

III. The Things Which Must Imminently Take Place!

WORSHIP IN HEAVEN: {Rev. 4:1-5:14}

The Throne in Heaven: (Rev. 4:1-11)

Introductory comments:

Remember: The Apostle John was exiled on the Island of Patmos had previously received a vision of Christ as recorded in Revelation 1. The first occurrence here of the phrase *after these things*, announces that the following content comes immediately after the previous vision recorded in Rev. 1. The Greek terminology of this phrase means "immediately after." It indicates the sequence in which events of the narration of the revelation occurred. In the first vision, John was commissioned to write the book of Revelation and instructed to address messages to 7 particular churches in Asia Minor. This second vision is now immediately following the first vision of Christ from Revelation 1 (*the things which you have seen*), and the giving of the messages to the 7 churches in Revelation 2 and 3 (*the things which are*). The first use of this phrase used here in Revelation 4:1 is dealing with John's chronology as he experienced these events. Later on in this verse this same phrase occurs again and relates to God's chronology of the events. It also marks the third major division of the book and is an important transition since it introduces the things, which must imminently take place. The information that Christ is revealing to John has now made a transition and is looking ahead to end time events. The events of chapters 4 and 5 are taking place from the hidden scenes in heaven, from which we are allowed a glimpse. The emphasis of chapter 4 is upon God as Creator, while the emphasis of chapter 5 is upon God as Redeemer. The following focus in chapter 4 is evident from the text of Scripture. One word occurs eleven times in these eleven verses. The focus is on the throne of God in heaven.

The Summons to Heaven: (4:1-2a)

1) *What John Saw:*

John suddenly recognized a door opened in heaven. The heaven spoken of here is not the first heaven of earth's atmosphere, or the second heaven of the universe, but is the third heaven which is the very throne room of God. The term "Behold" is used to grab the attention of the reader and it emphasizes John's astonishment. John was granted the immeasurable privilege of having a glimpse of heaven and fortunately for us he was given permission to record what he saw.

2) *What John Heard:*

John again hears a voice as he did in the first vision recorded in Rev. 1:10. In fact John notes that this was indeed the same voice as the first voice which he had heard. And once again he describes that voice as sounding like a trumpet. Remember: "*Like the sound of a trumpet*," is a phrase that describes the intensity and clarity of the voice. The trumpet was one of the loudest instruments of the time period and a good illustration as to the intensity of the voice he heard." "The trumpet carries with it the concept of authority also."¹⁹⁹ "The trumpet here signals the necessity to submit to whatever is commanded."²⁰⁰ It was a signal to action. Keep in mind however that it is not a trumpet being used here, but the voice that John hears sounds like a trumpet.

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It was the authoritative and commanding voice of the Lord Jesus Christ which John had heard. The Lord Jesus issued one command here to John and that was, "*Come up here!*" The Greek verb *anaba* is in the imperative mood emphasizing that this was a command by which John was to assume a new vantage point for the sake of the revelation which he was about to receive. **-This is not the rapture taking place here in this verse. The command is not directed to the church, but is a singular directive to John the apostle for the purpose of receiving revelation from God. There is no possible way and no possible support for this command to be interpreted as the rapture of the church.** Now keeping in mind also chronologically the rapture would have already taken place at this point. *The things which are* in chapters 2 & 3 precede the event we know as the rapture while chapters 4 through 22, *the things which must imminently take place* are events which follow the rapture. The rapture is actually the first event of the things which must imminently take place. However there is **NO** teaching on the rapture in chapters 4 through 22 and this is likely due to the fact that adequate revelation has already been given regarding the rapture of the church. Since Revelation is dealing with the pouring out of God's divine wrath on the world, then the rapture of the church would not be a key emphasis in the revelation that John would receive.

Now keeping this in mind, as we look at the rest of the statement we are told exactly what the Lord's purpose was in calling John up to heaven. It was so that he might show John the events that *must take place after these things*. *These things* were the events of chapters 1 through 3 as they had already been revealed and thereby emphasizing the third division of the book as taken from the outline of Revelation 1:19.

