

The Supreme Headquarters of the Universe

📖 Revelation 4:1-11

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 April 2, 2017

🌐 fgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

We come to Revelation 4 to begin our exposition of the book that is the culmination of the previous 65 books. In 1:1 we said that the title of the book is The Revelation. In our translation it is the revelation *from* Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must quickly take place at the appropriate time. And He sent and communicated these things by way of an angel to His bond servant John. In 1:3 there is abundance of understanding pronounced for the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and hold on to them, for the time of their manifestation is near. In 1:19 the Lord Jesus divides the Revelation into three sections; the things which John had seen, which are a vision of the resurrected Christ, and therefore refers to Revelation 1, the things which are, which are the seven churches, and therefore refers to Revelation 2-3, and the things which will take place after these things, which are the Tribulation, the Millennial Kingdom, the Great White Throne Judgment and the New Heaven and New Earth, and therefore refer to Revelation 4-22. If we follow this outline, we see that these three divisions are sequential. The Christ was resurrected first, then the Church was formed and is taking place and after the Church has run its course the Tribulation will come. This strict chronology implies and is consistent with the Church's pre-trib rapture. In 3:10 we saw the promise to the local Church at Philadelphia, which is a promise to the universal Church, to be kept from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole world, to test the earth-dwellers. These earth-dwellers are a technical group in the Revelation that are identified as persistent unbelievers. They refuse to believe. The hour of trial is for them, not the universal Church which is promised to be kept from that hour of trial. Therefore, by the end of chapter 3 we are certain that the Church will not be on the earth during the Tribulation.

We come now to Revelation 4 and verse 1 says **After these things I looked**. John is giving us the sequence of the revelation as he received it. He had already received the revelation of the resurrected Christ, then the seven churches, now he looked and began to see something that was next. This means that what He seeks next is not the Church. It will only be mentioned by that name one last time in Revelation 22:16. The curious absence of the word *ekklesia*, the most common word to denote the Church, in Revelation 4-19 was commented on by Walvoord who said, "The word *church*, so prominent in chapters 2-3, does not occur again until 22:16, though

the church is undoubtedly in view as the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7. She is not a participant in the scenes of the tribulation which form the major content of the book of Revelation." The most likely conclusion is that the Church is not mentioned on earth in Revelation 4-19 because she is already in heaven. John himself may even represent the Church being caught up at the rapture to heaven in this verse. When John **looked** he saw **a door standing open in heaven**. That doorway was just beckoning John to pass through. Then he heard **the first voice which he had heard** previously. The first voice he heard was the voice in 1:10, which seems to be the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is difficult to determine entirely because 1:1 says the revelation was given from the Lord Jesus by way of an angel to John. Therefore, the voice could be that of an angelic guide. The voice was **like the sound of a trumpet speaking**. That is, the voice rang out loud and clear. And the voice **said** to John, **"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things**. Because of the similarity of this description to the rapture and because of the placement of this verse just before the Tribulation, many have concluded that this is typology of the pre-trib rapture. I personally think that such a well-placed description is not at all out of touch with divine revelation. And to say that it is not at least typological of the rapture is to show a predisposition against the rapture as pre-tribulational. Further, it is interesting that previous prophets like Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel were all allowed to look into heaven, and Ezekiel and Paul were even caught up into heaven, but not one of them was allowed to come back and report what they saw in heaven. John, therefore, is unique. We gather that John was taken into heaven to see firsthand what heaven was like and to be given a heavenly vantage point of the things transpiring on earth. Repeatedly the vision from here moves from heaven to earth and the things in heaven decide what happens next on earth. Therefore heaven rules earth.

In verse 2 we read, **Immediately I was in the Spirit**. While some take this as John's human spirit, the phrase more likely means John was taken over by the Spirit such that he was transported to heaven, either physically, or spiritually, or in some sense not exactly described, but thereby given heightened awareness to comprehend the things he saw.

And behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. What we find here is probably the most majestic scene in the Revelation. As what we see is the supreme headquarters of the universe and those which attend the war counsel immediately preceding the Tribulation. As majestic as the scene is, not near enough attention is given to this chapter and its implications as should be. First of all, we have a picture of **heaven**. People have their own ideas of **heaven**. They want heaven to be a certain way because they can't imagine enjoying heaven if it does not have the things from this world that they enjoy. We all know the song, "If heaven ain't a lot like Texas, I don't want to go..." Well, when we see heaven as it really is, the focal point isn't our puppy dogs, our flowers, our motorcycle or our significant other. It's **a throne...and One sitting on the throne**. There is nothing as awesome as Him sitting on His throne. All the attention is focused on Him on HIS throne. A **throne** represents sovereign rule. It is mentioned 14 times in this chapter (Revelation 4:2 (2x), 3, 4 (3x), 5 (2x), 6 (3x), 9, 10 (2x)). Therefore, **throne** is the central theme of this chapter. We are to know from this that the events which begin to unfold on the earth in Revelation 6 are emanating from the **throne and the One sitting**

