Revelation 4

John is the world’s last prophet. He has been given the messages to the seven churches of Asia. Now we come to Chapter 4, the beginning of the world’s last vision, which is of future events for the early church. For us the rest of the book is some past, some current, and some future events.

I know many of us look at this book very hesitantly and perhaps with fear, because it takes a fair amount of time and effort to study it, but these visions are meant to be encouragement (Rev. 1:3). That is something that we have to remind ourselves of as we study this book. If you are a child of God, these are visions of our God, his providence, how he works in the world. He shows us the conclusion of the plan that he created before even making the world. One of the most incredible parts of Revelation is God choosing to show himself to us, which he does in chapter 4. Not exact details, but his appearance.

The opening scene of the vision is similar to the opening of the apocalyptic visions that Isaiah and Ezekiel received. They all see the throne room of the Almighty before being allowed to see future events for their generations.

**Rev. 4:1-3**  
**1** 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.”  
**2** Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. **3** 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.

**4** 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. **5** 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.  
**6** Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. **7** 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. **8** The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is and is to come!”

**9** Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** 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:

**11** “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.”

**v. 1**

*after these things*

*I looked, and saw a door to heavenly*

*first voice like a trumpet*

*“come up here and I will show you what must take place after this”*

John is connecting chronologically the events that happened to him. Now Revelation becomes almost like a play at the theater, where events unfold and characters come and go. All is set in history as God has designed. He received the letters and now this vision appears to him. He looks up and sees a door. A voice invites him in to heaven and in an instant he is having this out of body experience.

**2 Cor. 12:1-4**  
**1** It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: **2** I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. **3** And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— **4** how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

He doesn’t fully know how these two gentlemen experienced their visions, but that is what he experienced from either seeing them or hearing about it.

There are plenty of people recorded in the bible having visions for us to understand.

When a person receives a vision, they are allowed to see into the heavenly places (The term is found 5 times in Ephesians.); it is the spiritual realm. Paul records in Ephesians that the church exists in the heavenlies, for Christ rules his kingdom from heaven. He is "above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Eph. 1:21). But there are evil powers and dominions that have not yet subjected themselves to Christ nor are they in his church. They are found "in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). There are passages that state beings are in the presence of God (Luke 1:19; Heb. 9:24) and some away from his presence (2 Thes. 1:9). So it is a special thing to be invited into the presence of God, and even into his throne room.

Generally it is recorded that when a person received a vision, to everyone else it were as if they were asleep. That is what happened when Balaam, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Joseph received theirs. In Acts 10:10, Peter fell into a trance before seeing the sheet fall on him.

It's pretty well agreed that John falls into a trance and is shown things in heavenly places.

This voice that calls to him, he describes like a trumpet (Signifies a battle call. Important event announced [Rev. 6:2, 19:11]). He says its the first voice which he heard coming from the door (Not in red letters. Probably God.). It calls to him to come and see the things which must take place after this.

What the voice said to him:

**“After this”** or after that moment, the things John was about to be shown would take place.

**Rev. 22:6**  
Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

**3. Three important doors are mentioned in Revelation. Where and what are they?**

4:1 is the vision of heaven.

3:8, 3:20 is the door of the gospel invitation, but pictured from both sides.

To Philadelphia (spread the gospel):

**Rev. 3:8**  
“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Closing remarks to the churches (gospel invitation). Possibly to Laodicea:

**Rev. 3:20**  
Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

**v. 2**

*immediately in the spiritual realm*

*saw a throne*

*one sat on throne*

So when John goes through the door and gets to heaven, he sees a throne and someone sitting on it. A throne signifies kingly authority; seat of imperial rule (Rev. 13:2 [the Devil gave the beast of the sea a throne, and great authority], 16:10). The word is mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, 17 times. So it certainly is important. From here everything that has been created was created, God rules from here, and this is the place we hope to reach some day.

**Rev. 20:11**

Then I saw a great white throne and him that sat on it,...

