

Rev. chapter 4.....vv 1-11

Enter any bookstore today and you will be sure to find numerous titles dealing with the afterlife. The recording of near-death visions and experiences is common. Christians and nonchristians describe being very sick or injured and having an out-of-body experience in which they can actually observe their body while doctors or rescue workers work on trying to save or resuscitate it. Often a bright light at the far end of a tunnel is experienced. Sometimes the person sees unspeakably beautiful things.

TV programs explore the complexities of life after death. There is much speculation about the heavenly abode beyond death. I can't vouch for the accuracy of these near-death visions and experiences, but in the Scriptures we are told of two people who were given the incredible privilege of visiting the heavenly realms.

In 2nd Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul tells us of his visit to heaven:

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—

4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.¹

He says he heard things which he was not permitted to speak about.

In today's text the apostle John is caught up into heaven, there to behold wondrous things which he struggles to describe to us.

Heaven is a wonderful place which is being prepared for those who know Jesus as Lord and savior.

At chapter 4 the book of Revelation takes a startling change of both scene and subject.

R.H. Charles writes:

¹ *The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

The dramatic contrast could not be greater. Hitherto the scene of the seer's visions had been earth; now it is heaven... In II- III we have had a vivid description of the Christian churches of Asia Minor... But the moment we leave the restlessness, the troubles, the imperfectness and apprehensions pervading II- III we pass at once in IV into an atmosphere of perfect assurance and peace... an infinite harmony of righteousness and power prevails.

The scene shifts from earth to heaven. The subject changes from Christ's concern as head of the church for conditions prevailing in that church to God's sovereign authority over his universe.

The clear teaching of this book is that God will defeat all evil in the end. Meanwhile, we must live in obedience to Jesus Christ, the coming conqueror and judge.

End of quotation

Rev. 4 and 5 are a unit. Remember there were no chapter or verse division in the Bible manuscripts.

Chapters 4-5 provide glimpses into Christ's glory.

Chapter 4 is John's vision into the throne room of heaven.

Chapter 5 is John's vision of the Lamb and the scroll.

Chapters 6-7 describe the breaking of the seals. So chapter 4-7 form one continuous vision.

God is on the throne orchestrating all the events that John records. The world is under His control and He will carry out His plans as Christ initiates the final battle with the forces of evil.

Before we start the exegesis of the chapter I'd like to mention that most pre-tribulation teachers will point to chapter 4 v 1 to prove the church is raptured before the events of the 70th week of Daniel, which they say is described in chapter 4 through 22.

The teaching goes something like this... The church is mentioned many times in the first three chapters, but not in chapter 4-22. John sees an open door and is asked to come up to heaven. These things are used as proof texts for the pre-tribulation rapture. Brothers and sisters, may I respectfully point out to you that there is absolutely no Biblical basis for using this text as a pretrib text. Nothing is even hinted about the church much less a rapture. John

saw a door and was asked to come up there. Scripture is to be interpreted grammatically, contextually, according to the normal literal meaning unless the passage is clearly nonliteral or symbolic. There arose in the third century a method of interpreting prophetic texts. Origin was the father of this allegoric method. Augustine perfected it and he is the father of amillennialism which basically says there will not be a literal millennial reign or kingdom of Christ.

Under the allegorical system of prophetic interpretation Scripture doesn't mean what it says. Instead it is allegorized to mean what the person doing the allegory wants it to mean.

Jerusalem isn't Jerusalem.

Heaven isn't heaven.

Church isn't the church.

A Jew isn't a Jew.

Meanings are assigned according to the author's will.

Pre-tribulation writers rightly disclaim this allegorical system. They insist that we must interpret the Scriptures according to their literal, normal, grammatical, contextual meaning.

I find it ironic and quite contradictory for them to teach a literal interpretation of Scripture and then come to Rev. 4:1 and say this verse teaches a pretrib rapture.

Brethren/Sisters, if our Bibles don't mean what they say to us, if we assign some meaning other than the clear, literal, contextual, grammatical meaning we might just as well throw our Bibles away. If we make our Bible say what we want them to say rather than what they plainly say, they are no moral or Scriptural guide to us. We are adrift without an anchor, sail or rudder.