on the throne. There is nothing merely human or demonic about the events beginning in Revelation 6. They are all being sovereignly directed from the supreme headquarters of the universe and by its Commander in Chief. Now this Commander in Chief is **the One sitting on the throne**, and this is the Father alone, even though Revelation 3:21 indicated that the Son is sitting at the right hand of the Father on the Father's throne. We know this is the Father alone because Revelation 5:7 depicts the Son as coming up to the One "who sat on the throne." So the Father is distinct from the Son, just as the Spirit is distinct from both the Father and the Son. They are three persons in the One true God. And the Trinity is seen numerous times in the Revelation. It is a highly Trinitarian book. So in verse 2, John, taken control of by the **Spirit**, was taken to heaven to see God the Father sitting on the throne. And the meaning of this picture is that God the Father is the Commander in Chief and the One sovereignly directing all the events that befall earth beginning in Revelation 6.

In verse 3 John saw God the Father, yet since no one can see God or has seen God at any time, the description in verse 3 is simply one of *color*. **And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.** We have three colors here. Color is a result of light. There is no color apart from light. John said in his first epistle that God is light and in Him is no darkness, not even a bit. That is very interesting and certainly distinguishes God as light from the light God created on day one. John saw three colors; two of which relate directly to the Father and one to the throne. The first color describing the Father **was like jasper**. The **jasper** was an ancient stone. Although our knowledge of ancient geology is limited, it seems clear from Revelation 21:11 that the modern opaque jasper stone is not what is meant. The **jasper stone** is described there as a watery crystalline brightness, more like a diamond. Most scholars think John saw a diamond appearance. The diamond represents the purity and holiness of God. The second color is that of the **sardius stone**. From ancient descriptions, this was a fiery red stone. Some described it as "blood colored." It represents the justice or judgment of God. The point of selecting holiness and justice is to alert us to the fact that it is time for God to judge the earth. He has been patiently waiting for men to repent, that time of patience has come to an end, it is time to judge, to vent forth His wrath. Smith said, it is a mixture of white light with fire, a dramatic picture "of His anger because of His holy nature reacting in response to the prevailing sinfulness of mankind, resulting in the judgment He is about to send upon the earth." The third color relates to the throne. It is **a rainbow around the throne like an emerald in appearance**. The significance of the color **emerald** is not known, though some think it relates in some way to nature. The significance of the **rainbow** is more certain. The **rainbow** was the sign of the Noahic Covenant where God promised that He would never again destroy all flesh as He had done in the Noahic Flood. It's presence here as a halo around the throne of God, just as in Ezekiel, is set forth as a reminder that God's judgment during the Tribulation will be tempered by His mercy. In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus said that the Tribulation judgments would almost destroy all flesh, but the time would be suddenly terminated so that both man and animal life would continue. So the rainbow is a symbol of God's judgment tempered by mercy. So the three colors that John saw when he saw God signify the

holiness of God, the justice of God and the mercy of God tempering the judgment that issues forth from His throne during the Tribulation.

In verse 4 we are introduced to others within the throne room of heaven. The throne room of heaven is the supreme headquarters of the universe. At this time there is a war council in the headquarters in heaven. The reason is because heaven is about to take over earth. Those attending the war council are the important advisors and counselors. Among these are the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. First we meet the twenty-four elders. **Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads.** Who are these **twenty-four elders**? Their identity is much debated. At least thirteen different views can be found. Most fall into two broad categories; one saying they are angels and the other they are men. My view is that they are men who represent the church. A quote from Gromacki summarizes the evidence. "The biblical description seems to point to believers of this present church age. They are already in heaven (Rev. 4+-5+) before the opening of the seal judgments (Rev. 6+). They are sitting on thrones before God (Rev. 4:4+). Angels never sit in the presence of God. However, Christ promised church-age believers that they would sit with Him on His throne (Rev. 3:21+). God positionally has made all believers today sit together in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:6). The elders are clothed in white robes (Rev. 4:4+). Church-age believers are promised such pure clothing (Rev. 3:5+, 18+; 19:7-8+). The elders have crowns of gold on their heads (Rev. 4:4+). . . . Believers in the churches are promised such crowns (Rev. 2:10+; 3:11+). In the Epistles, believers are also promised crowns for spiritual accomplishments (1 Cor. 9:25; 1Th. 2:19; 2Ti. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; 1Pe. 5:4). Holy angels do not wear crowns, but believers can and will wear them. . . . The elders are set in contrast to angels (Rev. 5:11+). The term presbuteros (elder) is never used of angels in the Bible. The word denotes maturity and growth. Holy angels could not be designated with this term because they were all created at the same time. . . . The more plausible explanation of the twenty-four elders is that they represent the redeemed of this present church age." If this is the correct identification then this is further evidence in favor of a pre-trib rapture.