**Isa. 6:1**  
In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

**Ezek. 1:26-28**  
26 And above the firmament over their heads *(4 living creatures and the HS)* was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. 27 Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. 28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

**Rev. 4:3**

**3** 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.

So all their descriptions are similar. The stones they mention for the specific pieces have similar attributes.

**v. 3**

*He was like jasper and sardis*

*an emerald rainbow around throne*

**Rev. 21:10-11**  
10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

* Jasper is described as clear as crystal. (Pure)
* Sardis is generally brown, amber, or flesh colored. (Like gold, a precious metal because of the color)
* The throne has a rainbow around it like an emerald or sapphire. (Green or blue)
* Then the brightness around him is described as fire, or the brightness of a rainbow appearing through the clouds on a rainy day.

These guys use the descriptions of stones because they are strong, but precious. Then we remember that God used a rainbow after the flood to show his promise forever after the flood that he would not flood the earth again. So seeing the rainbow appear around him should remind us of his promises; our hope of glory. He gives all light off in the spectrum of colors.

**v. 4**

*Around the throne were 24 thrones, with elders*

*clothed in white*

*crowns of gold*

John writes that there are 24 thrones surrounding God's throne, and on those 24 thrones are 24 elders. To help us understand this I would like to quote a few familiar sources.

Ron Courter stated in his ‘Interpreting the Meaning of Symbols in Revelation’ chart that, “Symbols are utilized not because they are unknown or mystical, but because they are well-known and can communicate to the audience due to familiarity.

Ray Summers also states that, “Multiples of numbers represents a magnification or absolute fullest extent of the number’s meaning. Numbers most often multiplied by 10, by themselves, or consist of multiple of themselves.” 12 represents organized religion in the world. For example, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 gates to the holy city.

G. K. Beale states that 12 represents completeness as well as the accompanying idea of unity in diversity. As in the one nation Israel is composed of twelve tribes. The twelve apostles mirror the same reality for the people of God in the New Testament period. There are also twelve months in one year and two sets of twelve in a day of twenty-four hours.

People also mention that there are 24 groups of priests in the OT, but I'm not sure how much bearing that has on the purpose of this event. The point is that it represents God’s people as a whole. Those who have overcome and kept their garments clean and white. Those who are crowned with victory.

In Matt. 19:28, Jesus stated to his apostles, "you will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (representing God's people)." It's possible Jesus was speaking of this place in heaven. Then people might say, well Judas killed himself. Then Matthias and Paul joined the apostles. I think that is going past the symbolic detail to become distracted by a literal interpretation. I might jokingly respond that Matthias took Judas' place and Paul said he was one born out of time so he doesn't count. Or we have a baker's dozen.

The point being, the 24 represents all of God's faithful people, from under both covenants. This is a picture of saved before God.

John describes them wearing white robes, symbolizing their righteousness or the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:8). In Rev. 6:11, it states that martyrs were given white robes. Being martyrs for the cause of Christ is a righteous act.

Crown:

*1. Diadem denotes kingly authority*

*2. Crown [stephanos]: symbolizes a victor*

Rev. 13:1, 19:12, 3:11, 14:14

So God gives a measure of authority to his faithful people, but it also symbolizes the honor that he gives to his victorious saints who overcame the world.

**v. 5**

*from the throne there were lightnings, thunderings, and voices*

*7 lamps of fire – 7 spirits of God*

"And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices." That is the very description of God on Mt. Sinai.

**Ex. 19:16-19**  
16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

It makes me think that his power disrupts nature itself to make mankind awe at his presence.

Then it is described that the Holy Spirit is there. "Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."

7 is the number for being complete/perfection.

7 lamps of fire before the throne (these 7 congregations [symbolic of the church universal as well in this book] are at the front of God's attention at the moment)

7 Spirits of God (Holy Spirit)

The lamps being Spirit present in the churches, the Spirit is working through the church to try and convert the world. God sends a message through the inspiration of the Spirit to John that some of them can be praised but some need to correct their evil behaviors to be effective congregations.

