

**VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY SERIES:
THE BOOK OF REVELATION
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CHAPTER FOUR:**

Four important Considerations when approaching Revelation Chapter four

1. Taking Revelation 1:19 as an outline of the book, chapter four begins the third section: *the things which shall take place after this*. The phrase *after this* (*meta tauta* in ancient Greek) in Revelation 1:19 is repeated twice in Revelation 4:1. Certainly this is a marking point for beginning the third division of Revelation 1:19.
2. Chapter four begins a heavenly perspective, looking down on the earth.
3. From Revelation 4 through 19 we have a section mainly concerned with God's judgment upon the world preceding Jesus' earthly reign, the period known as the "Messianic Woes" or the "Great Tribulation."
4. Revelation four introduces us to the place judgment comes from: God's throne in heaven.

A vision of a throne is said to be one of the most glorious scenes in the entire Bible. It is one that denotes authority, power, majesty and splendor and conveys the fundamental idea that God is King of the Kingdom of God and He reigns over the entire creation. In Revelation's vision of the heavenly throne room, it now introduces people to God, who is the Creator. The scene pictures a rightly ordered universe in which God is at the center. Around the throne are four living creatures, who represent the created order. Here begins a shift in the Revelation in that the scene is now moving from the earth into the heavenliness. Jesus has spoken to the earth dwelling church voicing His rebukes, commendations and corrections and now John is lifted into heaven where He sees a vision of God sitting on His throne of majesty. Starting here at the fourth and fifth chapters God sets up the heavenly scenery of the succeeding visions in which God on His throne will bring both blessings and judgment upon the earth

Verse 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 show you things which must be hereafter.”

Chapter four begins with the phrase, "After this," points to a transition in literary styles as well as a shift in John's vision. In Chapters two and three, John individually addresses seven churches in Asia; however, Chapter four does not seem to have a specific audience like the two previous chapters. The door and "come up hither" symbolize the change in scene for John. John was now able to see some of the mysteries of God and able to report them back to us. John also did not open the door himself, God opened this door for him which reveals how one enters Heaven. It is by God's will not our own. We are saved because God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. We have His word, His Holy Spirit and His voice speaking to us because God has chosen to unveil Himself as an act of grace toward us. John also is clearly separating these sections of the book, but he is employing the same image of the door that he employed while addressing the churches.

Revelation 3:8 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it

John further signals to the reader that he is shifting back into a description of his heavenly vision by referring back to, "**The first voice which I heard,**" which he recognizes as Jesus.

Additionally, John once again shifts into description through that figure of speech, which he then employs throughout the rest of Chapter four.

“Come up here”.....indicates that John must leave earth and enter heaven. On three separate occasions, John will be invited to a place to see a revelatory vision (4:1; 17:1; 21:9).

Verse 2 “And immediately I was in the spirit and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.”

“**In the Spirit**”- the capitalization of *spirit* by the translators suggests that John is in the Holy Spirit, which is certainly true. However, this is not what John is attempting to communicate here. All believers have opportunity to be in the Spirit, but that does not mean such a one will receive revelation from God. This phrase "is an idiom indicating that John’s revelatory experiences took place not "in the body" but rather "in the spirit,” that is in a Holy Spirit induced vision trance... "In the spirit" means totally immersed in a vision. John was not physically there, that is in body, but his spirit experienced that which believers currently await: the rapture. John sees a throne, and the following verses show that the figure sitting on the throne is God the Father. It is similar to the scene in Daniels prophecy found in Daniel 7:9-12

Daniel 7:9-12 “As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool.His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. 11 “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. 12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

This was an image familiar in the minds of the initial readers representing power, justice, and the established authority structure. In this and following chapters, John will offer an alternative authority structure in which God’s majesty and justice will prevail. This would have been immensely comforting to Christians who were being treated unjustly by their government. Today it might serve as a warning to modern Western Christians who often benefit from the

current authority structures. Believers still ought to hold the model given in this chapter as the standard against which to measure their own governments^[1].

Verse 3

”And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardius stone, and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like an emerald.”

The gems and rainbow (a reminder of God's faithfulness and promise to Noah after the great flood in Genesis 9:13) are John's way of describing intense glory, a beautiful sight.

These stones are also mentioned, along with other stones, in Exodus 28:17-20. In Exodus, the stones are found with 7 others on the breastplate of a high priest. **Sardius** is a blood-red stone that symbolizes the sacrifice of blood (the first-coming of Christ and his death on the cross).

Jasper is a white stone that symbolizes total power. In the verses in Exodus, the first stone is Sardius and symbolizes the first-coming of Christ and Jasper is the last stone, symbolizing the second-coming of Christ. Since the order is reversed in this passage from Revelation, we can interpret the meaning in a reflective way: John, receiving a vision of the world after the second-coming sees the Jasper most recently and the Sardius (the crucifixion) further back in time. The Jasper and Sardis stones represent God because they were the first and last stones in Aaron's breastplate (Exodus 28:17-20), and God says of himself the he is the first and last many times. (Isaiah 48:12)

Verse 4

4And round about the throne were four and twenty seats, and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

The number four-and-twenty could go back to King David's division of the Levitical priesthood into 24 sections (I Chronicles 24:7-19) or it could refer to twelve plus twelve, symbolizing the tribes of Israel plus the disciples. Other suggestions for the meaning of the twenty four elders include that they are angelic figures on a heavenly council, they represent saints in heaven, or that they are representatives of the church in heaven. An elder is a person that is chosen by God to represent Him and minister to the saints. The 24 elders, then, represent a much larger number of saints in heaven. They are a representation of all the righteousness in Heaven. They have "seats" of authority and "crowns" of reward. The white garments signify righteousness which has now been judged and purified. Note that the Old Testament saints are not present. They will be resurrected and rewarded after the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-3).

