

A STUDY of REVELATION CHAPTER 4

1. After these things I saw (perceived), and behold! A door, open (having been opened) within the heaven. And the first sound (voice) which I hear (heard) [is; was] as a war-trumpet talking with me, saying,
"Come up (Ascend) here, and I will show you what things it is necessary (binding) to birth (to come to be in existence) after these things."

"The verse begins, 'after this ...' and then proceeds with the further revelation of Christ, but in order to have an 'after this' you have to hold in consideration the preceding chapters with their messages to the 'overcomer.' The foundational truth found in the phrase 'to him that overcometh,' is the pre-requisite for whatever is to follow in the joys and victories that come into the life of the believer." (Ray Prinzing, Revelation, A Positive Book)

"A door was opened in heaven for the seer. There are two possibilities here. (a) It may be that he is thought of as already being in heaven, and the door is opening into still more holy parts of heaven. (b) It is much more likely that the door is from earth to heaven." (William Barclay)

We were just told that the Lord stands at the door and is knocking (3:20). He set a door of opportunity before the Church within Philadelphia -- or was that also a door of access into a higher realm? Jesus said, "I am The Door: if any one may enter through Me, he will be delivered (saved), and he will go in and come out, and he will find pasture." (John 10:9) In Matt. 25:10, when the door was shut, access was denied.

A. E. Knoch says, "The 'openings' of this prophecy should be given careful consideration." Here we have a door having been opened within heaven. In ch. 19:11 we see heaven itself opened [cf Matt. 3:16 where Jesus sees the heavens opened]. In ch. 9:2 we see opened the well (or, pit, shaft) of the abyss (the bottomless; the deep -- LXX in Gen.1:2; 7:11; Isa. 44:27; 51:10; 63:13; Amos 7:4; Jonah 2:5); then in ch. 12:16 the earth opens her mouth to swallow up a river. There are openings of scrolls and seals. In ch. 11:19 God's temple is opened within heaven (His body is here in the realm of the spirit, i.e., in heaven); then in ch. 15:5 the temple pertaining to the tabernacle of witness is also opened within heaven (does this speak of "the body of Moses" [Jude 9; ICor. 10:2; Heb. 3:2]? The term "tabernacle of witness" is "... a common title in the O.T. for the tabernacle in the wilderness [Num. 9:15; 17:7; 18:2]." -- Barclay). The openings seem to speak of access, of things released or consumed, and of revelation.

In this second vision John heard the voice of the same person Who spoke to him in the first vision: again it was the voice as of a war-trumpet (ch. 1:10). I think it safe to conclude that this speaker is the Lord.

The message to John was to come up to where the speaker was: "Come up here." This calls to mind the words of Paul in Phil. 3:14, "the high call," "the upwards call," God's calling above within Christ Jesus." The door into heaven, access to the place here the Lord is, has been opened to John, and now he has been invited to ascend into this place. It was the place where John would be shown this vision, a vision about things that must be birthed into existence.

2. And immediately I in myself came to exist within spirit (or: in myself I came to be {or: I birthed myself} within [the] Spirit), and behold! A throne being laid down and lying within the heaven, and upon the throne [was] One continuously sitting.

The call to John implied action on his part. He was not transported, but was told to come up. The verb in the first phrase is in the middle voice, which means that the subject (John) was acting upon itself (himself). Thus it would seem from this that to come to be "within [the] spirit" requires something from us. John's response was immediate. Once he had "come up" into the spirit realm (heaven) he could see what was there, and what the Lord wanted to show him.

"Yahweh is in His holy TEMPLE; Yahweh -- His throne is in the heavens." (Ps. 11:4, CVOT) From this association we can see the ark as a symbol of His throne, and the Holy of Holies (the Most Holy place) is a type of the heavens.

"Thus saith Yahweh, The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool." (Isa. 66:1, Rotherham). This figure shows contrast between the two realms, defines the place of ruling, shows the subservient place of earth, and establishes the place of His throne.