3) What John Experienced:

"*I was in the Spirit,*" is the same phrase used to describe John's experience in Revelation 1. "The Greek word translated "was" is literally "became" and therefore indicating that this was something unusual."²⁰¹ John was not in the Spirit in the sense that all believers are said to be in the Spirit. John was transported spiritually into the reality of heaven for the purpose of the giving of divine revelation. "The Holy Spirit took possession of John's senses and he was caught up into heaven and could hear and see what was happening before God's throne, although he was physically on the earth."²⁰²

The Scene in Heaven:

"The central theme of John's vision is the throne of God, mentioned eleven times in this chapter. All the features of the chapter can be outlined based on how they relate to that throne of divine glory. After describing the throne, John tells us who is on the throne, what is going on around the throne, what comes from the throne, what stands before the throne, who is in the center and around the throne, and what is directed toward the throne."²⁰³ John uses several prepositional phrases with the term throne which provides us the structure/outline of this chapter.

The Throne:

The term "behold" emphasizes John's amazement at what he was witnessing. The first thing John notices as he gets a glimpse of heaven is the throne of God. The Greek term *thronos* is used for an oracular seat, a teacher's chair, a judge's bench, planetary alignments and as a king's throne. Here it

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is a reference to God's heavenly throne which is mentioned in all but three chapters of Revelation (2,9,10). It is the central focus as stated earlier of this chapter because it is mentioned 11 times. John beheld the glory and majesty of God on His throne in heaven. The throne emphasizes God's sovereign rule and authority. "A vision of God's immovable throne reveals He is in permanent, unchanging, and complete control of the universe. That is a comforting realization in light of the horror and trauma of the end-time events about to be revealed (Rev. 6-19)." ²⁰⁴

On The Throne:

One sitting:

After his initial mention of the throne, John moves on to give a description of the One sitting on the throne. "John gave no anthropomorphic description of the one sitting on the throne. He simply reported that, *"He who was sitting [was] like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance."* ²⁰⁵ It is of little doubt who it is that is sitting on the throne. It is the omnipotent sovereign God of the universe. The term sitting here does not denote rest, but reigning. This is not the first time in the Scriptures that we have been given a description of God on His throne:

Isaiah 6:1-4

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

1 Kings 22:19

And Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left."

Daniel 7:9-10

9 "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took [His] seat; His vesture [was] like white snow, And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne [was] ablaze with flames, Its wheels [were] a burning fire. 10 "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened."

Ezekiel 1:26-28:

26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, [was] a figure with the appearance of a man. 27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and [there was] a radiance around Him.

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28 *As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so [was] the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such [was] the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*

"That description is reminiscent of the flashing light, blazing fire, and vivid colors in Ezekiel's vision. Revelation 21:11 describes jasper as 'crystal clear.' Most associate the jasper stone as being a diamond. 'All the shining, flashing facets of the glory of God are compared to a diamond, brilliantly refracting all the colors of the spectrum. A sardius, from which the city of Sardis got its name, is a fiery, bloodred ruby. It too expresses the shining beauty of God's glory, and may also symbolize God's blazing wrath, about to be poured out on the sinful, rebellious world (Rev. 6-19).' There is possible further symbolism in the choice of these two stones. The sardius and the jasper were the first and last stones on the high priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:17-20), representing the firstborn (Reuben) and the lastborn (Benjamin) of the twelve sons of Jacob. It may be that these stones depict God's covenant relationship with Israel. John's vision of God's throne is not one of peace and comfort. Its flashing, glorious, splendorous magnificence reveals the terrors of God's judgment. Truly, Our god is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29, Deut. 4:4)."²⁰⁶

Around The Throne:

After giving a description of the One sitting on the throne, John moves out from the throne and describes what and who surrounded the throne. First John describes the what, he saw a rainbow around the throne which was like an emerald in appearance. Then John describes the who, he saw 24 thrones around the throne of God and upon those 24 four thrones there were 24 elders.

What was surrounding the throne: A rainbow that was like an emerald in appearance was around the throne. This is not a rainbow as we know and see during certain atmospheric conditions on the earth. First of all it uses a different Greek term that the LXX uses to translate rainbow in Genesis 9. The idea is more of a bow which encircled the throne. Instead of just an arc, it is a full and complete circle. In fact the noun form (*kuklos*) of the adverb around (*kuklothen*) is a term which designates a ring or circle. This circled rainbow around the throne of God is emerald in color and symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy, and grace (cf. Genesis 9:13-17).