Note that their thrones are **Around the throne**. This means they surround the Father's throne. The number of thrones is as the number of elders, **twenty-four**. Why **twenty-four**? The order of priests in the OT was composed of "twenty-four." They represented the whole Leviticus priesthood. Church age believers are a kingdom of priests (1:7). We are to rule with Christ. Therefore, the **twenty-four** may reasonably represent the whole Church. Their clothing is **white garments**. The **white garments** represent being clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Upon their heads they wear **golden crowns**. These are victory crowns representing rewards received at the judgment seat of Christ. In verse 10 they cast these crowns at the feet of Him who sits on the throne because it is His grace alone that made the works done worthy of the rewards. The twenty-four elders, therefore, represent the raptured, resurrected, rewarded Church, which is now in the Father's house, just as Jesus predicted in John 14, if it were not so, I would have told you.

In verse 5 we see judgment coming out from the throne. **Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder** remind us of the scene at Mt Sinai when God descended in a great cloud Theophany to give the Law. The fearful sights and sounds were meant to put reverential fear in the Israelites so that they would be afraid of judgment if they broke the Law. Here it is again, a warning of impending judgment coming in the Tribulation beginning in Revelation 6. Also, **there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Burning fire** is also a picture of judgment. The **seven Spirits of God** are not seven different spirits, but according to Revelation 1:4, a title of the one Spirit of God. Zechariah 4 referred to the eyes of the Lord as the seven Spirits. Here the Spirit is portrayed by **seven lamps of fire burning continually before the throne**. The message is clear; **burning** is coming in the Tribulation. The picture of Revelation 4-5 is clear; everything that begins in Revelation 6 is emanating from the supreme headquarters of the universe and from the Father, the Son and the Spirit. There is nothing merely human or demonic about the four horsemen of the apocalypse or any of the other judgments that come. They all come from the throne of God. This is a picture of the war council in that holy room preparing for the onslaught.

In verse 6 we are introduced to some additional items and members of the war council. **and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the midst and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind**. In front of **the throne there was something like a sea of glass**. In the OT the bronze laver was a **sea of glass** representing the cleansing of sin as the priests washed their hands and feet of all the daily filth so they could approach God. This **sea of glass** is described as being **like crystal**. It was **crystal** clear. The signification of perfect clarity is that all sin has been cleansed so that there is no longer any need for confession of sin; All who are present have total access to God on His throne. The sea of glass is the true bronze laver, the one in heaven, the one after which Moses modeled the earthly copy.

Next we see four more members of the war council. The **four living creatures**. They are **in the midst and around the throne**. This means they are in the immediate vicinity of the **throne**. They are His closest council members. There are four, so one on each side of the throne. The same creatures are seen in Ezekiel. There they are moving rapidly in a circular motion around the throne. They are probably doing the same here.

Who are these **creatures**? They are described as **living** (*zoon*), a word that is often used of domestic or wild animals. But they do not seem to be animals but rather some class of angels. Similar angels called seraphim are described in Isaiah 6. Other similar angels called cherubim are described in Ezekiel 1. It is hard to tell if these are either. They have six wings while the ones in Ezekiel have four. The ones in Isaiah have six and so they seem more similar to them. In either case they attend to God's throne. Cherubim were portrayed on each end of the Ark of the Covenant with God's glory dwelling between. Again, the Ark was a fitting copy on earth of the true temple in heaven seen here. The point is to see into the war council and the awesome appearance of those who attend most closely to God's throne.

If these are angels, and they seem to be, it is interesting that angels are often described as compositions of various animal parts. Perhaps the animals were created to reflect these angels. Just as each animal has unique abilities so these angels composed of many parts may indicate their multi-faceted abilities. Further, they are **full of eyes**. Eyes represent intelligence. **Full of eyes** represents supernatural intelligence. Nothing escapes their judgment. As a part of the war council, they are involved in several of the judgments in the Tribulation. Each one releases one of the four horsemen of Revelation 6. Therefore, they are involved in executing God's judgment. That judgment begins in Revelation 6.

