

Lightning Thundering And Voices

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A Glimpse Of God On The Throne
An Exposition Of Revelation 4

In introducing this chapter, it is significant to notice that chapter one of Revelation presents a vision of the Son - the resurrected Christ - as priest, ministering in the heavenly temple. The fourth chapter is a vision of the Father enthroned in the same temple. Chapter five is a vision of the Father and the Son. What is the significance of the Father being brought to view in chapter four? The book of Revelation is primarily a revelation of the Son of God. Nevertheless, the Father is also involved, in fact, all heaven is involved in the great plan of salvation and the restoration of this world to the kingdom of God.

“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 show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” Revelation 4:1, 2.

It is claimed by some that because this chapter is introduced by the term: “After this” that chapter four occurred after the events of chapter three. However, when we analyze this chapter, we find that the term “after this” really means after the vision of chapters one to three. It is a new vision. There are seven parallels between chapter one and chapter four, indicating that chapter four is an introduction to a new series of scenes that were shown to the prophet.

Seven Parallels

Revelation 1

- 1:10 “I was in the spirit.”
- 1:10 “Heard a great voice as of a trumpet.
- 1:12 “Seven golden candlesticks”.
- 1:4 “From the seven Spirits which are before His throne.”
- 1:6 “Hath made us kings and priests unto God.”
- 1:19 “Write the things which shall be hereafter.”
- 1:12-17 Description of Christ.
- 1:20 An introduction to the seven churches.

Revelation 4

- 4:1 “The first voice as of a trumpet.”
- 4:2 “I was in the spirit.”
- 4:5 “Seven lamps of fire.”
- 4:5 “Before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”
- 4:4; 5:9,10 “Has made us to our God, kings and priests.”
- 4:1 “I will show thee things which must be hereafter.”
- 4:2, 3 Description of the Father.
- 5:1-5 An introduction to the seven seals.

These parallels indicate that chapter four, like chapter one is also an introduction to a vision - a new vision. Chapter one describes the Son. Chapter four describes the Father. Chapter one is an introduction to the prophecy of the seven churches. Chapter four is an introduction to the prophecy of the seven seals of Revelation.

“Behold a door was opened in heaven.”

What is this door? For over a century it was taught that this door was the door into the heavenly temple, the door into the first apartment. The view held by many today, however, is that this door is the door into the Holy of Holies - the second apartment where the throne of God is generally considered to be. This is based on the message to Philadelphia: “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” (Revelation 3:18.) This was the door into the second apartment of the heavenly temple, through which Christ entered in 1844, and which the believer is invited to enter by faith. But is this the same door as in Revelation four? There is no certain evidence for this. The section in Revelation that tells of the open door into the second apartment of the awesome temple is Revelation 11:19.

“And the temple of God was opened in heaven and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament”

On the other hand, the evidence is clear that the door of Revelation 4 is the door of the first apartment. “There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.” Revelation 4:5.

In the apartment where John was gazing there were seven lamps. In the earthly type - the sanctuary of the Jews - the seven lamps were located only in the first apartment. Therefore, the logical conclusion must be that where John was gazing was none other than the first apartment, the holy place of the heavenly temple.

It is also claimed that the throne in the earthly temple was located only in the Holy of Holies and that Revelation four must be describing the second apartment. It is agreed that in the earthly sanctuary, the Shekinah glory did dwell between the cherubim in the second apartment. Generally speaking, God limited His presence to the “holy of holies”. But why did the Father do this? It was done in mercy to man. A veil, several inches in thickness, divided the two temple apartments, in order to hide the glory of God. It was to protect men, because, to sin “God is a consuming fire” and unless He limited His presence, man being a sinner, would be destroyed. Therefore, in order to enable man to approach God, to commune with Him, to get to know Him, God limited His presence to the Holy of Holies - the second apartment. However, in the heavenly temple, there is no sin or sinners, therefore, there is no need of any limitation on the part of the Father. We must not limit the throne of God to any one particular spot. We must not lock the Most High in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly sanctuary.

It is informative to notice that even in the first apartment of the earthly tabernacle, sometimes the presence of God was manifested in such a way that the priests were unable to enter into the sanctuary at all.

“This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory.” Exodus 29:42, 43.

God met them at the door of the tabernacle - the door of the first apartment.

“Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” Exodus 40:34, 35.

