



## 12. Revelation 4 – Heaven.

### **Read Revelation Chapter 4:1-11**

The location of the Book of Revelation changes now from the Earth. Jesus has been speaking through John to the Seven Churches and it is not mentioned again until the end of the Book. Jesus has been encouraging the churches who have lost their way by trying to shepherd them back on track. The decision as to whether any person belonging to any of the Churches, wishes to follow Jesus closely is entirely up to the individual. Equally that individual decision, where it relates to you and me, cannot be answered by anyone else. It is a matter of personal choice, and Jesus is content to leave it to us to decide for ourselves.

But there was a purpose in Jesus calling John up to Heaven to be with Him. It was to "show you what must take place after this," **Revelation 4:1**. We must never think that God is operating in a vacuum, as far as His people are concerned. He wants us to know ahead of time what He is doing, so that we can understand His purposes for us. He will share with us what lies ahead if we are prepared to take the time to fellowship with Him. The Lord shared with Abraham what He was about to do for him (**Genesis 18:10**) and also at Sodom (**Genesis 18:17-19**). How much more would He share with us what He is about to do on the Earth as He gathers to Himself His Church, the Bride for whom He died such an ignominious and horrific death on the Cross, so that she might be free to serve Him and to be with Him for ever! God judges the Earth that crucified His Son. He wanted to show to John, and through him, to us, the events which we can expect to cause the amazing climax of the Ages. We are living in that time! Revelation Chapters 4 and 5 serve as an introduction to Chapters 6-20. In the throne room of Heaven where ultimate power, authority and judgement reside in the Person of Jesus, the Lamb, assumes the responsibility of initiating the great final conflict with the forces of evil; the end of which will see the Lamb triumphant and Satan consigned to the Lake of Fire. The visions of judgement that are seen here are about Israel and the Nations rather than the Church.

In **Revelation 1**, we read that John, when in the Spirit, heard a voice from behind that sounded like a trumpet. He turned to discover Jesus, from whom the voice had come. **Revelation 4:1** repeats this, but this time there is an open door.

"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here ....." **Revelation 4:1**

John knew to 'look', which is a challenge to keep our spiritual eyes tuned to what God is trying to reveal to us. He recognised the same voice so he knew to **listen** to what he was being told, and in his obedience he was 'at once in the Spirit'. Imagine what he, and we, would have missed if John had 'been too busy'! John is immediately in the Spirit, and in Heaven at God's throne. The great vision of the unforgettable Throne, the Throne which is the seat of absolute control throughout the entire period of judgement.

There are three phases of judgement: seals, trumpets and vials, as the world becomes increasingly wicked and godless and the lawlessness comes to a head. God then steps in and completes the work to make a final end to sin.

The door is always open for us to come to Jesus. Ever since His crucifixion and resurrection, when the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (**Matthew 27:51**) signifying that Jesus had opened the way for us to have direct access to the throne of God, rather than go through an intermediary (a priest).

