

The Throne of God

Revelation 4

Turn your TV set on and sit back for a while. Odds are you won't have to watch long before seeing some "expert" give his prediction for the future. First a scientist is interviewed about the future development in computers, technology and space. Then a diplomat is asked to speak on the future of the Middle East. Next a political pundit speculates on the future of an upcoming election. Finally, a woman steps in front of a satellite image of the earth to deliver the most dubious prophecy of all – the weather forecast.

The future is big business. Despite the fact that we live in the most scientifically sophisticated age in human history, the occult and prophecy business is booming.

Check the internet or look at the magazines at the grocery store as you stand in the check out, you will find pages of advertisements for palm readers, tarot readers, astrologers, psychics and other assorted soothsayers. You can download an app for .99 cents, which will give you a daily horoscope. People regularly read books or supermarket tabloids that are filled with predictions made by Nostradamus, Edger Cayce, Sonia Choquette (*Showll-Ket*) and Jean Dixon.

Ironically, our society has largely bypassed the only true source of information on the future: The Bible, especially, the book of Revelation.

As we come to the 4th chapter of Revelation, we come to the brink of the third division of the book. Revelation 1:19 gives us the three sections: The Things Which Thou Hast Seen (Revelation 1:1-20); The things which are (Revelation 2:1-3:22) and The things which shall be hereafter (Revelation 4:1f).

Beginning with Revelation 4:1, notice the phrase, "**After this.**" It signals a shift in the events. This is a future scene that will take place after the Church has finished its course and has been removed from the world. John is not the first biblical prophet to have the privilege of standing on earth and looking into heaven. Other like him are Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah. But John is the only one who saw heaven while standing on earth but was actually summoned into heaven. No prophet in all of Scripture was ever allowed to enter heaven to report what he saw.

Even the Apostle Paul was “caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:4). But he did not give us any written or verbal report. John is the only one.

Why is this point significant? I believe this represents what the church will see from its heavenly vantage point after it is caught away to be with Christ. Many of us here many have muddled notions of what heaven will be like. Some actually think we will be living on clouds and playing harps. Others project their favorite past time on heaven, for the golfer, it is the endless golfing course; for the fisherman it that celestial fishing hole, and for the cowboy it is “that great roundup in the sky.

Heaven is nothing like that. It is far more and better than what we can imagine. The Scene opens up with John being brought before the Supreme Headquarters of heaven! What John first saw dominates everything else in this scene.

First is the Throne of God.

In fact, this is a central theme seen repeated in the book of Revelation. **Out of 22 chapters** in the book, there are **only five chapters** in which the word, “throne” **does not appear**.

God is seen as towering over all human events. Everything we read about in the newspapers and see on TV, however awesome, saddening, or triumphant, takes place in the shadow of the sovereign throne of God.

I recently read of a missionary who was speaking at a conference in England. He specifically remembered the song service at the beginning of the meeting. The chapel was filled with Christians, singing heartily to the Lord. One of the choruses they sang with the popular hymn, “Our God reigns.” However, when they typed the song sheet they made a typo. Instead of typing, “Our God Reigns” they mistakenly typed, “Our God Resigns.”

Fortunately, the people knew the song and sang it correctly. But, unfortunately for many Christians today, they sing and live as if their God had resigned and was no longer in power. Thank God, He reigns! He is on the throne! And this is the theme of the Book.

To many in our day the fact that there is a God and that He is on the throne of the universe **goes directly against their secular thinking**. They hate the idea of divine authority, because this means that there are absolutes which

cannot be changed. There are moral and spiritual values that are guaranteed by the One Who sits on the throne.

But people in our age want to be their own moral and spiritual authority.

They want to choose whatever sexual behavior suits them. They want to do whatever they desire without guilt or judgment. They want to be **free to make up their own religion**, to invent their own gods, or even become their own gods if it suits them. They want to be **free to conduct their business** and amass their fortunes **without ethical constraints**.

Though people rebel; the existence of God's sovereignty is an unalterable fact of the universe. The operation of His moral law is a certain and irreversible, just as the physical laws of the universe are unalterable. Jeremiah 17:12 says, that God's throne is "A glorious high **throne** from the beginning."

THE CENTRAL FIGURE ON THE THRONE

Second, the figure on the throne is God – Revelation 4:2-3.

"And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. ³ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

John is actually permitted to see the Lord of the universe on His throne. **What does He see?** He sees pure, flashing, jewel like colors. Because of this, many believe that John wrote Revelation before writing 1, 2, 3 John. Because in 1 John 1:5 he describes God as light. "God is light: and Him is not darkness at all."