“And the Lord spoke suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.” Numbers 12:4, 5.

Isn't it remarkable? God stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

“And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. And the Lord spoke unto Moses.” Numbers 20:6, 7.

“And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.” 1 Kings 8:10, 11.

This shows that at times God did dwell in the first apartment of the earthly tabernacle; and so in the great antitypical heavenly temple, we can expect the presence of God to preside in the first apartment as well as in the second apartment. Some futile attempts have been made to try and explain away the fact of the seven lamps being in the same apartment as the throne in Revelation four. It is claimed that when John was given this vision, he was in the first apartment and that he looked through into the second apartment, where the throne was, and that right near him was the seven branched candle stick, or the seven lamps. This view flagrantly conflicts with the view of the vastness of the eternal temple.

As one author declares, “As in vision, the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there ‘the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.’ Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven” (1)

It is crystal clear. The scene of Revelation 4 is the first apartment of the great heavenly temple. We now come to a description of the Father Himself, upon the throne.

“A throne was set [or positioned] in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 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.” Revelation 4:2, 3.

The prophet does not describe the form of the Most High, he describes the colors that surround Him. “Like a jasper:” This is generally a deep-red color, although jasper is also known to be brown, yellow or even green. It is generally thought that it here denotes a deep red. Then the sardine color - from the stone called Sard - an orange or orange-red color. Undoubtedly, this refers to the glory that surrounds the person of the Father. According to other Scriptures, the Father is bathed in eternal fire, and fire has orange reddish hues.

This is confirmed by the prophet Ezekiel who also was given a view of the great God of the universe upon one of His thrones.

“And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone” [bluey-white, a different throne from Revelation four] “and upon the throne was the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the color of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire and it had brightness round about.” Ezekiel 1:26, 27.

No doubt these colors describe the glory, the fire, that surrounds the person of the Father in the great eternal temple. As previously noted in Revelation 4:3, there is also “a rainbow round about the throne [i.e. behind and to the sides of the throne] like an emerald.” This must be a magnificent backdrop to the eternal throne. “Like an emerald” denoting a greenish hue. How strikingly beautiful it must be.

Ezekiel also alludes to this backdrop “As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Ezekiel 1:28.

Why a glorious rainbow as a backdrop to the fiery presence of the Most High? This is very significant. The rainbow denotes the union of mercy and justice. As one author declares,

“As the bow in the clouds is formed by the union of sunlight and shower, so the rainbow encircling the throne represents the combined power of mercy and justice. It is the mingling of judgment and mercy that makes salvation full and complete.” (2)

“As the bow in the clouds results from the union of sunshine and shower, so the bow, the rainbow above God’s throne, represents the union of His mercy and His justice.” (3)

The second thing that the rainbow represents is God’s covenant. After the mighty Flood of the days of Noah, in order to comfort Noah, God set the rainbow in the atmosphere to indicate that never again would the earth be overwhelmed with water. The rainbow is also a sign of God’s everlasting covenant that He will save from destruction the repentant members of the race. It is a symbol that our God is a covenant-keeping God. The life-filled universe of God, gazing upon the rainbow, are reminded that the great omnipotent Creator, is a being in whom they can trust, a God who keeps His word - a covenant-keeping Creator. Is there any need for such a symbol in heaven above? Let us not forget that the great enemy has brought God’s character into grave question. Serious doubts have been instilled into the minds of the inhabitants of the sinless universe, but the rainbow continually reminds them that they can trust in their God - that the slanderous lies that were spread concerning Him will not stand.

The Revelator then describes the scene around the throne - “And round the throne were four and twenty seats [or thrones] and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.” Revelation 4:4.

Crowns denote authority, kingship. How is it that there are those by the throne who have kingly authority? Does God share his rule? Does the Creator delegate authority? Yes! He permits others to share in His eternal counsels. But does God require counsel? NO! Our God is omniscient.

“Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?” Isaiah 40:13, 14.

God does not need counselors; yet it appears that He shares His counsel with His created beings. God is a great sharer. He is not a dictator, He is not autocratic. As intelligent creatures share in His counsels, in a special sense they come to learn and to know God. The Most High shares His rule with angelic beings. Lucifer, before he fell, shared in the ruler ship of the universe. Lucifer declared:

“I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.” Isaiah 14:13.

