

The Book of Revelation *Revelation 4 (NIV)* “The ‘Who’s Who’ of Heaven”

Introduction

There is a major shift in emphasis between the third and fourth chapters of this book. This shift can be explained by the key to understanding *Revelation* which was offered in **Chapter 1:19**. John was told to a) “write down the things which he had seen”, which was referring to his vision of the glorified Savior in chapter one; b) “The things which are,” meaning the evaluations of the churches that were present during John’s day, covered in **Chapters 2-3**; and c) “the things that are to take place after this,” which begin with **Revelation Chapter 4** and continue until the end of **Chapter 22**. It is this final section that comprises the biggest portion of Revelation. As you can clearly see, **Chapter 4** actually begins with the words, “After this”, so there can be no doubt that at this point we are entering in to the final “phase”, if you will, of the narrative.

In **Chapters 1-3**, John was given a vision and instruction, while he was worshipping on the Isle of Patmos. In **Chapter 4**, he is transported in the Spirit into the very throne room of heaven. It is important to note that Christ, shortly after His resurrection, had hinted to John that this phenomenon would occur, and that John would, with his own eyes, see “the coming of The LORD” before his death.

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This is the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “LORD, who is going to betray You?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “LORD, what about him?” Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die. He only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” John 21:20-23

So you see, what happened to John in **Revelation Chapter 4** was a fulfillment of the word spoken by Jesus. In a very special way, John did not die before he was able to witness the coming of The LORD. He was given the supernatural ability to be “raptured” (spiritually speaking) into the very throne room of God before his death, so that he could record the account of the second coming of Christ based on a firsthand eye witness account! What an awesome experience this must have been for the aged disciple! It is hard to imagine what he felt as he was transported into a this holy place of such splendor and Majesty.

John does his best to describe for us what he saw as he stood there in the presence of The Almighty Creator of the universe. He uses earthly imagery which his readers might be able to comprehend as he attempts to describes the indescribable. We can only use our imagination to try and visualize what he saw that day. But thankfully, one day, those who have placed their faith in Christ will witness these wonders for ourselves! As The Apostle Paul has said:

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12

As we read in awe John’s description of what he saw, a “who’s who of heaven” appears before our very eyes, as we are introduced to **God The Father**, seated upon His throne; **The Elders** seated around the throne; **The Seven-Fold Spirit of The Living God**, like blazing fire illuminating the throne room; and finally, **The Four Living Creatures** (the Seraphim), who bear the throne of God. Let us turn our attention to each of these, as we see together what John saw. As it will give us great insight and understanding as to what must take place “after this”.

God The Father

As it should be, the first and most preeminent entity that John describes for us is The Almighty Everlasting God, seated upon the throne of heaven. He is indescribable to say the least, but John attempts to give us but a glimpse of His majesty. He likens His radiance to shining jewels. The word "jasper" is better described as a diamond, with its sparkling brilliance radiating light in all directions. Brilliant white light accompanied by a fiery ruby red glow emanated from The Ancient of Days as He was seated in His place of supreme authority above all of creation, space, and time. John does not try to describe Him any further, because there are no words to express the glory of God in mere human terms.

Encircling the throne was a rainbow made up of varying shades of green that sparkled like an emerald. It is important to note that this emerald rainbow is a complete circle, as opposed to the rainbows we see here on earth. For you see, in heaven there is nothing that is left incomplete. God will see to it that all things are brought to their fullness in Him in the proper season. Every single Word that He has spoken will come to fruition. Nothing will be left undone. Here on earth, we await the fulfillment of His promises to us His chosen people. But we may rest in the knowledge that just as the rainbow completely encircles His throne in eternal glory, God will complete His purposes. And just as the evergreen rainbow suggests, these truths are everlasting! Our Almighty Father, can be counted upon to do as He has promised.

