

REVELATION

The Triumph of Jesus

The aged Apostle John was on the island of Patmos suffering under the iron heel of Roman imprisonment. The emperor Domitian had sentenced him to a life of isolation because of his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, the true and eternal King.

Suddenly Jesus Himself appeared to him for the first time in approximately 60 years. The sight of the glorified Christ rocked John's world to say the least. Jesus challenged John to record...

- His vision of Christ (chapter 1)
- The Lord's message to the 7 churches of Asia Minor (chapters 2-3)
- The events leading up to the end of the world (chapters 4-22).

Revelation 1:19... **"Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."**

Here are two interesting facts about this transitional chapter and the chapters to follow in comparison to the first three chapters.

- The "Church" is not mentioned after chapter 3 except when you come to the very end of the book (Revelation 19)
- The church's favorite name for God is "Father" and that name is used four times in chapters 1-3. The references are 1:6; 2:27; 3:5; 3:21. After chapter 3, the name "Father" is not used again in the book of Revelation.

We are turning our attention to the future. God is going to reveal His prophetic plan to us in these pages.

"Throne" is the key word in chapter 4. It appears 14 times in this chapter and 42 times in the entire book of Revelation. Is it not significant that right here as we see the consummation of human history begin to unfold before us, the first thing that comes to our attention is the throne of God? What does the word mean?

It speaks of God's majesty and glory and His sovereign rule over the nations and over mankind. His rule is fixed and unshakeable and permanent.

Psalms 47:8... God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.

Psalm 103:19... The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

The “Throne of God” also represents His judgment of the human race. His moral laws are fixed, therefore His judgment is firm.

Psalm 9:7... But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment

Revelation 20:11–12... Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

This powerful message was written to Christians who desperately need hope and a fresh vision of what God is up to. Can you imagine what a comfort this emphasis on God’s throne must have brought to John and those who would read this book of Revelation in the churches?

Persecution of believers was rampant. Torture, deprivation, and martyrdom were commonplace. For those believers to discover that God was sovereign and in complete control must have been like a shot in the arm to them! They discovered that their King—Jesus the Messiah—was the King of kings and Lord of lords and He would come again to rule and reign. What an encouragement!

This throne message is vitally important to believers who live in the 21st century. We are facing uncertain days to say the least. Verse one is our introduction to this amazing vision.

"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven..." Chapter 3 ended with a door closed and Christ seeking entrance into the church He created and loved. Now chapter 4 reveals an open door into heaven itself! It is a door of revelation of future events. The word *“Behold”* is an exclamation of vivid emotion.

“And the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here’ ... Notice he speaks of a voice like the sound of a trumpet. This is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ as earlier portrayed in Revelation 1:10. His voice is authoritative! Paul described this same trumpet voice...

1 Corinthians 15:51–52... Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The three words "Come up here" constituted an invitation to the Apostle John to be transported in his spirit into the presence of God, in order that he might see and consequently write about the blessedness of heaven and the prophetic truths about the future.

As the trumpet voice summoned John to heaven, so we wait for the sound of the trumpet that will summons us to meet the Lord in the air.

"And I will show you what must take place after these things"... Notice the words "after these things". They refer to what happens on the earth after the church age has culminated with the rapture of the church.

1. THE DESCRIPTION THAT DEFINES THE THRONE

What distinguishes the throne in this vision from other earthly thrones? Look first at...

A.) The Position of the Throne

Revelation 4:2... Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

"Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven"... The translation of John from earth to heaven was immediate. This is the way the rapture of the church will occur.

Someday it's going to be that quick; you and I will be transported into the presence of God. Those words will be uttered to us: "Come up here." God is going to take us home. The Lord is going to meet us in the air and so shall we ever be, with the Lord.

Notice that the throne is in heaven. This is the vantage point for the prophecies John will hear concerning the future. The predictions we hear today about global warming, the global economy, a global religion, and the need for a global government are made from a mere man-centered, earthbound vantage point. What John hears has the stamp of divine authority and truth upon it.

