

Blessed is he who reads
and those who hear the
words of this prophecy,
and keep those things
which are written in it; for
the time is near.
Rev. 1:3

Verse by Verse Through the Book of Revelation

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Revelation Chapter 4

Chapter 4 begins the real pageant of the Apocalypse. Chapters 4 and 5 set the stage for the seven seals—These chapters take John into the heavenly sanctuary where stands God's throne and where John sees courtiers—particularly four "living creatures" and 24 elders—and their worship.



1. **After this** That is, after John had seen the vision of the seven churches. Now John is being carried forward in time to when the

judgment of God begins.

I looked Or "I saw," an expression John uses repeatedly to introduce new scenes or important new symbols (See Rev. 1:2)

And behold, a door was opened Greek "standing open"

In heaven: Not "into heaven" as if John were on the outside looking in. John's attention is now directed to a symbolic vision of the throne of God in heaven. That the description of God's throne and the scene about it in chapters 4 and 5 is to be understood symbolically, rather than literally, is clear, from chapter 5:6, where Christ is described as "a Lamb as it had been slain having seven horns and seven eyes," yet alive and able to come and take the book from the hand of God.

Inasmuch as this is obviously a highly symbolic figure, it follows that the whole prophetic incident is to be interpreted in the same way.

And the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me This voice is doubtless that of Chapter 1:10

Which said, Come up hither, An invitation to John to enter into vision, directing his senses away from his earthly surroundings and focusing them on heavenly things

And I will show thee things which must be hereafter. Come up and I will show you what must yet happen.

2. **And immediately I was in the spirit:** Greek: en pneumatī meaning a vision

And behold, a throne was set in heaven, Greek meaning “was sitting” The throne was already in position

And one sat on the throne. John only implies that a presence was on the throne. Such a reference to the Father stands in striking contrast with the detailed description of the Son (See Chapter 1:13-16) but the Son is human as well as divine, and can therefore be described appropriately in human terms.

3. **And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper** Greek iaspis, not precisely the modern jasper, but a stone described by the ancient naturalist, Pliny, as translucent (Natural History xxxvii.)

And a sardine stone: This stone was found at Sardis and, accordingly, took the name of that city. Here it describes a brilliant red light.

There is a striking similarity between John’s description in Revelation 4 and Daniel’s description in Daniel 7:9-13. Both prophets were looking at the same scene. Each pictures “the thrones” or “seats” set in order around the central throne, and both Daniel and John attempt to describe the One occupying that throne.

Daniel says His “garment was white as snow.”

John says He was “like a jasper or more accurately, like a diamond.”

Daniel says “A firey stream issued and came forth from before Him.”

John says He was like “a sardine stone” or the sardius, a brilliant red stone.

The dazzling white of the jasper or diamond could well represent His holiness while the firey stream could symbolize His righteousness.

And there was a rainbow round about the throne, . (Compare Ezekiel's vision of the throne of God (Eze. 1:26-28) Rainbow is the symbol of hope. When the rainbow first appeared, it was a sign of God's everlasting covenant of peace. Genesis 9.

In sight like unto an emerald The throne itself was like an "emerald." Green, being the living color, well expresses the mercy of God.

It would seem that the throne John and Daniel described is not the "throne of glory" Matt 25:31 and Rev. 20:11 (This throne is white.) It seems like it is the "throne of grace" where you and I can come for mercy and pardon from sin as described in Heb. 4:16.

4. **And round about the throne were four and twenty seats** Greek thronoi "thrones" The scene is reminiscent of Isa. 24:23 "The Lord shall reign...and before the elders He shall be glorified."

And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting clothed in white raiment; The white raiment is symbolic of righteousness (See Rev. 3:4)

And they had on their heads crowns of gold. Greek Stephanoi: emblems of victory (See Rev. 2:10) The fact that they wear crowns of victory has led some to suggest that they represent redeemed men. Many Bible scholars believe that these elders are some of the saints who arose from their graves at the time of Christ's resurrection. (Matt. 27:52, 53; Eph 4:8) The main resurrection is still future (1 Thess. 4:16) These elders, then, are sinners saved by grace.

But why 24? A priest had to be chosen from among his brethren. Heb. 2:17. These men, being priests, were the chosen representatives from every race and nation of the world. When Christ arose from the grave, "Many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves." (Matt 27:52,53). Then "when He ascended up on high, He led a multitude of captives." Ephesians 4:8) It was in this sense that He became "the first-born among many brethren." Romans 8:29. When He was installed as our High Priest, He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. Hebrews 1:9. Those "fellows" were not angels; they were men. They were His "brethren" who arose with Him from the grave. They were the antitypical wave-sheaf offering, as it were, and became the antitype of the ceremonial in the Mosaic ritual. Leviticus 23:15.

