

## **THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

### **Revelation 4:1-11 | Session 8 | The Incredible Throne Room of God**

#### **SEVEN PAIRS OF VISIONS IN REVELATION (4:1-20:15)**

The book of Revelation is not a haphazardly written prophecy. God gave it to Jesus Christ, who sent it as a sign via His angel, who sent it to John. We would expect that it be written in an organized, systematic manner. Beginning in this session and throughout the rest of the prophecy, we will read about seven pairs of colorful visions given to John. The book is so well laid out that, while not always chronological, the first of each pair of visions pertains to events that are taking place in heaven, and the second part of the pair concerns events taking place on earth. The Holy Spirit created this outline, and the brilliant theologian and scholar E.W. Bullinger spotted it<sup>1</sup>:

- ❖ The First Vision “In Heaven” (4:1-5:14).
  - The First Vision “On Earth” (6:1-7:8).
- ❖ The Second Vision “In Heaven” (7:9-8:6).
  - The Second Vision “On Earth” (8:7-11:14).
- ❖ The Third Vision “In Heaven” (11:15-19).
  - The Third Vision “On Earth” (11:19).
- ❖ The Fourth Vision “In Heaven” (12:1-12).
  - The Fourth Vision “On Earth” (12:13-13:18).
- ❖ The Fifth Vision “In Heaven” (14:1-5).
  - The Fifth Vision “On Earth” (14:6-20).
- ❖ The Sixth Vision “In Heaven” (15:1-8).
  - The Sixth Vision “On Earth” (16:1-18:24).
- ❖ The Seventh Vision “In Heaven” (19:1-16).
  - The Seventh Vision “On Earth” (19:17-20:15).

## **THE FIRST VISION IN HEAVEN (4:1-5:14)**

### **THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD (4:1-3)**

Verses 1—

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<sup>1</sup> E.W. Bullinger, theologian and scholar. 1837-1913. He points out the outline above to the reader; Bullinger did not create it. It would have made more sense to divide chapters by considering these seven visions. These visions do not align with the chapters and verses in our Bible, which man in the 1500s added. The first Bible with chapter divisions was the Geneva Bible of 1557. The Holy Spirit created the outline above; Bullinger only spotted it.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, *“And...coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending on upon Him”* (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10). For Jesus, the *heavens* were opened. For John, a **door was opened in Heaven**. There are other doors announced in Revelation. In 11:19, the *door of the Temple of God is opened* to John, and in 15:5, *the door of the Tabernacle of the Testimony is opened*. John is not just *looking*; he is perceiving the objects in the vision and getting a glimpse of Heaven, one room at a time. Later in chapter 19:11, *all of heaven* will be opened for Jesus’s return and for the *armies in heaven which will follow Him*.

**The first voice I heard was, as it were, of a trumpet.** Earlier, in Chapter 1:10, John *heard a great voice, as of a trumpet*. We noted in that passage how a trumpet is a sound of strength and sounds forth an alarm, even a call to battle or war. The voice invites him to **come up**; it is likely the angel who is speaking here: **and I will show thee things which must be hereafter**, that is, the *latter days*. These days were made known by God to King Nebuchadnezzar when Daniel said, *“But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.”*<sup>2</sup> (Daniel 2:28).

Many believe the phrase **Come up hither** alludes to the Rapture of the Church. C.I. Scofield, an American theologian at the turn of the last century, is partly responsible for propagating this misunderstanding. In the Scofield Study Bible (which I use), he wrote this note: *“This call seems clearly to indicate the fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.”* Scofield failed to *rightly divide* here. Notice that the **voice** is speaking only to John, as indicated by the singular pronoun **thee**. It is not a shout from the Lord to the Church; it is not identified as the voice of the archangel, nor is the trumpet identified as being the voice of Jesus Christ or God. C.I. Scofield has read *into the Scripture (eisegesis)*. Each of us should take care not to do that. Taking the entire book of Revelation as the future prophecy of *The Time of Jacob’s Trouble*, as John experiences these visions, the Rapture will have already occurred, and the Body of Christ will be with the Lord.

Verse 2—

**I was in the spirit**; John can see the latter days by the power of the Holy Spirit (also in 1:10, although translated in the upper case).

**Behold a throne.** If this is God’s throne (which we will see that it is), John may have only been able to see it and write down the words he heard because he was **in the spirit**. The apostle Paul wrote how he was *caught up in the third heaven...paradise, but the words he heard were unspeakable and were impossible for a man to utter* (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). It looks like Paul only caught a visual glimpse of Heaven. John sees and hears.