Who was surrounding the throne: Also surrounding the throne was 24 thrones with 24 elders sitting on them. These elders were dressed in white garments and had golden crowns on their heads. Much debate has existed as to the identity of the 24 elders and who they represent. The following is a list of the various views:

- 1-These elders are men who are representatives of Israel.
- 2-These elders are men who are representatives of the Church.
- 3-These elders are men who are representatives of both the church and Israel.
- 4-These elders are angels who are representatives of the O.T. priestly orders.
- 5-These elders are angels who are representative of the faithful of all ages.
- 6-These elders are angels who are a special class of angels.

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Now lets look at the data a little more closely:

The reference to the 24 thrones indicate that these elders reign with Christ. There is no Scriptural evidence that angels are or will be ruling or reigning. In fact the role of angels is to serve/minister (cf. Heb. 1:14). However, consistently through the Scriptures the church is promised a reign with Christ (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12). This immediately cancels out views 4-6, and also causes some conflict for views 1 and 3.

The term elders (*presbuteroi*) is never used in the Scripture to refer to angels. It usually speaks of an older man in general. It often speaks of rulers in both Israel and the church. This of course further negates views 4-6.

The white garments worn by these 24 elders are most commonly referred to as the wardrobe of the redeemed. Angels do appear in white but most commonly the usage of the term is in regard to believers. In fact the context of Revelation is important in this regard. Remember the church in Sardis were promised that they would be clothed in white garments (3:5). Also the church in Laodicea was encouraged to purchase white garments for the purpose of clothing themselves (3:18). Later on at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the bride of Christ will be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean symbolizing the righteous acts of the saints (19:8). White garments in Scripture especially in Revelation usually symbolize Christ's righteousness imputed to believers. This would rule out every view except view 2.

Further more the golden crowns which are on the heads of the 24 elders are never promised to angels thereby lending further evidence that these were redeemed men. In fact angels are not even seen wearing these crowns. The Greek term for crown here, (*stephanos*) is the victor's crown which is symbolic of honor and reward. It is the same crown promised to the believers in Smyrna (2:10), and mentioned throughout the N.T. in regards to the reward of the believer (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25, 2 Tim. 4:8, James 1:12, 1 Pet. 5:4). This would cancel out views 4-6.

There exists a distinction made between the angels, tribulation saints, and the elders in Revelation 7:11 & 14. This distinction supports the idea that these elders are the church.

In addition there exists no mention of the church being on the earth during the tribulation as is presented in Rev. 6-18.

The elders are pictured in heaven during the Great Tribulation as Revelation unfolds.

CONCLUSION: It is my firm belief that these 24 elders are representative of the church. The above support clearly points in favor of that view. Often throughout the Sripture the number 24 is used as a number representative of the whole. In 1 Chronicles 24:4-5, 7-18; there were 24 officers of the sanctuary representing the 24 courses of the Levitical priests. There were also 24 divisions of singers in the temple (1 Chron. 25). Some have tried to identify these 24 elders as representative of Israel. It is important to note that National Israel as a whole does not come to salvation until the tribulation period when they will face judgment. There also exists a view that these elders represent Israel and the church, however for the same reason as above this cannot be the case. In addition to the fact that Revelation never divides these 24 elders into two units of 12.

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The clearest conclusion is that the 24 elders are representative of the entire church pictured here on thrones (co-reigning), dressed in white garments (the imputed righteousness of Christ), wearing golden crowns (representing honor and reward). What a glorious and magnificent picture to realize that we will one day be in the very presence of our Holy, Omnipotent, Sovereign God, standing before Him in Worship, proclaiming His majesty, bowing before Him on His throne and casting our reward at His feet.²⁰⁷

From The Throne:

These lightnings, sounds (voices) and peals of thunder are not coming from the throne but from the one who sits on the throne.

Similar terminology is used in the Old Testament:

1- First at Sinai associated with the giving of the Old Testament Law. (Ex 19:16)

Ex. 19:16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who [were] in the camp trembled.

2- Second in the vision of Ezekiel. (Ezek. 1:4-28) In fact this entire passage of Ezekiel 1 seems to be very parallel to the vision of John in Revelation.

3- Other passages uses one or more of these terms to describe a manifestation of God's glory or a display of His omnipotent power. (Cf. Ex. 9:23,28; 1 Sam. 7:10; 12:17-18; Job 37:14; Ps. 76; 77:18).

This terminology is repeated within the Book of Revelation: (It is used three other times which appropriately interprets the idea here in Rev. 4.)

1- It is used in Rev. 8:5 associated with the breaking of the 7th Seal Judgment.

