

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

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THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER (4:1-22:5)

a. The Second Vision: Christ and the World – 4:1-16:21

2097255. Commission of the Lamb – 4:1-5:14

After the warnings given to the people of God through the seven churches, God now turns His omniscient eyes on the heathens.

This is the final section of the threefold revelation that God gave to John as recorded in Revelation 1:19, "*Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;*" Now we enter into the "things which shall be hereafter." This is confirmed by Rev. 4:1b.

a. The Scene is Heaven (Revelation 4:1 -11)

1. The One who sits on the Throne (4:1-3)

Revelation 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."*

The chronology of events from the events recorded in chapters 2 and 3 with the rest of Revelation is one of continuation. After the seven churches which represent the present situation or better known as the church period, John is now brought physically into the final stage of God's revelation of man's existence, "the things which must be hereafter."

NOTE: the word "church" does not appear again in the rest of Revelation. The rapture would have taken place and the "local church" with genuine believers inside them, as the visible witness of God's Truth, is removed. What remains would be the church of the antichrist, churches that have compromised and given their allegiance to Satan.

The local church period will end with the coming of the First Resurrection (for those who have died in Christ) and the Rapture (for those who are alive when Jesus returns to bring us up to heaven).

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, *"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (cf. 2Thess. 2:1-17)*

The door to heaven was already opened to John. This refers to the third heaven that the apostle Paul was brought into. 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, *"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."*

This was the very presence of God is and ever will be.

The first voice that he heard sounded like a trumpet which was similar to what he had heard earlier in 1:10. The comparison is that of authority. John was commanded to come up hither!

How is it that sinful man can enter into the very presence of God and not be consumed? Did God not say to Moses that no man can see Him and live? (cf. Exo. 33:20)

The purpose of coming up before the presence was to be shown the things that were to occur in the future. We regard this to be the future even from our perspective, nearly 2000 years later.

Revelation 4:2, *"And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne."*

The phrase "in the spirit" is similar to that used in 1:10 to describe John when the great voice that sounded like a trumpet. What this phrase means is that the Spirit of God strengthened him to receive what God has in store for him. John will not be able to endure God's revelation on his own strength. God must sustain him in such a spiritual exercise.

Some like MacArthur believe that the throne mentioned here does not refer to a piece of furniture but a symbol of God's sovereign rule and authority located in the temple in heaven. MacArthur's argument is that the temple mentioned in Rev. 21:22 is spiritual, therefore the throne mentioned here must also be spiritual also (**MacArthur**, vol. 1, page 146, 147). MacArthur is incorrect in his observation as the throne was set in heaven and NOT in the heavenly temple. No where in Revelation did God say that the throne was in the heavenly temple. We are told that the throne was in HEAVEN!

It is true that there are instances in the Bible like Psalm 11:4, Hebrews 1:8 and Luke 1:32 where Temple and throne are mentioned together but it is the immediate context that determines the usage of a word. In Rev 3:21, the word is used in the literal sense describing Jesus Himself sitting on the heavenly throne which is also the case here as recorded in Rev. 4:3. The understanding of the text here is that the throne refers to an actual seat where the symbolic meaning of a throne is included, that is one of authority and power and dominion. The detail description of the "Person" seated on this throne is also given to us. If it not "real" as MacArthur has suggested, then the person seated would also not be real. But the person is real. He is the LORD Jesus Christ.

The One who sits on the throne is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In the OT, the term "sit" refers to rest, implying that the task is completed. But here it does not refer to rest but judgement. The omnipotent King of kings and Judge of judges will rule and reign over all.

Some of the OT saints were given a glimpse of such a magnificent view of Jesus Christ. They include: Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-6), Micaiah (1Ki. 22:19), the psalmist (Ps. 47:8), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-10) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28). Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were all humbled by their experience unlike the flippant, horrendous and blasphemous claims and boasts of today's claims of visions of God by many Charismatics.

"jasper stone and sardine stone" -- Revelation 4:3, *"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."*— Jasper stone is also mentioned in Rev 21:11 but with an additional description, that it was clear as crystal. This would probably point to a diamond as suggested by MacArthur (ibid). Jasper is understood by us today as green in colour and opaque. But the jasper here is

crystal clear. MacArthur's suggestion that it is a diamond is arbitrary as the word used is not a diamond but a jasper stone. The proper interpretation is that it is a "special" **jasper stone** which is green in colour and crystal clear in appearance. **Sardine stone** is like blood-red ruby. The greenish and reddish stones perhaps demonstrate the colourful brilliance of God and this is supplemented by the presence of a rainbow round about the throne. It was a magnificent and brilliant sight which John beheld!

Jasper and sardine stone were the first and last stone on the breastplate of the high priestly garment respectively. Could this be a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel which will be mentioned in Rev 7? Hence Jesus comes as a representative of redeemed Israel as well and saying to John that I am now restoring the pre-eminence that Israel once had as my witness to the world that they are mine.

