

REVELATION

Heaven Opened

Revelation 4:1

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So far we have learned about the cities and conditions of the 7 churches and how we can apply their circumstances and struggles to the panorama of history – even in our own day.

There are a couple of things to be aware of as we move on to chapter 4:

- **Time:** The letters to the 7 churches were written to real churches that existed in John's time – *"the things which are."*

Now there is a shift from the now to the future, to *"the things that must take place after this."*

It is important to understand that this shift to the future refers to chapters 6-22, which provide us with a survey of history from John's time to Jesus' 2nd Coming. Chapters 4 and 5 are introductory to chapters 6-22, but are not chronological. What John is witnessing in Chapters 4 and 5 is the enthronement of Christ, which occurred 64 years earlier – in 31 AD. By showing John this glorious event, the stage is set for what's to come. Remember this is earth from heaven's perspective, so as history unfolds before John, he is reminded that Jesus reigns on the throne of the universe = good news.

- **Language:** The language of chapters 1, 2 and 3 is straightforward and is, in general, easy to understand. In chapter 4, John will begin to use complex symbolic language that is not easy to interpret. His use of symbolic language reminds us of the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament.

Revelation 4:1 – After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. The voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

John – in vision – is ushered into the heavenly temple – throne room of God.

At the center of this amazing room is a Being sitting on a throne. He is the object of worship.

The throne is featured 17 times in chapters 4 and 5. It is central to everything that will take place and is fundamental to our theological understanding of the events that follow.

A throne, in the ancient world, was the symbol of power and authority. Whoever had the throne had the power. Even today, a throne is used to describe monarchy: "After years of preparation, Charles takes the British throne."

The throne of God stands for his power and authority over the universe.

However..... There is someone who wants the throne – Satan (Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:12-19).

The central issue in the Great Controversy between God and Satan is WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO RULE.

Revelation 4 and 5 portrays a decisive event in that conflict – The Coronation of Christ as He takes his place on the throne of the universe.

John was not the 1st to be invited into this wonderful place. Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19), Isaiah (6) and Daniel (7:9-10) were all given a glimpse of the splendor of the heavenly throne room. However, Ezekiel 1 most closely resembles Revelation 4. As a matter of fact, about 1/3 of words in Revelation 4 also appear in Ezekiel 1.

What words would you use to describe God's radiant glory?

Ezekiel used fire:

Ezekiel 1:27 - I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.



John used 2 specific gem stones:

Revelation 4:3 - And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.....

Jasper comes in a multitude of shades. At least 12 different types of jasper exist, so which one was John talking about?

Well, combine that with his use of Carnelian (Sardius – a red precious stone, probably ruby or carnelian), and Ezekiel's use of fire, I think we can reasonably choose red jasper.



Encircling the throne was a rainbow that resembled an emerald.



Dissecting the theological symbolism, we find that, in the Old Testament, these 3 stones represent the tribes of Reuben (Sardius), Benjamin (Jasper) and Judah (Emerald):

Exodus 28:17-20 - And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, *even* four rows of stones: *the first row shall be* a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: *this shall be* the first row. The second row *shall be* an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. The third row a figure, an agate, and an amethyst. The fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper.... (KJV)

And the rainbow, reminds us of God's covenant promise to Noah after the flood:

Genesis 9:12-13 - And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

We can conclude that not only is John witnessing the pure, unapproachable, splendor of God, he is also being reminded of God's faithful care of his people and his trustworthiness in keeping his covenant promises.

-24 Elders-

Surrounding the throne are 24 elders. They are sitting on thrones, wearing white robes and golden crowns.

Who is this group? Some say they are angels. However, nowhere in scripture or in Jewish tradition are angels ever referred to as elders and as we continue our study we will see that "elders" and "angels" are 2 distinct groups.

If they are not angels, then who are they?

Clue 1 – 1 Chronicles 24:4-19; 25:1-3 (also see 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:8-10):

In the Old Testament there were 24 divisions of priests. Each division was led by a chief priest = 24 chief priests. In Jewish tradition these chief priests were called "elders." Additionally, temple singers – those who led in worship – were divided into 24 groups.

Exodus 19:5-6 – Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

Revelation 1:5-6 – and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

This group functions as both priests and kings.

Clue 2 –

Revelation 3:21 – To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

What is the promise and to whom is the promise made?

Clue 3 – (also see 3:18; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14):

Revelation 3:4-5a – Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.....

What is the promise and to whom is the promise made?

Clue 4 – (also see Revelation 3:11 and James 1:12):

Revelation 2:10 – Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 – I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

What is the promise and to whom is the promise made?

The crown that John is talking about here is not a royal crown, but a crown of victory – the Stefanos Crown. This crown is reserved exclusively for those who have triumphed over sin.

This is a new group not seen in heaven before. Cherubim and Seraphim are regularly mentioned in the Old Testament, but no "elders" were ever observed by the prophets.

Putting the clues together: This is a symbolic group - a representation – the firstfruits of redeemed humanity. Their number is symbolic as well - representing God's people in both the Old (the 12 tribes of Israel) and New (the 12 Apostles) Testaments – the church in its totality.

Enoch might be there. Moses might be there. Elijah might be there. No doubt those Jesus took to heaven with him as firstfruits of the resurrection are there (Matthew 27:52-53; Ephesians 4:8 Also see Desire of Ages, chapter 87).

They are there to witness the coronation of Jesus – can you imagine?!

-Holy Spirit-

Before the throne, 7 lamps are burning, "These are the 7 spirits (or the 7-fold Spirit) of God."

7, as we know = completeness, fullness, totality. These 7 lamps represent the complete work of the Holy Spirit.

-Sea of Glass-

Also before the throne John sees what looks like a sea of glass – clear as crystal. Ezekiel saw the same thing (Ez. 1:22) as did Moses (Ex. 24:10).

-4 Living Creatures-

Closest to the throne are 4 living creatures. They are like nothing John has seen before:

- A Lion, a Calf (Ox), a Man, and a Flying Eagle.
- 6 Wings (Isaiah 6:2).
- Covered with eyes.

John's description of these Beings resembles those in Isaiah's vision of Isaiah 6:2 and Ezekiel's vision of Ezekiel 1:5-25 and 10:12-15, 20-22. John, Isaiah and Ezekiel were seeing the same Beings. Ezekiel gives us additional information that these beings are, in fact, Cherubim, the exalted order of angels who stand in service to God and guard his throne. They are always seen in proximity to the throne (Rev. 4:6; 5:6; 14:3) and remind us of the covering Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:18-21).

-Unending Worship-

There is nothing quite so stirring as a large congregation singing together. So, what John experienced next must have been absolutely earth shattering (Revelation 4:8-11 also see Isaiah 6:3-4):

Day and night the living creatures sing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

As the living creatures raise their voices to give glory, honor and thanks to God, the 24 elders fall at his feet in worship.

They lay their crowns before the throne and as one voice sing: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

John's portrayal of the elders falling down and casting their crowns before the throne of God reflects a Roman court ceremony where kings presented their crowns to the emperor as a sign of subordination and worship. "You are worthy" was shouted as the emperor made his entrance and Domitian, the emperor at the time of the writing of Revelation, claimed the title, "our Lord and God." Those who were suffering for their refusal to participate in Emperor worship would have been filled with assurance that the God they worshipped was the only One worthy to be worshipped as Lord and God.

The stage is set and envoys from the whole universe are ushered into the Throne Room. Jesus has come home and the greatest coronation in history is about to get underway.....

Psalm 24:7-10 - Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty -- he is the King of glory.