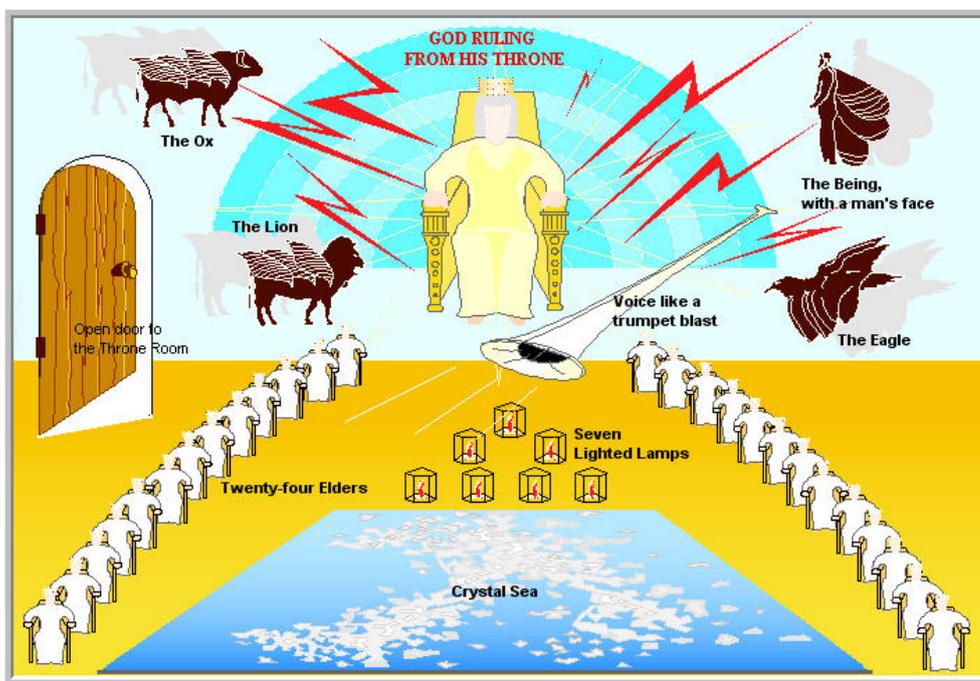
John's experience with Jesus was similar to the Rapture. In the Bible, the Rapture is always described as happening just before the Tribulation. The Tribulation is the period of the last seven years of this planet as we know it, under the influence of Satan. It will be a period like no other. It will be a time when Satan attempts to force his hand and to usurp God's throne. **It cannot take place while the Holy Spirit is still on the earth living in the Believers.** We do not need to be unsettled about this time, as we are being led by the Holy Spirit and being warned, but we do need to walk in step with Him over the tiniest activities day by day before this all happens, so we are trained in the ways of God. In this time there will be those:

"proclaiming himself to be God. .... *but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.*"<sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the

breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of His coming..... work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,..... They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie <sup>12</sup> and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness”, **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**.

John was not taken to Heaven permanently at this time, as all Believers at the time of the Rapture will be, but his experience may have been similar to Paul’s described in **2 Corinthians 12:2-6**, where he was caught up to Heaven. Also many others have described being transferred to heaven for differing lengths of time and have written interesting books about their experiences. For example ‘Heaven’ by Randy Alcorn; ‘Visions beyond the veil’ by HA Baker and ‘I saw heaven’ by Roberts Liardon. John had been very clearly told to write about what he saw, whereas Paul “heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell..... I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.” **2 Corinthians 12:4-6**. It is so wonderful for us to know where we are going to spend eternity, some of the description is in words we understand and some is hard to imagine, but it helps us to focus on the fact that this world is not our home, and we have a better place to look forward to, **John 14:3**.

### **Heaven – the Throne Room; Revelation 4:1-6**



It was not an empty Throne, for God is the Ruler of Heaven and Earth. John did not have to wait while someone sent for God to attend to His regal business. God was there, just as He always is, ruling in ultimate Power, Justice and Might over mankind and their affairs: ‘The One who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.’ What does it show us when God is described as a stone? John Philipps in his book ‘Exploring Revelation’ describes jasper as an example of true hardness, this is an analogy of God’s government which is fixed and firm; His moral laws

are just as inflexible as His physical laws. One day the Lord Jesus will rule the earth with a rod of iron (**Psalm 2:9**), which is the very symbol of unyielding hardness. The second stone used to describe God on the Throne is carnelian or sardine (**KJV**), meaning holiness as the colour of the stone is a deep fiery, flashing red. It reminds us that ‘our God is a consuming fire.” **Deuteronomy 4:24**. While sin exists in the Earth, God’s attitude towards it is one of burning holiness.

The judgement of God can be described as the combined two strengths of hardness and holiness; but as seen in the ephod of the High priests’ clothing, our names are forever written over His heart; the place of affection and love, **Exodus 28:17-20**. His judgement is inevitable and we should never give way to cheap grace, **Romans 6:1**. Remember the One through whom all judgement will be given is Himself both God and man, **John 5:22, 27**.

