

Revelation Chapter 4

1) The Reigning God (4:1-11)

- a) The Christians in the seven churches had been persecuted, were being persecuted, and would be face with more persecution. The exhortation given has been to conquer, overcome, be victorious in all circumstances.
- b) Details of trials yet to come will begin in Chapter 6.
- c) Now they are to be shown, contrary to appearances, God is still on the throne and that He, not the Roman emperor, is in control.
 - i) The futurist/premillennialist interpretation is that Chapters 4 & 5 describe the “rapture” which is to precede the tribulation, the description of which begins in Chapter 6.
 - (1) See page 4 of the Introduction for a general description of the futurist interpretation.
- d) Rev. 4:1 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”
 - i) After this – after the vision of the son of Man and the letters to the seven churches.
 - ii) A door standing open in heaven



- e) Rev. 4:2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.
 - i) I was in the Spirit
 - (1) Recall Rev. 1:10 – I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,

- (a) Recall 2 Cor. 12:1-4 – Paul (or someone he knew) had a similar experience and stated that he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body.
 - (i) Paul also stated “he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.”
 - (ii) John was told “write in a book”.
- (b) Recall John 4:24 - God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth
 - (i) Such an understanding would agree with Jesus’s statement which John recorded in his gospel.
- (c) However, what John was about to hear and see (at a minimum) indicates that John was thoroughly receptive to it, whether in the body or out of the body.
- (d) Some views that have been suggested are:
 - (i) The writer was in a devout frame of mind - a state of holy contemplation - when the scenes were represented to him.
 - (ii) The representations were supernatural; that is, they were something which was disclosed to him, in that state of mind, beyond any natural reach of his faculties.
 - (iii) These things were so made to pass before him that they had the aspect of reality, and he could copy and describe them as real.
 - (iv) These symbols were real; that is, they were a real and proper delineation of future events. They were not the mere workings of the imagination. He who saw them in vision though there may have been no representation to the eye, had before him what was a real and appropriate representation of coming events.
- ii) a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne
 - (1) One throne, central to the vision.
 - (2) One seated on the throne
 - (a) Rev. 4:5 - the seven spirits of God
 - (b) Rev. 4:8 - the Lord God Almighty
 - (c) Isaiah 6:1-13 - In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne
 - (d) Ezekiel 1:1-28 - the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God

(e) John 1:18 - No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

(f) Neither Isaiah, nor Ezekiel, nor John attempts to describe the one on the throne. God is spirit – how can man describe him?

f) Rev. 4:3 And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

i) Rev. 21:9-27 - having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

ii) As in the case of the new Jerusalem, John can only use descriptions of rare and highly-prized jewels that are known to man.

iii) Jasper

(1) Sometimes green, but there is a variety that is clear and brilliant, like the jasper in Rev. 21:11 – clear as crystal.



(a)

(2) The glory and holiness of God

iv) Carnelian (sardius in some translations)

(1) Colored by other minerals that may be mixed with it, usually deep red from iron.



(a)

(2) The wrath of God (appearance like fire when held in the hand)

v) Emerald

(1) In its purest form, a deep, glowing green.



(a)

- (2) The mercy of God
- vi) Rainbow – reminder of both the wrath and mercy of God.
 - (1) Gen. 9:8-17 - I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
 - (a) A symbol of hope in the midst of tribulation.
 - (2) Exekiel 1:26-29 - Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.
- g) Rev. 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.
 - i) Twenty-four thrones, twenty-four elders
 - (1) Why twenty-four thrones? Who are the twenty-four elders?
 - (2) The following verses suggest that the 24 elders represent Christians, perhaps martyrs, who were exhibiting the promises made to those who are faithful, those who conquer.
 - (a) Rev. 5:8-10 - by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation
 - (b) Rev. 2:10 - Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 - (c) Rev. 3:5 - The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments
 - (3) Other interpretations of the twenty-four include:
 - (a) 2 x 12 - A unity which can be divided into parts: 12 tribes, 12 Apostles, (also 12 hours in a day and 12 night)
So 144 (12x12) is the idealized completed and united people of God
 - (b) The redeemed people of God from every age – 12 tribes, 12 apostles.
 - (c) Rev. 5:10 - you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God
 - (i) The priestly tribe of Levi had 24 divisions, according to function.
 - 1. 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 - ... the eighth to Abijah ... the twenty-fourth to Maaziah. These had as their appointed duty in their service to come into the house of the Lord
 - 2. Luke 1:5-10 - there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah

