

Love Community Baptist Church

Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

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Revelation – Chapter 4

BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD

A. The transition to the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation.

Taking Revelation 1:19 as an outline of the book, chapter four begins the third section: the things which shall take place after this.

Chapter four begins a heavenly perspective, looking down on the earth.

- The Bible has other important references to heaven, in passages such as Isaiah 6:1-8, Ezekiel 1, and in passages describing the Tabernacle, which symbolically describes heaven (Exodus 25-32 and 35-40).
- In the description of heavenly things, John uses symbols. However, not everything is symbolic. As in the parables of Jesus, many of the details are merely descriptive and they are not necessarily intended to carry a special significance of their own.

From Revelation 4 through 19 we have a section mainly concerned with God's judgment upon the world preceding Jesus' earthly reign, the period known as the "Messianic Woes" or the "Great Tribulation."

- God's judgments are announced by a seven-sealed scroll, seven trumpets, seven signs, and seven bowls that pour out God's wrath.

Revelation four introduces us to the place judgment comes from: God's throne in heaven.

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

After these things: Revelation chapters 2 and 3 spoke to the churches, and the seven churches comprehended all churches. After Jesus was finished speaking to the churches, after these things, John experienced the vision of Revelation 4.

John's description of heaven.

(Revelation 4:2b) The point of focus: a throne set in heaven.

And behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

This throne was what first impressed John, and it is the centerpiece of this vision. John was fixated on the occupied throne, and everything else is described in relation to this throne.

The throne is not empty. There is some One who sits on this great heavenly throne. The throne is a powerful declaration of not merely God's presence, but of His sovereign, rightful reign, and His prerogative to judge.

(Revelation 4:3) What John saw at the heavenly throne.

And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

Like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance: Instead of describing a specific form or figure, John described emanations of glistening light in two colors: white (jasper may mean “diamond”) and red (sardius).

And there was a rainbow around the throne: The throne was surrounded by a green-hued rainbow (in appearance like an emerald). The rainbow is a reminder of God’s commitment to His covenant with man (Genesis 9:11-17).

(Revelation 4:4) What John saw around the throne: the twenty-four elders.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

Before the elders caught John’s eye, he noticed the twenty-four thrones they sat on. These twenty-four elders sat on lesser thrones, around the throne. Later John will mention their song of worship (Revelation 4:10-11).

On the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting: Who are these twenty-four elders? Commentators debate whether they are glorified human beings or angelic beings. Taking all things into consideration, the elders certainly seem to represent God’s people.

Clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads: The white robes and crowns of the elders seem to indicate that they are indeed human beings — in glory, of course.

(Revelation 4:5) Impressive and fearful sights at the throne of God.

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

The lightning, thunder, voices and fire are reminiscent of God’s fearful presence at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19 and 20:18-19). They communicate the awe associated with the throne of God.

Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne: The Holy Spirit (the seven Spirits of God, as referred to in Revelation 1:4 and Isaiah 11:2) is represented by seven burning lamps. In other passages He is represented as a dove (Matthew 3:16) or a flame of fire (Acts 2:3).

- The lamps of fire are important because the Holy Spirit is not ordinarily visible. To become visible, He represents Himself in a physical form like a dove or a tongue of fire.

(Revelation 4:6a) The sea of glass before the throne.

Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal.

Is this sea really made of glass, or did it just look like it? Commentators are divided on this point. For example, Robertson says, “appearance, not material” and Alford says, “material, not appearance.” Whether it looks like glass or is actually made of glass, it is the finest glass, like crystal.

(Revelation 4:6b-8a) The four living creatures all around the throne.

And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.

Four living creatures full of eyes: From comparison with Ezekiel 1:4-14 and 10:20-22, we understand these creatures to be cherubim, the spectacular angelic beings surrounding the throne of God. Satan was once one of these high angelic beings, according to Ezekiel 28:14.

Cherubim/cherubs are angelic beings involved in the worship and praise of God. The cherubim serve the purpose of magnifying the holiness and power of God. This is one of their main responsibilities throughout the Bible. In addition to praising God, they also serve as a visible reminder of the majesty and glory of God and His abiding presence with His people.

Their multitude of eyes indicates these living creatures (not "beasts" as in the KJV) are not blind instruments or robots. They know and understand and have greater insight and perception than any man.

Like a lion... like a calf... a face like a man... like a flying eagle: John described four cherubim, each with a different face. From comparison with Ezekiel 1:6-10, we can see that each of the cherubim have four faces, and at the moment, John saw each one of the four different faces pointed in his direction. The significance of these four faces has been interpreted in many ways.

