

## Revelation Chapter 4- John Karmelich

1. My title for Chapter 4 is: "A sneak peak at God's throne room."
  - a) When you think about the bible, there are only a few things God asks you to accept by blind-faith. For example, God does not expect us to accept Jesus as a "given". The entire bible is a commentary on the role and necessity of Jesus. In terms of our relationship with God, the only thing He asks us to accept by faith is His existence and His own perfection.
    - i) For example, the bible does not say anything about God's origin. God asks us to simply accept that fact He always has existed, exist now, and will exist forever.
    - ii) We must also accept by faith that God is perfect. If God was imperfect in any way, He cannot be trusted. If God were capable of lying, He could not be trusted. If God does not know all things, then He would be capable of making mistakes. That is why we believe God knows all things, past, present and future. At the same time, God cannot force us to love Him. If He did, then it would not be true love on our part, but just forced love or coerced love.
  - b) With all that said, the bible does not spend a lot of time describing heaven.
    - i) You can think of the bible as one big description of the "entrance requirements" to heaven. The bible goes out of its way to show evidence for the existence of a promised Messiah (Jesus), His purpose and His role and the fact that if we as humans believed He died for our sins, we make it into heaven.
    - ii) Which leads to the theme of this lesson: If God went to all of this time and trouble to describe how we are to get into heaven, you would think the bible would spend a lot more time and text describing heaven itself. That's the rub. There is very little text in the bible about what heaven is like. You would think since God is so motivated to get us there, He would spend more time describing the place!
    - iii) A reason God spends so little time describing heaven is God wants us to focus on how much it cost Him for us to get there, and not focus on what Heaven is like.
      - a) Think about what God's salvation cost Him: His only son. I can't think of anything more painful in life than losing one's only child. God wanted us to understand how much pain and love He was willing to go through just so He could spend an eternity with us.
2. Chapter 4 of Revelation is one of those rare occasions where heaven is actually described.
  - a) Chapter 4 focuses on God's throne room. It may not be the only place in heaven, but it is the headquarters. In describing heaven, it would be the place to start. It's the capital. ☺
  - b) Let's start with an assumption about heaven: There is no time.
    - i) The first thing one must understand is there is no "time" in heaven. God created all things. Therefore, God created time. If God created time, He must exist outside of time as we know it. The classic example is watching a parade from a helicopter. From the ground, a parade may take an hour or more to watch. From a high helicopter, one can see the whole parade at once. In this world, we are "stuck in time" and can only see part of the parade at any one time. God can see the whole thing from start to finish. God intervenes in "our time" when He answers prayer and works through humans to accomplish His will.
  - c) The bible then teaches that all humans will live forever. When God created our souls, it is an everlasting being. Our bodies decay, but the soul lives forever. Whether or not we like those rules, one has to accept the fact one is going to live forever. If anything, it should motivate us to not only get into heaven, but also have lots of perks when we get there. ☺
  - d) OK, so why should I learn now what heaven is like? Can't I just find out when I get there and be surprised? Can't I just wait and get a ticket for a guided tour one day? ☺

- i) One learns about heaven for the same reason one learns about God in the first place: If you love someone, you want to know everything about them, including where they live. God gives us the privilege of showing us His "throne room".
  - ii) One can also learn more about the nature of God by understanding His throne. The throne room, as described in this chapter, is full of word pictures of God, angelic beings and probably believers in God in our redeemed state.
- 3. OK, time for disclaimers. ☺
  - a) Chapter 4 through the end of the book begins the third section of Revelation. An outline for Revelation was given back in Chapter 1: "Write, therefore, what you have seen (Chapter 1), what is now (Chapters 2-3) and what will take place later (Chapters 4-22). (Revelation 1:19, NIV, parenthesis added).
    - i) What is "now" is the church age. The first words of Chapter 4 are "after these things". These "things" were the letters to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3.
  - b) There are many views on Revelation given by people who take their bible seriously.
    - i) I'm going to touch on some of the views and then of course, give my personal view, which I'm positive is correct. ☺
    - ii) For you bible scholars out there, when you disagree, first, take a deep breath, walk around the block and then say the magic words, "I disagree". We all agree the text itself is God's word. We should disagree "agreeably" on its meaning.
  - c) Revelation 4 through 22 was all future oriented to the writer John. He was using 1st Century language to describe things, which were probably difficult to describe.
    - i) The most common view among Evangelical Christians is that everything in Chapters 4 through 22 is 100% future to us to today.
    - ii) Another common view, especially among Catholic and Orthodox denominations is that much, but not all of Revelation Chapters 4 through (about) 19 is describing events that are future to John, but not to us.
    - iii) We'll tackle some of these views as we go. Know that they are out there.
  - d) The good news is you don't have to memorize every possible interpretation. One has to accept by faith that the text itself is the Word of God. Some of the broader applications cut across differences in interpretations and are the most important.