Woe to the congregation that loses its first love, and goes in the way of Balaam's doctrine, that boasts of its riches and honors; woe to those that become careless and unconcerned; for the God of heaven will call everyone to account for it, and will bless those that labor in his cause to bring all to Christ.

There is similar imagery in Zachariah 4. In a vision he sees 7 lamps, and several other items that we will not talk about. An angel states that the they are "the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit."

**v. 6**

*before the throne a sea of glass, like crystal*

*4 living creatures (G2226 – living forms)*

*full of eyes front and back*

He then states there is a sea of glass, that looks like crystal before the throne. We will see the sea several more times in the book and things happening on it or to it, in chapters 15 and 21.

This sea represents the transcendence of God, it is perfect and calm yet we cannot approach God in our current human state. So this sea is before his throne between God and man. In chapter 15:2, it tells us the sea is on fire and the faithful are standing on it. The fire is showing God's judgment on the world, through which the faithful have passed successfully, and perhaps the trials they had to go through in overcoming the beast to get there. To be able to approach God.

Then in chapter 21:1, John writes that the sea is no more. Once victorious, in heaven we will be face to face with God.

**1 Cor. 13:12**  
For now we see in a mirror (KJV glass), dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Like looking at someone's reflecting in a window (dimly), we can make out some details but not all. When we are face to face we see them clearly. That is a principle that this sea stands for.

**Then there is also 4 living creatures in the midst of the throne and around it.** The KJV says beasts, but everyone agrees that living creatures is a more apt term for them, because they are not just animals.

These are not the same beasts from Rev. 13 and Daniel 7. Those represented different empires of man. These creatures represent something else entirely.

I wanted to begin by defining the words.

Isaiah saw the: (Isa. 6:2, 6)

seraphim (H8314) - *burning, that is, (figuratively) poisonous (serpent); specifically a saraph or symbolic creature (from their copper color).*

Ezekiel saw the (Ezek. 10):

cherubim (H3742) - *of uncertain derivation; a cherub or imaginary figure*

East of Eden (Gen. 3:24)

2 on the ark of the covenant (Num. 7:8-9)

God sits above those 2 (Ps. 80:1)

2 associated with the destruction of Jerusalem [God's glory left the city] (Ezek. 10:15)

Statues of them in Solomon's temple (Heb. 9:5)

John saw the:

4 living creatures

(H2416) *alive; strong; life; wild beast; creature*

(G2226) *a live thing, that is, an animal: - beast.*

They are described as "full of eyes in front and in back." This suggests to us that they can see in all directions. I don't know that it means through time, forwards and backwards, but the point being God's greatest guardians watch over creation with the ability to see it all.

**v. 7**

***1st a lion, 2nd a calf, 3rd a man, 4th an eagle***

I appreciate Johnny's question:

**14. What would the faces on the living creatures suggest to you? Verse 7.**

Let me tell you of some of the beliefs of our most trusted resources:

Many people claim that they are attributes for God, but then why would his own attribute praise him in chapters 4 and 5? That really doesn't make sense. They are described as living entities.

Some also claim that they are attributes of Christ. They are pictured in many classical paintings as the faces of the men who wrote the gospels, and represent what those gospels focused on. Christ as King (as in Matthew), Servant (as in Mark), Son of Man (as in Luke), and Son of God (as in John). But the more level headed scholars all agree that this is excessively speculative.

**One**. Wild animals, domestic animals, mankind, and flying animals. All of creation gives praise to God.

**Two**. I liked Homer Hailey's description the best:

"A study of Isaiah's "seraphim" (Isa. 6:2-3) and Ezekiel's "cherubim" (Ezek. 1, 10) will be helpful, though not decisive, in interpreting John's living creatures, for John's use of figures and symbols is independent.