2- It is used in Rev. 11:19 associated with the blowing of the 7th Trumpet Judgment.

3- It is used in Rev. 16:18 associated with the pouring out of the 7th Bowl Judgment.

"From the throne is not the fury of nature, but the firestorm of righteous fury about to come from an awesome, powerful God upon a sinful world."²⁰⁸

Before The Throne:

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,] as it were, a sea of glass like crystal;

a) The 7 Lamps of Fire:

These 7 lamps of fire are different from the 7 lampstands of Revelation 1. In fact the following phrase distinguishes them from the lampstands by calling them the 7 Spirits of God. "Unlike the lampstands mentioned in 1:12-13, these were outdoor torches, giving of not the soft gentle light of an indoor lamp, but the fierce, blazing light of a fiery torch."²⁰⁹

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As noted in Revelation 1:4 & 3:1 these 7 spirits of God are used as a symbolic reference of the Holy Spirit, and this imagery is drawn from Zechariah 4:1-10 in which they are identified in Zech. 4:6 as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is embodied in various ways throughout the New Testament:

- At the Baptism of Christ, He is described as a descending dove. (Mt. 3:16)
- At Pentecost, He is described as tongues of fire. (Acts 2:3)
- In Zechariah 4:1-10 & here in Revelation 4:5, He is described as 7 lamps of fire.

These 7 lamps of fire here, represent the fullness and completeness of the 7-fold Spirit of God and add to the imagery of Revelation 4 & 5 depicting the Holy Trinity:

- The One sitting on the Throne: The Father
- The 7 lamps of fire: The Spirit
- The Lamb (Rev. 5): The Son

b) The Sea of Glass:

This is not a literal sea, but is metaphorical language. Revelation 21:1 tells us that there is no sea in heaven. The phrase, *as it were* could be translated "something like" and emphasizes that it is not really a sea. In fact from John's perspective he had no other way of describing what he saw but to associate it from something here on earth that he had experienced. "What John saw at the base of the throne was a vast pavement of glass, shining brilliantly like sparkling crystal."²¹⁰ We see similar terminology in Exodus 24:10 and Ezekiel 1:22. It is probably important to note that glass was a costly material in ancient times and in Job 28:17 crystal is ranked among the most valuable of all treasures on earth. This crystal clear floor/pavement added to the glorious splendor by reflecting the flashing many colored light from the throne. Some have suggested that it may symbolize God as set apart, Holy & Pure.

In and Around The Throne:

First of all these four living creatures were located in the center and around the throne. This means that they were immediately near the throne. They were stationed in the inner circle nearest the throne.

Second, the term creatures is misleading and not an accurate translation of the Greek text. They are better referred to as living beings or living ones.

Third, these living beings have obviously been mentioned before in Scripture. (Cf. Ezekiel 1:5-11 & 18; Ezekiel 10:3-22 especially vs. 15). From reading these verses it is apparent that these are the same beings and Ezekiel specifically identifies them for us as cherubim (angels).

These cherubim are an exalted order of angels frequently associated in Scripture with God's holy power (e.g. 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; & Isa. 37:16)²¹¹. In fact in each of these references God is described as being enthroned above the cherubim. Most believe that Satan, before his fall was one of these cherubim (Ezek. 28:14-16).

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These cherubim are described as being full of eyes in front and behind. (Rev. 4:8; Ezek. 1:18; 10:12) This is symbolic representing their keen awareness, alertness and comprehensive knowledge, although it is important to recognize that they are not omniscient, they just have a supreme perception.

In Revelation, John describes each as having a different appearance. We see them described as a lion, calf, man and flying eagle in appearance. These once again are the same description in Ezekiel 1. However, in Ezekiel 1:6 they are described as each having all four faces. It is likely from John's perspective or position that he did not notice this. "Those descriptions may view the four cherubim in relation to the created world; the lion represents wild creatures, the calf domestic animals, the eagle flying creatures, and man the pinnacle of creation. Symbolically, the lion represents strength, the calf service, the man reason, and the eagle speed."²¹² Although the symbolism is somewhat unclear, it is apparent that these are a special order of cherubim rendering service to God.

They are described as having 6 wings which is a similar description to Isaiah 6:2. In Isaiah they are described as using 2 to cover their faces, 2 they covered their feet and with 2 they flew. This would likely emphasize their supreme responsibility in rendering service and worship to God.

