

Revelation 4 NIV “How do you picture God?”

“(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’ “(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 carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

“(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. “(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.

“(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."

“(9) Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: (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.’”

When you think about God, do certain images come into your mind?

How do you picture God?

Everyone likely sees Him differently.

Some of our California friends insisted that God is a she.

The Lord willing, we'll deal with that thinking another day.

How do you picture God?

You get an idea of what children think about God from what they say and write.

Here's a sampling:

A little girl named Jane wrote: **“Dear God: Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you have now?”**

“Dear God: Thank you for my baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.” Alex

“Dear God: It rained for our whole vacation and is my father mad! He said some things about you that people are not supposed to say, but I hope you will not

hurt him anyway. Your friend (but I am not going to tell you who I am)”

“Dear God: I want to be just like my daddy when I get big, but not with so much hair all over.” Sam

“Dear God: I bet it is very hard for you to love all the people in the world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it.” George

“Dear God: My brothers told me about being born, but it doesn't sound right. They are just kidding, aren't they?” Christopher

The Sioux City Journal once published survey results of what Nebraska youngsters “say about God . . . A 12-year-old thought the Psalms tell us God is ‘the coolest dude of them all--totally awesome.’

A Kimball, NE religious school teacher noted: “Second-graders see God in a more tangible form than adults. ‘Often times they see him as a real person,’ she said. ‘They look for him in the (church) sanctuary.’ She said her students usually give God a halo or crown when they draw pictures of him.

“And heaven is usually depicted as a special place with rooms. Family members, flowers, trees, butterflies and rainbows are almost always included. Even though young believers don't understand the spiritual side of God yet, Hunzeker (the teacher) said their faith is admirable. ‘It's so simple,’ when they pray . . . the youngsters expect answers.”¹

Do you wonder if the kids’ conceptions of God are the same 20 years later?

Has your image of God changed over the years?

How do you picture God?

I recently came across some graduate theology class notes I took 5+ decades ago.

Two of theologians’ favorite terms stood out in those class notes.

Theologians often state their views of God using \$2 words.

Religious thinkers tend toward opposite assumptions about God’s nature.

One side says that God is transcendent, “wholly other,” they like to say.

In Latin, transcend means to climb over or beyond.²

Those theologians regard God as so different, so high and so remote, one can scarcely know about Him.

¹ SCOTTSBLUFF, Neb. (AP) – Published in the **Sioux City Journal**, April, 1998

² Transcendent-Above material (physical) existence.
Immanent-within limits of knowledge- near.

In some ways, today’s text seems to support that view.

Verse 1 reads that John saw a “door standing open in heaven.”

A penetrating, familiar voice invited John to come up to see what would soon take place.

In other words, come up to this remote place which is out of reach for most people.

Bible skeptics often scoff at the idea of heaven being up.

If you live on a sphere-shaped planet, they mock, “Which way is up?”

I have no idea which way up is.

Planet earth spins while it revolves in a big circle around the sun.

The sun, its planets, and their moons apparently travel a certain direction, while the entire Cosmos seems to be expanding.

As far as I know, up relates to where you perceive you are and where your goal is.

If you question the Bible’s take on going “up” to heaven, consider this perspective:



Suppose you are sitting relaxed with your legs propped up and you spot a spider on your knee moving toward your torso.



You slap that arachnid fulfilling your existential threat against that spider’s life.

Someone close to you does not see the spider, and asks, “What happened?”

“That spider was crawling up my leg,” you exclaim.

From your perspective that arachnid was traveling up your leg, correct?

If your feet were elevated, was the spider moving up or down?

Some brief observations about heaven’s location:

First we must not forget *Revelation’s* symbolic language.

Revelation’s symbolic visions resemble scenes in a serious cartoon movie.

In a presentation of that type, we do not expect that everything we see or hear is physically possible.

In cartoons, no one questions whether mice, ducks, and dogs can really talk or perform gravity defying actions.

Two, some folks speak of other realms, e.g. 4th and 5th dimensions.