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<sup>2</sup> See notes on Daniel here: <https://rogerfeenstra.files.wordpress.com/2023/04/daniel-2-13-28-session-5-notes.pdf>

Verse 3—

**He that sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardinos (sardine) stone.** In pictures and art, God is depicted as an old man with white hair and a beard on the throne. This description comes from Daniel 7:9; Daniel refers to Him as the Ancient of Days<sup>3</sup> (See also 1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1), and John describes the One sitting on the throne as resembling precious stones. Probably he means the colors of these stones. We do not know why these particular colors and they are difficult to identify today. Jasper, for example, is a stone of various colors; some are purple, others blue or green, and some the color of brass. *Sardinos* is more flesh-colored or yellowish/brown.

**A rainbow round the throne...like unto an emerald.** We can picture a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet, but God's rainbow around his throne is emerald. We have never seen, nor do we think of, an emerald rainbow. And yet, that is the rainbow of God that surrounds His throne.

The word *iris* is the Greek word in this verse for rainbow. *Iris* is translated as **rainbow**, but there is no *rain* surrounding the throne, so it must refer to the shape of the bow, not the rainbow we experience after a rainstorm in which the Sun refracts off droplets of water in the atmosphere. This **rainbow** around the **throne** is not atmospheric as we experience.

There are few references to *rainbows* in Scripture; however, the most well-known passage is found in Genesis, after the Flood. Genesis 9:13-16, God said to Noah and his sons,

“I do set *my* bow in the cloud (Hebrew, singular), and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud (Hebrew, singular) over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud (singular).”

This passage speaks of a singular cloud; the Hebrew word for cloud, used in Genesis 9, is singular, indicating *one cloud*. Unfortunately, some translations, like the ESV, translate the word in the plural, *clouds*. But the word is singular; it is a cloud. And I think that is significant. God's purpose in Genesis for setting a bow in **a cloud** after the flood was to remind Him of His promise not to judge the world by flood again. The Genesis passage continues,

“And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you (Noah and his sons)... and I will look upon it, that I may remember my everlasting covenant...this (bow) is the token of the covenant...”

From our perspective, we immediately think of the colorful rainbow we are familiar with, but is the bow we see, the same bow God showed Noah and his sons?

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 90:2, “Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

COULD IT BE THAT GOD'S ORIGINAL **BOW** THAT HE PLACED IN THE SKY IN GENESIS WAS SUPERNATURAL, NOT THE ORDINARY (EVERYDAY) RAINBOW WE SEE AFTER A RAINSTORM?

We can speculate for a moment:

God told Noah and his sons to look for the **cloud** (singular) and for the bow He was sending. God is making a covenant with Noah by showing him a supernatural cloud with a supernatural bow in the cloud. And if it is singular, this appears to be a one-time event, a **token** to authenticate his promise to Noah and his sons that He will never again destroy the Earth and all flesh by water.

So let's add to our speculation that this bow God set in a cloud in Genesis is the very one John sees surrounding the Throne of God in Heaven. This **emerald** bow surrounding God's Throne is an everlasting reminder for God, not for Man. God constantly sees the bow as He occupies His throne in Heaven as a reminder to Him.

After the flood, when rain and clouds (plural) began to form, the natural forces of sunlight and atmospheric conditions would create the multicolored rainbow we see, which is undoubtedly beautiful and often breathtaking. And we can certainly remember God's promise when we see it, but the rainbow was not given for us to remember *but for God*. And God, seated on His Throne, surrounded by His bow, sees it constantly and remembers. God's rainbow, according to Revelation 4:3, is emerald green.

### AROUND AND BEFORE THE THRONE (4:4-8)

Verse 4—

**Around the throne were four and twenty seats.** Why the KJV uses the word **seats** is debatable. The Greek word is *thronos*. It is the same word that is translated as **throne**. Literally, *Around the throne were four and twenty thrones*. The KJV translators likely used the word **seats** to make the verse read smoothly and help the reader distinguish these 24 thrones from the throne of God. But the **four and twenty seats are thrones**, maybe smaller and lower, but still thrones.

**I saw four and twenty elders sitting** on these thrones. The Greek word **elder** is *presbuteros*. This word is usually translated as *elders* but also means *old man, eldest, or someone advanced in life*. The apostle Paul instructed Titus to *ordain presbuteros in every city* (Titus 1:5). Elders in the church are to *rule well* and to *labor in word and doctrine*. The word **elder** gives the idea of possessing maturity and wisdom. These **four and twenty elders** are not earthly men since they sit on thrones in heaven.

Everyone wants to know the identity of these **four and twenty elders**. Their identity ranges from “They are representative of the Church” to “They represent Israel” to “They are the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel” or “The twelve apostles and twelve prophets,” etc. I propose that they are neither of those.

