

BOOK OF REVELATION

Part 10 - Description of God's Throne: Chapter 4:1-11

I. INTRODUCTION

We are now moving into the next section of the Revelation. Revelation 1:19 gives us the outline of the book as given by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1: **The Things Which Thou Hast Seen – The Unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ**
Chapters 2-3: **The Things Which Are – The Message to the Seven Churches**
Chapter 4-22: **The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter – The Future Yet to Come**

We have studied so far the following:

Revelation 1: We see the Apostle John imprisoned on the island of Patmos, a small, rocky island where one cannot grow food very well or at all. John was sent there to die, which was normal practice for “political prisoners” of the Roman Empire. Common criminals were sent to the copper mines to do hard labor. John is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and sees the Lord Jesus Christ unveiled. His description: His eyes as a flame of fire, indicating his piercing gaze. His feet like fine brass, indicating his justice. His garments are pure white, indicating purity. John collapses on his face at the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, knowing the physical weakness of our human form, comforts him and tells him that he is the beginning and the end of all things and commands him to write a book to the seven churches in Asia. This region is known today as Asia Minor and is encompassed by the modern nation of Turkey.

Revelation 2-3: Jesus addresses the seven church in Asia one at a time. The churches the Lord Jesus address are the churches in: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyratira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Each of these churches get a unique message from the Lord Jesus Christ and is representative of seven different periods of the church age:

- Ephesus holds to true doctrine, rejects the Nicolaitines doctrine, but loses its first love and commanded to return to it – The Apostolic Era (@33-100 A.D.)
- Smyrna is comforted due to its heavy persecution and is not chastised. - The Era of Persecution (@100-313 A.D.)
- Pergamos is where the power base of Satan is located, has some embracing the doctrine of Balaam (making believers stumble), and has some embracing the Nicolaitines. - The Era of the Distortion of Christianity (@313-500 A.D.)
- Thyratira is where the prophetess Jezebel has deceived the majority of the believers there and Jesus put no further burden upon the small remnant that still serve him. - The Era of the Dark Ages (@500-1500 A.D.)
- Sardis is dead with a living and extremely small remnant. - The Reformation Era (@1500-1700 A.D.)
- Philadelphia is given an open door that no man can close and is not chastised. - The Missionary Era (@1700-1900 A.D.)
- Laodicea is physical rich, spiritually poor, lukewarm, and make the Lord nauseated, and Jesus is on the outside knocking to get in. - Current Era (@1900 A.D. - Present)

II. EXEGESIS – DESCRIPTION OF THE SCENE AROUND THE THRONE OF GOD

VERSE 1: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven:...”

We see after the addresses given by the Lord Jesus Christ to the seven churches is complete that the scene changes immediately. The word “looked” here carries the meaning of “seeing” without moving one's head to turn and look. The word “door” carries the meaning of a passage way or portal. This passage way leads into heaven.

In scripture the word “heaven” can refer to three different places:

- **First Heaven:** The term used by many Bible students to refer to the atmosphere around the earth that contains the clouds and the winds. When the word “heaven” was used in the Old Testament it could either have referred to the atmosphere around the earth, or the abode of God. The phrase “the heaven” refers specifically to the atmosphere. The context of the passage will tell the reader the true meaning of the word in the passage.

Genesis 8:2 “The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained;”

Psalms 104:12 “By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches.”

- **Second Heaven:** The term used by Bible students to refer to the physical universe and all the galaxies that it contains. Most often translated “heavens” in the Old Testament because it comes from a plural of the same Hebrew word that is used to describe the atmosphere .

Psalms 19:1 “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

You can see in the following verse in Psalms refers to both the First Heaven and the Second Heaven.

Psalms 115:16 “The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.”

- **Third Heaven:** The words used by the Apostle Paul, and since by Bible students, refer to the adobe of God, and his angels, that is beyond the universe. In several places in the Old Testament it was referred to by the phrase “the heaven of heavens”.

2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 “(2) I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. (4) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

“...and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me;...”

No doubt a picture representing the Rapture of the church which will occur before the beginning of the Tribulation. Notice that John refers to the voice having the sound of a trumpet. Could this passage possibly give us a clue as to what the “trump of God” really is. More likely than not, this is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking here.

The Rapture of the church is described in detail on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

“...which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter”

John hears a voice thru the door that sounds like a trumpet inviting him to witness the next events. This occurs right after John saw the Lord Jesus Christ in his true glorified form. The same two words used in the Greek for the first two words of this verse “after this” are translated “hereafter” at the end of the verse. These words carry the meaning of “after these things”.

This is a reference to a prophetic events The “hereafter” is the next set of events after the Church age is concluded after the Rapture.

VERSE 2: And immediately I was in the spirit:

The phrase “in the spirit” is the same phrase used in Revelation 1:10. John is not in heaven but by the power of the Holy Spirit is being shown a vision of heaven, while still being on the isle of Patmos.

Revelation 1:10-11 “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, (11) Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea”

“...and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.”

John's vision goes now directly to the Third Heaven, as the Apostle Paul had described in scripture. He sees a throne, which always has the connotation of power. He is witnessing the throne of God in Heaven. And in the next verse we will read the description of the occupant of this throne.

VERSE 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.

Jasper today comes in many different colors and is opaque. In ancient times it was most often the color green or many different colors at once. Also the jasper was much more translucent, which one could see through. The sardine stone was almost always darker in color.

The rainbow has all the colors of the visible spectrum included in it and it is made by light being refracted by water droplets or some other refractory material. It is a visible manifestation of the bright light coming from another source. The rainbow here could possibly have been generated by the glory of God directly. It is interesting to remember that the rainbow is reminder of the promises that God has made, He will keep.