The entire vision resembles that of an emerald, very green and glorious in colour. The rainbow represents God's covenant faithfulness to the world about the world's destruction by water. Perhaps here it is a reminder of the impending judgement that will follow as the wrath of God is poured down upon the earth!

Yet it was not all gloom and doom when we think of the rainbow. It was also a reminder of God's grace and mercy and faithfulness toward sinful man, that man had existed for so long after the flood was not due to man's improved condition but that God's grace and mercy had abounded in man's life.

2. The Ones who Surround the Throne (4:4-11)

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS (4:4-5) – Revelation 4:4-5, "*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. 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*" -- Round about the throne were 24 seats (thrones-same Greek word) and on them sat 24 elders.

WHO ARE THESE 24 ELDERS? Some have said that they refer to angelic beings and others say that they refer to the 12 tribes of Israel plus the twelve apostles.

View # 1 -- 24 elders refer to 24 angels -- First and foremost, the 24 elders sat on 24 thrones which means that they reign with Jesus Christ. Nowhere in Scripture did the Bible say that angels sat or will sit on thrones reigning with Christ. They are also not pictured as reigning or ruling but being ruled one day by the Christians (cf. 1Cor 6:3). Angels' roles have always been that of ministering spirits.

Hebrews 1:13-14, "*But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*"

Furthermore the term "elders (*presbuteroi*)" have never been used in the Bible to refer to angels but only to men. The term "elders" refer to age like an older person and angels do not age at all. The white garments of the elders refer to the garment of salvation which God gives to all believers because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on Calvary. This is the symbolic garment of righteousness which was imputed to all believers when a person receives Jesus Christ into his heart.

'Crowns of gold' represents victory and triumph. Victory over sin and death and Satan would be included here. Holy angels though are said to appear in white (cf. Jn. 20:12, Acts 1:10) but they are never described as having golden crowns on their heads. They have not known sin (other than fallen angels) and definitely have not experienced the grace and mercy of God in relation to salvation. Angelic beings that fall into sin will remain in their state of sin without salvation.

View # 2 – 24 elders refer to the 12 tribes and 12 apostles -- Could the 24 elders refer to the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles? It appears unlikely because John could not be seeing himself seated on the throne as he was observing the entire event. The text does not say 12 plus 12. The reference is to the number 24 not 2 "twelve".

View # 3 – 24 elders refer to The Great Tribulation Saints -- Others say that the 24 elders refer to the saints who go through the Great Tribulation. This is also not tenable as the Great Tribulation has not occurred yet and why would these saints have pre-eminence over the saints who lived and died in the Old and New Testament periods? Faithfulness is always the measure of the believer's salvation and rewards are not based upon the degree of his suffering. If this view is true then we better not believe in Jesus before the period of the Great Tribulation but wait until it comes and then believe! This line of reasoning would be absurd!

View # 4 – 24 elders represent the myriads of saints who have been raptured and participated in the First Resurrection -- The number 24 has been used in the Old Testament as a number or representation. In 1 Chron. 24:4-18, 24 officers of the sanctuary represented the 24 courses of the Levitical priests, and 24 was also the number of divisions of singers in the temple (cf. 1Chron. 25). The appropriate interpretation is that it refers to a representation of the redeemed who have been raptured or resurrected. These are the ones who will sing songs of praise in the next chapter of Revelation (cf. 5:8-10). These glorified saints have been given their white raiment and on their heads would be crowns (*stephanos-c* crowns won as a prize unlike "diadems" which means "regal crowns") of gold.

'lightnings, thunderings and voices' – Out of the throne of God emanates 'lightnings, thunders and voices.' This is a reference to the awesome presence of God (cf. Exo. 19). In Rev 8:5 it refers also to the judgement of God during the Great Tribulation. In Rev 11:19, it represents the awesome presence of God as in Exo. 19. And in Rev. 16:18, it refers to the judgement of vials being poured out upon sinful men. This is therefore interpreted as symbolic of the impending judgement from the all powerful God who is awesome and no man will be able to stand against Him. The day of His wrath is at hand!

NOTE: The day where Christ is seen as a mild mannered Lamb of God is over. He will now come again as the awesome God who will judge this sinful world.

“seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God” – refers to the sevenfold representation of the Spirit of God. The seven spirit of God represents the sevenfold attribute of the Spirit as spoken by Isaiah in Isaiah 11:2, *"And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD,"* and also Zech. 4:1-10. [Deity would be included in Isaiah 11:2]. The Spirit of God is involved in judgement as well.

NOTE: The presence of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Greatest Judgement of mankind is most comforting and appropriate. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit will all be present on the final moments of man's existence just as the Trinity was present at the time of the beginning of mankind when God said, "Let us make man in our image."

THE FOUR BEASTS (4:6-8) – Revelation 4:6-8, *"And 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."* -- The sea of glass refers to the large area in front of the throne that looked like glass and not a literal sea. It was shimmering and crystal clear in its representation. There were four beasts that were found in the midst as well as around the throne. This refers to their presence in the inner circle of the throne. Perhaps this will be the judgement scene on the day of Great White Throne Judgement as recorded in Rev. 20:11-15.