As John beholds The Great King in His majesty, there is a sense that something both awesome and terrifying is about to occur. God is preparing to pour out His wrath, which I believe is symbolized by the fiery red color emanating from His glory. It is a just wrath, for His holiness and purity (symbolized by the brilliance of a diamond), demands spotless perfection. The judgment of The Holy One is about to be unleashed upon the earth. Heaven is preparing to go to war with earth. And the awesome fury of the One seated upon The Throne is about to be unleashed upon the disobedient.

The Elders

Many have speculated as to the identity of the twenty four elders who surround the throne of God. Some have incorrectly deduced that they are angelic beings assembled to attend the throne. This could not be further from the truth. The description given for these elders actually reveals their identity for us. I believe with all my heart that *The Bible* answers its own questions. Therefore, not much speculation as to the identity of these individuals is required. We can know exactly who they are based upon the description of them that we are given in the text.

The elders are wearing "victors crowns" (Stephanos in the Greek), which symbolizes that they have overcome something. They are dressed in spotless white robes, meaning that they have been declared as holy and pure. They are seated upon thrones, which means that they have been endowed with some measure of authority as they are assembled around the throne of heaven. These descriptive elements tell us that these beings cannot be angels, for the angelic hosts have not overcome anything in order to receive crowns. In fact, each of these attributes sound like the very things that Christ has promised to His Church. Let us look back at all He has promised to bestow upon His Church in the preceding chapters, and it will become obvious as to who the elders truly are.

- 1) Eternal life (**Revelation 2:7**)
- 2) Crown of Life (**Revelation 2:10**)
- 3) Protection from 2nd death (**Revelation 2:11**)
- 4) Hidden Manna (**Revelation 2:17**)
- 5) White Stone - Admission into the kingdom (**Revelation 2:17**)
- 6) Authority over the Nations (**Revelation 2:26**)
- 7) Morning Star - Christ Himself (**Revelation 2:28**)
- 8) White Robe (**Revelation 3:5**)
- 9) Pillars of the Kingdom (**Authority 3:12**)
- 10) Sit on Thrones with Him (**Revelation 3:21**)

So you see, these elders, have all of the possessions that Christ has promised to give those who trust in Him. Therefore, these elders represent The Church of The LORD Jesus Christ. Remember what *The Bible* says about the church:

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. **Revelation 1:5b-6**

So these elders are representatives of the raptured church, which has been called up to heaven just before God pours out His wrath upon this wicked world. So, the question remains; why are there 24 of them seated upon thrones? To answer this question, we need to go back to *The Old Testament*. When King David made decrees as to how many priests were to continually serve in the temple of The LORD, he based the designation upon the 12 month cycle of The Jewish lunar calendar. As it was specified, a rotation consisting of 24 groups of priests were designated to serve at the altar of God continuously. With each group serving two weeks per month. This ensured that there were the same number of priests serving in the house of God continually.

Now, do not miss this! We, the church, according to **Revelation 1:5-6** and **1 Peter 2:5**, are a royal priesthood set apart both to reign with God and to serve Him! *So here is the best part: ALL of us will be called upon to serve in this capacity.* If you are a believer in Jesus. Then you shall be a priest and ruler in the kingdom of heaven!

And this is why I believe so strongly in the rapture of The Church my friends. Because as God is preparing to pour out His wrath upon the earth... We, represented by the elders clothed in spotless white and wearing crowns of victory, will be seated around the heavenly throne of God our Father! We will not be subjected to the wrath that is to be poured out upon this sinful world.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation (deliverance) through our LORD Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. **1 Thessalonians 5:9-10**

When God pours out His vengeance upon the earth, we will be safely seated around the throne of heaven, existing as a kingdom and as priests to serve our God!