- The four faces have been said to represent the elements, the cardinal virtues, the faculties and powers of the human soul, the patriarchal churches, the great apostles, the orders of churchmen, the principal angels, and so forth.
- The four different faces of the cherubim are often taken as symbols of Jesus as represented in each gospel. In classical church architecture, these four "characters" are repeated often as a motif that signifies both heaven and the four gospels.

Because there is no specific connection between the four faces of the cherubim and a particular gospel, different traditions have connected these four faces of the cherubim in different ways. Some have seen Matthew as the "Lion" gospel, showing Jesus as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Mark is seen as the "Ox" gospel, showing Jesus as a humble servant, a worker. Luke is seen as the "Man" gospel, showing Jesus as the perfect man, the second Adam. John is seen as the "Eagle" gospel, showing Jesus as the man from heaven, the sky. Still, this approach also has other interpretations.

Gospel	Victorinus	Irenaeus	Augustine	Clarke	Suggested
Matthew	Man	Man	Lion	Man	Lion
Mark	Lion	Eagle	Man	Lion	Ox
Luke	Ox	Ox	Ox	Ox	Man
John	Eagle	Lion	Eagle	Eagle	Eagle

Perhaps it is safest to say that the four faces are important because they represent all of animate creation, in its utmost excellence. The lion is the mightiest of wild animals, the ox strongest of domesticated animals, the eagle king of all birds, and man is highest of all creation.

John describes what happens at the throne of God.

(Revelation 4:8b) The living creatures constantly worship God.

And they do not rest day or night, saying:

"Holy, holy, holy,

***Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"***

The cherubim constantly repeat the phrase holy, holy, holy. God's holy nature and character is declared, and emphasized with a three-time repetition.

The cherubim declared that the Lord God is Almighty. As in Revelation 1:8, the ancient Greek word is pantokrator, with the idea of "the One who has His hand on everything."

Who was and is and is to come: This repeats another idea from Revelation 1:8, and refers to God's eternal Being. It translates the thought behind the meaning of the name "Yahweh."

(Revelation 4:9-11) The twenty-four elders worship the enthroned God.

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

***"You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created."***

The worship of the twenty-four elders is prompted by the cherubim. Since the cherubim worship God day and night, so do the elders.

The twenty-four elders worship (which means to credit worth or worthiness to) God. The elders credited God for their own work and reward, and they did this as they cast their crowns before the throne. They recognized that the worth, the worthiness belonged to God, not to themselves.

- Casting the crowns simply acted out their declaration, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power. If God was worthy of the glory and honor and power, then He should get the crown.
- There is also an allusion to a practice in the Roman Empire. The Emperor of Rome ruled over many lesser kings, and these kings were at times commanded to come before the Emperor and lay their crowns down before him in homage. Then he would give them back, as a demonstration that their crowns, their right to rule, their victory, came from him.
- The crowns mentioned in Revelation 4:10 are the **stephanos** crowns, the crowns of victory, not royalty. These are the crowns of achievement that a winning athlete would receive at the ancient Olympic Games. The twenty-four elders — representing all the redeemed of God — threw every achievement reward they had back to God, because they knew and proclaimed that He was worthy... to receive glory and honor and power.

"Our text says they all cast their crowns before the throne. There are no divided opinions in heaven, no sects and parties, no schisms there. They are all in perfect harmony and sweet accord. What one does, all do. They cast their crowns, without exception, before the throne. Let us begin to practice that unanimity here. As fellow Christians, let us get rid of everything that would divide us from each other, or separate us from our Lord. I do not read that there was a single elder who envied his brother's crown, and said, 'Ah, I wish I were such an one as he is, and had his crown.' I do not read that one of them began to find fault with his brother's crown, and said, 'Ah, his jewels may be bright, but mine have a peculiar tint in them, and are of greater excellence.' I do not read ought of dissension; they were all unanimous in casting their crowns at Jesus' feet. They were all unanimous in glorifying God." (Spurgeon)

The twenty-four elders worshipped God because of His creative power and glory. The fact that God is Creator gives Him all right and every claim over everything — even as a potter has all rights and claims over the clay (Romans 9:21).

- God's right over us as Creator is a fact that can be accepted and enjoyed, or rejected, leading to frustration. There is tremendous value in our recognizing our "creatureliness" before God.
- We confess a fondness for the King James Version translation of Revelation 4:11: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* The wonderful phrase and for thy pleasure they are and were created reminds us that we each exist to give glory and pleasure to God. Until we do that, we don't fulfill our created purpose.