

The Revelation to John
Chapter Four
A Future Scene
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This chapter starts a new period of revelation in the book. Previously John was on earth, although in the spirit, and Jesus gave him information about seven churches that were contemporary with him. Now he is going to receive information about events in his future. This future revelation continues in the same vein through chapter sixteen. In chapters 4 and 5 John gives us a vivid description of the scene in heaven from which he will receive the revelations. Chapters 6 and 7 give us the information about the breaking of the six seals. Chapters 8 through 11 give the soundings of the trumpets with the seventh seal shown in chapter 8. Chapters 6 through 11 is a continuous revelation based upon the scene described in chapters 4 and 5. In chapters 12 through 16 Jesus presents a series of signs that seem to be the culmination of the wrath of God to be poured out on the earth at the end of the current era per:

Rev 15:1 "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished."

We now begin this great study beginning with his description of what he saw of heaven. First it is important to point out that the Bible gives us the accounts of two people who actually visited heaven: John and Paul (2 Cor 12). Paul was not permitted to speak of what he saw but John is told to relate his visit for our edification. There have been many bizarre accounts of people who claim to have visited heaven or have had a "close encounter" with heaven. I would much prefer to learn from the one who really did visit heaven and was allowed to inform us of his visit. Why do people flock to read someone other than John's account of heaven? Perhaps it is because they just are not really sure that an afterlife exists and other people's accounts bolster their belief in heaven. But we do not need any other sign than what God has given us in His Word and those with true faith will be very cautious about any other account.

Mark 8:12 And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

The Throne Room in Heaven

**Rev 4:1 "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."
Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne."**

Prior to this writing John had been on earth. Now he is called to visit heaven. He is to be shown the things that must occur because the sovereign God has ordained them. His journey to heaven was not in a physical body but as a spirit. He sees that Jesus has opened a door through which he can enter the throne room of God. This is the place where Jesus ascended and where we are spiritually present as His children.

Eph 2:6 “and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,”

He used the trumpet analogy as he had done in chapter one that signifies His voice as authoritative. John is fascinated with thrones probably because of the earthly focus on the Emperor’s throne. He is pointing out here that there is a far greater throne in heaven than any in the world. He states that the throne was standing, which emphasizes its permanence throughout all time. John does not reveal who the One sitting on the throne is but it is obviously Jesus for we read of similar accounts in Isa 6:1, 1 Kings 22:19, Dan 7:9-10, and Ezek 1:26-28. The fact that He is seated states that He is in a judgment stance.

Rev 4:3 “And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

Rev 4:4 And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.”

The jasper stone is probably a diamond and the many facets of the diamond that reflect the light would be representative of the many aspects of Jesus. The sardius is a fiery, blood red ruby and is probably symbolic of the wrath of God about to be poured out on the world. The jasper and the sardius are also the first and last stones on breastplate of the high priest. The rainbow about the throne is described as like an emerald in appearance and may indicate that green was its predominant color. The rainbow would signify God’s continual covenant that has been kept with His people. The fact that it is now around the throne rather than aimed at Him would indicate further that He is now in command of the bow and about to shoot arrows at the earth. Why the color green would be dominant is not clear. Leon Morris (in one of my references) says that it represents God’s mercy toward us but he does not give a Biblical reference for that interpretation. The word used for emerald (Strong’s 1304a) can also be interpreted as a flashing gem so the rainbow could have appeared as flashing against the background. Some words still remain a mystery.

Around the major throne are 24 minor thrones upon which are seated 24 elders dressed in the white of righteousness and wearing golden crowns. The identity of the elders has been considerably discussed. The number 24 is representative of completion and representation so these people probably are representative of some group. Some people say that the number is for the twelve tribes of Israel and the other twelve are for the apostles but the number is never split in the book. The crowns that they wear are the

same type as promised to the believers at the church at Smyrna and they are given to people who have achieved victory in a race or game. These elders are undoubtedly people rather than angels and are then representatives of people who have persevered through tribulation and trials on earth and are the people of God ruling like promised to the true believers at the church of Thyatira. Ironside also reminds us that King David appointed 24 elders to represent the Levitical priesthood as discussed in 1 Chronicles 24. He then says that, in like manner, these 24 elders are representatives of all of the priests (children of God) who have been saved during all time.