Toward the Throne:

As we move to the end of verse 8, John's attention is changed to what is being directed toward God's throne. It is here where the scene in heaven culminates in the worship of God. Beginning in this passage we have 5 great hymns of praise. In each of these hymns the size of the choir increases. It begins with the 4 living beings, increases with the 24 elders, in 5:8 there is an addition of harps, in 5:11 the rest of the angels add their voices, and it concludes in 5:13 with all created beings of the universe joining in. These 5 great hymns of praise is broken down into 2 movements. In chapter 4 it is the hymn of creation while in chapter 5 it is the hymn of redemption.

A Hymn of Worship "Proclaiming God's Attributes:

Specifically 3 attributes of God are focused on in this passage in which God is given glory, honor, & praise.

God's HOLINESS: *Holy, holy, holy,*

Some Definitions:

"Possibly its primitive meaning was to be separated, or to be elevated, or to be lofty, or something of the kind." {Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 145}

"Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, all His attributes are holy; that is whatever we think of belonging to God must be thought of as holy." {Tozer}

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"The basic meaning of holiness is 'set apart' or 'separation.' Several features are embraced in the holiness of God. It has a transcendent emphasis, indicating 'He is absolutely distinct from all His creatures and is exalted above them in infinite majesty. It has an ethical emphasis, indicating He is separate from moral evil or sin.' Holiness' points to God's majestic purity, or ethical majesty." {Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 192-193}

God's Holiness in the Scriptures: (This is not exhaustive)

- 1-God's character is holy--Isa. 57:15
- 2-God's rule is holy--Ps. 47:8
- 3-God swears by His holiness--Ps. 89:35
- 4-The seraphim ascribe perfect holiness to God--Is. 6:1-3
- 5-The 3rd person of the trinity is called "Holy"-- Lk. 12:12
- 6-God's temple is holy--Ps. 11:4
- 7-God's people were to be Holy--Dt. 7:6, 1 Pet. 1:15

Etc... One could go on and on. It is clear that God is completely separate from His creation and from all evil. He is HOLY!

GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE: *the Almighty*

Not only was God's holiness a cause for worship but so was His power. He is called "the Almighty" here. It is a term that God first identified Himself to Abraham (Gen. 17:1). "It is a term that identifies God as the strongest, most powerful being, utterly devoid of any weakness, whose conquering power and overpowering strength none can oppose."²¹³

Scriptural Illustrations of God's Power:

- 1-The Miracles of Jesus demonstrate God's power. (Cf. Mt. 8:14-16; 8:23-27; John 11:43-44)
- 2-The Resurrection of Jesus and of believers is by God's power. (1 Cor. 6:14)
- 3-The Creation account demonstrates God's power. (Gen. 1 & 2)
- 4-The Exodus from Egypt demonstrates God's power.

Etc.....Obviously we could go on and on here as well, but it is clear God is the Almighty (All Powerful) God!

GOD'S ETERNALITY: *who was and who is and who is to come*

God is infinite in relation to time. God is without beginning or end, free from all succession of time, and is in fact the cause of time. God lives beyond time. God's nature is without beginning or end. Scripture repeatedly affirms God's eternity. (Cf. Ps. 90:2; 93:2; 102:24-27; Mic. 5:2; Hab. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16)

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*GOD IS INDEED: The HOLY, OMNIPOTENT, ETERNAL GOD & CREATOR OF THIS UNIVERSE!

The Actions of Worship:

1-From the 4 living beings: They are proclaiming glory, honor & thanksgiving to God.

2-From the 24 elders: They are falling before God. (The first of 6 times they do this: cf. 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4) This is a sign of reverent worship, and is a natural response to the majestic, holy, awe-inspiring glory of God. (cf. Gen. 17:3; Josh. 5:14; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 43:3; 44:4; Acts 9:4; Rev. 1:17) They are said to worship God and another emphasis is placed upon His eternity. Lastly, they cast their crowns before God. "They are not preoccupied with their own excellence. They are not concerned about their own holiness, honor, or reward. All those things pale into insignificance and become meaningless in light of the glory of God."²¹⁴

A Hymn of Worship "Praising God as Creator"

-God is Worthy!

Now the 24 elders join in praising God as Creator. They proclaim God as worthy to receive glory, honor & power.

-God is Creator!

He created all things. (Gen. 1 & 2) They proclaim that God created all things and that He created all that existed based solely on His good will and pleasure.