WHAT IS THE IDENTITY OF THESE FOUR BEASTS?

“Beasts” – the word used here is that of “living creatures”. See Ezek. 1:4-25). The Greek word is the word for “life (*zao*)” This is opposed to the word “beast” used in Rev 13 and 17 and 19:19, 20; 20:4, 10 which refers to “a wild beast (*therion*).” This word “*therion*” has been used to refer to wild animals in Acts 28:5 – the poisonous serpent that bit Paul (literal actual snakes) and Hebrews 12:20 and James 3:7 referring to the wild animals that roam the earth (figurative usage with reference to wild men with animal like behaviour).

These living creatures are full of eyes in front of and behind them. This means that they were very aware of, alert to their surroundings and that they also have comprehensive knowledge of what was about to happen. They are not omniscient but nothing that happens can escape their scrutiny.

Ezekiel identifies the four living beings of Ezekiel 1 as cherubim. These are the exalted order of angelic beings.

Beast # 1 – LION. This represents the wild creatures. It also represents strength and might like the “king of the jungle.” It represents rulership.

Beast # 2 – CALF. This represents domestic animals. It represents service.

Beast # 3 – FACE OF A MAN. This represents the climax of God's creation. This represents reason.

Beast # 4 – FLYING EAGLE. This represents flying creatures. It represents speed or swiftness of judgment.

These four creatures represent the fullness of the work and character of the angelic beings that serve God. They are powerful beings. They were created to serve God and they will bring the wrath of God to man. They are also creatures of reason as the angelic being can explain and communicate with the apostle John throughout the book of Revelation. Finally they are swift in carrying out God's commands.

“They have six wings on them” – Why six wings? Isaiah gives us the answer in Isaiah 6:2-3, *“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. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

The covering of their faces means that they dare not and could not see God directly. The covering of the feet means that they stand on holy ground. And the remaining two wings were used for flying as they go about doing God's will. Their pre-occupation day and night was to praise God. The focus here is that of God's holiness which will precede the coming judgement. It is a very appropriate attribute of God to highlight here. Also the reference to God as the ALMIGHTY (*El Shaddai* in Hebrew) means that no one is able to stand against Him.

His eternity is mentioned here to show that the frame of reference of His judgement will be from the beginning to the present and to the end. God was there from the very beginning and He continues to exist throughout history and He is here now at the very end to judge mankind. He SAW with His own eyes everything that man had done all these thousands of years of man's existence. Man will not and cannot escape His perfect judgement.

THE UNITED FUNCTION OF THE BEASTS AND 24 ELDERS (4:9-11) – Revelation 4:9-11, *“And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 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, 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.”* -- When these four beasts give glory and honour and thanks to Jesus Christ, the 24 elders also responded in similar fashion, “glory and honour and power.”

The cherubim thank Jesus Christ because the end has come and the punishment of the evil ones including fallen angels chief among them was Satan himself. Included in their thanks would be the salvation of the believers. Luke 15:7, "*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*" And Luke 15:10, "*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*"

Above all it must include the "doing" of the will of God on earth as God's will is always done in heaven. Now it will also always be done on earth as per the Lord's Prayer. For this brings glory and honour to God.

The 24 elders did not focus on themselves as seen in their casting of the crowns before the throne. They came off their "seat" and prostrated before their Redeemer and King and worshipped Him. What a blessed day it would be. No matter how wonderful heaven is and the greatness of the reward God has for us, the redeemed with their spiritual and glorified bodies will have only one thing foremost in their mind, to worship the One living and True God!

We may struggle with worship on earth because of our sinful nature but in heaven, this will be our blessed pre-occupation and focus. How sad it is for us to struggle today when for all eternity this is what every believer will do forever.

The believers will focus on the power of God – This brings great comfort to every believer when they have to endure sufferings and persecutions for the sake of Christ today. God will now judge sinful man and His justice will prevail.

The Christian must remember that it must be for the sake of Christ that we can rejoice and count it a blessing to suffer. There is no blessing in God's eyes when we are persecuted for sin sake, only for righteousness.

Matthew 5:9-12, "*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*"

1 Peter 4:12-19, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let*

them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

Jesus Christ as the Creator of all things is the focus of the believers as they worship Him because as the Creator Jesus Christ will judge all mankind. This was the basis of God's judgement upon the Gentile nations in the OT (cf. Amos 1 and 2).

NOTE: The worthiness of Jesus Christ will be the focus in Rev 5 as no one will be able to open the seals which begin the wrath of God being poured out upon sinful men. Chapters 4 and 5 will set the theme for the rest of Revelation.

Jesus Christ sits on the throne in Heaven surrounded by the reigning raptured saints and the cherubim who will be praising Him for the judgement of God is at hand. To see the justice of God prevail upon sinful men is not one of vengeance on the part of sinful men but to see God's perfect justice fulfilled upon the earth. God's justice is always based upon the character of the thrice Holy God and this is most comforting as there will be no injustice or mistake at all in His sovereign judgement.

This is also the basis for our understanding and use of the imprecatory psalms.