  - e) There are only 11 verses in this chapter. Still, we are working with word-pictures, images and references to elsewhere in the bible. Revelation is the only New Testament book that primarily works in word-pictures, as opposed to a straightforward, narrative text.
  - f) Remember the riddle, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Revelation is an elephant, and a big one at that! My goal is to "eat" Revelation in bite size chunks.
- 4. Chapter 4, Verse 1: After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.
  - a) Let's recall some facts from Chapter 1: The writer is the apostle John, as in the writer of the Gospel of John. This is not John the Baptist. Revelation was most likely written about 60 years after Jesus resurrection. John was a prisoner for the crime of Christianity, and was banished to a penal colony on a Mediterranean island called Patmos.
    - i) Chapters 2 and 3 were Jesus dictating to John seven specific letters to seven specific churches. Each letter ended (or contained) a phrase saying in effect that all Christians need to hear what Jesus is saying to those seven churches.
    - ii) John wrote down this information about the 7 churches. We have an unspecified time gap after Chapters 2 and 3. The first words of Chapter 4 are "after this".
    - iii) John's been banished to this island. He's trusted in Jesus for about 60 years now. John hasn't seen Jesus since the resurrection. Now John gets this vision about the writing to seven churches. By the time he finishes writing and catches his breath, he looked up and "saw a door standing open to heaven". That starts Chapter 4.
    - iv) What does this door look like? Did a wood door appear in the sky? How big were the doorknobs? ☺ The text doesn't specify any more details.

- b) In order to understand what is going on, let's contemplate some facts about Jesus after He was resurrected:
  - i) Paul says that when we are resurrected, we will somehow be like Jesus in our resurrected bodies (1st Corinthians 15:53).
  - ii) All of the Gospel stories of Jesus' appearance after the resurrection always involved Him eating something. Given that, Jesus has the power to eat in His resurrected body. I suspect we will do the same. I wonder if heaven has a waste disposal system. ☺ I believe the reason Jesus was eating after the resurrection was to show He was not some sort of ghost, but has a real resurrected body. It is a different type of body. It is "suited" for living in heaven as well as living on earth.
  - iii) In one of the stories about the resurrected Jesus, He appears in a locked room. (John 20:19). Somehow, our resurrected bodies can walk through solid walls, (assuming we're that much like Jesus) and then can visually appear to people.
  - iv) My personal view is our resurrected bodies exist in more than three dimensions. The world as we know it, only exists in three dimensions, plus we are locked in time in this lifetime. We can't suddenly jump into the future or into the past.
  - v) Therefore, for a "door in heaven to open", somehow, another dimension(s) is revealed to John to show him this doorway. The bible gives hints every now and then that this hidden world we cannot see.
    - a) For example, "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll;" (Isaiah 34:4 NIV). This verse implies there is more to life than what we can perceive.
    - b) Somehow, the world is more than we visually know it. If God created the world, He exists outside of that world. Every now and then, the bible has hints of this world being revealed to us. Verse 1 is one of those hints.
- 5. Verse 1, Second Sentence: And 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."
  - a) OK, here's John standing on the island of Patmos. He's still mentally recovering from seeing Jesus and writing down notes which would become chapters 1-3.
  - b) All of a sudden, John here's a voice saying, "Come up here". My first thought might be, "OK, uh, do you have a ladder?" ☺ When we get to Verse 2, we'll discover that God somehow transports John up into heaven. John is "raptured" up into heaven. More on "rupturing" when we get to Verse 2. What is important is that when God calls us to do something, (God said "come up here") He then makes a way to make it possible.
  - c) Next, how do we know who's speaking to John? The verse starts by saying, "And the voice I had first heard speaking". Chapter 1 identifies that as Jesus. It wasn't blunt, but it included the reference "I was dead...now alive" (Verse 18). Remember John saw Jesus after the resurrection. John knew what Jesus looked like, but John didn't recognize Jesus in Chapter 1 of Revelation, because Jesus' "look" was different. This vision of Jesus was different enough that Jesus said to John in Chapter 1, Verse 17 "Do not be afraid".
  - d) Back to this verse, there is a reference to the voice being like a trumpet. Imagine a trumpet noise that is distinct enough to say, "Come up here..." Why a trumpet?
    - i) There are many trumpet references in the bible. It is best compared to army bugler. The idea is to "sound the alarm" as something is about to happen.
  - e) Now comes the key part: The last part of the verse says "I (Jesus) will show you (John) what must take place after this". My first question would be "after what?"
    - i) The "after what" is a key point to Chapter 4, and the remainder of Revelation.
    - ii) The "after what" is the events after Chapters 2 and 3.
    - iii) Chapters 2 and 3 not only give "status reports" on seven churches, but also say that Jesus will judge these seven churches and also judge all Christian churches.