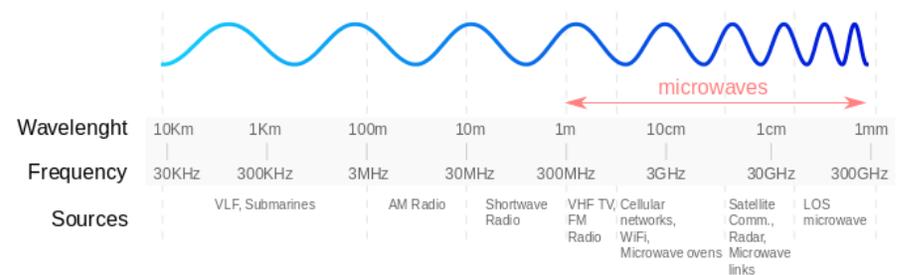
When the Bible speaks of Jesus’ second coming, the sudden revealing of heaven, and the New Jerusalem, he will appear in a dimension we do not see now.

As we pointed out last week, everything will be completely new.

Think how long it took for mankind to discover sound waves of various types. The potential for using those waves was there from the beginning.

“James Clerk Maxwell mathematically predicted the existence of radio waves in 1864. Heinrich Hertz was the first to send and receive radio waves. Between 1885 and 1889, as a professor of physics at Karlsruhe Polytechnic, he (Hertz) produced electromagnetic waves in the laboratory and measured their wavelength and velocity.”³

In the beginning, the Lord made “waves.”



³ www.sparkmuseum.com/BOOK_HERTZ.HTM

We still don't see those waves but they have always been present.

Who knows what dimensions might exist that no one imagines now?

Let's return to Revelation's scenes:

“(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 jasper⁴ and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

“(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.

⁴ Some think that the word jasper here refers to a diamond; others that it indicates a yellow or brown colored gem.

“(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 above appears to support the view of God's transcendence, doesn't it?
We see references to God's glory, majesty, and power, but nothing describes Him.

As Paul, the Apostle stated:

“The King of kings and Lord of lords . . . alone is immortal and . . . lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.”⁵

People try to describe what God looks like.

They forget that God is Spirit.

Jesus: **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”⁶**

⁵ 1 Timothy 6:15, 16 NIV

⁶ John 4:24 NIV

Furthermore, we can't escape God. **“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”**⁷

Remember the story of the three blind men attempting to describe what an elephant is like?

Each had a hold of the elephant, but one held its tail, another, its trunk, and the third, the beast's leg.

Their notions were real, but incomplete.

Human comparisons fail because God is Spirit and our flesh confines us.

By starting with human notions, we always arrive at limited, inadequate views of God.

Revelation tells God's majesty, dazzling—an emerald rainbow encircles His throne.

Revelation reveals God as unapproachable.

In Christ, we begin to know God.

Jesus His son brings God near: Anyone who has seen me has seen the father.”

“(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 beings-creatures likely represent creation's Fiercest (Lion),

⁷ Psalm 139:8 NIV

Strongest (Ox), Man (Intelligent), and Flying eagle (Majestic & Perceptive). Covered with eyes, they stand watch but also to praise—**“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the one who is, who was, and is to come.”**

And the 24 elders?

Some think, they symbolize the 24 courses of priests in the Old Testament (possibly the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles). These elders are likely leaders encouraging us to the highest levels of service and praise. We're at our best when we praise, honor, and glorify God, the Creator of all that exists.

We lack space for further details.

It's sufficient to say that:

Every being in heaven praises God.

They never stop praising Him.

Why do they praise God?

"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."

God created everything and keeps the Cosmos going.



Yet here's our situation.

We adore ourselves, other people, things near us; we neglect to praise our Creator.

To our shame, we neglect honoring God.

Think of the adulation, praise and honor people give ball players, politicians, race car drivers, actors, preachers, and famous folks.

In a few years, all today's powerful people will “go the way of all flesh.”



Can you identify this pair?

A century ago, their names were household words. In the congregations, where I preached this sermon, only two persons identified the football player.

No one knew the actress’s identity.

If the world lasts, today’s famous people will be forgotten in a few decades. But all of heaven will still be praising God.

Think of the 24 elders as a heavenly pep squad leading us in honoring the only one worthy of praise:

“(9) Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: (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.’”

If your picture of God includes love,

mercy, truth, and faithfulness you are probably not far off in your assessment.

Please do not forget, though, that the phrase “is to come**” warns us all that Jesus will appear on the final day bringing righteous judgment.**

He knows the hearts and secret motives of all in His creation.

Are we praising him with our time, money, voice, and energy?

If not, we are making the biggest mistake of our lives.

I pray that we’ll all spend significant time today and this week on the things that endure.⁸

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⁸ PS Did you recognize Theda Bara and Jim Thorpe?