In verse 7 similes are used to describe the four living creatures. **The first was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.** The **lion** is known as "the king of the jungle" and generally represents that which is most noble among animate creation. **The second creature was like a calf** or better an **ox**. The **ox** is known for its great strength in the animate creation. **The third creature had a face like that of a man.** **Man** is known for his intelligence and reasoning capacities. Mankind is the wisest of the animate creation. **The fourth creature was like a flying eagle.** The **eagle** is the swiftest in animate creation. "Together, then, the four living beings picture all animal life from the perspectives of greatest nobility, strength, wisdom, and speed."¹

In verse 8 the four living creatures are given further description. **And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is the LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.** The **six wings** is identical to the seraphim of Isa 6. They too said "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY." The fact they **are full of eyes** means they have supernatural intelligence. The addition of the phrase **around and within** means **around** their bodies and **within** the underside of their wings. With eyes under their wings they can fly without loss of vision.

What the four living creatures do, **Day and night is not cease to say, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.** The expression **day and night** means that they say this during the **day** and during the **night**, not that it is all they ever do. That they do other things is stated explicitly in Revelation 6:1, 3, 5 and 7 where each "*of the four living creatures*" summons one of the four horsemen to "*Come*" and release judgments on the earth.

What they say is praise that focuses on three attributes of God: The first is His holiness; "**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**". The three-fold ascription of holiness is known as the *Trisagion*. It is identical to the praise of the seraphim in Isa 6:3. God is holy. He is the standard for what is right and wrong and He exercises justice against wrong. The second is His omnipotence; **THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY**. This is a title of the Father used in Revelation 1:8 that emphasizes His power. He has the power to release judgment upon the earth to remove evildoers. The third is His eternity; **WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME**. This title was used in Revelation 1:4 of the Father to emphasize He has no beginning or end. He will never go away. He always has been. His enemies on earth are temporal and so have a beginning and will come to an end. "As the absolutely holy one, He is

thoroughly entitled and has ample might to initiate stringent measures against His own creation in order to return it to its original holy state."²

In verse 9, the ascriptions of praise offered by the four living creatures signal the twenty-four elders to worship Him. These twenty-four elders represent the Church. **And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne.** The first response of the twenty-four elders is *a change of position*. They **fall down before Him**. This is the proper position for worship. The second response is the **worship** itself. They worship Him. The third response is they **cast their crowns before the throne**. They were pictured with golden crowns on their heads in verse 4. These were the crowns given to them as reward for their works done in the body. By casting them before His throne they are acknowledging that apart from His grace the works could never have been done. Ultimately "Everything revolves around the throne and Him who sits on it; this is the center of attention in this heavenly scene."³

In verse 11 we find their ascription of praise, **Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.** First, they ascribe to the Father **worthy; worthy are you, our Lord and our God.** **Worth** was traditionally ascribed to an emperor in a triumphal procession. The Father is **worthy**. He is **our Lord** which means **our Master** and **our God** which means our Sovereign. Second they say that He is **worthy...to receive glory and honor and power**. When we glorify God we are reflecting His essence. His essence is worthy to be reflected. When we **honor** God we value highly His essence. When we ascribe to Him **power** we are recognizing His ability to do all things.

The reason for pronouncing Him worthy of glory, honor and power is because He **created all things, and because of His will they existed, and were created.** The first thing they praise Him for is His creation work. The next thing they will praise Him for is His redemptive work. But for now the focus is on His creation work. The praise is a three-fold ascription; first, **for You created all things**, is aorist active. It refers to God's original creative work in Gen 1; second, **because of Your will they existed** is an imperfect. It describes the fact of all things being in existence and the reason for their existence **for His will**. God chose to create because He willed it. He did not have to create to have a companion or to express His divine attributes because He is complete in Himself; third, **and were created** is aorist and states that there was a beginning to all that **exists**. Before He created He was all that existed. When He created the creation came into existence apart from Him but dependent upon Him. He is worthy to receive glory, honor and power because of His great creative work.

Today we have seen the meeting of the war council in heaven, the supreme headquarters of the universe, in preparation for the judgments to be released on earth in Revelation 6. Central to the war council is the throne and the Father who sits upon the throne. His central features are holiness and justice but this is tempered by

mercy, as there will be some who survive the Tribulation. The Spirit of God is portrayed as a consuming fire. In thrones around the throne there are twenty-four elders, those who have been raptured, resurrected and rewarded, sitting in His midst. Also, in the most immediate vicinity of the throne there are four living creatures; one signifying nobility, another strength, another intelligence and another speed. They are ready to unleash His judgments on earth. The only additional member not listed so far is the Son. He is the subject of Revelation 5. Then the scene in heaven will be complete and the judgments on earth can be unleashed.

¹ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 360.

² Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 363.

³ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 366.