Since God dwells in unapproachable light and is the One whom no one has seen or can see (**1 Timothy 6:16**) He is described in Ezekiel in terms of the reflected brilliance of precious stones, which we can compare with John’s description in Revelation, **Ezekiel 1:26-28**

The emerald rainbow was described as encircling the Throne, not just an arc but a full circle, which shows perfection and speaks of endless Love. It also reminds us of His promise never to destroy the earth again by

flood. 'This is the sign of the covenant I have established between Me and all life on the earth.' **Genesis 9: 8-17**

Around God's throne were twenty-four other thrones on which were seated the twenty four elders. The number twenty four speaks of the 'double-twelve of God's Word' – all encompassing, all-inclusive of Old and New Testaments, or Covenants, so the Elders here represent 12 from the Old Testament, one from each Tribe of Israel and 12 from the New Testament – the twelve apostles. Thus every Believer is represented here. God surrounds His Throne with authority and order; He likes things to be done fittingly and with dignity. This should challenge us to offer worship from a heart of surrender and purity. These elders were dressed in white showing their purity as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection and they wore crowns of gold on their heads. These crowns are to be used to lay at His feet.

These activities in Heaven are accompanied by terrifying sights and sounds from the Throne: "flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder," **Revelation 4:5a**. Remember when Moses was given the Ten Commandments, God gave very clear instructions for the order of how things were to happen, but these came with frightening sights and sounds, as Mount Sinai trembled violently, **Exodus 19:16-18**. 'The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." **Hebrews 12:21**. These activities remind us there is something to be feared about God's Judgement, (**Hebrews 10:31**) but thank God there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, **Romans 8:1**.

'Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God' **Revelation 4:5b**. This vision that John shares with us now is one of the time immediately after the Rapture. In Heaven are Jesus Himself, the Elders, and of course, the Holy Spirit. He is symbolised here by the seven lamps of fire. These represent the sevenfold Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has many manifestations, diversities and operations, but here the number seven refers to God's completion, the perfect operation of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness. The presence of the Holy Spirit before the Throne of God indicates that His work is finished on Earth. This work was to 'convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement,' **John 16:8**.

This work was begun on the Day of Pentecost when 'suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven ..... and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.....' **Acts 2:1-4**. He has been acting on behalf of Believers ever since then, but now they are all in Heaven. Zechariah also confirms the seven lamps represent One Spirit, **Zechariah 4:2-6**, and reminds us that God clearly declares that all our activities are "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD Almighty." **Zechariah 4:6**. Isaiah also gives us an insight into the sevenfold Spirit of God: 'The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord'. **Isaiah 11:2**. Of course we must not place too much emphasis on 'Numerology' (the assignment of meaning to certain numbers) Paul exhorts us to study the Word of God, not numerology, pyramidology, or symbolisms of any sort (or any other '- ology' for that matter!).

'Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal'. **Revelation 4:6**  
This sea, when used as a Biblical term represents a mass of people. These people are the Believers from all ages gathered at the Throne of God, praising Him and worshipping Him. The gathering that is indicated in these verses of Revelation Chapter 4 represent a family gathering – in fact the first gathering of the family of God, almost His entire family, but not yet quite complete as there will be some Believers to come out of the Tribulation period, as we shall discover during subsequent studies.

Crystal is the only earthly substance in which flaws cannot be hidden. In fact any flaws are magnified! The Lord will 'present the Bride to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless', **Ephesians 5:25-27**. We as Believers are part of that Bride. **Revelation 15:2** describes the crystal sea as being mingled with fire. This indicates strongly that the Holy Spirit (often symbolised by fire) has produced the crystal sea and is responsible for its presence at the Throne of God. Everything about crystal speaks of the glorious Church, not only its ability to expose flaws, but its beauty, fire and even its melodious sound.

### **The Living Creatures; Revelation 4: 6-11.**

John goes on to describe for us four living creatures around the throne. These creatures were all-seeing. Nothing could approach the Throne of God without being seen. They had eyes everywhere! The creatures looked like animals according to John – a lion, an ox, one having the face of a man, and a flying eagle, **Revelation 4:7-8**. Ezekiel also had a vision where creatures of a similar type were described; 'Their faces

looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, 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'. **Ezekiel 1:5-10**

This part of the vision is one of the 'uncertainties' of Revelation. Life Application notes state these creatures represent the character and quality of God. Like the Cherubim, the highest order of angels, they guard the Throne of God leading all in worship and proclaim God's holiness. It has been said that the Lion emphasises God's majesty and power; the Ox represents His faithfulness, also His sacrifice; the Man represents His incarnation and His intelligence and the Eagle symbolises His gifts of the Holy Spirit and His sovereignty. Also the Gospel writers are often interpreted as emphasising a certain facet of God's limitless character. Matthew, in his portrait of the Lord Jesus shows Him as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He constantly points the Jews to their King and Messiah.