The general rule of interpretation is always to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Is there anywhere in Scripture where we find the answer? Yes, there is.

In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Priests were *the example and shadow of heavenly things...the pattern of things in the heavens...figures (or copies) of the true* (See Hebrews 8:5, 9:23,24, read the context).

In 1 Chronicles 28:11-13, King David is turning over to his son Solomon the plans for the building of the Temple. Everything David gave Solomon was *“the pattern of all he had by the spirit...of the house of the Lord... But he goes on in verse 13, Also, for the courses of the priests and the Levites.”* The *courses* were the divisions of the priests who would serve in the Temple. The division is found in 1 Chronicles 24:1-5, *“The sons of Eleazer there were sixteen chief men...and eight among the sons of Ithamar,* ” Twenty-four. These men, chosen by God by lot and patterned after something Heavenly, were to be the choicest of men and officials or nobles of the sanctuary. They governed the *house of God, that is, the Temple*.

Since the Temple on earth and all of its elements, including the priests, is a pattern of the things in the heavens, then there must be choicest of creatures and officials who govern God’s Heavenly Temple. The **four and twenty elders** are some kind of created beings (not angels) in heaven, performing a priestly role before the Throne of God. Their purity or *unfallen state* is indicated by their **white raiment** clothing and their **crowns of gold**. They are not the Church, nor do they represent the Church.

Verse 5—

**And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings**, likely speaking of God’s judgment coming in the Tribulation, which is what Revelation is about. The **lamps of fire** are the **seven spirits of God** which we discussed in 1:4 and indicated that the plain sense is that they are servants (created beings) **before the throne**.

Verse 6, 7, 8a—

No pictures show us what the Throne room of heaven looks like. John could only describe it in the best way possible, **before the throne...a sea of glass like unto crystal**. How large, how wide, how deep? One day we will know, but now we take these unknowns by faith.

**In the midst...and round about the throne were four beasts.** The Greek word for **beasts** is the word *zoons*. We get our word “Zoo” from this. The KJV translators chose the word **beasts**. These are some *living creatures*; *the word can mean any living creature.*

When we get to chapters 13 and 17, we will read the word *beast* there, but it is not the Greek word *zoon*; it is another Greek word that means *a wild, untamed beast*. Here the Greek word is different, these beasts are not wild, and they are not human. Maybe we should call them by their Greek name, *Zoon*, and leave it at that. The singular is *Zoa*. Like the *elders*, the *Zoon* are not angels since chapter 5:8,11 distinguish them from angels.

Can we find their identity by looking at the earthly Tabernacle/Temple since it was designed after a heavenly pattern? Could these living creatures be Cherubim? The first mention of Cherubim is found in Genesis 3:24. After Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, God *placed...Cherubims as guardians...to keep the way of the tree of life*. The word *placed* means to *station* or *dwelt in a tabernacle*. Could it be that the garden of Eden became God’s dwelling place after the Fall and the very place where Cain and Abel brought their offerings *unto the Lord* (Genesis 4: 3,4)?

After the flood, the garden would have been destroyed, and there would no longer be a need for the Cherubim to guard the *gates of Eden*. But, in constructing the Tabernacle and the Temple, God gave Moses, later David, and finally Solomon the pattern for the *Ark of the Covenant*, in the Holy of Holies, where God met with the High Priest and spoke to him. Cherubim would be placed on either side of the Ark of the Covenant.

Whatever they are, **The four beasts** and their description are incredible, fantastic, and strange simultaneously, each with six wings...full of eyes, and a different face.

## WORSHIP AROUND THE THRONE (4:8-11)

Verse 8b-11—

These heavenly beings **rest not day and night saying**: This is the first time we hear the spoken word coming from heaven aside from John’s instruction to “Come up hither” in verse 1. In future visions of heaven, we will hear more. The word heard is praise and worship from the **beasts** to the One seated on the Throne, **Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty** to the Sovereign eternal (**which was, and is, and is to come**) God over all Creation.

The **four and twenty elders fall down before** the Lord God Almighty and **cast their crowns before the throne**. This is where Christians get the wrong idea that “we” will cast our crowns before the Lord.

Why is the praise uttered, and why are they falling before the throne? We will see it soon because judgment is about to be announced and pronounced on the earth. Satan, who has

taken the dominion of God's creation and has hijacked earth as his domain, is about to meet his demise. Earth does not belong to Satan. ***All things were created by God and for His pleasure (verse 11).*** Earth is about to be taken back from the grip of Satan, but Who will be the one to do it? Next time we will find out in part two of the first heavenly vision.