- iv) Therefore, the big debate question is does "after this" refer to after the church era on earth ends? One can interpret "after this" to meaning after all the churches are in heaven with Jesus.
  - a) This view is the most popular with Evangelical Christians. It's not the only view, just the most popular. If you recall from the last few lessons, I talked about the theory that each church represented a different time era in church history. The opening words of Chapter 4, "after this", refers to after those church era's. Now we will read in Verse 2 of John "magically transported" into heaven. That is considered a picture of the rapture of the church. I'll deal with that term in a few moments.
  - b) I should give some alternative views as well. Some believe "after this" refers to the time era after 90AD (more or less) when John wrote the Book of Revelation. This view, which is common among Catholic theologians believe most of Revelation covers the last 2,000-year history. It is as if Chapters 2-3 give a "status report" of the churches, and "after this" covers the last 2,000 years and counting of history. This view sees all the negative aspects of history as God's judgment on the world.
  - c) There is another view that it is John-only in heaven in Chapter 4, and not the church. I'll expand on this more in a moment. Right now, it occurred to me I've already written 3.5 pages and I'm still on Verse 1. ☺
- 6. Verse 2: At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.
  - a) Remember in Verse 1, Jesus called from heaven down to John on earth and said, "Come up here". Before John had time to think about how he was going to get up there, we have the "at once" reference at the beginning of Verse 2. Somehow, someway, John was taken up into heaven so instantly, he never had time to think about how to get up there.
  - b) Since John was taken up so quickly, this is a good time to discuss the "rapture" theory.
    - i) The word "rapture" means to be taken up suddenly. It would be like an eagle suddenly swooping up its prey up in the sky and that prey had no idea. It would be like you sitting here reading this text and the next second you were in heaven. You had no idea how you got from Point A to Point B as it happened too fast.
    - ii) The word "rapture" is not in the bible. That word comes from the Latin. The Greek word "har-pad-zo" is translated (roughly) to "rapture" from Greek to Latin. That word is translated as underlined in the following New Testament verse.
      - a) "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1st Thessalonians 4:17 NIV)
    - iii) Here is another clue about the rapture: "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1st Corinthians 15:52, NIV)
      - a) Notice in the 1st Corinthians verse the reference to the trumpet. John said Jesus voice was like a trumpet in Revelation 4:1. That is why many connect John's sudden "rapture" to heaven with the rapture of the church.
    - iv) Christians vary as to when this rapture occurs. First, let me explain the "pre-tribulation view, which is a rapture prior to "The Great Tribulation":
      - a) The view is that the "Great Tribulation" covers a specific seven-year time span. We'll discuss that more in later chapters.
      - b) The "pre-tribulation" view is that the church is raptured up into heaven before the start of the tribulation. The fact that John is up in heaven before all the Revelation-judgments start is an argument given for this view. This view is often abbreviated the "pre-trib(ulation)" view.

- c) The "post-tribulation" view is that the church is raptured up into heaven after the end of this seven-year specific tribulation period. An argument for this view is that Jesus never says in the New Testament that He will come two times. Therefore, Jesus only comes for us once at the end of the seven-year tribulation. They see that as an argument that the Christian church must go through this tribulation period with everyone else living on the earth at this time. This is called "post-trib." for short.
  - v) Next, let's discuss those who don't believe in a literal 7-year tribulation period. They are called "amillennialists". Following the seven-year period comes a 1,000-year period where Jesus rules over the world. This is Chapter 20 of Revelation. Both the "pre-trib's" and the "post-trib's" believe in a literal 1,000-year millennium.
    - a) In the Greek, if you put an "a" in front of a word, that word is changed to a negative. It is like when we put "non" in front of a word. For example, we may say, "That makes sense" or "That is nonsense". The three letters "non" changes a word to mean the opposite of the original term. The letter "a" in front of a Greek word has the same meaning.
    - b) The amillennial view is that the 1,000 year period is not literal, but figurative. There is no literal 1,000-year period. In this view, Jesus just comes back once for the church and everybody is in heaven. The description of the 1,000-year reign is a word-picture and not a literal event.
    - c) The amillennial view is that there is still a rapture of the church, but it is a single "wrap up" event. There is no literal seven year-tribulation and no literal 1,000-year millennium. There is just Jesus coming back to get the last bunch of saved Christians and life as we know it on earth, will end.
  - vi) Don't know which view is right? Don't worry, bible scholars have been debating this stuff for a long time. It's not a Christian requirement that one holds one particular view. Know that there are also variations of these major views.
  - c) Meanwhile, back to Verse 2: John was somehow caught up in heaven. The rest of the verse says the first thing He sees is "A throne in heaven with someone sitting on it."
    - i) I have no idea how big heaven is, but I do know that when John went up to heaven for this vision, he was taken to headquarters. This is God's throne room.