Moses was told that no man can see the face of God and live. No one, not even John has even seen the face of God at any time. All anyone has ever seen are the manifestations of His Being, which tell of His attributes and His glory. John saw a figure on the throne, but the features of that figure were lost in the dazzle nimbus of lights that surround the throne. It was not just God the Father whom John sees on the throne. He also sees the Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The first stone is jasper. It is a bright crystal. Normally the *jasper's color is affected by the mineral* in the ground and appear opaque with a tinge of red, yellow, brown or green in color; and rarely blue. But here it is perfect and crystal clear. **It is often used to describe dominance and holy perfection.**

His holiness is unaffected by those things around Him. It is perfect holiness.

The second stone is the sardine, which is a beautiful, glowing, blood red stone. **This stone suggests the Son**, who gave His blood for us as atonement for our sins. He is the Lamb of God.

The third stone is the emerald. John saw a great rainbow encircling the throne. Green as an emerald. This is brilliant in varying shades of emerald circling the throne of heaven, symbolizing the Holy Spirit's administering the holiness and redemption of God to all creation.

An interesting side note, that all rainbows are circles. When we see a rainbow in the sky we are seeing only part of it. When we stand on the ground and look at a rainbow, half of the refracted image is hidden below the horizon. The best way to view a rainbow is from an airplane, where the entire circle of it is visible.

The Twenty-four Seats and Elders

“And round about the throne were **four and twenty seats**: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, **clothed in white raiment**; and they had on their heads **crowns of gold.**” – Rev. 4:4

The twenty-four elders sat on twenty-four thrones. They are human representatives not angels for they reign with Christ. Nowhere in Scripture does angels sit on thrones, have crowns on their heads or referred to as elders.

Angels are to minister to those who will inherit salvation [Heb. 1:14; Matt. 18:10]. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Whereas the Church is promised to reign with Christ [Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12]. For it says in Revelation 3:21 “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” And again in Rev. 5:10 it says, “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Several views regarding the twenty-four elders.

First view: The twenty-four represents **the entire heavenly priesthood** [1 Chron.24:4-5, 7-18; 1 Chron. 25]. All believers [O.T. and N.T.] are priests, all

worship. Therefore, whoever the twenty-four elders are, they represent a larger group who have been redeemed.

Second view holds that the twenty-four represent just those from the raptured, glorified church. The final view and the view of this author is that the twenty-four represent **two groups** – the twelve tribes [Israel] and the twelve apostles [the Church] – saints in two different dispensations.

The White Raiment and gold crowns.

Although angels do appear in white, the white garments here are referring to the dress of believers [Rev. 3:5, 18; 19:8. White garments symbolize Christ's righteousness imputed to believers [2 Cor. 5:21]. The crown relates to the promise that the saints will rule and reign with Christ.

From the throne [4:5a]

“And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices:”

These sights are associated with **God's presence** [Ex. 19:16; Ezek. 1:13]. For example, in the book of Exodus 19:16 we find

“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.”

And in Ezekiel's vision of the throne in Ezekiel 1:13 we find . . .

“As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.”

Furthermore, lightning and thundering are also associated with God's judgment. This can be seen in Revelation 8:5, “And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.” As well as in Revelation 11:19 – “And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail” and in Revelation 16:18, where it says, “And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the

earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.” Since they come from God’s throne, **they are a prelude of the judgment that is to fall upon the earth** – the Tribulation [Rev. 3:10].

Before the throne [4:5b-6a]

“There were **seven lamps of fire** burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁶ And before the throne there was a **sea of glass like unto crystal**”

Two items we will look at, “lamps of fire . . . sea of glass.”

The “Lamps of fire” describe blazing torches and links them with **the seven Spirits of God**. As noted earlier in Rev. 1:4, the seven Spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in all His fullness [Isa. 11:2; Zech 4:1-10]. **In this passage it speaks of fiery judgment**. Torches are often associated with **war** [Judges 7:16, 20; Nahum 2:3-4].

John depicts God as ready to make war on sinful, rebellious mankind with the Holy Spirit being His war torch. The Holy Spirit is a Comforter for believers [John 14:26] but a consumer to those who reject Christ.