Lucifer had a throne. He had ruling power and many other angels also have ruling power in the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul says:

“Unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10.) What is a principality? A domain ruled over by a prince. Undoubtedly, an angelic prince. Our God is a great sharer. He shares His rule, He shares his counsel. Our God is a wonderful sharer.

What is the identity of these twenty-four elders? It appears that they have come from the earth:

“Thou was slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation: and has made us unto our God, kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.” Revelation 5:8-10.

These twenty-four elders say: “You have redeemed us”. This indicates that they must have entered into the scene of the heavenly temple, after Calvary, because they say: “Thou was slain, and has redeemed us to God”. They have white robes, indicating that they are righteous in character, for the “fine linen” [or robes] “is the righteousness of the saints”. (Revelation 19:8.) On earth they had developed Christian characters. They were overcomers. This is the significance of their crowns.

“Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” James 1:12.

Some of them could also have been martyrs. “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.” Revelation 2:10.

They could have been martyred for their faith in God before the first Advent of Christ. They also are “kings and priests” indicating that they are of the order of the Melchizedek priesthood of which Jesus is High Priest. They are priest-kings -assistant priests it seems to Christ in the heavenly temple. The number 24 could correspond to the 24 divisions of the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament described in 1 Chronicles 24. The twenty four elders declare that they “were redeemed from the earth”. At what time did this transpire?

The apostle Paul, speaking of Jesus’ ascension to heaven, says, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” (Ephesians 4:8.) In the margin (KJV) “captivity” reads: “a multitude of captives.” So when Jesus ascended to heaven, He “led a multitude of captives”. Who and what were these captives? Our God never compels or forces anyone. These captives would be willing captives, undoubtedly voluntary captives of love. At his ascension He led them to the kingdom. But who were they? Scripture gives a clue...

“Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent from twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection and went into the city, and appeared unto many.” Matthew 27:50-53.

What a dramatic event! After the resurrection of Jesus, there rose from the dead this company who had been victorious Christians, saints, who were probably martyrs. John the Baptist could have been involved in this company. They “went into the holy city and appeared to many.” What was the purpose of their visits to many in Jerusalem? When Jesus rose from the dead, the Roman soldiers were commanded to spread the rumor that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. This was done to hide the mighty truth of Jesus’ resurrection. In order to counter the rumor, the Lord raised up this special company, who went into the city and appeared unto many, informing them of their own resurrection and in particular of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, proving that Jesus was the true Messiah. (4) How fascinating are the ways of God!

The Revelator now describes the atmosphere that surrounds the throne of God.

“Out of the throne proceeded lightning and thundering and voices.” Verse 5.

What does this mean? Several times in the book of Revelation we have a similar expression. It appears that this is a description of the unceasing, awe-inspiring activity connected with the administration of the universe. We are being given a glimpse here of the throne, the centre of control. Our God is a God of action - a God of activity. When we read Ezekiel’s vision of the throne, it is significant to notice how he described the movements of the angelic beings, who are the messengers of Jehovah. This description throws light on the expression of verse 5. Ezekiel speaks of:

“The living creatures [having] the appearance of a flash of lightning.” Ezekiel 1:14.

“And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings,” Ezekiel 1:24.

What a sensational experience!

“And the sound of the cherubims’ wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaks.” Ezekiel 10:5.

As these mighty beings take off, like a flash of lightning from the throne and return, there is a sound like thunder. We could have a little whisper of this when we recall the big military air bases and the taking off of powerful fighter aircraft. But what a contrast to the throne of God, the centre of the universe, a place of

tremendous activity. As the messengers of God at the behest of the infinite, flash their way to and from the throne to the vast universe, “there proceed lightning and thundering and voices”. We suggest this is what the apostle is describing when he gazes at the activity and atmosphere of the throne.

The Revelator continues:

“There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.”

We have already referred to the seven lamps of fire, but what is meant by ‘the seven Spirits of God’? Are these lamps the seven spirits of God? What is meant by the ‘seven Spirits’? This is a term describing the Holy Spirit - the Third Person of the Godhead. Why the ‘seven’? It denotes completeness and continuity. Scripture ascribes seven qualities to the Holy Spirit:

“And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, [the Messiah] the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:2.

1. “The Spirit of the Lord” denoting His deity
2. The Spirit of wisdom.
3. The Spirit of understanding.
4. The Spirit of counsel.
5. The Spirit of might.
6. The Spirit of knowledge.
7. The Spirit of fear or reverence for the Lord.