    - ii) One thing to catch is that the person sitting on the throne is never described as God Himself. It is very much implied, but there is no verse that bluntly states, "This is God sitting on this throne". Either John didn't want to state the obvious or he was so shocked by the vision, that he was busy describing what he saw as opposed to trying to interpret what he saw.
  - d) God once told Moses, "But," he (God) said, "You (Moses) cannot see my face, for no one may see me (God) and live." (Exodus 33:20 NIV). So how could John see God the Father and "still live"? One answer is that John's sins were removed at the cross, and now John, along with you and me, has the privilege that Moses never had! A related idea is Moses couldn't see God's "face" as God was too big for Moses to comprehend. We're not sure John, here in Revelation, saw "God's face" either. My personal view is that we are going to spend eternity learning about God and grasping that comprehension!
    - i) How God is physically described is the topic of Verse 3.
7. Verse 3: And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.
- a) First, let's say what God does not look like: He is not an old man with a grey beard!
  - b) Next, comprehend the literalness of all of this. There is a literal heaven. This is not a weird dream John had one day! John was transported to a literal throne in heaven.
  - c) God revealed these details about heaven so we know what the place would look like when we get there! It's not a requirement for Christians to know this stuff, but it is a blessing to comprehend it.

- d) Now, onto the big question: What did John mean by "jasper and carnelian"?
    - i) Let's start with "jasper". We get a clue later in the Book of Revelation:
      - a) "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." (Revelation 21:11 NIV)
      - b) Whatever John meant by jasper, it is clear (i.e., colorless). Most believe it was a diamond, or more specifically, a diamond as reflected by the light.
      - c) Most commentators believe John wrote his 3 letters (1st, 2nd and 3rd John) after the book of Revelation. Notice how John described God the Father:
        - (1) "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1st John 1:5, NIV)
      - d) The idea of pure light is the idea of "perfection". God revealed Himself to John in a way to understand God's perfect purity, free from any sin.
      - e) Notice this light is not a blinding light. In the next few verses, John was able to describe other things in the throne room. If this light was blinding, John could not describe anything else in that throne room.
    - ii) Next, we have the word "carnelian". Other bible translations say "sardius" (KJV, NKJV, NASB) or "ruby" (The Living Bible).
      - a) As best we can tell, this precious stone is red in color. Remember John was using first century language to describe what He saw. Somehow, the light coming from the throne was clear, and at the same time, had "red" like the light coming through a red ruby.
      - b) The most likely word-picture is that "red" refers to blood. In the Old Testament, the most sacred object, which represents the presence of God, "The Ark of Covenant" was sprinkled in blood to represent the shed blood for the forgiveness of sins.
      - c) Now picture the "white or clear light" of purity, and at the same time, it is covered with shed blood. That would best be described as light shining through perfect jewels as described above.
    - iii) So why not just say, "What came from the throne was white light with some red?" The answer is to understand how precious is jewelry. It is something special to behold and to admire. One must not forget that aspect of God.
8. Verse 3 (cont): A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.
- a) The second thing John sees is what is encircled around the throne: A rainbow, resembling an emerald. For those who don't know, an emerald is green in color.
    - i) Notice John didn't describe the chair God was sitting on. We don't even know that there was a chair! John somehow understood this was God's throne room as the centerpiece of the room was this bright white light with shades of red.
  - b) Biblically speaking, when we think of rainbows, we think of the Noah's ark story.
    - i) After the flood, God put a rainbow in the sky. God said the rainbow is a symbol of His promise He would never again destroy the world by a flood. (Genesis 9:13-16). The fact that you and I are here today proves that fact is correct.
    - ii) The only other biblical reference to a rainbow is the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel when he saw God's throne room. (Ref.: Ezekiel 1:28)
    - iii) OK, so why the rainbow? The important part of God's promise to Noah is that no matter how sinful man becomes, God will not destroy flood the world again. It is symbolic of God keeping His promises to mankind. Even though we are unfaithful to God, He cannot break His promises to us!
  - c) Why did the rainbow resemble an emerald? Emeralds are green. When you think of "green", you think of the earth (land), at least the earth in springtime. Nature is primarily green in color. It is another way of God saying He won't destroy all of nature again with a flood. We tend to forget that God is not only the God over humans but over all of nature itself. This rainbow promise is that God will never again destroy all of nature.

- d) The point of the rainbow on the throne room is to remind us of God keeping His promises. Not just the flood promise, but also all His promises. If God is not perfectly trustworthy, we can't trust in God's promise of salvation through Jesus!
    - i) Another point of the rainbow will be evident in chapter five. A key issue of Chapter five is that no person could keep "their" commitment to God in that we have all sinned. The idea of the rainbow is that God is faithful to us even though humanity has been "unfaithful" (i.e., perfect in keeping God's laws) to Him.
