

## Revelation Lesson 04

### Revelation Chapter 4

**Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies**

Email: [mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com](mailto:mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com)

Website: [www.KjvBibleStudies.net](http://www.KjvBibleStudies.net)

**Introduction:** We continue our study of the book of Revelation this week.

Whereas to this point, John had been on the Isle of Patmos, confronted by the glorified Christ, now the location shifts to heaven itself where John is transported in spirit. There, he is introduced to the throne of God along with the elders and spiritual creatures before the throne.

#### I. John Sees Door Opened into Heaven

*(Rev 4:1) After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*

The next major subject of the book begins. As per Revelation 1:9-10, John was on the Isle of Patmos where he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (the first day of the week), and met with the glorified Christ. Jesus delivered to John the seven messages to the seven churches that are recorded in chapters 2 and 3.

Now, "after this" (afterward), John "looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven." That which he first heard was "the first voice" which evidently was the voice John had heard in 1:10. It was the voice of Jesus. His voice was loud, and clear as a trumpet. The Lord said, "Come up hither" ('come up here'). It is in the imperative mode. The Lord then informed John, "and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."

Up to now, the book's focus was on the things which were—the needs and problems of the churches were addressed. Their strengths were mentioned as well. Once the first order of business has been concluded, the focus of the book is on the hereafter. Though what John would initially see apparently were current events in heaven, the focus of the book is on things to come.

*(Rev 4:2) And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*

Immediately, John was "in the spirit". Notice the word "spirit" is not capitalized here as it was in 1:10. There John described himself as being "in the Spirit on the Lord's day". Evidently, he was transported in his spirit to heaven from where was revealed to him that which he wrote. After being called in spirit up into heaven, the first thing John evidently saw was the throne of God.

As the following context will unfold into the next chapter, the One seated upon the throne quite clearly is God the Father. It may be what John saw was a representation of God, similar in nature to a theophany. It is evident that his spirit was transported to heaven. He may have been given the privilege to see God directly. Whichever, the One seated on the throne is the Father.

In Revelation 5:6-7, it is clear that the Lamb is present, in addition to Him who was seated upon the throne. In no place is the Holy Spirit ever referred to as seated upon the throne of God. Thus, by elimination, the remaining alternative is the Father.

*(Rev 4:3) 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.*

John described He who was seated upon the throne. . He (God) was “to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone”. There was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. Similar description is given by Daniel in the book of Daniel 7: 9-10, 13. 4:3

*(Dan 7:9) I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.*

*(Dan 7:10) A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.*

John recorded the majestic splendor his eyes beheld. He likened the manifestation of God on His throne to a jasper and a sardine stone. Though there is no definitive description available of jasper stones, they generally were thought to be a transparent or translucent gemstone of several colors ranging from purple to blue to green. The color most frequently mentioned is purple. Sardine or sardius was another type of transparent or translucent gemstone which was blood red.

John saw a representation of God on His throne which may have been brilliant, transparent purple and red with the light of His Deity shining through. . Some think the jasper to be a white diamond-like stone and the sardine to be flesh colored. They have referred to the Deity and humanity of our Lord. However, the former position is likely more accurate if for no other reason than the supporting statements found in 5:6-7. Jesus is distinct from Him seated upon the throne.

Arching over and above the throne of God was “a rainbow round about the throne like unto an emerald.” This rainbow evidently had a color like an emerald—transparent green. The first impression John received upon arriving in the spirit in heaven was the throne of God and He who sat thereupon.

John described Him as apparently being brilliant transparent purple and red, perhaps bespeaking divine royalty and authority. Arching over the throne area was a rainbow that struck John as the transparent green of an emerald. It must be a breathtaking taking beautiful sight.

*(Rev 4:4) 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.*

John continued to describe other seats (thrones) which were situated apparently in a semicircular fashion before the throne of God. In addition to the throne of God, twenty-four other thrones were noted by John. The word translated as seats is (yironov) thronos and is also translated as throne. In either case, it bespeaks a seat of authority.

The question therefore arises, who are the twenty-four elders seated upon these twenty-four thrones before God? First, these are called elders which is translated from (presbuterov) presbuteros. The word certainly can have a generic sense of one aged or by virtue of position occupying a place of leadership. The word presbuteros is also a specific title for the leader of the local church. Though usually translated as elder, throughout the New Testament, that term referred to those who are commonly called 'pastor.' The first clue to who these elders are is at hand. These twenty-four elders are described as sitting.

Recall the promise of Jesus in 3:21 of some sitting with Him in His throne. That promise was to brethren of the church age who overcame the world, the flesh, and the devil.

*(Rev 3:21) To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*

Apparently, one of the rewards for faithful service to Christ is being allowed to have a seat of authority before the throne in heaven. These twenty-four elders are described as being "clothed in white raiment." Revelation 19:8 describes how the church in heaven will be arrayed, "in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

Finally, in 5:9 the elders praise Jesus because He has redeemed them to God by His "blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Clearly, the elders are of the church for they have been redeemed by His blood and they are from every nation on earth. It may be that there are more than twenty-four thus rewarded. It may be that many are allowed that privilege and are rotated on a scheduled basis thereto. The fact they are called elders may imply they are these who were in fact elders or pastors in the churches on earth.

The significance of the number twenty-four is not clear. There were twelve apostles and there were twelve tribes of Israel. However, Israel does not seem to be in view here other than perhaps the fact the early church was comprised in significant numbers of believing Jews. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus told His disciples, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon

twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” . Perhaps, the twenty-four thrones therefore might refer to twelve thrones ruling over Israel and twelve for the rule of the nations.