When we look at the “ages of the Church” as laid out in **Revelation 2-3**, we see that Laodicea is the final era of the Church upon this earth. We are now living in this final church age. At the close of this age, The Church will no longer remain upon the earth. We shall be gathered to Christ at the rapture. It is important to notice that after Chapter 3 of Revelation, the church is not mentioned again until **Chapter 19**. As the events that shall occur upon the earth are being described in great detail in the coming chapters, there is not one single reference to the church being present. Therefore, the shift that takes place beginning with **Chapter 4** (introduced as “after this”) is speaking of the raptured saints no longer being upon the earth as the Tribulation period begins. What a blessing to know that we have been delivered from the coming wrath! Just as John was symbolically transported to heaven as a witness to these things, the church will be transferred to heaven prior to their occurrence! Praise The LORD for the rapture of The Church!!

The Seven-Fold Spirit of God

John describes the fullness of God’s Spirit as being present before the throne in the form of seven torches blazing with fire. As we have previously discussed, the number 7 represents fullness or completeness in The Scriptures. So God’s Holy Spirit is fully manifested in heaven at this time. This is also an indication that the rapture of The Church has taken place, for the Spirit of God lives within The Church of God. Therefore, as we have been called above, so has The Spirit. Remember the words of Paul when He spoke about the coming of the Antichrist:

Concerning the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become so easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us — whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter — asserting that the day of The LORD has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the One Who holds it back will continue to do so till He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom The LORD Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming. **2 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

The fact that The Holy Spirit is fully present in heaven as John describes the preparation for heaven's war against earth is further evidence that The Church will be raptured prior to these events.

The Four Living Creatures

The Four Living Creatures that John describes for us have been identified in Scripture before. The prophet Ezekiel described these creatures, as did the prophet Isaiah. Ezekiel informed us that these creatures are the Seraphim, the "throne bearers of God," who continually attend to Him for all eternity (**Ezekiel 1**). They are described as having multiple faces; resembling those of a Lion, Calf, Man, and Eagle. Isaiah also described them as having multiple wings (**Isaiah 6**). Many have tried to speculate as to why these beings have been created by God in such a manner, but no one truly knows the reason.

In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month — it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin — the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was on him.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.

As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like topaz, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not change direction as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault, sparkling like crystal, and awesome. Under the vault their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 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. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

It is interesting to note that the Israelites used to encamp under four similar banners as they traversed in the wilderness. Those who gathered with the Tribe of Dan encamped under the banner depicting the eagle. The tribe of Ruben was represented by a banner of a man. Ephraim was under the banner of a calf or an ox, and of course Judah was represented by the lion. So perhaps the symbolism of the Seraphim is represented among the standards of Israel.

To serve as a separation between these Seraphim throne bearers, and Almighty God, there is a crystal clear barrier that is often described in Scripture as a "glassy sea". This barrier is first mentioned in *The Old Testament* when Moses beheld the Gory of The LORD in Exodus:

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction." **Exodus 24:9-12**

Just as Moses witnessed, the "glassy sea" as a divider between the Holy One of Israel and His creation, it also seems to serve as a shield between the four creatures and the radiant power of He Who sits upon the throne. Perhaps it is there as a protection for them. For who can stand in His presence? But for certain, this glassy sea demonstrates to all of us that there are none who can attain to the heights of The One and Only God of the universe. There are none in all of Creation that can ever become what He is. He is on a level known only to Himself. Satan foolishly thought that He could attain such heights, but his pride led to his own demise. In the Book of *Isaiah*, the LORD declares:

"I AM The LORD, and there is no other: apart from Me there is no God. I will strengthen you though you have not acknowledged Me, so that apart from the rising sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides Me. I AM The LORD, and there is no other..." **Isaiah 45:5-6**

The glass ceiling underneath His throne establishes this reality. As the four living creatures cry out to His holiness in worship continually, the elders, who represent the church, prostrate themselves and cast their crowns at the feet of this Holy One. For the greatest accolades of man are nothing in comparison to He Who sits upon the throne of heaven. He truly is One of a kind.

"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." **Revelation 4:11**

This proclamation of the Elders is a testimony to the rightful place of The One Whose throne is born up by the mighty Seraphim. He is The God of Creation, and as such, it is His right to punish those who are in rebellion against His supreme authority. The judgment upon this fallen world... is ready to begin.