9. Verse 4: Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.
- a) OK, after John describes God's throne, the next thing John notices is 24 "other" thrones, presumably smaller thrones surrounding God's throne.
  - b) Notice this vision in heaven is not just a "one-second-and-John's-gone" vision. John had time to count 24 thrones around the main throne. My only point here is that this vision lasted for some time and was distinct enough that John could count to twenty-four!
  - c) On to the big question: Who are these twenty-four elders and why should I care? ☺
    - i) This is the reason I took the time to explain the rapture theory. One's position on the twenty-four elders is pivotal to one's view when the rapture takes place.
    - ii) Let's start with what these 24 elders were wearing: They were dressed in white and gold crowns on their head. The white dress represents "purity" before God.
    - iii) If they represent Christians, consider the verse in Revelation that says, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:13b, NIV)
    - iv) Those who believe in the rapture prior to the seven-year tribulation (i.e., the events described in Revelation 6 through about 19) take the view that the 24 elders represent the church. If the 24 elders represent the church, they are in heaven "now", prior to Chapters 6-19. Somehow, someway, these 24 elders are the leaders of Christians who are in heaven.
    - v) Those who don't believe the rapture happens prior to the tribulation believe these 24 elders represent angelic beings.
    - vi) Let me give you the argument for the 24 elders representing the church:
      - a) The Greek word for "elder" is "pres-boo'-ter-os" (Strong's Dictionary), from which the Presbyterian denomination takes its name. It means "senior". This does not mean there are only 24 Presbyterians in heaven. ☺
      - b) If John wanted to call these "elders" angels, John would have used the term "angels". The words "angels" and "creatures" are used elsewhere in Revelation to describe angelic beings in heaven. In the New Testament, the word "elder" is used to describe an elderly church member. In the Old Testament, it only refers to the Jewish tribal leaders. Even John himself addressed his third epistle to a specific (human) church elder.
      - c) Back to the verse, these elders have "crowns". In Revelation 1:6 and 5:10, Christians are described as a "kingdom of priests". Well, kings need crowns. By the way, the word for our crowns is more like a victory crown. The idea is we achieve victory by our continual trust in Jesus for our sins.
      - d) Here are these elders dressed in white robes, and at the same time, have the crowns of victory. Putting this all together, the view is that elders represent the church leadership.
      - e) Does this mean that only the "top 24" Christians sit in this room? Don't know. ☺ Remember that in heaven, there are more than three dimensions. It could be symbolic, representative or could be multitudes of Christians embodied or represented in these twenty-four elders.

- vii) Now let me give you the argument for the 24 elders representing some sort of angelic beings:
    - a) The same way humans have free will, we will learn later in Revelation that angelic beings have free will. Some choose to follow Satan. We'll get to that in Chapter 12 of Revelation. The bible speaks of demonic beings. We know that God created all angelic beings. Some of them followed Satan in his rebellion against God.
    - b) The view is these 24 elders represent the leadership of angelic beings who have victory in God over the demonic forces of the world.
    - c) We know that angelic beings are in "ranks". We get clues of that from Daniel and Revelation. These are the 24 leaders of those angelic ranks.
    - d) The argument is that no Christians deserve to be more special than any others than they deserve the role of "Top 24!" We are all sinners saved by the grace of God, and therefore the "24" represent angelic creatures.
  - d) OK, so why 24 thrones? Why not 12 thrones or 32.7 billion thrones? ☺
    - i) Some speculate it represents both the church and the redeemed of Israel. It represents the 12 apostles (with someone replacing Judas) and the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus told the apostles that they would be in 12 thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Ref.: Matthew 19:28). The other 12 thrones would be representing the tribes of Israel. When we get to the "New Jerusalem" in Revelation Chapter 21, there are references to both the 12 apostles and the 12 tribes.
    - ii) Another theory is that King David divided the Israelite priests into 24 divisions in 1st Chronicles Chapter 24. That pattern is represented here.
  - e) With all of that said, we'll come back to these 24 elders in Verse 10. John gets back to describing other aspects of the throne room in Verse 5.
10. Verse 5: From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.
- a) OK, let's recap what John saw so far in this chapter:
    - i) First John commented on God himself, compared to the light of bright jewels.
    - ii) Next, John commented on 24 smaller thrones around the main throne.
    - iii) Now here in Verse 5, John saw and heard lightning, rumbling and thunder.
      - a) One can't see thunder, just hear it. It validates we can hear in heaven!
  - b) Stop and think: When you see thunder and lightening in the distance, what is our first thought? The answer is usually is, "a storm is coming". That is the case here. The "storm" is the judgment on the earth that begins in two chapters.
    - i) The sight of lightening and the sound of thunder draws our attention to that site. That's the other idea of this sentence. It is God's way of saying, "Look here!"
11. Verse 5, (cont.): Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.
- a) The good news about this line is that it does not require any interpretation. It plainly says in the second sentence that the seven "lamps" were the seven spirits of God.