“There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven spirits of God.” Revelation 4:5.

Does this mean that the seven lamps are not really there at all, but it is actually the Holy Spirit that is present in the heavenly temple? This requires a detailed explanation. Since the day of Pentecost, 31 AD, the Holy Spirit has resided upon the earth. This person, being divine, is omnipresent, but in a special sense he now resides upon this earth. Jesus said,

“I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter [another Paraclete], that he may abide with you forever.” John 14:16.

Abide means to dwell. The dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit is upon this earth. Jesus said, “I will not leave you comfortless [orphans]: I will come to you.” John 14:10.

We have the great Comforter with us continually. Again Jesus said, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” John 16:7.

The Holy Spirit resides upon the earth as the Vicar of Christ. He is God on earth. He is the Director of the work of God on earth. Thus the seven literal lamps of fire in the heavenly temple represent the Holy Spirit upon the earth.

It is timely at this point to enunciate or repeat an important principle of interpretation. This principle of interpretation has been neglected, but we believe that if it is understood and applied it will save much confusion and error.

Since Pentecost, we live in what the Spirit of- Prophecy describes as “The Dispensation of the Spirit” (5) In the Christian era - the Dispensation of the Spirit - the things of the kingdom of God have two main applications. In the heavenly realm they have a literal application but in the earthly realm of the kingdom of grace, they have a spiritual application.

Today we find that this principle has been reversed. Often when the heavenly temple is spoken of, it is spoken of as a spiritual temple.

Things in heaven are described as being spiritual or wholly symbolic. The reverse is true. According to this law of interpretation, things in heaven have a literal application in the dispensation of the Spirit, and on earth they have a spiritual application. In heaven we have God the Father, a literal God, but we also have a God on earth - God the Holy Spirit. He is a spiritual God, the third Person of the Godhead. In heaven Jesus Christ is present literally, but on earth Jesus Christ is present spiritually. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Again, in heaven we have the Holy City - a literal city, but on the earth now we also have a 'Holy City'. The Scriptures speak of it in Hebrews 12:22, 23 and Revelation 11:2, where it says that the Holy City was trodden underfoot forty and two months, referring to the time of Papal supremacy. Is it a literal city, or a spiritual city? It is a spiritual city, the city of the Christian church. Again, in heaven there is a literal temple, on earth a spiritual temple - of believers. (Ephesians 2:20-22.) In heaven there is a literal throne. On earth there is a spiritual throne, the throne of the heart. In heaven there are literal stones comprising the Holy City. On earth there are spiritual stones forming the Christian church. (1 Peter 2:5.)

In heaven there is a literal priesthood of Christ and the 24 elders. On earth there is a spiritual priesthood - the priesthood of believers. In heaven there is a literal intercessor - Jesus Christ - "the one mediator between God and man". On earth, however, there is a spiritual intercessor, the Holy Spirit, who makes "intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered." (Romans 8:26.)

In heaven there is a literal altar of incense. On earth there is a spiritual altar of incense, the altar of the human heart. In heaven there is a literal incense, on earth there is spiritual incense. In heaven there are literal offerings of Christ's blood and righteousness. He pleads before His Father: "My blood, my blood." His blood and character are literally in His person. His righteousness is literally in heaven - a living righteousness.

On earth, now, there are spiritual offerings - the offerings of prayer, of praise, of thanksgiving. (1 Peter 2:5 and Hebrews 13:15.) The righteousness is a spiritual righteousness received through the Holy Spirit.

In heaven there are literal lamp stands, or lamps. On earth there are spiritual lamps, or candlesticks. They are the seven churches, in other words, the Christian church. (Revelation 1:20.) In heaven there is literal light in the lamp stands. On earth there is spiritual light in the lamp stands - the light of the Holy Spirit - the light of truth.

In heaven there is literal show bread. On earth, in the spiritual temple, there is spiritual bread - the Word of God by which man alone can live. In heaven there is a literal river of life. On earth there is the spiritual river of life. According to John 7:38, 39, it is the Holy Spirit.

There is a literal tree of life in heaven. On earth now, there is a spiritual tree of life - the Word of the living God. In the Kingdom of Glory at the Second Advent there will be a literal resurrection of believers. On earth now, there is a spiritual resurrection of believers - the spiritual rebirth - being "born again".