Mark's portrait of Christ, shows Him as an ox, giving His life in service and sacrifice. Then Luke the doctor draws the portrait of Jesus as the man tracing His ancestry back to Adam, and is full of stories showing Jesus' gentleness and humanity. John's portrait of Christ can be seen as the eagle as He is the one who came from on high and who lives in the highest Heaven. There have been many eloquent, learned writers over the 2000 years who make different points about each gospel. The important thing is that the living creatures all reflect some aspect of God's character. This is understandable as they are constantly in His Presence; this also happened to Moses and **Exodus 34:29** says 'the skin of his face shone'. Those of us who spend our time in His Presence become like the Lord Jesus, **2 Corinthians 3:18**.

As these creatures give glory to God, and it is as they do so that the praise and worship is extended to include the twenty four Elders, and all give praise to the God of Heaven and Earth. The Elders fall down before the Living God, worship Him, and lay their crowns before the Throne, this is a sign of complete submission using these words:

**"You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honour and power,  
for You created all things,  
and by Your will they were created  
and have their being."**

Simply to call God 'Lord and God' was a triumphant confession of faith, declaring to the known world and the principalities and powers that He holds first place in the whole Universe. It is vital that we keep declaring this Truth whatever our situation looks like so we have victory.

This unity of worship sums up the entire scene in Heaven – one of praise and worship of the Almighty God Who has created all things perfectly, for His glory and pleasure, and in complete order and harmony. How could we possibly think otherwise? When in doubt of how to pray or what to pray, this is all we need to know so we can join with all the host of heaven. Do you and I want to be part of this most amazing scene? I believe that we do, but if we do, we have to be serious about the person of Jesus Who is the focus of all this attention. Salvation comes only through Him, and we owe Him our very lives.

Any questions we have about this passage will be unravelled when we see Jesus face to face, and we know as we are known!

## **12. Revelation 4 – Heaven – Challenge Questions**

- 1. Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you and be prepared to share your answer.
- 2.** What impresses you most about Heaven? What are you looking forward to when you reach eternity?

### **Read Revelation Chapter 5:1-14**

- 3.** In general terms, what does Revelation 5 portray to us? Where is Jesus as Revelation 5 takes place?
- 4.** What job does Jesus have in Heaven?
- 5.** What problem does there appear to be in Heaven? What unanswered question appears to remain in Heaven?
- 6.** What two promises does **Jeremiah 33:2-3** contain. Why are they so applicable to us today?
- 7.** Can you write down one question that you would like to ask God? Now ask Him, and keep a note of it in the back of your Bible.
- 8.** Was anyone able to open the scroll in Heaven? Why was John so very upset when he thought that no one was able to open it?
- 9.** What answer did one of the Elders give to John which satisfied his sadness?

- 10.** Jesus is also described as being like a Lamb. What was so significant about this Lamb, and why was it so different to any other lamb?
  
- 11.** Why did John the Baptist refer to Jesus as a Lamb in John Chapter 1?
  
- 12.** The Lamb described in Revelation Chapter 5 had two significant attributes both described with the figure seven. What were they, and what is their meaning?
  
- 13.** Around the Lamb were the Elders what did they have in their bowls? How should this encourage us? What were the points in their new praise song?
  
- 14.** What is the job of an angel so far as you are concerned? Give verses. Could you ever expect to see one or to be involved with one?
  
- 15.** What are the differences between an angel and a demon? Which has more power and authority?
  
- 16.** What is the main occupation in Heaven? Does everybody take part? What attitudes might we have to change when we get there?
  
- 17.** Sum up in one short sentence the highlight for you of all the activity described in Heaven.