B.) The Person on the Throne

Revelation 4:2–3... Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

"And One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance"... The sovereign, all powerful God was on the throne in heaven. The appearance of God is compared to a ...

"Jasper stone" Both of the stones mentioned here are found in the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28:17-20) and in the New Jerusalem that descends out of heaven (Rev. 12:10,11,19-20). The jasper stone was crystal clear with a diamond-like appearance. This stone pictures for us the glory of God! Then the appearance of God is compared to a ...

"Sardius stone" The sardius stone has a red ruby-like appearance. This description pictures for us God's wrath that is about to be unleashed on the inhabitants of earth.

"And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance"...The rainbow is all about the pledge of God's faithfulness. In Noah's day, it was a pledge of God's faithfulness to never destroy the world by flood again.

Consider this; God the Father made a pledge to His Son that one day the earth would be His footstool. It was a promise of His majestic rule over the earth and all of mankind (Acts 2:34-35; Psalm 110:1; Heb. 1:13; 10:13).

Psalm 110:1... The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

Usually, a rainbow appears *after* the storm; but here, we see it *before* the storm.¹ The rainbow represents living hope in the midst of judgment and it reminds us that God is merciful (Hab. 3:2). With God there is perfect balance between His wrath and His mercy! The complete circle emphasizes perfection.

You can plainly see, as we approach this throne, that we are in the presence of the eternal God. God the Father occupies the throne, but God the Son stands at the center of it (Revelation 5:6, 7:17,) and God the Spirit casts His light before it. We are in the presence of the triune God. It is an awesome sight.

2. THE SERVANTS WHO SURROUND THE THRONE

John's eyes must have been big as saucers! Who could have imagined all of this?

¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Re 4:1.

A.) The Church

Revelation 4:4... Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones *I saw* twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads"... This scene focuses on God's church. Who are these who occupy the 24 thrones that surround God's throne?

The number 24 speaks of completion and representation. There were 24 officers of the Sanctuary representing the 24 courses of Levitical priests (1 Chron. 24:4-5, 7-18). There were 24 divisions of singers in the temple (1 Chron. 25). These 24 elders represent a larger group.

These are representatives of the redeemed who have been promised the right to reign with Christ in glory (2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; Matt. 19:27-28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12).

"White Garments"...These white garments speak of victory and purity (see Rev. 7:9). These are the "overcomers" who have conquered because of their faith in Christ (1 John 5:4-5).² Now they live with the perfect righteousness of Christ. I want you to know that in heaven the struggle with sin is over (1 Jn. 3:2).

"Golden Crowns" refers to the victor's crown (Rev. 2:10; 1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12).

Revelation 4:5... Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God

"Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder"... This same description is used in Exodus 19:16-18 to picture God's presence on Mt. Sinai. In Rev. 8:5, this same scene is used to describe the wrath of God. A dreadful storm is about to be unleashed on the earth. God's judgment is something to be feared.

Hebrews 10:31... It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

"And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God"... John saw two things before the throne of God. First, there were seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God. The word for lamp means a torch as in 8:10. This is the

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Re 4:1.

Holy Spirit (the Seven Spirits of God) in all His fullness and perfection. Fire represents judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:7–8... and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

People need to be reminded over and over again that if they do not respond to God's offer of grace they will face His fierce judgment.

Revelation 4:6... and before the throne *there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.*

"And before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal"...In heaven, light reflects off this sea of glass like crystal and spills through beautiful jewels thus making heaven the most beautiful of all places.

B.) The Creatures

Revelation 4:6b–7... and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

"And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures"... These four living creatures are stationed in a circle nearest the throne of God. The term "Living Creatures" comes from a Greek word meaning "living ones." In Ezekiel 10:15, these beings are described as cherubim, an exalted order of angelic beings that are associated with God's mighty power.

