

John is Caught Up into Heaven and Sees the Throne of God

Revelation 4

Revelation 4 - *"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."*² *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.*³ *And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.*⁴ *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.*⁵ *And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*⁶ *Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.*⁷ *The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.*⁸ *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*⁹ *Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,*¹⁰ *the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:*¹¹ *"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."*

Background Notes

In Revelation 1:19 John was told, *"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."* This verse gives us a good outline of the Book of Revelation: things of the past, things of the present (to John) and events of the future. The transition between the "things which are, and the things which will be hereafter" is found at the end of Revelation 3 and beginning with Revelation 4. The messages to the seven churches that existed in John's day (and certainly apply to churches today) are all part of "the things which are."

Now notice what John was told in Revelation 4:1 - *"After these things...."* So, in Revelation 4 we begin the division of the Book of Revelation that will cover "the things which will take place after this." These events were future to John's time, and we believe they are still future today. However, the future events described in Revelation 4 and the following chapters may not be that far in the future -- the end times could be quite near!

All Christians are not in agreement as to the details of the "end times." There are several different positions, even among those Christians who hold to a futurist view of Revelation. The futurist view that we're presenting in our talks on

Revelation is known as the “Pre-Tribulational” view, and we believe that Book of Revelation supports this futurist view. The Pre-Tribulational view holds that the next event on God’s prophetic calendar is the Rapture of the Church, which could come at any time. The Lord’s return for His Church is imminent – this means it could happen at any time! Following the Lord’s return for His Church, the seven-year Tribulation Period of judgments will come upon this earth. These events are covered in Revelation 4- 19.

In the Pre-Tribulational view of Revelation, the Church will not go through the Tribulation, because the Church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air before the Tribulation. That’s why this view is called the Pre-Tribulational view. We believe that the Book of Revelation supports this view, and that the book of Revelation makes sense only when interpreted in light of this view.

Doctrinal Points

1. In Revelation 4 the Rapture of the Church is implied.

In chapters 2 and 3 of the vision, John was on earth, writing to the seven churches on earth. Here at the beginning of Revelation 4, in the vision John was caught up (or “raptured”) into heaven -- immediately and suddenly. Beginning with chapter 4, in the vision the Church is not seen again on earth during the time of the world judgments on earth that is covered in Revelation 4 through 19.

In Revelation 19 we have “the Marriage of the Lamb” that takes place in heaven. The bride, the Church, has made herself ready. Revelation 19:7-8 - *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”*⁸ *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”* The implication here is that the bride has not just arrived in heaven in Revelation 19, but has been in heaven for some time. She has been in heaven, preparing for the marriage, while the Tribulation judgments are taking place on this earth.

So, in Revelation 4:1 there is a strong implication of the Rapture of the Church. The “open door in heaven,” and the fact that the Apostle John was suddenly transported to heaven, and the fact that the Church is no longer seen on earth after this verse, but is seen in heaven preparing for the marriage of the Lamb -- all of these items in the vision point to the idea of the Rapture of the Church in Revelation 4:1. So in Revelation 4 the Rapture of the Church is implied.

2. In Revelation 4 the throne of God is presented.

*“Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”*³ *And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.*⁴ *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.*⁵ *And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

⁶ Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸ The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" ⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

In the vision, the throne of God and God Himself are seen with the brilliance and glory of precious stones. The emerald rainbow around the throne reminds us of the covenantal sign of the rainbow in Noah's time, and emphasizes the fact that God keeps His covenants with His people forever!

In verse 4, twenty-four elders clothed in white were seated on twenty-four individual thrones around the throne of God. Most likely these twenty-four elders represent believers in heaven. They are the redeemed saints who are clothed in righteousness, who have been rewarded with thrones and crowns, and they worship the Lord forever: "*the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:* ¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

The lightning and thundering proceeding from the throne of God represents God's judgment against sin. In the vision, the fact that there were seven lamps of fire representing seven spirits of God does not mean that there are seven Holy Spirits! No -- seven is the symbolic number of perfection and completeness.

Who do the four "living creatures" of verses 6-9 represent? Various good suggestions have been made. The fact that they were seen worshiping the Lord (v8) leads me to believe that they are angelic beings. In fact, their symbolic description in verse 7, involving the likenesses of a lion, calf, a flying eagle and the face of a man is very similar to the description of the cherubim in Ezekiel 10. In Ezekiel's vision of God's throne chariot with the whirling wheels (also seen in Ezekiel 1), living creatures identified as cherubim were associated with God's throne.

Ezekiel 10:9-22: "*And when I looked, there were four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by each other cherub; the wheels appeared to have the color of a beryl stone.* ¹⁰ *As for their appearance, all four looked alike—as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.* ¹¹ *When they went, they went toward any of their four directions; they did not turn aside when they went, but followed in the direction the head was facing. They did not turn aside when they went.* ¹² *And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around.* ¹³ *As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, "Wheel."* ¹⁴ *Each one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, the second face the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face*

of an eagle. ¹⁵ And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar. ¹⁶ When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also did not turn from beside them. ¹⁷ When the cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still, and when one was lifted up, the other lifted itself up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them.

¹⁸ Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. ¹⁹ And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. ²⁰ This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim. ²¹ Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. ²² And the likeness of their faces was the same as the faces which I had seen by the River Chebar, their appearance and their persons. They each went straight forward."

The living creatures of Ezekiel's vision were cherubim. Cherubim and seraphim are high-ranking angels. The cherubim in Ezekiel's vision were very similar in description to the living creatures of Revelation 4:7.

"The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within" (v8). This description emphasizes their wisdom and knowledge. What they say concerning the holiness of God is very similar to the description of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:2-3 "Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

What an awesome scene we have here before us of the throne of God in heaven! In Revelation 4 the throne of God is presented.

Practical Application

Praise the Lord for the "sea of glass, like crystal."

Verse 6: "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal." We might be tempted to think that the sea of glass in the vision would be more beautiful if it were a deep blue sea of water for sailing, with waves for swimming and surfing! But that kind of sea can get stormy and dangerous. In fact, in Scripture the sea is often used to symbolize trouble and restlessness and even wickedness, as in Isaiah 57:20 - "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

The heavenly sea of glass, smooth and sparkling like crystal, conveys the idea of undisturbed peace and rest -- forever. What a great future for believers! Praise the Lord for the sea of glass, like crystal!