

## The Revelation 4

Written by K B Napier  
Friday, 01 November 2013 20:39

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### “Before The Throne of God”

The first three chapters of The Revelation were quite easy to understand, because the meanings were given by Christ Himself. In this chapter we come across descriptions that require more thought, though I believe that even without complex research we can start to understand at least the outline of this chapter, simply by thinking in a spiritually-symbolic way, but only as suggested by the text itself. The chapter prepares the way for ensuing chapters, by declaring the power and majesty of God.

The Revelation has been a happy hunting ground and play area for sects, cults and stiff-necked individuals, throughout history, because of its symbolism, but the main consideration must always be whether or not the explanation for the symbols is consistent with, or given by, scripture and what we know about God.

#### Verses 1-4

1.

“After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

2.

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

3.

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.

4.

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

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“After this” might imply that this part of the vision came to John some time after the first one... as Matthew Henry suggests. This may, or may not, be correct. Henry is correct in one suggestion – that when we expect to see God, we will see Him and be given benefits and further revelations. Note that the door was opened NOT by John’s desire or activity, but by God Himself. Whatever we know that is divine comes to us *by* divine will, not by our ‘gifts’ or prayers. The same is true of prophetic views of the future – only God can give these, when He wishes to reveal them. Everything else is fraudulent or satanic.

When Christ finished giving His instructions to John for the seven Asian churches, He began to show him yet more. John defines the moment in this way: a “door was opened in heaven”. This tells us that John looked and saw some kind of aperture above him (in Heaven). Why do I say ‘above him’? Because of the words “Come up hither”, where “come up”, *anabaino*, means to ‘go up’ or to ‘rise’ or be ‘borne up’, or to ‘ascend’; that is, he looked up and moved in an upward direction.

A loud distinctive voice (symbolised as a trumpet) came from this opening, telling him to ‘come up hither’ so that Christ could show John other things; the word ‘hereafter’ does not necessarily mean ‘in the future’. The majority meaning is, simply, ‘these things’, though a minority meaning can be a reference to the future, or ‘afterwards’.

Thus, the most likely interpretation is ‘Come up and I will show you something else’. (*it can also sustain the meaning of future things, so such a meaning cannot be ruled out; we shall see as we progress*).

This was the ‘first voice’, and this implies that John heard others later.

John says that following this statement, he was “immediately... in the spirit”. I do not make this equal to charismatic claims, but see this merely as an explanation by John, that he was in the heavenly realm, as verse 2 indicates. Note that John was *already* “in the Spirit” (1:10), so this was something other than being in a spiritual state before God. “Spirit”,

*pneuma*

, can have one of several meanings and it appears that in this case it implies that John, a mortal being, was given access to the spiritual realm of Heaven, by divine decree. (One possible meaning is that of a soul that has left the body – but I do not think this applies in the text, because of its structure).

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John saw a throne, *thronos*, with a footstool, before him, in Heaven. Someone was sitting on the throne. The 'throne', when ascribed to God, speaks more of His power and authority than of His actual physical presence, though He was certainly there. This ought not to confuse us, for the spirit realm is far beyond our limited understanding anyway. We must just accept that John, a human being with a mortal, physical body, was somehow taken to the heavenly and spiritual world and was able to communicate and see what was happening.

This was real, yet not (in our eyes). It was seen physically, yet not. It was a vision – real, yet not in our own terms, and not according to normal physical laws. John saw what he saw, yet it would not be visible to anyone else, just as Saul of Tarsus saw Christ clearly though others nearby on the Damascus road did not. The workings and actuality of visions are true mysteries that transcend our human existence.

The One Who sat on the throne was "like (or, resembling) a jasper and a sardine stone". ("Like" means similar-to, not the actual object). Jasper (*iasopis* – a Phoenician word) is a precious translucent stone and can be one of a variety of colours, but usually like fire. The sardine and jasper stones were first and last on the High Priest's breastplate. The description is of His brilliance rather than of an image.