Someone has written about this issue, specifically v 1 of chapter 4:

Quote,

Unfortunately some pretribulationists have tortured this verse to support their notion of the timing of the Lord's removal of the elect from earth to heaven. However this view is usually argued by laymen who merely repeat what they have heard others say. There is no exegetical or Scriptural basis for this claim.

End of quotation

In v 1 John saw a door opened in heaven.

The KJ text actually distorts the meaning here. John did not see the door opening; he saw a door which was open.

The NAS text says, behold, a door *standing* open in heaven². And then he heard the voice he had heard back in chapter 1 v 10.

The voice sounded like a trumpet. It said, Come up here³

It is likely that this door was a door between earth and heaven.

In the early chapters of the Revelation there are three of the most important doors in life. Barkley says they are:

I. The Door of Opportunity

"Behold," said the risen Christ to the church of Philadelphia, "I have set before you an open door."

That was the door of glorious opportunity by which the message of the gospel could be taken to the regions beyond.

God sets before each of us our own door of opportunity.

Each of us is gifted and talented by God with unique gifts and abilities.

We have the opportunity to develop those gifts for His service and glory or to waste and squander them by misusing or not using them.

Each of us has a unique group of friends and associates that we meet on a regular basis. Do we take the opportunity to tell them the good news of the gospel or do we remain silent to the opportunity to share the gospel? This is the door of opportunity.

II. There is the door of the human heart.

Christ says in Rev. 3:20, *I stand at the door and knock*⁴

At the door of every heart there comes the knock of the nail-pierced hand and we may open or refuse to open.

There are some here today who have resisted the Holy Spirit's call to salvation. Christ's

²*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

³*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

⁴*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

knock at the door of their hearts is turned away.

I urge you if you are here without salvation through Jesus Christ, throw open the door of your heart. Accept that salvation while you still have time and opportunity.

This is the door of the human heart...

III. There is the door of Revelation.

John writes, "I saw a door in heaven standing open".

God offers to every person the door which leads to the knowledge of God and eternal life. Scripture speaks several times about the heavens being opened.

A. God opens the heavens for vision.

Ezekiel says, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God⁵
Sometimes God sends to those who seek Him visions of Himself and of His truth.

B. In Mark 1:10 the heavens were opened for the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism.

If we earnestly seek God the Spirit of God descends to meet us.

C. In John 1:51 Nathanael is told that he would **see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man**⁶

Someday the heavens will open to display the glory of the coming Christ.

That day will bring joy to those who know and love Him but amazement and fear to those who have rejected Him.

In v 2 John is in a trance, in the Spirit. This phrase is an idiom indicating that John's vision took place "not in the body", but rather in the Spirit, in a vision or trance.

John is taken from earth to heaven "in the Spirit"⁷ or "in a vision".

⁵*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

⁶*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

⁷*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

There John sees a throne and one sitting on the throne.

John focuses first on the One seated on the throne.

Second he focuses on what is around the throne.

Third he points out what is before the throne.

First God the Father is seated on the throne. The throne of God is mentioned 40 times in the book of Revelation.

The Jews pictured God ruling all of creation from a celestial throne.

The throne symbolizes God's absolute authority. For John's readers the most powerful throne in the world would have been Caesar's throne. Caesar sat on the most glorious throne in the world. Caesar controlled one half of the gross national product of the Roman Empire. However his glory and wealth paled into insignificance when compared to God's. John says God's throne emanated the light of brilliant gemstones and surrounding it was a rainbow glowing green like an emerald.

It's interesting to note that when a rainbow is viewed from above the earth (as from a plane) the rainbow is a circle rather than the arc we view from the earth.

I take it that the rainbow completely surrounded the throne like a halo.

These gemstones were the most pure elements known at that time.

They symbolized purity and great wealth. God owns all the riches in the entire world. His purity is greater than the crystal-clear gems.

His beauty far surpasses all of them.

