 For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. 23 And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for (our) adoption, the redemption of our body.

The elders are present as John witnessed the great multitude of the saved from the tribulation (Rev 7:11-12). They were also present at the destruction of Babylon (Rev 19:4-5).

The elders also have been raised at the coming of the Lord, for even the apostles eagerly await that day. From this point forward, we must think of John as an observer of the day of the Lord and not a participant. He will see the elders here and the resurrection there, but they are all a part of the great day of the Lord in Revelation 22:12:

12 Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.

The elders' song praises the God, Almighty of all creation in verse 11:

Worthy are you, our Lord and our God,  
to receive the glory and the honor and the power:  
for you did create all things,  
and because of your will they were, and were created.

This song repeats the teaching of Paul among the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of Athens and emphasizes once again the theme of the Revelation: God, Almighty is the alpha and omega, and no other can or will be. Paul taught in Acts 17:24-28:

24 The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands; 25 neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 and he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined (their) appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; 27 that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: 28 for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said, "For we are also his offspring."

Thus, John, and we through him, begins to see the wonder and splendor of God revealed to us. The singular nature of this view of God, Almighty, cannot be altered by philosophy or theology or speculative theories.