

The Study of the Book of Revelation

The Open Book

Chapter 4

Revelation 4 describes Heaven in Terms of the Ancient Hebrew Sanctuary.

Revelation 4:1

“After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.”

“a door was opened in heaven” - In this verse, the word “was” doesn’t appear in the Greek Text. It was supplied by the translators. It describes an Open Door into Heaven. (See **Rev. 11:19**) John didn’t see a door opening, but rather, when he looked, the door was open into the heavenly sanctuary.

Key Point: At Jesus’ Ascension He went back to heaven to be our great High Priest. John is now getting a glimpse into Jesus’ heavenly ministry.

Hebrews 4:14-16

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Key Point: Revelation 4:1 is taken by many Christians as the time of the Secret Rapture. Yet, John isn’t taken physically to heaven, he is invited to see it through a vision. As we saw with the messages to the seven churches, which covered seven different times periods of the history of the church. This leads us to the second coming of Jesus, which the Bible says, that *“Every eye shall see Him.”* When Jesus comes to get His people, He is coming for all of them at the same time. This text is simply stating that John is invited through a vision to see the ministry of Jesus, that started here on this earth, and is now continuing to take place in the heavenly sanctuary.

Revelation 4:2-11

“2 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. 4 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. 5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and 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: and in the midst of the throne, 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; 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.”

“And immediately I was in the spirit” – In Revelation 1:10 John says that he was *“In the spirit on the Lord’s day.”* Which means he went into a vision on the Sabbath day. Here he is once again taken into a vision, but this time we aren’t told what day it was.

“a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” – Here we see the Father sitting on the throne.

Revelation 4:3

“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.”

“like a jasper and a sardine stone” – To look upon the Father was like looking at precious gems. An interesting observation is that the Sardis was in first row of the breast plate, while the jasper was in the last row. The breast plate had one precious stone for each of the tribes of Israel, that was worn by the High Priest in the front. He was to bear them close to his heart. God’s people are close to His heart.

“a rainbow round about the throne” – Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary describes RAINBOW like this:

“An arch of colors in the sky, caused by light passing through moisture in the air. The most important reference to the rainbow in the Bible occurs in Gen 9:13-17, where the rainbow serves as a sign of God’s covenant with Noah. This covenant was a promise by God to the world that it would never again be destroyed by a flood. The rain clouds and the rainbow were never again to be regarded by man as a threat of ultimate judgment, but as an unchanging indicator of God’s mercy. This passage does not state that this was the first rainbow, but that it gained this new significance after the Flood.

The remaining references to the rainbow in the Bible develop this symbolism. They all occur in passages where judgment is to be announced, notably in Rev 4:3 and 10:1 in connection with God’s judgment of the world (Ezek 1:28). In all these cases, however, the rainbow is a sign of the glorious presence of God. It is a reminder that His mercy and grace will finally triumph.”

Revelation 4:4

“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.”

“and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting”

The word *“seats”* used here is the Greek word *“Thronos”* meaning Throne. So John actually sees 24 thrones around the throne of God. On these thrones, John sees *“Elders”* sitting. The Greek word used here for elders is *“Presbuteros”* meaning elderly or older; specifically, an Israelite Sanhedrin. One of the keys to understanding who these elders are is in the following verses.

Revelation 4:4

“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.”

John sees the elders clothed in white raiment, they have received Christ’s robe of righteousness. They also are wearing golden crowns. The word translated crowns, comes from the Greek word *“Stephanos,”* meaning a Victors Crown. The next clue we have is found in Revelation 5:8-10.

Revelation 5:8-10

*“And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, **having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.** And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and **hast redeemed us to God by thy blood** out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”*

Here we continue to get a bigger picture of who these elders are. John sees that they have “Harps,” and claim the Jesus has redeemed them to God by the shedding of His blood. If Jesus redeemed them by His death on the cross, then the twenty-four elders had to have lived on this earth! Is there anyone that has lived on this earth and is now in heaven? Yes! We know that Enoch and Elijah were translated, and Moses was resurrected and taken to heaven. Remember that on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw Elijah and Moses talking to Jesus. (Ref. Matt. 17) Then the Bible declares that at Jesus’ resurrection some saints were resurrected and went into Jerusalem to testify of Jesus.

Matthew 27:50-53

*“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And **the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.”***

Ephesians 4:8

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” The R.S.V. reflects a better reading of the Greek in Ephesians 4:8 *“Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he **led a host of captives,** and he gave gifts to men.”*

CONCLUSION:

Matthew tells us that there was group of saints resurrected when Jesus was resurrected. Paul tells when Jesus went back to heaven that He led a group of saints back with Him. Now John sees them sitting on thrones around God’s throne. The 24 Elders are a small group of Resurrected Saints that serve God in the Heavenly Sanctuary, as an Example of Victory. Their names are not revealed - to prevent people from praying or worshipping them, or naming churches after them. Therefore, these twenty-four elders are saints that Christ had redeemed, and they became the first fruits to present to the Father. They also helped in ministry, having golden vials which are the prayers of the saints. They thus declare that Jesus has made them kings and priest. All those who will be redeemed in the end will someday join the twenty-four elders, proclaiming the worthiness of the One who redeemed us by His blood.