In heaven there is eternal life for the believer, literally. Now, on earth there is eternal life for the believer, but in a spiritual sense. In heaven, God's law is inscribed on literal tablets in the literal ark in the literal temple. On earth, God's law is inscribed on the spiritual tablets of the human heart, in the spiritual temple of the believer.

Again, believers in heaven, will sit literally with Christ (Revelation 3:21.) "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne". But, according to Ephesians 2:6, believers now sit with Christ in heavenly places in a spiritual sense. There is a literal Kingdom of Glory in heaven and there is a spiritual kingdom of grace on earth. Jesus is a literal king in the Kingdom of Glory, but on earth He is a spiritual King.

Here we believe is a great principle which is very relevant today. When it is properly applied, it will help one to avoid error and confusion, particularly in regard to the heavenly sanctuary and the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to make the above principle more clear it is set out overleaf showing the comparisons between the two applications.

“And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.” Revelation 4:6.

This is a vast shining area before the throne of God. When one travels through the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, he is reminded of a location like the above. The practice of the Communist governments when they take over a country is to demolish buildings in the centre of the main cities and create a vast square. What is the purpose of the square? It is for their mass parades, their vast assemblies, where the leaders receive obeisance from the people.

In God’s kingdom, in the first apartment of that awesome sanctuary, there is a mighty assembly area called “the sea of glass”. Who will assemble on that? Revelation describes one group that will be there.

“I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire [no doubt reflecting the glory of God] and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” Revelation 15:2, 3.

Isn’t that thrilling? One day, if faithful, all the saints will stand upon that sea of glass. “A great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kingdoms and peoples and tongues stood before the throne.” Revelation 7:9.

Millions upon millions of the redeemed will stand upon the sea of glass, as well as the multiplied millions of angelic beings (7:11) who will join in the great heavenly chorus in praise of the Most High. This reveals the vastness of the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary and confirms the description as penned by Ellen G. White -

“The heavenly temple, the abiding place of the King of ‘Kings, where thousand millions minister unto Him and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him, that the temple filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its ‘shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration - no earthly structure could represent its vastness and its glory.” (6)

AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION THAT HELPS TO AVOID CONFUSION AND ERROR

The Heavenly Kingdom of Glory.

1. God the Father - a literal Person
2. Christ in heaven is present literally
3. A literal Holy City [Revelation 21]
4. A literal temple [Hebrews 8:1-3; Revelation 11:9]
5. A literal throne (Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 22:1)
6. Literal stones [Revelation 21:19]
7. Literal priesthood [Hebrews 2:16-18; Revelation 5:8-10]
8. Literal intercessor “The man Christ Jesus [1 Timothy 2:5]
9. Literal altar of incense [Revelation 8:3] (8)
10. Literal incense [Revelation 8:3, 4] (10)
11. Literal offerings of Christ’s blood and righteousness in His person [Hebrews 8:3; 9:12, 13]
12. Literal lamp stands [Revelation 1:12]
13. Literal light in lamp stands [Revelation 4:5]
14. Literal show bread (13)

15. Literal River of Life [Revelation 22:1]
16. Literal Tree of Life [Revelation 22:2]
17. Literal resurrection of believers [1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17]
18. Eternal life for believer, literally [Revelation 21:4]
19. God's law on literal tables in literal Temple [Revelation 11:19; 15:5]
20. Believers will sit literally with Christ [Revelation 3:21]
21. A literal Kingdom of Glory
22. Jesus will be King - literally

The Earthly Kingdom of Grace.

1. God is spiritual-the Holy Spirit - is God an earth
2. Christ is present spiritually [Matthew 28:20]
3. A spiritual Holy City -the Christian church [Revelation 11:2]
4. A spiritual temple of believers [Ephesians 2:20-221 (7)]
5. A spiritual throne-heart of the believer
6. Spiritual stones-individual Christians [1 Peter 2:5]
7. Spiritual priesthood of believers [1 Peter 2:5, 9]
8. A spiritual intercessor. Holy Spirit [Romans 8:26]
9. A spiritual altar - the heart (9)
10. Spiritual incense (11)
11. Spiritual offerings-prayer praise, thanksgiving, [1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15, 16]
12. Spiritual lamp stands- the seven churches [Revelation 1:20]
13. Spiritual light in the church - Holy Spirit
14. Spiritual bread -Word of God [John 6:51, 63]
15. Spiritual river of life. The Spirit [John 7:38, 39]
16. Spiritual Tree of Life - Word of God (14)
17. Spiritual resurrection of believers - born again [Ephesians 2:1; John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17]
18. Eternal life for believer spiritually [John 5:24]
19. God's law on spiritual tables of spiritual temple of the believer [Hebrews 8:10]
20. Believers sit with Christ in heavenly places, spiritually now. [Ephesians 2:6]
21. A spiritual Kingdom of Grace
22. Jesus is king - spiritually now.