Ezekiel 10:15... Then the cherubim rose up. They are the living beings that I saw by the river Chebar.

"Full of eyes in front and behind"...This description highlights their awareness and alertness.

Now look at verse 7...

Revelation 4:7... The first creature *was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.*

"The first creature was like a lion"... These four descriptions focus on God's creation. This represents wild creatures. This is symbol of strength and majesty.

"And the second creature like a calf"...This represents domesticated animals who offer service.

“And the third creature had a face like that of a man”...The man represents the pinnacle of God’s creation. This speaks of intelligence and wisdom.

“And the fourth creature was like a flying eagle”...This represents flying creatures. This represents loftiness and swiftness.

The servants who surround God’s throne are there to serve Him night and day. What a blessing it must be to live in such close proximity to the living and true God!

3. THE EXALTATION THAT ENGULFS THE THRONE

Revelation 4:8–11... And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.” 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

The emphasis of these four verses is worship. **“Worship”** as defined by W.E. Vine means...

“Broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgment to God, of His nature, attributes, ways, and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgment.”

A.) The Response of Exaltation

“And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings”...From Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6, we learn that with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

“Are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God”... Now we are introduced to a great hymn of praise that focuses on God as Creator! The quartet of living creatures begins by praising God for **His holiness**. Because of God’s perfect holiness, He must judge sin!

“The Almighty”... Then they praise God for **His power**. This descriptive term for God is used 10 times in the New Testament and 9 of those times are right here in Revelation (Revelation 19:6). God has no weaknesses. He is the ultimate power and none can oppose Him and win! The world is about to find this out the hard way.

"Who was and who is and who is to come"...Here they praise Him for **His eternity**. God has neither beginning nor ending. Paul wrote these words of praise...

1 Timothy 1:17... Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now look at verse 9...

"And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever"...This is worship! Notice that genuine worship triggers a response from the 24 elders in verse 10...

"the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever"... This is the first of six times in Revelation where these elders bow down and worship the Lord God (5:8,14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4).

"And will cast their crowns before the throne, saying"...They lay aside their given glory to add to His glory. God the Father is glorified and exalted in this magnificent worship experience.

I wonder if John did not fall down on His face and join in the heavenly worship! God and God alone deserves our worship right here and right now. God forbid that we give ourselves to materialism, pleasure, or any other false god!

B.) The Refrain of Exaltation

Now look at verse 11...

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created"...The Greek word for *"worthy"* was used of Roman emperor when he marched in triumphal procession. **They glorified God for His creation!**

We praise God for saving us but how many times have we praised Him for creating us and for creating this amazing world we live in? You won't find any songs of evolution in heaven! Here we find these 24 elders recognizing God as the source and sustainer of all life and all of creation.

CONCLUSION

In her book, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Marva Dawn remembers an animated discussion she had with her high school freshman English teacher over the word **awful**. I insisted on using **awe-full** to describe something so exalted as to arouse reverence. She

preferred that I stick with the word's common spelling and its usage to designate something dreadful.

We should have looked in the dictionary. My old *Webster's* lists as its first definition "inspiring awe; highly impressive." Not until its fourth entry does it supply the definition usually assumed in idiomatic English: "very bad, ugly, unpleasant."

Today we apply the related word *awesome* to clothes, food, music, and cinematic effects. The word is so overused that we trivialize the Awe-full One. We've somehow gradually reduced our sense that this is a breathtakingly transcendent *GOD* we're talking about. *Marva J. Dawn, Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down (William B. Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 98-99*

In John's day, the heavenly throne must have energized the followers of Jesus Christ. The same is true for our day. We worship an **AWE-FULL GOD**. Our world may be appearing to come apart at the seams. The future may include suffering for our Lord Jesus Christ. But, every day we must be reminded that He is a breathtakingly transcendent God who is on His throne today and He will always remain on His throne sovereignly ruling His creation! Glory to God.