The 'sardine' stone, or *sardius/sardinus*, was also a precious stone. There are two types of *sardius*, the red/flesh-coloured 'carnelian', and a 'sard', which was yellow-brown. This stone describes God's glory and majesty. Both stones together are descriptive and probably refer to the preciousness and perfection of the One sitting on the throne. Possibly the *sardius* was of the carnelian-type, red/flesh coloured; did it refer to Christ in human form (hence flesh-coloured)? We do not know. At any rate, the One on the throne had to be one of the Trinity and was male in appearance. (The *sardius* was favoured in ancient times because of its brilliance after being polished. It forms the sixth foundation of the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem).

Around the throne was a rainbow. (We can ignore the idea that this may, or may not, be linked to the meaning of a (pagan) female messenger of deity). The rainbow, *iris*, symbolised a message from God. The colour of it was light green rather than like rainbows we see today, like that of an emerald. The symbol here is clear: the emerald represented Judah (*and that is why an emerald was found in the high priest's ceremonial breastplate*).

The rainbow also represented God's promise to mankind concerning the earth, and it rested on the head of an angel. Though descriptive of God's promise never again to drown the world, the hope was preceded by divine fatal judgment upon wicked rulers, nations, and all who reject Him.

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Surrounding the throne were 24 seats, occupied by 24 elders. As this word can mean older men, members of the Sanhedrin, or pastors/bishops, the full meaning is not made obvious, but it definitely refers to a 'heavenly Sanhedrin' or council of Believers, who sat around God, aiding Him in His judgements. These elders were the 'courtiers' of heaven, there to do God's bidding. Their worthiness is found in their garments, the 'white raiment' symbolic of purity and acceptance by God. They were obedient and faithful, hence their gold crowns, such as are promised to all who are similarly faithful. And their posture was one of perfect rest – sitting.

The elders were witnesses to the things of God. The whole scene speaks of authority and might, full reverence and power; we must all bow before Almighty God for His rule is supreme and above all authority delegated to human beings. It also shows that no matter how vile or all-powerful wicked men can be, they are nevertheless subject to God and His people, who will judge them by God's laws, on the day of judgment. They will not escape.

### Verses 5-9

1.

“And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

2.

And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto a 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.

3.

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.

4.

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

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After giving us the general appearance of the throne and its setting, John then gives us the circumstance. He saw and heard thundering and lightning coming from the throne (*ek* – out of, or away from). We could apply one of several symbolic meanings to this, but they would be stretching interpretation too far. The simplest interpretation is that the thunder and lightning symbolise God's Almightyness, before Whom all creatures must bow and fear, and His words of command.

'Voices' also came from the throne, other than the voice of the One Who sat upon it. What were these sounds? The word 'voices', *phone*, can mean the sounds made by inanimate objects such as instruments, spoken words, languages, etc. The broadest meaning is that of giving out information, so perhaps we are being told that all truth, the word of God, comes only from one supreme source. Overall, the 'voices' refer to the words of God, the ruler of the Universe and beyond; He Who is Creator and Sustainer of all life.

In front of the throne were seven burning lamps whose fire shone forth, lighting everything around them in the presence of God. The lamps symbolised the light of God as represented by His seven Spirits (remember the seven spirits in an earlier text). That is, the activities and characteristics of God which spread light and truth to all creatures. This is sometimes symbolised elsewhere as God's breath from His nostrils, or as wind blowing wherever it wishes. The Spirit of God also symbolises the essential nature of Himself, life-giving and all-powerful.

In front of the throne was a 'sea of glass' that was like crystal or pure quartz (*kruos* – ice). The inclusion of the word 'crystal' means that there was a large area that was 'crystal-clear', again confirming the purity of God and everything to do with Him. It is likely that this 'sea' referred to a large bowl, as was found in the Temple, used by priests to symbolically cleanse their hands of all sin, before God. It may, or may not, have contained the blood of the Saviour.

In the middle of the throne and around it, were four 'beasts', which were 'full of eyes'. Parts of each beast resembled various animals or birds. Do not be too concerned with the word 'beasts', for this can also refer to created, living beings and not just 'brute beasts' (a meaning which does not apply in this text). Each was 'filled' with eyes, meaning they were all-seeing, speaking of the omniscience and omnipresence of God – a reference to His Almightyness. These 'beasts', by the way, only ever refer to beings in the presence of God's throne.