- (4) More significant than any of the various interpretations is that they fell down before the Lamb and sang a new song
- (a) Rev. 5:8-10 - the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song (Worthy ...)
- h) Rev. 4:5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,
- i) Recall the scene from Mount Sinai:
- (1) Heb. 12:18-25 - a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest [19](#) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.
- (2) Exodus 19:16-20 - On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.
- (3) The same awesome power of God is shown again, but this time it is the Lamb who approaches God instead of Moses.
- (a) Rev. 5:7 - he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.
- (4) The power displayed here overwhelmingly surpasses anything a Roman emperor could display. God is fully capable of avenging the suffering brought upon Christians.
- ii) The seven torches of fire (some translations will have lampstands instead of torches) invokes the image of the lampstand in the tabernacle.
- (1) Exodus 25:31-40 - You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.
- (a) These were the source of light in the holy place of the tabernacle.
- (2) The image is not the same as the seven golden lampstands of Rev. 1:12-13, which are the seven churches.
- (3) Here, the seven torches or lampstands are the seven spirits of God.
- iii) The seven spirits of God
- (1) Other usage in Revelation
- (a) 1:4 - and from the seven spirits who are before his throne

- (b) 3:1 - ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.
- (c) 5:6 - I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
- (2) Seven indicates “sacred completeness” or “perfection”.
- (3) Some suggest “seven spirits” refers to Isaiah 11:1-2
- (a) **1** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **2** And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of *wisdom* and *understanding*, the Spirit of *counsel* and *might*, the Spirit of *knowledge* and the fear of the Lord.
- (b) I believe these are characteristics of Jesus, the Messiah rather than seven spirits of God.
- (4) Eph. 4:4-6 **4** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—**5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- (5) When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples (apostles), he never spoke of multiple Holy Spirits.
- (a) John 14:16-17 - **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be^g in you
- (b) John 15:26 - But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.
- (c) John 16:13 - When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
- (6) My conclusion is that there is only one Spirit, but the symbolism of “seven” in Revelation is that it is complete, and is before the throne, ready to do the Lord’s bidding.

i) Rev. 4:6-8a and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind, **7** the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. **8** And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within ...

i) as it were a sea of glass, like crystal

(1) Indicates there is a separation between God and the churches.

(2) But that separation will not always exist.

(3) Rev. 21:1 - and the sea was no more.

(4) Rev. 21:3 - "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

(5) Once again, in heaven, the people of God will have direct fellowship with God.

ii) Four living creatures

(1) Isaiah 6:1-3 - **1** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

(2) Ezekiel 1:4-14 - **4** As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. **5** And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, **6** but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. **7** Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. **8** Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: **9** their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. **10** As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on

the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. **11** Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. **12** And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. **13** As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. **14** And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.

- (3) Three different visions (Isaiah, Ezekiel, John) have much in common.
- (a) ζῷα (zōa) - an animal, living creature, something alive
 - (b) θηρίον (thērion) - a wild beast, animal, brute
 - (i) The *beasts* of Rev. 13 are not the same as the *living creatures* of Rev. 4, although some translations use *beasts* in Rev. 4.
 - (c) Full of eyes in front and behind
 - (i) Omniscience, all-seeing, all-knowing
 - (ii) Heb. 4:13 - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
 - (iii) Prov. 15:3 - The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.
 - (d) Lion, ox, man, eagle
 - (i) All creation worships God, and these four may symbolize wild animals (lion), domestic animals (ox), man, and birds (eagle).
 1. Rev. 5:13-14 - **13** And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” **14** And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.
 2. Rev. 4:11 - for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created
 - (ii) Bravery (lion), strength (ox), intelligence (man), swiftness (eagle).

- (iii) Man is the only one mentioned as having a face here, while Ezekiel saw four faces and Isaiah simply called them seraphim (fiery ones).
- (iv) **All** give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, day and night.
- (e) Six wings
 - (i) John recorded only that they had six wings.
 - (ii) Isaiah recorded covering face, covering feet, and flying, possibly to signify humility, modesty, and swiftness to obey God's command.
 - (iii) Ezekiel recorded four wings with two covering their bodies.
- (f) The purpose of this vision is to give encouragement to the obedient. God has awesome power, and it is God who reigns supreme, not an earthly ruler such as Domitian.
- j) Rev. 4:8b and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"
 - i) Hymn: "Holy, Holy, Holy".
 - ii) First praise is for the purity of God.
 - (1) The three-fold repetition was the Hebrew way of expressing the superlative degree.
 - iii) Second praise is for the power of God – Almighty.
 - iv) Third praise is for the permanence of God – who was, and is, and is to come.
 - v) We see the four living creatures continually praising God.
- k) Rev. 4:9-11 **9** And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, **11** "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
 - i) The twenty-four elders around the throne join in the song of praise with the four living creatures.

ii) They willingly gave up their crowns, representing spiritual victory, to the God who is supreme.

(1) Rev. 3:11 - Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

(2) When a king was conquered, they were forced to cast their crown before the conqueror. The victorious elders cast their crowns willingly.

1) To summarize Rev. 4:

i) God is in control, not the emperor.

ii) God is eternal – the creator of all and the protector of His people.

iii) Satan may rage against the people of God, and some may think Satan is winning, but it is only temporary, and God is not moved.





THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES SURROUND THE THRONE (4:5-8)



THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS JOIN IN PRAISE (4:9-11)