The next scene around the throne is rather strange when it is first read.

“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. 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. 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.” Revelation 4:6-8.

What a scene, these four living beasts! Are they beasts? The Greek word is “Zoa”, and it means “living ones”, or “living creatures”. The term “beast” is an unfortunate translation.

They are “full of eyes before and behind and full of eyes within”. Knox's translation reads, “they had eyes everywhere, to see before them and behind them”.

Ezekiel, in his vision of the throne, also described these living creatures as...

“Full of eyes, round about them four.” Ezekiel 1:18.

“And their whole body, and their backs and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even wheels that they four had.” Ezekiel 10:12.

This is significant for it is frequently mentioned. “Teeming with eyes” as one commentator writes. When Zechariah predicted the coming Messiah, he likened Him to a stone with seven eyes: “upon one stone shall be seven eyes”. (Zechariah 3:9.) Again in Revelation 5 where it speaks of the Lamb before the throne, it says He had 19 seven horns and seven eyes.” (Revelation 5:6.) Many scholars believe “the seven eyes” denote perfect intelligence, but probably it means more than that. We believe the key to the mystery is found in the book of Daniel, the book that is closely coupled with the book of Revelation. When Daniel described the heavenly beings about the throne, he employed a significant word.

“I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven... And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven. This matter is by the decree of the watchers and demand by the word of the holy ones.” Daniel 4:13, 17, 23.

These heavenly beings are spoken of as “watchers”. With what would they watch? With their eyes. What would they be watching? The heavenly host is very watchful of us on earth, but in this verse it is referring to heaven. We believe this represents the eternal vigilance, the unwearied watchfulness, the infinite sensitivity of those heavenly beings who wait upon God, the One who, “neither slumbers nor sleeps”. When Jesus alluded to these heavenly beings, He said,

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones [children]; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always [continually] behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 18:10.

The angels of God are continually conscious of, continuously have in sight, the face of God. They are always aware of every expression on the face of God. We suggest that this is the significance of the phrase that they are “full of eyes”. No matter where they are, no matter in what direction they face, they behold the face of God and are supremely sensitive to every sign and every expression from the Eternal One. They are the special messengers of the Most High. As the Psalmist said:

“The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure.” Psalm 103:19-21.

The expression, “full of eyes” could denote the fact that they are so constructed that they continually observe the face of God and are awake to His every request. These living creatures around the throne appear to be the highest order of angels and they are there to administer the decisions of the Deity and as such we suggest that that is why they are described as being “full of eyes” or eternally watchful.

These four living creatures are also described as having the faces of four different creatures, as well as having six wings each. This corresponds with the description of Isaiah...

“I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet and with twain he did fly.” Isaiah 6:1, 2.

With two of his wings he covered his face, denoting reverence for the Most High; with two wings he covered his feet, denoting humility, and with two wings he did fly, denoting his response to God’s commands.

“And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.” Verse 3.

Undoubtedly, these are the same beings that John saw in the fourth chapter of Revelation. Ezekiel declared,

“This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims.” Ezekiel 10:20.

Isaiah called them “the seraphims” denoting a special order of angels. There are seraphim and cherubim, special orders of angels who continually attend the throne of God. They are described as having the faces of a lion, an ox or calf, a man and an eagle. Ezekiel indicates that they each have four different faces -

“They four had the- face of a man and the face of a lion ...the face of an ox-the face of an eagle.” Ezekiel 1:10.

An initial reaction to the above description is that these must be extremely grotesque looking creatures, but on reflection, it is true that the face of an animal, especially a domesticated animal, can possess a very appealing and attractive face and being associated with the throne they undoubtedly would be impressive in their appearance. What is the role of the seraphim and cherubim?