It's interesting that John did not describe the form of this person on the throne.

He alone is sovereign. Caesar was worshipped as God. Caesar is not God. Only God is God. Only God is pure and holy.

In this scene John struggles to describe the throne room of God and those who were praising Him there.

Praise is saying thank you to God for each aspect of His divine nature.

Our inward attitude becomes outward expression. When we praise God we help ourselves by expanding our awareness of who He is.

Second, around the throne are 24 thrones. I take it they are smaller thrones.

24 elders or literally "ancient ones" sit on the thrones.

If you look at the commentaries you know there is lots of speculation about who these elders are.

* Some say they symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel in the OT and the twelve apostles of the NT. They would represent all the redeemed from all the ages.

* Some say they symbolize the 24 courses of priests who served at the temple. Talk about a cushy job! There were so many priests that they were broken into 24 courses.

Each of these courses served two weeks per year at the temple. Then they were replaced by another group of priests.

* Most likely the elders are an angelic group who provide worship.

They serve with the four living creatures.

They are beings who live in heaven and worship God at His throne.

They wear crowns and white robes.

I am not going to be dogmatic, but I believe these beings are a special class of angels who constantly praise and worship God the Father.

Now from within and before the throne...

In v 5 from the throne (in NIV) came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.

There is something awesome in a thunderstorm. Recently I was driving to the ministry trailer. The sky was black and ominous. Suddenly there was thunder/lightning and driving wind and rain. Later I drove down Middlesex Road, saw many trees broken and the roof of a house torn off and broken.

John saw and heard flashes of light, peals of thunder and rumblings.

The colors of the gemstones listed would be green, red and transparent white. These colors emanated with the noises and rumblings from the throne of God.

What an incredible sight! And sound!

In Exodus Mount Sinai was filled with lightning and thunder. The OT often uses such imagery to reflect God's power and majesty.

Psalm 77:14-18:

14 You are the God who works wonders;
You have made known Your strength among the peoples.

15 You have by Your power redeemed Your people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

16 The waters saw You, O God;
The waters saw You, they were in anguish;
The deeps also trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water;
 The skies gave forth a sound;
 Your arrows flashed here and there.
 18 The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind;
 The lightnings lit up the world;⁸

Before the throne seven lamps or torches were burning.
 These lamps/torches represent God the Holy Spirit.
 Apparently the number seven represents the Spirit's perfection and completeness.

In v 6 John describes a shining sea before and around the throne which looked like glass.
 John says it looked like crystal.

Crystal-clear glass was very rare in the ancient world. It was worth more than gold.

The sea of glass⁹ serves as the magnificent floor of God's throne room and highlights the magnificence and holiness of God.

The sea of glass¹⁰ suggests the vast distance which, even in the case of one who stood at the door of heaven, separated between him and God's throne.

Exodus records a similar scene when Moses, Aaron and Israel's' elders saw the God of Israel. Under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky.

John McArthur says, "Heaven is not a shadowy world of mists and indistinct apparitions. It is a world of dazzlingly brilliant light, refracting and shining as through jewels and crystal in a manner beyond our ability to describe or imagine."

Just think. That's our future home! Aren't you homesick to leave this old sinful world and dwell there!

In v 6b four living creatures are introduced.

These are angelic beings of high order serving as part of the worship and government in heaven.

In Isaiah we see creatures like this described as seraphim.

These seraphim surround God's throne, lead others in worship and proclaim God's

⁸*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

⁹*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹⁰*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

holiness.

The text says they are full of eyes in front and behind.

The eyes symbolize knowledge and alertness. These creatures see and scrutinize everything.

They are powerful figures with six wings.

They appear at least eight times throughout the book of Revelation.

In v 7 the creatures are described.

The first like a lion.

The second like an ox.

The third had a man's face.

The fourth like a flying eagle.

Ezekiel saw four similar creatures.

In his vision each cherub had four faces.

Apparently the creatures John saw had one face each.