The next item is “A sea of glass like unto crystal” – v. 6

The word “**sea**” is used metaphorical since there is no sea in heaven for we find in Revelation 21:1, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and **there was no more sea.**”

Apparently, what John saw was a pavement of glass, shimmering like sparkling crystal [see Ex. 24:10; Ezek 1:22, 26]. Heaven is not dark [Rev. 21:23; 22:5) but a place of shimmering light and brilliance that defines human imagination [1 Cor. 2:9-10]. Other places confirm this. For example in Revelation 21:23 it says, “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: **for the glory of God did lighten it**, and the Lamb is the light thereof” and in Revelation 22:5 we find, “And **there shall be no night there; and they need no candle**, neither light of the sun; **for the Lord God giveth them light**: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

There are three views on the sea of glass. It represents:

Some see this as the separation between God and man and it points to God’s holiness. Hence, all creation is separated from Him by the sea of glass except for the cherubim & seraphim that guard His holiness.

The second view is that it symbolizes **the Word of God**. This thought is taken from the **sea of glass placed in Solomon's temple which symbolized God's Word** and was placed there for the means of cleansing and sanctification [1 Kings 7:23; Eph. 5:26]. This is the view of this author.

The final view some see this as the **Church at rest** – now in her glorified, resurrected state, free from persecution and sin.

In and around the throne are four beasts.

“And round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.
7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him” – Rev. 4:6b-8a

“The four beasts” [4:6-8a] or the four living beasts [or living ones] are introduced in this passage and they play a significant role in the end times events. These creatures are stationed in the inner circle nearest the throne. They are not animals but cherubim, an exalted order of angels associated with God's holy power [1 Sam. 4:4; Ps. 80:1; Isa. 37:16]. They guard God's holiness and attend God's throne [Ezek. 28:14]. They are very much involved with the coming judgment [Rev. 6:1-2, 6; 15:7].

They are “full of eyes before and behind” – v. 6b. This describes their awareness, alertness and comprehensive knowledge. Although these cherubim are not all-knowing like God, they are exceptional in guarding and doing the will of God with nothing getting past them.

Their faces are “like a lion . . . a calf . . . a man . . . a eagle” – v. 7. There are several different views regarding the choice of words used to describe the four living ones.

- 1) They represent the created world. The Talmud** saw these creatures as the four primary forms of life in God's creation: the lion – **king of the beasts**; the calf – king of the **domestic animals**; the man – the king [**pinnacle**] of God's creation and the eagle – king of the **fowls**.
- 2) They are representative of God's attributes or qualities.** The lion represents His majesty & omnipotence; the calf represents His patience and continual labor; the man represents His intelligence and rational power, and the eagle represents His sovereignty and supremacy.

- 3) They represent Israel as they camped around the tabernacle under four banners.** In the book of Numbers, we find Reuben's standard [symbolized man]; Dan's standard [symbolized an eagle]; Ephraim's standard [symbolized the calf] and Judah's standard [symbolized the lion].
- 4) Finally, some see them as representing Christ in the Gospels.** Matthew – Christ as King [lion]; Mark – Christ as Servant [calf]; Luke – Christ as Man [man-humanity] and John – Christ as God [the eagle].

Toward the throne [4:8b-11]

“... and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. ⁹ And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, ¹⁰ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 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.”

This scene in heaven culminates in worship directed toward God on His throne.

In this passage and in Chapter 5 we are given five great hymns of praise. **The choir in Revelation 5 gradually increases in size.** Rev. 5:8 begins with a quartet, the four living ones. In Rev. 5:10 the twenty-four elders join in. In Rev. 5:8 harps are added and in Rev. 5:11 the voices of angels begin their praises; and finally, in 5:18 - all created beings of the universe join this choir of praise.

Chapter 4 is the hymn of creation. Chapter 5 is the hymn of redemption.

The living ones give praise to God for his holiness, his power and his eternity. His holiness for He alone is holy, separate and absolutely untainted by an evil, error or wrongdoing. His power for no one can oppose Him. His power is seen in creation as well as judgment. God's eternity for He always was and always will be.

The twenty-four elders prostrate themselves before God [Rev. 5:8, 14; 7:15; 11:16; 19:4]. This posture is one of reverence to a holy, righteous God. The elders cast their crowns before the throne and join the chorus of praise with the four living ones. These elders acknowledge God's right to redeem and judge His creation.

Chapter four ends with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worshiping in awe and wonder as God prepares for judgment. All creatures owe their very existence to God as their Creator. As chapter four concludes, it is a fitting introduction to chapter five as the increasing choir of praise lift their voices to the glory of God's Son Jesus Christ as Redeemer as they say with one voice "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"