

## **Notes on Revelation 4**

Intro: The revelation has been introduced, John has seen the resurrected Christ, and he has dictated the letters to the churches to prepare them for the events about to transpire. Chapter 4 begins the "revelation" of the "things that are to shortly take place." The vision begins with God. As we study we want to think about Him. What does this vision tell us about God and why did those Christians and we as well need to know these things about Him?

### **The throne scene**

John's transport in vision to heaven

After these things...--the addresses to the churches are dictated and written.

I looked...--Remember the Revelation was "shown" to John in symbolic pictures.

Door in heaven...--An opportunity to witness the conflict from the heavenly standpoint.

Come up here...--John is being prepared to see the revelation of the things which must shortly come to pass.

In the Spirit--conveys inspiration, the Holy Spirit guided John as He received this revelation from Christ by His angel.

The throne

This idea is put forward as central to the vision.

The throne symbolizes the rule of God from heaven.

It is standing and occupied; not thrown down or abandoned.

One sitting on the throne

For dramatic effect he is not identified but we instinctly know who He is and that becomes evident in the description.

Like jasper (white, a diamond?, Cf. 21:11) and sardius (red) in appearance--Do they symbolize something about God? Righteousness and justice (Cf. Ps. 89:14-15; "Righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne..")

A rainbow around the throne. All students are familiar with the promise of God connected with the rainbow: Gen. 9 teaches that the rainbow is a sign of the Noahic covenant: I will not destroy the earth with water again. Thus, the rainbow itself might symbolize the mercy of God toward his fallen creatures. This rainbow is like an emerald in appearance (Green).

Thrones around the throne

These are in Greek "thronou" or "thronoi". Throne is a better translation than "seat"; though the word "seat" may convey a position of authority in connection with rule.

There are twenty-four of them. Here let's suggest that someone is reigning with God! That much is clear. But who are they?

Those sitting on the thrones (the twenty-four elders)

In O.T. symbolism elders may suggests those that are old or those who serve as leaders or representatives in behalf of God's people.

Twenty-four--Some say it is derived from the 12 tribes of the O.T. and the twelve apostles of the N.T. Twenty-four was the number of courses of priests that served God in the temple (1 Chron. 24) to offer praise on harps and incense in the temple. Later we see the elders doing what priests do (Rev. 5:8). It would be an appropriate symbol for those who served God as His priests.

Sitting on thrones--God's people are a kingdom of priests. They reign with God as they serve him.

Clothed in white garments (This indicate moral purity or holiness).

Golden crowns on their heads (The crown is a symbol of victory.) Later the elders cast their crowns before the throne, a symbolic acknowledgment that God is the source of the victory and that they are unworthy. Their bows of incense they hold symbolize the "prayers of the saints".

Perhaps then the twenty-four elders stand for all the redeemed, the imagery suggesting a priesthood in service to God. Their worship is not playing on harps and burning incense, but praising and praying to Him.

Lightning and sounds and thunders come from the throne.

In Biblical symbolism these suggest God's majesty power in the midst of divine judgments.

Cf Ex. 19:16; Ps. 144:6; 18:13-14.

Seven torches are before the throne

These are said to be the seven spirits of God. Again the symbol seems to be of the Holy Spirit who is on earth.

Before the throne indicating that God is always aware of what they symbolize.

In as much as fire is a symbol of persecution and Christians must pass through the fire on their way to heaven the torches symbolize the Holy Spirit's intercession in their behalf (Rom. 8:26) and God's awareness of it. It is a figure of comfort and consolation to Christians. (Cf. Ac. 9:31).

A sea of glass like crystal

Later John sees this sea of glass mixed with fire (persecution) and those who have come off victorious over the beast standing on it. Later when the new heavens and earth are established "the sea" is no more.

In view of these statements we might conclude that the sea represents the path man must cross to gain access to God. It is glassy indicating the calmness and tranquility of our journey but also mixed with fire, indicating the possibility of trial and persecution.

The four living beings

The word is "zoan", living beings but not necessarily "creatures"; not "therion", beasts as we find later in the book. They are very similar to Isaiah's "seraphim" (Is. 6:2-3) and Ezekiel's cherubim (Eze. 1, 10).

Yet, here these special creature are distinguished from angels (5:11) and "every created thing" (5:13). I would suggest that they represent something uncreated, something so closely associated with God that they become the personification of that thing. They are symbols of the "life" that exudes from God and that brings his will into motion.

As we look further we see that these creatures suggests what is "noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate nature". Thus, the living beings are symbols of the divine attributes by which he manifests his will, whose existence constantly praises him, his strength, meekness, intelligence, speed. As such they "have no rest" for God always is what He is. And have eyes around and within indicates the complete omniscience of God. They give glory, honor, and thanks to God. Their message: Holy, holy, holy... They declare his power and eternal existence. As the living beings praise God, so do those who have been redeemed among men. They fall before God and worship Him, casting their crowns before Him. They praise him as Lord and God and creator of everything.

### **The message of this vision**

There reigns in heaven, Almighty God--glorious, holy, possessed of all that is necessary to execute his will upon earth and in heaven. These very qualities glorify Him without ceasing. In the exercise of His will and power, He has brought into existence all that exists. From among men there are those who by God's grace and power know Him for who He is and are passing into his world, praising him for the victory He has given them over their trials.

In this God all Christians set their hope. From this God comes forth judgments upon the world of the wicked. He is worthy of our total submission. There is no one or no thing on earth that can or should displace him from our love and loyalty. Before Him, any god (the greatest idol of the Greek pantheon), any man (the great king among men) or any earthly pleasure pale into infinite insignificance.