  - b) The fact that the interpretation is given also tells us that "word pictures are acceptable as interpretations". There were literal lamps in this throne room, but the bible plainly tells us the lamps represent the spirit of God.
  - c) Time for an important deviation: Back in Exodus, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle. Notice this New Testament comments on that tabernacle:
    - i) "They (the Israelites) serve at a sanctuary (the tabernacle) that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. (Hebrews 8:5, NIV) Somehow, someway, that Israelite tabernacle is a "copy of what is in heaven".
    - ii) One of the items in that tabernacle was a seven-branch candlestick. It was seven separate oil lamps that all connect to a single source. I believe that same seven-branch lamp is in play here. Verse 5 says seven lights were burning. It could be seven separate lampstands, or tying it to Hebrews 8:5, it is a single candlestick.



- d) As the text says, these lights represent the Holy Spirit. A function of the Holy Spirit is to "illuminate" God into our life. That is why we pray before studying God's word. That is why we ask the Holy Spirit's help even as we pray (See Romans 8:26). A function of the Holy Spirit is to "bear light" on what God desires for our life.
  - e) Remember the number seven represents "completeness" in the bible. Just as God rested on the seventh day from His creation, the seven lights represent the complete work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
12. Verse 6: Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.
- a) Imagine standing on an ice skating rink, except the ice is not cold and we don't slip and fall. ☺ That's sort of the picture here. I get the impression it was big, but not vast. John himself was not standing on this "sea". He could grasp the entire size of this sea.
  - b) To understand this, we have to go back to the Hebrews 8:5 reference to the fact the tabernacle built by the Israelites in the desert is a model of what is in heaven. One of the furnishings associated with that tabernacle is a large washbasin. It was a place the priests to wash prior to going into the tabernacle.
    - i) The last half of Exodus describes how to build this tabernacle and its furnishings. The size of almost every item is specified in detail. When you read about this "bathtub" (called "the bronze laver" in Exodus 30, 39 and 40), the size is never mentioned. It's as if the Israelites were free to improvise as to how big it was.
    - ii) The word picture of the bathtub/bronze laver is a word-picture of washing our sins. The size is not stated in the bible as to show there is no limit to the sins that can be washed clean. (I love that bit of bible trivia!)
    - iii) Now let's get back to Revelation Chapter 4, Verse 6: I believe this same "washtub of water" is in focus here. Instead of washing in the water, one stands on top of the water! My point is there is no more sin in heaven. We have to wash our sins here on earth. Once we are in heaven, we are perfectly forgiven of sins. In the original tabernacle, one has to symbolically wash of their sins prior to entering. In heaven, we can approach God directly as our sins were already "washed cleaned" by Christ. We can now stand "on top" of this sea of glass. Verse 6 says it is as "clear as crystal" to represent the purity of being free from sin.
    - iv) On a related note, it also represents God's holiness. It represents the perfection of God and the "sinlessness" of God the Father Himself.
13. Verse 6 (cont.): In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.<sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.<sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.
- a) OK, if things we're not weird enough so far, now it really gets strange. ☺
  - b) John says that around God's throne were "four living creatures".
    - i) They were all covered with eyes in front and in back (Verse 6).
    - ii) The first one was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third had the face of a man and the fourth was like a flying eagle.
    - iii) Each of these four had six wings and even more eyes under the wings.
    - iv) OK, any questions so far? ☺
  - c) There were two other Old Testament prophets who had the privilege of seeing the throne of God. There were similar visions in Ezekiel Chapter 1 and Isaiah Chapter 6. Each vision was a little different from each other, but they both mentioned these strange creatures. Isaiah called them "seraphim" (Isaiah 6:1). They are called "cherub" (singular) and "cherubim" (plural) in Ezekiel and elsewhere. Some believe seraphim's and cherubim's are distinct classes of angels and some believe they are both the same creatures as John saw here. Whatever it was, it was strange. ☺

- d) So who or what are these four "creatures" and why should I care? ☺
- i) We get clues about them all through the bible: Back in Genesis, after Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, God placed cherubim to guard the way back to Garden so Adam and Eve couldn't go back. (Genesis 3:24).
    - a) Some say the cherubim's purpose was so Adam and Eve couldn't go back and eat of the "tree of life" and live forever. They had to physically die and go to heaven based on the "future cross". They couldn't go return to the Garden of Eden and the cherubim guarded the Garden of Eden.
  - ii) Ezekiel Chapter 28:13-17 says that Satan was a cherub prior to his rebellion. Satan is not mentioned by name, but Ezekiel says this cherub was in the Garden of Eden until "sin was found in him". It becomes obvious it refers to Satan himself. Given that, many theorize the cherubim were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to keep Satan-the-cherub from returning.