Daniel 12:1-3

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

The white robes symbolize purity. This image is depicting heavenly worship. When the priests later take off their crowns and bow, it is showing their reverence. This verse is also depicting heavenly worship.

Psalm 96:9-11

9 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. 10 Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof.

Verse 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.

Throughout the Bible, the divine supremacy and the power of God has often been demonstrated by comparisons with lightening, thunder and other powerful natural displays. Before the throne, there are seven lamps or seven spirits. In addition, throughout the New Testament the term spirit is used in reference to angels. Revelation also does speak of angels very frequently. But another argument posed could be that the seven lamps or seven spirits symbolize the completeness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is said to be the light, but all three parts of the Divine Trinity are present within the lamp, or spirit. There is only one spirit of God, but there are multiple manifestations of Him. Fire and its burning characteristics have been a symbol of God throughout the Bible to show God's powerful consumption. The flashes and sounds are John's attempt to convey a sense of majesty, holiness, and supernatural activity beyond his understanding.

Verse 6 "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal, and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

There has been a discrepancy among theologians on what exactly the "sea of glass" symbolizes. Some believe it is not merely a body of water or actual clear glass, but rather is a representation of a massive amount of humanity (whose numbers are expansive like that of a vast sea). The crystal may be interpreted to symbolize the very purity, flawlessness or righteousness of the people. Other scholars and theologians believe the "sea of glass" is the floor, which is likened to a sea because it continues into the distance. If you take it to be a body of water, it could symbolize how you must be clean and purified to get close to God. The "creatures" are the special angels (Ezekiel 10:15-22) who guard the Throne of God. The eyes symbolize wisdom and all-seeing vigilance.

Verse 7 “And the first creature was like a lion, and the second like a calf, and the third had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle.”

The four living creatures may be heavenly beings representing humankind and all animals.

The likeness to a lion symbolizes strength and power. “Like a calf”: The image of a calf demonstrates that these beings render humble service to God. “Third ... face like that of a man: Their likeness to man shows they are rational beings. Fourth ... like a flying eagle”: The cherubim fulfill their service to God with the swiftness of eagles’ wings. The whole vision has a strong allusion to Ezekiel 1:4-14

Ezekiel 1:4-14

4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. 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. 6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. 7 And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass. 8 And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. 9 Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. 10 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. 11 Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. 12 And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went. 13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. 14 And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Verse 8 “And the four creatures each had six wings about them, and they were full of eyes within, and they rested not day and night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

The wings show the ability to move quickly. These creatures are perfect guardians, seeing everything, missing nothing, and never resting. No one would be able to approach God's throne without being seen by one of these creatures. The eyes of the creatures were also able to see everything that happened in Heaven and on Earth. The praise they give here and the elders' response is for John's benefit, to establish the authority stated in the next verse. Worshiping the Lord is initiated by these four creatures, as evidenced in the next verse, displaying the order in worship. This verse has strong allusions to Isaiah 6.

Isaiah 6:1-3 “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

Verses 9-11 “And when those creatures gave glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who lives forever and ever,¹⁰ the four and twenty elders fell down before him that sat on the throne, and worshiped him that lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for you have created all things, and by your will they are and were created.”

At the presence of God it is a normal thing to fall down prostrate at His feet. The "four and twenty elders fall down before Him" shows their great humility at the presence of God. A deep respect and honor should be given God. "To Him that sat on the throne" is very interesting. God the Father is on the central throne, but immediately on His right hand sits God the Son, Jesus.

The "throne" encompasses both the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The word "worship" has been misunderstood by so many. We sing about it in our songs and use it in our prayers. But do we truly know how to worship? Our churches call Sunday services, worship, but again, very little true worship goes on. The word that was translated "worship" here means "absolute reverence to God, to adore Him". One of the meanings of the word means to "kiss", like a dog

licking his master's hand. Absolute humility and adoration of God is what it really means. Do we go to church to humbly worship and adore our God? A deep respect and honor should be given God. "Cast their crowns": Aware that God alone is responsible for the rewards they have received, they divest themselves of all honor and cast it at the feet of their King. Why do they "cast their crowns before the throne"? These crowns are the victorious crowns that Jesus has placed on their head. They, or we, have done nothing to earn the crowns. These crowns belong to Jesus, not us. He won the victory. He placed them on our head. Everyone benefits from the victory, but Jesus won it. This is another act of humility on their part. When they throw the crowns at Jesus' feet, they are telling Him that they are His because He won them.

Revelation 4:11 "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

"For thou hast created all things": It is the Creator God who set out to redeem His creation. Here we see the worthiness of God and why He should be praised. It is, in our society, the popular thing to worship the created rather than the Creator. We are warned about this over and over throughout the Bible. Not only in terms of getting our priorities mixed up and thinking too much of money, jewels, family, homes, automobiles, and recreation (which can certainly become a God to us), God is a jealous God. He will not allow the believer to mess around with false gods. How could we compare the Creator of it all to His creations? We must recognize God to be supreme to all others in every way. Before the world existed, He spoke, and it became. The power of his Word created all that we know. We see here that the whole universe was created for God.