

Revelation Ch. 4: The Glory of God

Jeff Randolph
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The purpose of the throne scene is to emphasize that God is in control. Though bad things occur, they happen for the greater good (Rom. 8:28). In the case of Jerusalem, the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21) and ultimate destruction had to take place. They had filled the cup of God's wrath, and it had to be poured out (Matt. 23:32; Rev. 16:5, 6; 16:19).

The visions continue with a background of the events that would shortly take place (1:1). The glory of God and the ascension of the Lamb is depicted, along with the plans that have been stored up for Jerusalem since that time, about to be carried out.

Verse 1

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."

After the previous visions, John was about to see yet another. Once again, the trumpet is used to refer to a loud voice calling for attention (see 1:10).

Verse 2

Immediately I was in the Spirit and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

The phrase "in the Spirit" probably means what it did in 1:10, an indication of the supernatural influence that John was under. This reiterates again that a symbolic vision is under consideration, not literal reality.

The throne of God is always identified with heaven, where we see both the Father and Son sitting on it (Matt. 5:34; Mat. 25:31; Rev. 22:1-3).

Verse 3

And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance

Jasper and sardius were precious stones. Both were included in the twelve stones of the high priest's breastplate of judgment (Ex. 28:17-21), and are also in the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18-20). These symbolize the glory of God (Rev. 21:11; Ezek. 1:26-28), and His righteous judgments. The red color of the stones may symbolize His wrath.

and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald

The rainbow was a sign of the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), and is likely used to show that these troubled times were not going to consume everyone, but is intended for the wicked. It is a symbol of mercy. The emerald, like the jasper and sardius, was a precious stone. This green stone may be used to indicate peace.

Verse 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

The identity of the twenty-four elders is not as simple to interpret as the previous symbols, though we can determine one thing for sure, they had *overcome*. These elders sat on thrones (3:21), had white

robes (3:5), and crowns of gold (2:10), and so we can deduce that they are ones who had overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:4), and were faithful to the death. The fact that they had overcome implies they were approved by God. Since elders are indicative of authority (cf. Deut. 27:1; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17), this picture may symbolize God-approved authority given to faithful men. This occurred under both covenants, making the number twenty-four a sum of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles (cf. Rev. 21:12-14; Matt. 19:28).

Verse 5

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices.

The coming storm has been discussed (1:7), and so this is a symbol of God's power (Ex. 19:16) and wrath (8:5; 11:19; 16:18; cf. 1 Sam. 2:10).

Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

The seven lamps are the eyes of the Lord running to and fro throughout the earth (Zech. 4:1-10; cf. Rev. 5:6). These "eyes" are identified with the Holy Spirit (1:4), who searches all things (1 Cor. 2:10; cf. Heb. 4:13). There were also seven lamps of fire burning in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:31-37; Num. 8:2), a foreshadow of heaven itself (Heb. 9). Unlike the seven golden lampstands, these lamps were the source of light (Ps. 119:105; 2 Pet. 1:21).

Verse 6-8

Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal.

Other places in this book, the sea is meant more literally in conjunction with the rest of the earth, but here is different. It likely refers to the separation that exists between man and God, and the cleansing that needs to occur in order to reconcile that relationship (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5; Acts 22:16; Rev. 7:14). Notice that there was a "sea" for priestly cleansing in the temple (1 Kings 7:23-51; 2 Chr. 4:2-22).

Later in the book, we see those who overcame the beast standing on the sea of glass (15:2). This is indicative of the trials and temptations that are a part of the cleansing process, and bring us closer to God, with Whom we will ultimately be reunited in heaven.

In this regard, the glass may symbolize this refining process (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9-15; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; 1 Jn. 1:7), since clear glass was rare and valuable during the first century (Roper, p. 214).

And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

Following the elders are another strange symbol, the four living creatures. These creatures are very similar to others mentioned in the Old Testament, namely the seraphim described in Isaiah (Isa. 6:2, 3), and the cherubim described in Ezekiel (Ezek. 1, 10). Based on the descriptions of these creatures, perhaps these symbolize the wonderful and amazing creatures God has created, for which He is worthy of praise (Ps. 150:6; Col. 1:16). The number four is the symbolic number for the creation.

We also see that the creation is a reflection of the characteristics of God (Ps. 148:3; Rom. 1:20).

The first living creature was like a lion

The lion is a symbol of strength and bravery, and is the king of beasts (cf. 2 Sam. 1:23; Rev. 5:5). This was one of the faces on the creatures in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 1:10).

the second living creature like a calf

The calf is gentle, and grows into the strong ox, king of domestic beasts (cf. Ezek. 1:10).

the third living creature had a face like a man

Man is the crown of all creation (Gen. 1:26; Heb. 2:5-8) and symbolizes reason and intelligence.

and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle

The eagle is swift (2 Sam. 1:23), soars high above the earth, and is king of birds. An eagle's wings symbolize protection (Deut. 32:11; Rev. 12:14), and the ability to rise above all evil (Isa. 40:31).

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.

The seraphim from Isaiah (Isa. 6:2) had six wings, three sets of two. The first set covered the face (humility), the next covered the feet (modesty), and the last set was to fly (service) (Roper, p. 216). Perhaps the wings with eyes represent what God expects to see from His creation, namely mankind (cf. Heb. 4:13; Matt. 23:12; Phi. 2:8). The eyes could also have to do with attentiveness to how we live our lives (cf. Pr. 6:20-22; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5; Heb. 2:1; 4:11).

And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”

God is worthy of praise because of Who He is and what He has done (Ps. 150:6; Ps. 19:1; cf. Isa. 6:3).

Verses 9-11

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever 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.”

The elders recognize that their authority comes from God, recognizing that He is worthy of all praise and honor (cf. Gen. 1; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-18; Heb. 1). If ever the question arises in one's mind why God should be worshiped, this is why!

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