

THE REVELATION

A Look into Heaven

LOOK UP! CHRIST IS COMING SOON! HALLELUJAH!

Today, we come to the third division of the book of **Revelation**. As we look into the things which are to come, we see Jesus personally inviting John to come into heaven. As we move from our study of the seven churches to chapter 4 the scenes are very different! As John goes through an open door into heaven, we too get a glimpse into the throne room! We see a scene of indescribable glory and hear things kept secret from the foundation of the world. The opening verse begins the third great division of this book—the things *to take place after this* – meaning after the Church Age is over.

Wiersbe puts it simply, “I believe that we must understand the rapture of **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** as transpiring between **Revelation 3** and **4**. The apostle is the symbol of this rapture. He sees the door opened in Heaven. His attention is turned from earth to glory.”

Read Revelation 4:1-3 (ESV) 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.”* ² *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.* 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.*

John did not see this door opening. This door was already open. John was in the Spirit meaning the Holy Spirit gave John this vision. As I think of the picture of the open door into heaven where John was invited to enter, I am reminded of what Jesus said concerning Himself during His earthly ministry. He explained in **John 10:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved...* One glorious day, those of us who have put our faith in Jesus will walk through the open Door into heaven. In the meantime Jesus through John’s experience provides us a glimpse into heaven. And, oh, what a wonderful sight we see! Praise the God who is holy, powerful and eternal.

This door is not in the atmospheric or starry heaven – instead the door opened into the third heaven mentioned by Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:2 (ESV)** ² *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.* Astronauts can take trips into outer space but the only way that anyone can enter the third heaven is through Jesus Christ. John was summoned to heaven in the Spirit. The mysteries of God are revealed by His Spirit.

John heard a voice speaking like a trumpet saying: *Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.* This would be after the church (dead and alive) is caught up in the air to be with the Lord and God's judgment begins on earth. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷ *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

And John was in the Spirit! Four times in **Revelation** John says he was *in the Spirit*. This expression means that the Holy Spirit was giving him in a vision—showing him situations and events he could not have seen with mere human eyesight.

The throne was already there, but John now sees it for the first time. This throne in the vision was not a piece of furniture. It symbolizes the majesty of God – the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our God is on His throne and His rule is sovereign and He has authority over all.

Our attention is now directed to the center of attraction. The throne represents the universal sovereignty and rulership of God. It means that He is in control. The general headquarters of this universe is in heaven, not in Washington, D.C., or London or Moscow.

As I talk about the descriptions of the things that John saw as he walked through the open door, understand that different commentators and interpreters have different opinions. As I read their thoughts, I use the ones that make the most biblical sense to me.

The jasper of the **Revelation** is not the opaque stone we know by that name. It is later described as clear as crystal (21:11). It is probably the diamond, the most brilliant of all the precious jewels. The other stone a carnelian or sardius is blood-red and may really be the ruby. Thus the two together give the idea of glory and of sacrifice.

Bible scholars see many meanings in these stones. I lean to the simple explanation that the whiteness of jasper represents the purity of Christ while the carnelian represents the blood of Christ. Glory and sacrifice! **Revelation 3:21 (ESV)** ²¹ *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.* Jesus and the Father were together on the throne. The Spirit was there too.

The prevailing color of the rainbow was a pleasant green, showing the reviving and refreshing nature of the New Covenant. It completely encircles the throne! From this side of the earth, we only get a glimpse of the rainbow – a half circle at best, reminding us of God's promise to never again destroy the earth by flood which always makes seeing a rainbow special. Note: we see a rainbow after a storm. This emerald rainbow comes before the storm. God's covenant was not just with Noah but with all creation.

Read Revelation 4:4 (ESV) 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.*

Who are these twenty-four elders seated on thrones? It is unlikely that they are angels, because angels are not numbered, crowned, or enthroned. Wiersbe suggests, “These elders probably symbolize the people of God in heaven, enthroned and rewarded.”

David Jeremiah agrees and suggests we can know this by the clothes they wear. They are clothed in white raiment – later on the Bride of Christ will be wearing white – the only ones in heaven to do so. The golden crowns on their heads are the victor’s crown. We know this because of the use of the Greek word *stephanos*. These are the crowns they were given at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Read Revelation 4:5-8 (ESV) 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,* ⁶ *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.*

Lightning, thunder, and voices emanating from the throne make it clear that a dreadful storm is about to burst on that world below. It would be similar to what happened on Mt. Sinai as the law was given. We have been living in the day of grace. We can come boldly to the throne of grace. But in this picture we see that we are back to the throne of judgment. This reminded John that God was about to judge this world because they have rejected Jesus Christ.

The seven Spirits of God that we have mentioned in previous studies are found around the throne. *Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.*

John is not giving an exact description but speaking in symbols. Concerning the *sea of glass* modern ideas about glass did not apply in the first century. Then glass was usually very dark, even opaque. Glass as clear as crystal would be enormously expensive. The sea of glass is often associated with the throne of God. Maybe this is something that causes the people not to get too close to that throne.

Also around the throne, John saw *four living creatures*. The word *beasts* as used in the KJV is not a good translation. We will see the four living creatures in other chapters of **The Revelation**. The texts that describe these creatures indicate that they are real, actual beings. They are all-seeing, their eyes being both towards God and towards creation. The four living creatures are a special, exalted order of angelic being or cherubim. We will study more details about them later on.

The Life Application Bible says that the four living creatures represent the attributes (the qualities and character) of God. These creatures were not real animals. Like the cherubim (the highest order of the angels), they guard God's throne, lead others in worship, and proclaim God's holiness. God's attributes symbolized in the animal-like appearance of these four creatures are majesty and power (the lion), faithfulness (the ox), intelligence (the human), and sovereignty (the eagle).

In summary, these beings are an exalted order of angels whose purpose is primarily that of worship (**Revelation 19:4**). They are very similar to the beings in **Ezekiel 1** and **10** and **Isaiah 6:1-3**, and they are in some ways involved in God's divine justice.

It is likely that they are protecting the throne of God and are about to execute judgment on the world.

Read Revelation 4:8-11 (ESV) .⁸ *And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, 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!"*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."*

The living ones each had *six wings* (as did the seraphs in **Isa. 6:2**). A second time their eyes are mentioned reminding us that their all-seeing function is clearly important. The living ones praise God continually. Their song reminds us of that of the seraphs: **Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)**³ *And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"* Tyndale says, "The simple repetition is impressive. So is the fact that holiness comes first. John's readers lived in a world (as we do) where evil was rampant and apparently all-powerful."

John described how the living creatures led out in worship like a choir or praise team in church today should lead out. And the 24 elders responded like the congregation of our churches should respond in praise and worship. I love verse 11. I memorized it many years ago in the KJV as a prayer in my early years at First Baptist: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power. For thou has created all things and for thy pleasure they were and are created.*

Need words for a prayer of praise – there you have it – straight from the throne room of God Himself – *thou art worthy O Lord!*