“This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel.” Ezekiel 10:20.

They are under God. They uphold God.

“Above the firmament [or platform of the throne] that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above it.” Ezekiel 1:2.

In Ezekiel, chapters 1 and 10 the prophet describes a vision of the throne of God. He saw a gigantic chariot like vehicle approaching from the northern heavens. It was comprised of mighty wheels that were as high as the sky. These wheels were living wheels, formed of the cherubim, and on top of these gigantic living wheels was a firmament [or platform] and on the platform was the throne and on the throne was one “as the appearance of a man”. The Spirit of Prophecy states that this was “the eternal One.” **(16)** The special role of the cherubim and the seraphim is to transport the Deity, to transport God. This seems to be God’s chosen method, when He travels in state. He travels via the cherubim.

“He rode upon a cherub and did fly.” Psalm 18:10.

Once this was thought to be poetic language. We now know that it is exact truth. Our great God is enthroned upon the cherubim, and as they flash their way through the vast regions of space, God, as it were, flies as He travels in state upon His throne.

“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the Holy place.” Psalm 68:17.

But not only is it the Father’s chosen method, but also that of the Son. When Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, how did He ascend? He was surrounded by a cloud of angels, disappeared from sight and traveled to the kingdom. Did He employ any particular mode of travel? Notice the statement from “Desire of Ages”.

“He slowly ascended from among them, drawn heavenward by a power stronger than any earthly attraction. As He passed upward, the awe-stricken disciples looked with straining eyes for the last glimpse of their ascending Lord. A cloud of glory hid Him from their sight; and the words came back to them as the cloudy chariot of angels received Him, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the End of the world.’” **(17)**

The angels of God in the form of a mighty chariot transported the Lord Jesus back to the kingdom. How marvelous! This is their role. But not only that, when God’s people ascend to heaven, they too, will travel by this special mode of transport.

‘The risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers’ aims. Friends long separated by death are united never more to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the city of God. On each side of the cloudy chariot are wings and beneath it are living wheels, and as the chariot rolls upward, the wheels cry: ‘Holy’ and the wings as they move cry, ‘Holy’ and the retinue of

angels cry, 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty' and the redeemed shout 'Hallelujah' as the chariot moves onward toward the new Jerusalem." (18)

Isn't that tremendous: When we ascend to the Father's house, we too, will ascend in a mighty, living, angelic chariot. A similar picture is presented by the prophet Daniel. In the seventh chapter he tells of the Most High moving His throne from one location to another.

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down [or placed in position] and the Ancient of Days did sit ...his throne was like the fiery flame and his [its] wheels as burning fire." Daniel 7:9.

Notice how the prophet describes the same scene.

"I saw the Father rise from the throne and in a flaming chariot, go into the holy of holies within the veil and sit down." (19)

Even in the heavenly sanctuary, the Father is transported by the cherubim in the form of a glorious, fiery chariot. The prophet then describes how after the Ancient of Days had been transported to the second apartment of the vast temple, where "the judgment was set", the Son of Man, Jesus, was taken by "the clouds of heaven" into the presence of the Father.

"Behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of Days and they [the clouds] brought him [the Son] near before him [the Father]." Daniel 7:13.

Who were the "clouds of heaven"? This is a term describing the angels of God. Notice how the prophet confirms this:

"Then a cloudy chariot, with wheels like flaming fire, surrounded by angels, came to where Jesus was. He stepped into the chariot and was borne to the holiest, where the Father sat." (19)

What a description! What glory! How vast must be the heavenly sanctuary! The angels of God travel as the lightning. What a sanctuary! What a temple!

Let us now consider the significance of the four faces of these fantastic cherubim. We will apply the principle "literal in heaven and spiritual on the earth". In heaven, there are these four literal living creatures with their four faces. They are a special order of angels associated with the throne. They engage in ceaseless praise of God, declaring: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." (verse 8.)

For many years the writer refused to dwell on this. He could not understand or comprehend how intelligent beings could ceaselessly cry, "Holy, holy, holy". Surely the time must come when such a cry would become tiresome and monotonous. He could not understand how a great and intelligent God would permit it. What is the answer to this? The praise could not be tiresome and monotonous, for that is contrary to the spirit of heaven. On what grounds?

