

REVELATION 4

- v1 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 shew thee things which must be hereafter.

The experience that John is entering into seems very much like Paul's "caught up into the third heaven" in 2 Corinthians 12:1-2**. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul is "caught up" to hear unutterable words which he says are unlawful to speak about (v4), and is even in such a state as to be unable to tell whether he is in or out of his body***! The only difference between John's vision and Paul's vision seems to have been that Paul saw what were the *realities* of heaven (if such terminology makes any sense), whereas John saw *symbols* of the heavenly realities.

We must remind ourselves that this incident provides a perfect illustration of how God works with us as individuals when we are blessed with His personal dealings. Was John to be shown these marvelous visions and insights for himself and his own blessing? No! Any time the Lord ministers to us through the Holy Spirit it is always for the edification of our fellow saints. These visions were for the joy and blessing of the people of God in the seven churches, not so John could make a name for himself and build himself up in the eyes of others (similar issues arise with prophecy and tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

The phrase "things that must take place" here is equal to Revelation 1:1, "things which must shortly come to pass," and Revelation 1:19, "things that shall be hereafter."

** There are three heavens in the Scriptures: the abode of God's creatures that fly (Genesis 1:20), the heaven of the stars (Genesis 1:16-17), and the heaven that is the abode of God (Luke 11:2).

*** The fact that Paul was completely oblivious to his own physical state tells us a great deal about the glories of heaven. He seems to have been so preoccupied with what was before him that many other things went unnoticed in the face of such wonder and glory. That may be just how glorious heaven really is!

v2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and [one] sat on the throne.

A sight or vision of the Lord before any work is done in His name (such as John experienced) is the pattern of ministry in the Bible (see Isaiah 6:1-8; Ezekiel 1:26-28 and 2:1-3). Indeed, the vision of Ezekiel chapter 1 may be the pattern for the vision of this chapter. There we see the Son of Man in His glory upon a throne with a rainbow surrounding the scene. One might think that reading Revelation chapters 4 and 5 gives us a vision of the Father (chapter 4) and the Son (chapter 5). Yet, in light of John 1:18 and the close parallel between Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1, there is some doubt. On the other hand, since in chapter 5 the One on the throne is differentiated from the Lamb, it is easier to think that chapter 4 is a vision of God the Father (see also the wording of Revelation 5:13).

The purpose for God showing John this vision is clearly explained in the vision of Isaiah six where Isaiah beheld the Lord in a vision. Note carefully that the Word says "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." The force of such a statement given to Isaiah is clear by its contrast. The powerful message that Isaiah was to grasp was this: "in the year this *earthly* king died I saw the *Eternal* King upon His *Everlasting* Throne." Isaiah's impression was to be John's impression as well from the vision before him. To serve God well and without fear of man (which brings a snare, Proverbs 29:25), we must have a clear view concerning the Sovereign Lord we serve.

v3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and [there was] a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

See Revelation 10:1; Ezekiel 1:26ff

The rainbow reminds us of the God who forever keeps His Word and His promises (cf. Genesis 9:11-16).

v4 And round about the throne [were] four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

In light of the tribulation that the saints partake of in the book of Revelation, and in that "white robes" which speak of martyrs that have persevered (Revelation 6:9-11), it seems that we should understand these twenty-four elders as symbolic of the overcomers and the crowns as the symbol of that overcoming (Revelation 3:5). They reign with Christ (Revelation 20:4). And eternal life/reigning are only for those who persevere and endure (Matthew 24:13; James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; 1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

v5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunders and voices: and [there were] seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

For "lightnings/thunder/voices" (better "sounds"), see Psalms 29, 77, and 94.