Sheaf offering: The Israelites used hand sickles to cut grain stalks near the ground. Several stalks were tied into a bundle by the reaper (Jer, 9:22). The first sheaves of each harvest were brought to the Lord as a first fruit offering. (Lev. 23:10).

Wave offering: That portion of sacrifices and offerings which was not burned but could be eaten by the priests and their families. (Ex. 29:24-26; Lev. 8:27-29) These pieces of meat were waved before the alter, symbolizing their presentation to the Lord.

Christ is our First Fruits (1 Cor. 15:20), and He arose on the very day of the first-fruit offering. Jesus died on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the first month, and He arose on the sixteenth day, exactly fulfilling the type. (Type means Christ gave the entire Sanctuary in the Wilderness modeled after the type in heaven.)

Twenty-four priests appear with Christ in His priestly ministry. This, too, is a fulfillment of the type. In the temple service there were twenty-four courses of the Levitical priesthood. See 1 Chronicles 24:3-19; 2 Chronicles 8:14. As the priests ministered before God in the earthly sanctuary, so John sees 24 elders ministering in the heavenly sanctuary.

5. **And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices**

This is a favorite expression of John: See 8:5; 11:19; 16:18) Probably portraying power and majesty.

And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Or seven fire lamps. In Chapter 1 the candlesticks (Greek luchnia Rev. 1:12 represent the seven churches. Here the lamps (Greek lampades) represent the seven Spirits of God. On the basis of this symbolism some have identified the “door” (Chpt 4:1) as one opening into the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. (Remember the first “room” of the sanctuary was where the lamp stand with 7 branches stood.) Others see this as a beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit searching constantly throughout the whole world for those whose hearts are perfect toward God. (2 Chron. 16:9; Prob. 15:3)

6. **And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal;** In ancient times glass was much more valuable than it is today. Here, it represents the clear, crystalline appearance of the surface on which the throne stood.

And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts (Greek zoa living beings” The word zoa does not indicate to what order of creatures these four belong. However, they closely resemble those of Ezekiel’s vision (See Eze 1:5-26) which Ezekiel calls cherebim (Ezekiel 10:20-22)

Full of eyes before and behind. (See Ezekiel 1:18; 10:12) This may be understood as a symbol of the intelligence and ceaseless vigilance of heavenly beings.

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.** Similar imagery is found also in the first chapter of Ezekiel. These beasts served God day and night.

Bible scholars for centuries have linked these symbols with the four Gospels. Matthew writes on the kingly side of our Lord symbolized by the Lion of Judah. Mark deals largely with the Savior as the servant of man, the ox symbolizing service. Luke, the physician, reveals His human aspect as the Son of man, hence the face of a man. John emphasizes His deity—Christ the Eternal—Sovereign, above all things, seeing all things: higher, swifter, greater than human thought. If this is the explanation it would indicate that the Gospels are “serving God day and night” by telling of Jesus and salvation.

Two commentaries say that these beasts stand for four standards of four tribes of Israel: Judah’s standard was the lion, Ephraim was the ox, Reuben the man and Dan the flying eagle. This doesn’t make sense since Dan and Ephraim aren’t included in the 12 tribes in Revelation 7.

However, the language is symbolic and I can’t find any commentary that explains this imagery to my satisfaction. (I’ll have to ask when we get to heaven.)

8. **And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him;** The cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision each had four wings (Eze. 1:6; 1:21), whereas the seraphim of Isaiah had six (Isa. 6:2). Wings may be understood as indicating the speed with which God’s heavenly creatures execute their errands. (Heb. 1:14).

And they were full of eyes within: Eyes signify intelligence

And they rest not day and night, Ps. 121:4 “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” The divine power upholding the universe never relaxes.

Saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come Holy was also the cry of the seraphim in Isaiah’s vision (Isa. 6:3)

9. **And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,** The fact that He “liveth forever” is the basis of His unceasing sustenance of nature (John 1:4)

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,**
11. **Thou art worthy,** Because He has given them life and all they possess.

O Lord, Textual evidence favors the reading “our Lord and God.” Those who hold the view that the 24 elders are human beings point out that the use of the title kurios, “Lord,” by the elders and not by the four beasts may be significant for the Hebrew counter word is Yahweh, the name by which God revealed Himself to the people. This title, they say, is fitting for the praises of men. (Also, in the next chapter we’ll read in 5:9 that the elders claim to have been redeemed from the earth!)

To receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure (or by Thy will)

They are and were created. Textual evidence favors the reading, “they were, and they were created.” John is obviously referring to the existence of the universe after God had brought it into being. God created and sustains all things. (See Col. 1:17).