A major point of significance is the clear implication that hereafter (recall that word in 4:1), the saints are in heaven. Though it clearly was on the earth in chapters 1-3, now it is found in glory. Revelation 4:2 also makes clear these events are hereafter. Before one word is mentioned of the various aspects of the Tribulation, the saints are found hereafter already in heaven. Then, after the account of the Tribulation is completed, the bride returns with Jesus Christ after the Tribulation as recorded in Revelation 19.

*(Rev 4:5) 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.*

John went on to describe, “out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices.” These are not further defined for us. However, lightning and thunder are surely symbolic of impending judgment. As the events of the Tribulation are about to be revealed in the succeeding chapters, the wrath therein may be hinted at by the lightning and thunder John thus saw and heard.

The word translated as voices (fwnh phone) can refer to both the sound of speech or to the sounds of inanimate objects. The former probably is more likely—perhaps the voices of the elders or of angels. The thought may be of military-type formations as officers bark out orders that are repeated by subordinates. If that be the case, implied may be the marshaling of the armies of heaven for the impending day of wrath about to begin on the earth. John also recorded the “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” These seven lamps are described as “the seven Spirits of God.”

As noted in comments in 1:4 and 3:1, these evidently are another way of describing the Holy Spirit, perhaps referring to His various ministries and their sevenfold perfection. See also notes on Isaiah 11:2. So far in this chapter, both God the Father and evidently the Holy Spirit have been described at the throne of God.

*(Rev 4:6) And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.*

John continues to describe the throne area of heaven. Apparently before the throne, and as far as the eye could see, was a sea of glass. Implied are the transparent, shining qualities of glass and how it reflects and transmits light. It is described as clear as crystal—perfectly transparent and flawless. Like the sea, it evidently stretched as far as John’s eye could see. The infinite character of God is implied.

John further noted, And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes and behind. In mentioning the “midst of the throne,” John apparently refers to the

greater throne area. The word translated as beasts (zvon zoon) has the sense of ‘creatures’ or even ‘beings.’

What apparently is described here and elsewhere in Revelation are angelic creatures. These four angelic creatures or beings in the midst of the throne area of heaven are described as having many eyes. The word translated (ofyalmov ophthalmos) literally means ‘eye,’ but can also have the more figurative sense of the ‘mind’ or of ‘perception.’ It might be suggested these four angelic creatures therefore represent the all-knowing mind of God. They also seem to correspond to the four “living creatures” described in Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 1:5.

*(Eze 1:5) 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.*

## **II. John Sees Four Beasts**

*(Rev 4:7) 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.*

John describes his perceptions of these four angelic beings. The first was “like a lion,” the second “like a calf,” the third “had a face as a man,” and the fourth was “like a flying eagle.” The Scripture does not give a definitive definition of the significance of these four creatures. Therefore varying ideas have been advanced to their significance.

Some have likened them to varying aspects of the ministry, some to the four gospel writers, others to the characteristics of God. It would seem the more likely sense is the latter, describing the characteristics of God. If that be the case, it might be suggested the lion represents the royalty of God, the calf (or ox as some suggest) His strength, the face of a man His personality, and the flying eagle His heavenly nature. That certainly is conjecture. However, the creatures described by Ezekiel manifested the same general characteristics.

*(Rev 4:8) 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.*

The reference to the wings of these angelic beings hearkens attention back to the seraphim(s) of Isaiah 6:2- 3 which also had six wings. It is likely as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John each were given glimpses of the throne of God, they each saw the same thing and recorded their perceptions accordingly. These beasts likely are angelic beings before and around the throne of God.

There they “rest not day and night.” There likely is not day or night in heaven. However, John used common earthly terms to describe how these angelic beings serve God continually and without ceasing before His throne. Their ministry is in praising God for they cry out day and

night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. Like the seraphim(s) of Isaiah 6:3 they ascribe triple appellation to God's holiness.

No other attribute of God is described in three-fold fashion. This lends credence to the position the primary and controlling attribute of God is His holiness. It may well also imply the individual holiness of each of the personalities of the Trinity. The object of this triple praise is the "Lord God Almighty." God is referred to fifty-eight times in the Bible as Almighty. He is referred to as "Lord God Almighty" five times, all in Revelation. Once again, His eternity is clearly implied in He "which was, and is, and is to come."

*(Rev 4:9) And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,*

*(Rev 4:10) 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,*

These four angelic beings not only praise the Almighty God in His holiness, they also give glory and honour and thanks to him who is sitting upon the throne, who liveth for ever and ever. True praise to God therefore also includes giving glory, honor, and thanks to Him. Again, His eternity is further emphasized in Him "who liveth for ever and ever." When the angelic beings praised God.

The twenty-four representative elders prostrate themselves in worship before their Eternal God as the angelic beings praise God. They moreover "cast their crowns before the throne." These who have been exalted to such a high place of leadership and recognition nevertheless cast the crowns they evidently had been awarded by Christ before God. It is an ultimate act of worship, adoration, gratitude, and humbling. The holy, selfless character of those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb in heaven is thus evidenced.

*(Rev 4:11) 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.*

As they fall down to worship their God, they cry out saying, 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. God is worthy of all such praise, worship, glory, honor, and power; for He created all things. Of further note is that "for thy pleasure they are and were created." The word translated as pleasure (yelhma thelema) is otherwise overwhelmingly translated as 'will,' in this case, God's will.

All things, including us, were therefore created for the fulfillment of God's will. Therefore, He is worthy of all praise. The church is thus described in heaven before the Tribulation. This is particularly in its representative leadership as they apparently fill the twenty-four thrones before the throne of God. They will have the privilege of not only worshipping God in person directly

before His throne, but also the sacred privilege of returning in gratitude the crowns of reward previously given to them.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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Email: [mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com](mailto:mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com)

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