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One beast looked like a lion (*representing bravery and great heroism*); another was like a calf (*representing something tender; offspring, or perhaps even a sacrificial animal*)

; another had the face of a man

*(that is, of the human race in general, not necessarily male or female in particular: this might refer to Man as higher than beasts and lower than God and angels. It could also mean Man as both human and divinely purchased. Or, it might simply mean that Man was represented before God).*

The fourth beast was like a bird, the eagle, often used as a symbol of godly aspirations and the soaring after godliness. Taken together they represent the magnificence and power of the Lord.

Each beast not only had eyes all over their bodies, they also had eyes 'within' or inwardly, in their souls. Thus, they could see or know everything outside of themselves, because they knew themselves inwardly and could see everything spiritually. They seem to represent God as all-knowing and all-seeing. They also had six wings apiece. Note that the Creator hovered over His Creation like a mother bird; He covers his people with His wings; wings are emblems of ability to transcend as well as of protection.

Continuously, these beasts praised the eternal God on the throne and the overall picture is of an awesome God Who elicits both fear and love, knowledge and power.

### Verses 10 & 11

1.

"The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

2.

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

To emphasise the 'otherness' and supremacy of God, the elders/*presbyteros* then fell prostrate voluntarily before God in profound reverence and worship  
*(not the same as the falling down of charismatics in stunned inability to think or speak, or with*

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*involuntary actions; these are always of Satan or psychological, ungodly, disturbance).*

Though the actual presence of God would mean a creature would fall on his face in sheer fear, it also means a deliberate action to show one's love, devotion and reverence for Who the person is and what He does. The latter meaning applies to this verse. These elders were not specific persons but representative of saved elders of the people; they were not angels. The number 24 refers to earthly conditions, that is, elders who acted on behalf of God towards Christians in this world.

The elders cast their crowns before God. to show that He elects and keeps them; it was He Who gave them their rewards as gifts, and not because they were deserving for their own actions. The crowns we will receive for faithfulness are given not for what we do ourselves, but for faithfulness to His word. Such faithfulness is a gift from Him to begin with, and the actions and results are all predestined and foreknown. Thus it is that the elders acknowledge God's power of predestination, by giving back to Him what He gave to them in the first place. This is a symbolic gesture, much as we might, on this earth, 'give back' everything we have to God, meaning, to show God that we have nothing of our own and owe everything to Him.

The elders all cried out 'thou art worthy' to the God Who, alone, deserves all praise, glory and honour. Why? Because He is the Creator; sufficient reason on its own to pay reverence. We also read here another sign of God's reasons for creation: He made everything for His 'pleasure'. He wished to do it, so He did.

I know many who cannot accept this reason and look for others, not found in scripture. Thus, they ignore or reject God as the Potter, for they cannot stand the idea that God created not only those whom He wishes to save, but also those whom He wishes to destroy. *(Bear in mind that we are not told why He destroys some and predestinates them to be so. The reasons are not given to us by God, and we do not have the authority to demand such reasons).*

God, then, has His creatures, and they must obey and be faithful, because they were made by Him. Whether or not we understand why, or even if we do not wish to obey Him, we are created for His purposes, nevertheless, and we *will* bow the knee, if not now, then at the final judgement.

By taking this simple approach to these texts we seem to have arrived at a simple answer or interpretation. It is this: that John saw God as He really is, all-powerful, with witnesses to testify to the fact night and day. John saw where purity comes from and saw symbols of God's

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character, causing all to bow before Him in reverence. If nothing else, this text gives us a taste of God as ruler of our lives and ruler of everything, demanding the highest view of Him ('glory'); total reverence because of Who He is and what He has done ('honour'); and acknowledgement of His miraculous might and excellence of character ('power').

### The Revelation, Chapter 4 (graphic aid)

showing relative positions

E = seats of elders

X = spirits/lamps

{jathumbnail off}

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E

E

E

E

E

Beast

E

**THRONE OF GOD**

E

x x x x x x x

(Seven lamps/spirits)

E

Beast

E

Sea of Glass

E

E

E

E

E

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