Rev 4:5 “And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

Rev 4:6 and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”

Lightening and sounds and peals of thunder would certainly get our attention! They are all awe-inspiring and should be understood as setting the stage for what is to follow. Such sounds are often associated with God’s presence as in the following:

- *Exodus 19:16 “So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.”*
- *Ezekial 1:13 “In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire.”*

We have already discussed the seven spirits of God in Rev 3:1 so please see that discussion for this topic. These torches are not lampstands but outdoor torches that give off blazing light. Torches are also affiliated with war such as in:

Nahum 2:3 “The shields of his mighty men are colored red, The warriors are dressed in scarlet, The chariots are enveloped in flashing steel When he is prepared to march, And the cypress spears are brandished.

Nahum 2:4 The chariots race madly in the streets, They rush wildly in the squares, Their appearance is like torches, They dash to and fro like lightning flashes.”

All of this background seems to be preparing the way for the unfolding of the wrath of God that will follow. There may no sea in heaven so John could be using the word metaphorically. However in the past the sea was a source of big trouble for fishermen particularly in the Sea of Galilee and other fishing areas as storms could suddenly appear and be fierce. Because of the dangers of sailing and fishing in those times, the sea was often used as a representation of trouble.

- *Psa 69:1-2 “(For the choir director; according to Shoshannim. A Psalm of David.) Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. I have sunk in*

deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me.”

- *Jer 6:23 “They seize bow and spear; They are cruel and have no mercy; Their voice roars like the sea, And they ride on horses, Arrayed as a man for the battle Against you, O daughter of Zion!”*

So it may be that the vision of the sea as glass would be an image that the troubles represented by the sea are past.

He saw something like a courtyard of glass that was gleaming like a crystal and was probably intended to signify that God was inapproachable by man. The four living creatures he described are better described as “living ones” so we do not think of them as animals and they will be involved in this book in very important ways. These “living ones” are discussed by Ezekiel in Ezek 1:4-25 and many scholars think that they are cherubim whose main purpose is to worship God. Since they have eyes both in front and behind means that nothing can be hidden from their view. There are differences between these living ones and the cherubim as we will mention below.

Rev 4:7 “And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

Rev 4:8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.””

John saw these living ones to be like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle. These choices seem to indicate that all created animals are represented: a wild animal, a domesticated animal, a bird, and man. Thus all of God’s creatures are represented in some manner. MacArthur also states the possible importance that all of the tribes of Israel camped under four banners: Judah (the lion), Ephraim (the calf or ox), Dan (the eagle), and Reuben (the man). As noted above, there are differences between these beings and the cherubim. Leon Morris notes that the cherubim have four wings each and each of these have six wings, the cherubim each have four faces and these have one, and the cherubim carry the throne whereas these are in the center and around it. We might remember that the seraphs each have six wings (Isa 6:2). We see that these beings constantly praise God and later will be involved in administering the wrath of God. We see that their praise is also like that of the seraphs:

Isa 6:3 “And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.””

With the three-time repeating of “Holy”, we see the primary character of God stated. He alone is Holy and His power will overcome all evil at the end. These beings also state that God is the infinity Being Who was, is, and is to come. What an awesome representation of our God!

Rev 4:9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,

Rev 4:10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Rev 4:11 "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 existed, and were created."

What a scene at the throne room of God in heaven! Not like that spoken of by most people claiming to have been to heaven! These verses combined with John 1:3, Col 1:16, and Heb 1:2 all make it very clear that Jesus is the One Who created everything and He is the One Who holds it all together (Col 1:17). Therefore there is no doubt that the One on the throne is Jesus, our Lord. The crowns mentioned here are of the same type as mentioned earlier and are the wreaths like those given to the winners of games in the Olympics. Paul also talks of receiving that crown:

2Tim 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 2Tim 4:8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

John tells us that the beings continue to sing praises to Jesus Who is worthy of glory, honor, and thanks. He is stated as the One Who lives forever. Then the 24 elders are prompted to prostrate themselves before Jesus and to cast their crowns before the throne because they are not willing to keep any of the honors given them for their service to their Lord. In the presence of Jesus He is the One Who receives all honor. The elders repeat the words of the beings except that they substitute power for thanks in line with their praise of Him Who created all things.

This is a magnificent message of encouragement to the small church that existed in an area of extreme sin, as we do today. This should also be an encouragement to us in that Jesus will rule over all and complete justice will be realized. It may seem now that evil persists and people receive earthly awards not consistent with their characters. But one day that will all change. We all look forward to that day when we also will be praising Jesus for His glory, honor, and power.