  - iii) OK John, what is your point? Cherubim (plural of cherub) were guarding the Garden of Eden. In Exodus, when you read of the most holy piece of furniture in the tabernacle, it was a "box" called the Ark of the Covenant. God ordered that two statues of cherubim were placed on top of this box. In both cases, the cherubim represented these angelic like creatures guarding the throne of God!
- e) If "God is God", why does He need guards? Why are these cherubim necessary? Couldn't God just "zap" anyone getting near the place if He wanted to? ☺
- i) Of course. A purpose of these "powerful" cherubim is to show that not anyone could approach God. This leads us to the next point about Cherubim: The physical description of these cherubim are the clues to understanding their purpose. Let's discuss those clues and come back to this question:
- f) First, let's discuss the four faces: One cherub had a face of a lion, another of an ox, another of a man, and the fourth of an eagle. Believe it or not, we're going to tie this to the fact there are four Gospels in the bible!
- i) The first cherub has the face of a lion, the king of the beasts. An Old Testament nickname for Jesus is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah". This title is used in Revelation 5:5 to describe Jesus. God promised the Israelites that their Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. The symbol of Judah is a lion (Genesis 49:49). Of the four Gospels, Matthew emphasizes Jesus "Messiah-ship" more than the others. The most common phrase of Matthew's Gospel is "as it was written" to show Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah. Matthew's Gospel has Jesus genealogy from the first Jew, Abraham to Jesus, which is also used to prove Jesus' proper genealogy as the promised Messiah to Israel.
  - ii) The second cherub has the face of an ox. The ox is the greatest of the domesticated animals. The emphasis is on servitude. Mark's Gospel has more miracles than any other gospels, again to emphasize Jesus as the great servant. There is no genealogy in Mark's Gospel because the genealogy of a servant is irrelevant.
  - iii) The third cherub has the face of a human. Luke's Gospel emphasizes Jesus "humanity". Luke emphasized how Jesus felt far more than the other three Gospels. Luke's genealogy started with the first human Adam, and worked to Jesus. Jesus is "fully God and fully man" and is the greatest of all humans.
  - iv) The fourth cherub's face is an eagle. The eagle is the greatest of all flying creatures. When we pray, we "look up to heaven". The eagle is the greatest of all creatures flying "in the heavens". John's Gospel emphasized Jesus as God. It has a genealogy, but it is more subtle. The idea of "In the beginning was the word...word was God" is (John 1:1) is John's genealogy of Jesus as John.

- g) Now let's get back to these four "creatures". The visual picture of the king of the beasts (lion), greatest servant (ox), greatest creature (man), and symbolic of God himself (eagle) is the "four faces of Jesus". I'm not saying these four creatures are Jesus, but the four are wearing the "emblems" of Jesus. Army soldiers may have a small flag on their uniform as an emblem of what country they serve. It is the same idea of these cherubim "wear Jesus' name" as part of their physical make up.
- h) This leads us back to a point of these four creatures: They show, symbolically, the way to God is through Jesus Christ! The reason God the Father has these four "guards" is to show the only way to approach God is through Jesus!
- i) Let's finish describing the cherubim: They have "eyes everywhere". The symbol of those eyes is they can "see all". Nothing is hidden from them. The same way God sees and knows everything about our lives is symbolic with this "lots of eyes" description.
- j) The same applies to their wings. The concept is these creatures can fly and travel anywhere and be anywhere. It is another picture of the fact Jesus is "all knowing".
- k) If you can handle the "four face creatures", you can handle the rest of Revelation! ☺
- 14. Verse 8 (cont.): Day and night they (the cherubim) never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."
  - a) Apparently, these four creatures can speak. Further, John understood what they were saying. Verses like this tell me that when we get to heaven, there will be no language barriers. Somehow, someway, we'll understand what everyone can say.
  - b) How did John know these creatures say this phrase this day and night? How long did John stay in heaven? Did some angel walk up to John and say, "These guys do this day and night?" Somehow, John knew this goes on day and night.
  - c) My personal view is that these four creatures were not robots. This is not some ride at Disneyland where programmed robots repeat the same phrase again and again.
    - i) What they are doing is leading worship. I'll come back to this in Verse 9.
  - d) Why say "holy" three times? Doesn't God get the idea the first time? ☺ Let me give you a clue: They're not saying it for God's sake, but for our sake!
    - i) In Jewish thought, to repeat something twice is done for emphasis. It is the same way we say, "That meal was very very good". To say it three times has even a higher emphasis, one of perfection.
    - ii) Yes, the three times is also a hint of the Trinity aspect of God!
  - e) The term "almighty" is best translated to mean, "God is in charge of everything".
  - f) The most holy name of God in the Old Testament is "Je-hov-ah". It literally means "the becoming one". An expanded meaning of Jehovah is the God who always was, is and always will be (to come"). These creatures are praising God's name and attributes.