Some have likened the four creatures to:

lion – majesty and power

ox – faithfulness

man – intelligence

eagle – sovereignty

The four may be representative of Christ: the lion representing His authority; the ox, His sacrifice (since the ox is a sacrificial animal); the man, His humanity; and the eagle, His divinity.

Some see in the four living creatures the four Gospels: Matthew is best represented by the lion, because in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is depicted as the Lion of Judah. Mark is best represented by the man, because his Gospel is the nearest to the physical facts of the life of Jesus. Luke is best represented by the ox, because he depicts Jesus as the sacrifice for all classes and conditions of men and women everywhere. John is best represented by the eagle, because, of all the birds, the eagle flies highest and is

said to be the only living creature that can look straight into the sun; and John of all the Gospels reaches the highest heights of thought.

Someone says the four forms suggest that which is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in animate nature.

Obviously none of these analogies should be pressed too far or be held dogmatically. Look what it says about the four living creatures.

They never rest.

They render a ceaseless tribute of praise to God. They cry HOLY, HOLY, HOLY¹¹

Reminds us of Isaiah 6 vv 1-4:

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

3 And one called out to another and said,
"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,
The whole earth is full of His glory."

4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.¹²

In Hebrew thought repeating something twice means it is very important.

When Jesus says **Verily, verily**¹³ He means, "Listen up. What I'm about to say is important."

When the Hebrews wished to really really emphasize the importance of something they repeated it three times.

The three-time mention of God's holiness shows us how important the worship and praise of God is.

In vv 9-11 we see the universal praise of the four living creatures and of the 24 elders or ancients.

¹¹ *The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹² *The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹³ *The King James Version, 1769.*

In vv 8 & 9 we see the eternity and universal nature of God.

v 8 - WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME¹⁴

John 1:1 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁵

John is speaking there of the eternity of God. He says. "Go back as far as you wish; God was always there."

In v 9, to Him who lives forever and ever¹⁶

Our puny minds can't really grasp the eternity of God. We are bound by time and space. God has always been and will always be.

In v 10 the 24 elders fall down in worship and cast their crowns; this is the stephanos, the victor's crown, before the throne.

The closing scene of chapter 4 brings out several important truths. It is evident that the living creatures are designed to give glory, honor, and thanks to God. The emphasis of their praise is on the divine attributes and worthiness of God.

The worship given by the 24 elders recognizes these attributes of God as well as the fact that God is the sovereign Creator of the universe. Also, in casting their crowns before the throne, they are saying that if it had not been for God's grace, salvation and goodness, they could not have had victory over sin and death. Here the creature is honoring His Maker and accepts the truth that humanity must be subject to its Creator.

Many people in the world today do not give such honor to the Lord God. Though they benefit from His goodness and live in a universe of His creation, they tend to neglect the worship of God. Wise is the soul who finds in the Scriptures the revelation of such a God and will bow now in this day of grace and begin to worship the God he or she will serve in eternity.

¹⁴*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹⁵*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹⁶*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

will¹⁷ in v 10 indicates a future event.

- A. fall down before Him¹⁸ = This is the first of a two-part action.
- B. worship Him¹⁹ = this is the second of a two-part action. In ancient worship one both bowed and offered verbal praise.
- C. cast their crowns before the throne²⁰

And then in v 11 a magnificent hymn of praise to God:

"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."²¹

The point of this chapter is summed up in this verse. All creatures in heaven and earth will praise and honor God because He is the creator and sustainer of everything. No king or emperor can make that claim. This role belongs to God alone.

The phrase "You are worthy" was used to herald the entrance of an emperor when he came in his triumphal procession.

The emperor Domitian caused the phrase "our Lord and God" to be used to refer to himself. Christians acknowledge only one Lord and God.

He is worthy of our highest honor, praise and adoration.

Do we show Him by our lives and by our voices that we honor, praise and adore Him?

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the exalted God who sits on the throne. This is none other than God the Father.

He alone deserves our adoration and praise.

May we be faithful to Him in our talk and in our actions.

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¹⁷*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹⁸*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

¹⁹*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

²⁰*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*

²¹*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, 1996.*