Firstly, the praise would undoubtedly be spontaneous. God would accept no other praise. But how could ceaseless praise be continually spontaneous? We suggest that the Person of the Deity is so awe-inspiring, so impressive, so moving, so overwhelming, that the cherubim, as they behold their great and wonderful God, cannot contain themselves.

They gaze upon the face of God. Face exhibits character and God's character is absolute perfection. What a face must the face of the Father be! One day "we shall see His face". When we see that face, we too, will be unable to contain ourselves and will also burst forth into praise. We suggest that this is the spontaneous praise of the living creatures associated with the throne.

A second element connected with this continual praise is that it must undoubtedly express itself in the most delightful and moving music. This would produce a beautiful atmosphere and probably the theme would be sung in countless variations.

Continuing our consideration of the four faces: In heaven there are four literal creatures, with four literal faces like a lion, man, ox, and eagle. What is the significance of these faces? We offer the following suggestions. These four faces present the four aspects of the Deity, particularly of Jesus Christ, God the son. The lion denotes kingliness, or royalty. The man represents humanity, involving mediation and priesthood. The ox represents service and sacrifice and fourthly, the eagle, soaring into the heavens, denotes Deity or Divinity. The four faces could also represent other beautiful aspects of the Godhead. In the lion we have bravery and courage; in the man we have sympathy; in the ox we have patience; in the eagle we have inspiration. Notice also that the face of each of the four creatures is representative off the head of its family. The lion is king of the beasts; man is the head of humanity; the ox is the head of cattle; and the eagle is the king of birds. This could strikingly portray the royalty of the great God of the Universe. He is “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

However, on earth these four faces would have a spiritual application. Scripture reveals this to be so. With Israel in the wilderness, the twelve tribes were divided into four groups around the tabernacle of God. Each of the four groups had a symbol, or a standard. Judah had the standard of the lion. It was a kingly tribe. Ephraim had the standard of an ox or calf. Reuben had the face of a man. Dan had the eagle as their standard. Without doubt these standards were the symbols of the coming Messiah.

When we come to the New Testament, after the Messiah has come, we find in the four gospels the same symbols are brought to view. In the gospel of Matthew we have Jesus presented as the lion, as king. In Mark’s gospel we have Jesus presented as the ox, as servant and sacrifice. In the gospel of Luke we have Jesus presented as the Son of man, denoting his humanity. In the gospel of John, we have Jesus as the eagle, representing His Deity, His divinity.(20) These symbols could also represent in the Lord Jesus the traits of courage, bravery, patience, sympathy and aspiration. Jesus, in His earthly existence, fulfilled to the uttermost these beautiful characteristics.

Finally we come to the concluding verse of Revelation 4. The living creatures in heaven are revealed as leading the rest of heaven’s inhabitants in worship and praise: “They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. And when those living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat upon the throne, and worship him that lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne.” Revelation 4:8.

These four living creatures lead heaven in worship. They proclaim three “Holies”. They use three terms for the Deity, “Lord”, “God”, and “Almighty”. They mention three tenses of God’s existence, “which was, and is, and is to come.” “Yesterday, today and forever.” They give glory, honor and thanks; and the twenty-four elders follow the example of the four living creatures. They “cast their crowns down before the throne”. Why do they cast their crowns down? In acknowledgement that their victories have been derived through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. They then proclaim the worthiness of the Father.

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” Revelation 4:11

Here is revealed the basic reason for giving glory to God; the true reason why we engage in worship, the real reason that we should give God our all. It is because He made us. He created us, He has the sole right to call for our complete obedience, because He made us. This is the basic reason for worship, for submission to our God. Next, we are given the motive for creation. Why did God create us? Here is the most beautiful point of the whole chapter.

“For Thy pleasure they are and were created.” Verse 11.

When God made this world, when He formed our race, when He made you, and me, He made us for His pleasure. He made us to enjoy us. What an inspiration! And even though man has departed from God, he can be reconciled to God through the Gospel, and restored to favor and recreated in God’s image. And our recreation and restoration is also for God’s pleasure.

When we reach the kingdom, we will experience the marvelous pleasure of God as He receives us. Oh that men could realize the depth of desire in the heart of God to receive man back. He has pleasure in us, and we will have unbounding pleasure in Him. Isn't that thrilling!

One of the most satisfying things in life is to be wanted, to be accepted, for someone to have pleasure in us. What an inspiration to believe, to follow, to obey, to be faithful to our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

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