- 15. Verse 9: Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: <sup>11</sup> "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."
  - a) Let's compare Verse 9 with Verse 10: Notice the "whenever" in Verse 9:
    - i) Verse 9: Whenever the (four)...creatures give glory (to God);
    - ii) Verse 10: (Then) the 24 elders fall down before Him.
    - iii) What we have here is a "cause and effect". The four creatures start to worship God and then the 24 elders follow along.
  - b) This gets us back to the debate over who are the 24 elders. The debate is whether they are angelic creatures or do they represent redeemed humans? Whoever they are, they spend a lot of time worshiping God. The "four" lead the worship and the 24 elders follow.

- c) A historical fact might be helpful here: In the Roman World, it was common for local kings within the Roman Empire to get together and lay their crowns before the Emperor. That Roman Emperor would then symbolically give them back their crowns to show them that the Emperor gives them the authority to be the local ruling kings.
- i) In many ways, this is similar to what is happening here. The 24 elders are wearing "stephanos" crowns. That's the Greek word for crowns. It means a crown of victory. Whoever the 24 elders are, they are wearing crowns of victory. If they represent the church, it represents the victory of Satan. It ties to Jesus use of the term "overcome" in Chapters 2-3 as we have overcome sin by the blood of Jesus. Those who argue that the 24 elders represent angelic creatures represents their victory over demonic forces.
- d) So what is really going here? I mean, it sounds kind of boring if we have to spend eternity throwing our crowns, picking them up again, throwing them, picking them up again, etc. ☺ What's the application of this text to our lives?
- i) The answer is in Verse 11: The actual praise line is "You (God) created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."
- ii) So why did God create all things? What's in it for God? Does God have a "need" to be worshipped out of insecurity or vanity? ☺ No!!! The best way to explain it is that God, is a God of love, a God of love needs something to express that love upon. He choose humanity. For example, let's say someone loves to paint pictures. If that person had all the money in the world, they would still paint out of their love for painting. The same applies to God. If a perfect God is perfectly loving, then He needs "something" to express that love upon, so He created "life".
- iii) In order to have that perfect relationship, free will is needed on our part. If God is forcing us to love Him, it is not perfect love. At the same time, God cannot just forgive us of our faults. If He did, He would not be perfect. That is why "God Himself" had to pay the price for sins so we can be perfectly forgiven and have an eternal relationship of love to God. God is looking for humans willing to express love back to Him the same way He wants to show love to us.
- iv) This leads us back to the text. The four creatures, wearing their "emblems" of Jesus, lead the worship in heaven of this love relationship. The 24 elders throwing their crowns before God is their way of showing appreciation and love back to God. Our love to God begins with the acknowledgement of who He is and the gratitude for our salvation. That is what is in picture in these verses.
- e) If we're going to spend eternity praising God, we may as well start practicing now. In other words, get used to it. God created us for the purpose of having a love relationship with Him. It starts with acknowledging who He is and what He did for us. That is what God is looking for in us: A love response to what He has done for us. The better we understand it, the more grateful we are.
- f) This leads me back to the opening question of this bible study: Why study about the throne of God? Why learn about it now, as opposed to asking for a guided tour when we get there? The answer is to understand why we as humans were created and what is our purpose and function in life, here and forevermore: To give glory to God. To reflect some love back to God that He has expressed on us. To be living witnesses of God's love for us. To be grateful for our redemption. To give God the credit for the victories in our lives. To cast our crowns before God's throne.
- i) Does this mean I have to quit my job and spend 24 hours a day singing hymns? ☺ No! One takes time out of one's day to worship God. Singing praises to God is a form of worship. Praying is a form of worship. Showing love to one another (putting other's needs before ourselves) is a form of worship. Reading God's word and thinking about it is a form of worship.

- ii) One needs to carve enough time out of one's life to show gratitude to God through various forms of worship and still "have a life". God still expects us to be productive members of society. God still wants us to be witnesses to the world around us. We can't be a witness to the world if we are not "in" it.
  - iii) If you don't enjoy worshipping God now, you'll be bored in heaven. I think there are going to be people in heaven who won't enjoy it as much as others. God creates us for the purpose of loving Him. We do that through worship. Here in God's throne room, and the primary function is the worship of God. Again, it is not done for any sort of vanity purpose on God's part, but to show us why we were created in the first place and what God desires for our lives.
  - g) Before I wrap up this lesson, take the time to re-read Verse 11: Put yourself and your heart into this prayer of the 24 elders. If my guess is right, we'll be doing this for eternity:
    - i) "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."
16. Let's pray: Father, Thank You for redeeming us. Thank You for creating this love relationship. Help us to appreciate more and more not only how much You have forgiven us, but just how much You love us. May our worship be pleasing to You in all that we do. May everything in our live, from the significant to the trivial all be done for Your glory. Guide as we live our lives for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.