As in Revelation 1:15, the theme is one of majesty, glory, dominion – in essence, the Lordship of God. The phrase "seven Spirits" is found four times in Scripture, all in the book of Revelation. It is easy to see why interpreters have seen God the Holy Spirit in this phrase because the term "Holy Spirit" is not found in Revelation at all! The idea of "seven" in Revelation seems to communicate fullness or completeness, in this case fullness of the Spirit (just as seven is used of the fullness of other subjects in Revelation such as God's wrath – Revelation 15:7). Fire and the Holy Spirit, as we find here, are often together in Holy Writ as the Spirit of the Lord conveys God's power (cf. Acts 2:1-4). We see commonly in the Old Testament the Spirit of the Lord falling upon men, empowering them for such work as was necessary (Samson, Elijah, Elisha, see in particular 2 Kings 2:9-10). Thus in verse five we have the Holy Spirit displaying before John (in vision form) the greatness and glory of God proceeding from His position of sovereignty as illustrated by the throne. As with men of God previous to John, this is the Living God, the One John must prepare to serve.

v6 And before the throne [there was] a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, [were] four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

The first part of this verse comes from Ezekiel 1:22. It is not surprising that so much of Ezekiel is used in the book of Revelation since the themes are so similar, themes of judgment and Israel. From here in 4:6 to 4:8, we have much the same description as we find in Ezekiel 1:4ff and Isaiah 6:1ff. The creatures do the bidding of their Sovereign Lord (Ezekiel) and pronounce His Holiness and Majesty (Isaiah). As in Isaiah's case, this vision for John was foundational before doing the work of the Lord. **KNOWING** the Lord comes first, knowing about Him and proclaiming His will comes second. John and his fellow pilgrims (Revelation 1:1, 1:9) must see their Lord before they can serve their Lord.

- v7 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.

See Ezekiel 1:10

The fourfold aspect of the creature may be to include different attributes of those who serve God. These creatures have the swiftness of an eagle, the wisdom of man, the grandeur of the lion, and the power of an ox (Ezekiel has "ox," Revelation has "calf"). All these attributes are used to do the work decreed by God (see the relationship between the Spirit and the work of this heavenly creature in Ezekiel 1:20).

- v8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about [him]; and [they were] full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

If I might paraphrase the emphasis of the language, the Scriptures say "the four beasts say Holy, Holy, Holy, is *The Lord*, *The Lord* who is Almighty, *The Lord* who is Eternal." There is real worship here, and even an explanation of why such should always be the case with all God's creatures. That the creatures have eyes all around speaks possibly to the fact that these creatures have a full view of the Lord and that this view of His majesty takes up all their purposes, time, and efforts. The wings probably speak of the beasts' ability to do the Lord's bidding swiftly.

- v9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

Again, the original Greek has such glory and beauty. In our verse we may paraphrase, "and when the living creatures give honor and glory to the one sitting upon the throne, *I mean He who is eternal*." The glorious "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 is here. The Eternal one is here (Psalm 90:2; 93:2). Glory and honor belong to Him (Jude 24f) for He ever lives, and in a special way this truth belongs to Christ and His people (Hebrews 7:25ff). The Eternality of the Lord is one of those special incommunicable attributes that separate Creator from creature. The attributes of God that creatures by their very nature *cannot* possess besides eternity are omniscience (all knowing), omnipresence (everywhere at once), omnipotence (all powerful), and incomprehensibility (cf. Matthew 11:27 and 1 Corinthians 2:11).

v10 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,:

The essence of Christianity is here in verse ten. We cast our crowns, we open our very hearts, we display our deepest love before the throne. When we think or hear of our Lord and the truths about Him (v9), we fall on our faces in worship before the Almighty. Our truest thoughts are "all to HIM I owe." There must always be a sense of this verse, of thanksgiving and worship in all we do (1 Thessalonians 5:18; Colossians 3:17). If we glory, we glory in the Lord because, "of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us *wisdom*, and *righteousness*, and *sanctification*, and *redemption*," 1 Corinthians 1:30-31! Is it too much to say with David, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty?" It is far too little! The saints of old said it best: What is the chief end of man? To love, worship, and glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.

v11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

"for thy pleasure they were created," is the essence of all creation and the essence of its purpose in its relationship to God. He is the center of all things, especially grace and judgment (Romans 9:20-24). It is for Him that all this was created, it is for Him that all things are sustained and shall come to their predestined conclusion and final consummation (Romans 11:36). The emphatic Greek word here is "you", "for **YOU**, even **YOU** have created all things, and for **YOUR** glory and good pleasure all things exist." Any other understanding of creation and the reason and purpose for man's existence misses the grandeur of Revelation 4:11.