The Apostle John was trying to convey to us that the glory of God in the best terms possible in our language. For no human language could adequately describe the glory. The description he gives is very similar to other descriptions given in other places in God's Word.

Exodus 24: 10-11 “(10) Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: (11) 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.”

Ezekiel 1:25-28 “(25) And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings. (26) And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. (27) And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. (28) As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

VERSE 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.

We see that there are 24 elders and of course 24 seats for them to sit in. Many Bible commentators wish to “spiritualize” these verses in Chapter 4 and 5. However the context of the passage is that of a literal view of what the area around the throne of God is like. The white raiment they are wearing represents their purity that they obtain from the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. They did not earn these white robes, they were given to them by the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the identity of these men? The scripture does not tell us for certain but it has been often speculated by many Bible student of the present and past that they are the twelve apostles and the twelve sons of Jacob, representing the saints of the Old Testament (The dispensation of Law) and the New Testament (The dispensation of Grace). More specifically the saints out of Israel and the church, the two institutions that God chose to work through for the benefit of all mankind. Only God knows for sure who these men are.

These men are not angels as some Bible student have assumed. You never see in scripture where angels wore crowns on their heads. The only ones portrayed in scripture wearing crowns are the saints of God, which are human beings not angelic beings. The New Testament teaches us about five different crowns that the believer can earn, so they can present them back at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ later.

VERSE 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.

The lightning which causes thunder, is seen in other places in the scripture when a view of the throne of God is shown even in the Old Testament. It is a part of the glory of God, which again is hard for us to imagine or describe in any human language. The “lightning and thunderings” are also a good representation of the justice and judgment that God is about to pronounce on a world that has rejected Him.

Exodus 20:18 “*And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.*”

VERSE 6: And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal:

The sea is often used in the Book of Revelation and other places to represent large groups of people. In this case, it is appropriate that John sees the mass of believers from all the different dispensations in the Old and New Testaments. The Word of God interprets itself again for you in other passages.

Revelation 15:2 “*And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.*”

We see here that the “glass of sea mingled with fire” is defined as the large number of Tribulation saints that have been martyred for their faith, primarily from refusing to take the Mark of the Beast. That sea is standing upon the sea mentioned here. This time we see the Tribulation saints standing with the saints of other ages as one massive assembly of believers. Also notice that the sea is stable and tranquil, not unstable and moving. A great way to describe the saints of God from all the ages being secure and unwavering in Him.

“...and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.”

We see in Verses 7-10 the specific descriptions of these four “beasts”. The word “beasts” (transliterated: zo-on) in the original language means “living creature” or “living animal” and is translated “beast” or “beasts” depending upon whether a singular or plural number of creatures is referenced. In Revelation 13-19 you see another “beast” that is exclusively seen on the earth is translated with another word in the original language (transliterated: thay-ree-on), which means “a dangerous animal” which fits the context of the “beast” on the earth. Another proof of the perfection and preservation of God's Word.

VERSE 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.

We see a parallel description of these four “living creatures” in Ezekiel 1:5. They are pictures of the scene around God's throne as well and no doubt the prophet Ezekiel is describing the same four beasts that the Apostle John saw here. But the prophet Ezekiel gives a more detailed description here. Notice two things special about the description given by Ezekiel. Notice that these “living creatures” could move very quickly so quickly their movements were not seen.

Ezekiel 1:5-14 “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. (6) And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. (7) 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. (8) And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. (9) Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. (11) 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. (12) Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. (13) And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. (13) As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. (14) And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.”

VERSE 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.

We see a further part of their description. The next parallel passages in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 10 makes it clear that these “living creatures” or “beasts” were angelic beings, specifically seraphim angels. The word “seraphim” used in the original language (transliterated: saraph) carries the meaning of a “burning” or “on fire”. They had a special appearance given to them by God. Many Bible students try to again “spiritualize” these passages when the context does not support these being figurative. Look now at the passage in Isaiah 6 that identifies them as angels:

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. (3) And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The reference “full of eyes” could possibly be a reference to their massive visual perception. But the scripture does not tell us for sure and there is no reason to spiritualize this passage as they probably did have that appearance being it is mentioned also in Ezekiel 10:

Ezekiel 10:10-14 “And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. (11) 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. (12) 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. (13) As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. (14) 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.”

The cherub mentioned here is referred to in other passages in Ezekiel 1 as an ox and Revelation 5 as a calf, a herbivorous animal. The cherub angel no doubt had the appearance of a ox or a calf.

VERSE 9-10 “(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,“

Notice the immediate response when these “beasts” or seraphim angels give glory to God, which they were created to do. The 24 elders also bowed down to God who is on the throne.

VERSE 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.”

This is the purpose of all creation. To serve and glorify God, the sovereign of the universe. We have the same purpose as the angels of God when they were created, and had the same choice that the angels had: to serve God or to not serve Him. Unfortunately, 1/3 of the angels rebelled with Lucifer, against God, and were cast out of Heaven. Mankind, chose in the Garden of Eden, not to follow God by also disobeying His word and were cast out of paradise. However, unlike the angels, which once they choose their position were forever stuck in that position, God has given mankind a chance to repent and be reconciled to Him. This gives the saint even the more reason to serve God: out of gratitude. The works of creation already glorify God.

III. APPLICATIONS

- At the end of the church age we will be taken up to heaven in The Rapture and will not go through the Tribulation. PRAISE GOD.
- We will be taken through that “door in heaven” and ushered right into the presence of God. We will see all these things that are shown here and will be the “sea of glass” mentioned here.
- You will see all the saints from the past ages and be reunited with loved ones and friends who have accepted Christ as Saviour and died.
- Our real purpose in life now as it will be then, is to give glory to God.
- Are you glorifying God now as you should with your deeds and words?