* Isaiah's seraphim have six wings; Ezekiel's cherubim have four; John's living creatures have six as do Isaiah's seraphim.
* Ezekiel's cherubim have four faces each; John's living creatures have one face each.
* Isaiah's seraphim worship and praise Him who sits upon the throne; Ezekiel's cherubim go forth as burning coals, as flashes of lightning to carry out the divine will in the execution of judgment, providing the coals of fire to be scattered over the city. John's living creatures praise God day and night (4:8); they usher in the four horsemen (6:1-8); one of these give the seven bowls of wrath to the seven angels (15:7); and they are among those who commend God's judgment against the harlot, saying, "Amen; Hallelujah" (19:4).

From this it may be concluded that they either represent spiritual forces of God used to carry out His divine purposes, or are a special order of heavenly beings, probably the highest and closest to the throne, who serve God's majestic will." --Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (p. 170-171).

Matthew Henry describes the four faces as attributes of these angels. They are like a lion because they are stronger than man, like an ox because they are more diligent than man, like an eagle because they can go places man cannot go, and like a man because they have the intellect like mankind.

**v. 8**

*6 wings*

*do not rest, singing praises continually*

*Song*

John writes that these creatures each have 6 wings. Isaiah would write that the seraphim used 2 of their wings to cover their faces in humility, 2 of their wings to cover their feet to show modesty, and 2 they flew with.

They were full of eyes.

They did not rest day or night, but sang to God. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." We sing some of those lyrics in our own version of Holy, Holy, Holy.

People say that the term "the Almighty" always refers to God the Father. It is used multiple times in the book of Revelation and from context it always proves to be the Father, except for 1:8.

**Rev. 1:8**  
“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Commentators are split down the middle whether it is God the Father or God the Son speaking here. It is a verse not necessarily connected to what comes before or after it. It makes sense for either person in this context. Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead so it can apply, but in context throughout the rest of the book it applies to the Father exclusively. In one of the original texts it even states, "says the Lord God." It doesn't really matter, but it's interesting.

The living creatures recognize the fact that God is holy, righteous, pure. They sing his title, the Lord God Almighty, but then they sing that he has always existed and always will. And we will see many songs like this throughout Revelation.

That is one reason why people will state sometimes that if you don't like singing, you probably won't like heaven. If you don't like worship, you probably won't like heaven. It is still a place of service. Worship is something that we should enjoy though.

**2 Chron. 30:23**  
Then the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness.

This was after a time when apostasy and profanity filled the nation, but Hezekiah worked to bring about a reformation. To bring the people's hearts back to God. Verse 26 said there was not a time of worship and celebration since the time of David and Solomon. Hezekiah was the 13th king since Solomon. (About half were good.) But the people were tired of sin and ready to come back to God and to worship him. That's the attitude all of God's people should have.

**v. 9**

*when the creatures give glory, honor, and thanks...*

*one who lives forever and ever (the eternity of God)*

When the 4 living creature give glory and honor and thanks to God, it's a signal for the 24 elders to fall down in worship as well.

John adds the note that they worship, "the one who lives forever and ever." A fact that has been written in scripture over and over.

**v. 10**

*24 elders fall down and worship*

*cast their crowns before the throne*

Then when it says that the 24 elders fall down to worship God, that same phrase is used again for emphasis.

It also tells us that they cast their crowns before his throne. They show their respect to him and admit their place in the order of authority. God authority is over their authority. They throw them down in recognition that they received their authority from him.

**v. 11**

*song of worship*

The Israelites were right to worship God so long ago singing:

**Neh. 9:5-6**  
5 “Stand up and bless the Lord your God  
Forever and ever!  
“Blessed be Your glorious name,  
Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

**6** You alone are the Lord;  
You have made heaven,  
The heaven of heavens, with all their host,  
The earth and everything on it,  
The seas and all that is in them,  
And You preserve them all.  
The host of heaven worships You.

Certainly the host of heaven does worship God. He alone is worthy of all glory for creation and his works, honor because of his promises, and power over all. As they sing in heaven, God has created all things. Then they say the ultimate reason why is for his pleasure.

Surely there is no greater honor to us as humans than to think we were created for his pleasure. He wants a relationship with us. He wants us to be victorious over the devil and this world. That should give us encouragement. God giving us this glimpse of himself and heaven itself should give us motivation.

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