Another interesting point is that the earthly sanctuary also had twenty-four assistants.

1 Chronicles 24:1-5

*“Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore **Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office.** And David distributed them, both Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, according to their offices in their service. And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar; and thus were they divided. **Among the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen chief men of the house of their fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers.** Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of the house of God, were of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar.”*

Revelation 4:5

*“And out of the throne proceeded **lightnings and thunderings and voices:** and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”*

*“out of the throne proceeded **lightnings and thunderings and voices**” – Ref. Rev. 11:19 Ellen White expounds upon this in the book, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 356 *“The holy places of the sanctuary in heaven are represented by the two apartments in the sanctuary on earth. As in vision the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.” Revelation 4:5. He saw an angel “having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” Revelation 8:3. Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven; and he saw there the “seven lamps of fire” and the “golden altar,” represented by the golden candlestick and the altar of incense in the sanctuary on earth.*”*

Revelation 4:6a

*“And before the throne there was **a sea of glass like unto crystal:** and in the midst of the throne,”*

“a sea of glass like unto crystal” – Ref. Rev. 15:2

The term “*Sea of glass,*” does not refer to a large body of water before the throne. It is sharing that before, under, and around the throne is made up of something that is glass like, in other words transparent. *“And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were **a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.**”* Ex. 24:10 Therefore, we see that the “*sea of glass*” is blue, but is clear and transparent. An interesting thought is that this is the same material that the Ten Commandments were made from. Ref. Ex. 24:9-12

Revelation 4:6b-11

*“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; 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.”***

“four beast” – The word beasts used here in the Greek is “Zoon,” meaning “Living Beings.” This is different from the Greek word used for the prophetic beast of Revelation Chapter 13, which is, “Therion” which means a dangerous, venomous or wild animal. The four living beings here are God’s Cherubim’s or Seraphim’s. Angels that take care of God’s desires on the earth.

Ezekiel 1:5-10

*“Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of **four living creatures.** And this was their appearance; they had the **likeness of a man.** And every one had **four faces,** and every one had **four wings.** And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, **they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.**”*

Ezekiel 10:1, 9-18

*“Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was **above the head of the cherubims** there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.” ... “And when I looked, **behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub:** and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, **O wheel. And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.** And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims.”*

Isaiah 6:2-3

*“Above it stood the **seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.**”*

Four Comparisons Between the Heavenly and the Earthly Sanctuary

No. 1 - In each there is a throne.

Revelation 4:2 - *“a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.”*

2 Samuel 6:2 – *“And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence **the ark of God**, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that **dwelleth between the cherubims.**”*

The “Ark of God” was located in the “Holy of Holies,” the “Most Holy Place” in the Earthly Sanctuary. This was God’s Throne, the MERCY SEAT, of the Sanctuary.

No. 2 - In each there are seven lamps (lights).

Revelation 4:5 - *“and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne...”* Ref. Rev. 1:12-13

Exodus 25:31, 37

31 *“And thou shalt make **a candlestick of pure gold:** of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same.”*

37 *“And thou shalt make **the seven lamps thereof:** and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it.”*

No. 3 - In each there are 24 assistants.

Revelation 4:4 - *“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.”*

1 Chronicles 24:1-18 - *“1. Now [these are] the divisions of the sons of Aaron 3 And David distributed them ... according to their offices in their service. ...5 Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors [of the house] of God ... 7 Now*

the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah ...18 The three and twentieth to Delaiah, the four and twentieth to Maaziah.”

The Righteous are Awarded a Crown (Stephenos) of Victory at the Resurrection, when Jesus comes back.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

*“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a **crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**”*

No. 4 - In each there are Four Cherubim.

Revelation 4:6, 8

6 *“and round about the throne, were four beasts...”*

8 *“And the four beasts had each of them six wings...”*

1 Kings 6:23, 27

23 *“And within the oracle {The “Oracle” is the “Most Holy Place”, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept} he made two cherubim of olive tree, each ten cubits high.”*

27 *“And he set the cherubim within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubim, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house.”*

1 Kings 8:6-7

“And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered the ark and the staves thereof above.”

Solomon placed two Cherubim within the Most Holy Place, whose wings covered above the place that the Ark was put. In addition, there were the two “Covering Cherubim” on the Ark. Thus, there were Four Cherubim in the Sanctuary. (See the description of the temple in **1 Kings 6:1 - 1 Kings 8:11**)

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.**”*

God the Father, who is sitting on the throne, is proclaimed as worthy to “receive glory and honour and power.” Because He is in control of this universe and together with Jesus and the Holy Spirit has not only created all things, but also formed the plan of redemption.

Colossians 1:12-16

*“Giving thanks unto **the Father**, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: **Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood**, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: **For by him were all things created**, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:”*

This verse clearly tells that God the Father had His Son Jesus create all things, therefore, both are worthy of worship and to “receive glory and honour and power.” May we each give our heart fully to Jesus our Redeemer, and cry holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, for Thou are worthy!