I would also point out that God is continuously sitting upon the throne: He always rules; He is always in control.

Isaiah had a vision similar to this one that John here describes. I would suggest reading Isa. 6. It would also be good to compare what Ezekiel was shown in ch. 1 of that book. Micaiah "saw the Lord sitting on His throne and all the host of the heavens standing beside Him, on His right hand and on His left." (I Kings 22:19) [In this context a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and volunteered to become a lying spirit (a spirit of falsehood) in the mouths of all His prophets (vs. 21-23). Is this an echo of the first chpt. of Job?]

But for a moment, let's consider the discussion in Heb. 8:1-5. We have Jesus, the new Chief Priest, within the right part of the throne in the heavens (same place as we see described here in Rev. 4), and He is a Servant of the Holy Things (Places) and of the True Tabernacle which the Lord pitched [in the heavenlies]. Verses 3&4 compare Him to the earthly priests, showing the differences and how they rendered service for an example, and BY A SHADOW, of the upper heavens, according as Moses had been instructed, being about to finish the Tabernacle. Vs. 5 ends saying, "For He is saying, 'See that you make (construct) all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN shown to you in the mountain.' " Can we conclude, then, that what Moses saw when he ascended into the mountain (a type of heaven) was the same scene that John here sees, and that the Tabernacle contains a type (in the Holy of Holies) of God's throne room? Are the cherubim on the veil and on each side of the mercy seat (throne) the same symbol as we will be seeing here in Rev. 4:6-8? If so, then it may be helpful to keep the shadows of the Tabernacle in mind as we consider this present scene.

3. And the One continuously sitting [was/is] for appearance (to [my] vision) like a jasper stone and a carnelian. And a rainbow, similar in appearance to an emerald, [was/is] around the throne.

4. Also around (encircling) the throne [were/are] twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones, twenty -four elders continuously sitting, having been clothed in white garments. And upon their heads [were/are] golden wreaths (symbols of having won in a contest, or of festal celebration).

5. And forth from out of the throne, lightnings and voices (sounds) and thunders repeatedly (continuously) proceed out. And seven shining ones (lights; torches) of fire, which are the

Seven Spirits of God, being continuously caused to burn before the throne.

6. Also before the throne [is/was] a sea as of glass (or: as a glassy sea), like clear ice (or: crystal). And within the middle of the throne and in a circle around the throne [were/are] four living ones (living beings) continuously being full of eyes in front and behind:

7. the first living one resembling a lion, the second living one resembling a calf (young bullock), the third living one has a man's face, and the fourth living one resembles a flying vulture (or: eagle).

8. And the four living ones (living beings), each one of them having six wings apiece, are continuously full of eyes in a circle around and internally; and day and night they continuously have no rest (intermission), constantly saying,

"Set-apart, Set-apart, Set-apart (Separated; Holy), Lord [= Yahweh] God, The All-strong (the Almighty; the Strong Holder-of-all), the One Who was and continued being, the continuously Existing One, even the One continuously (habitually; repeatedly; progressively) coming."

Let's contemplate the scene just described: the continuous fire of the shining ones causing the flashing of gem-like colors from the One on the throne; the continuous voices (or, sounds) and the thunder following the continuous bolts of lightning; the 24 elders on their thrones and the fullness of God's Spirit manifested as the shining of His fire, shedding light (knowledge & understanding); the four living ones within and around the place of His power and authority, yet that place surrounded by a rainbow: symbol of hope and promise, sign of His covenant; then finally the calm of a glassy sea.

The figure of the thunder & lightning, the call of the trumpet and the voices all call to mind the scene in Ex. 19:16-20 where Moses met with God and received the pattern, then later built the model, i.e., the Tabernacle. Malcolm Smith, and others, have compared the scene which John saw to what Moses saw and then built. The ark represents God's throne (the Mercy Seat); the cherubim on the ark and in the veil of the Holy of Holies answer to the living ones. Ps. 99:1, "The LORD, enthroned on cherubim, is king." (Tanakh), or, in the CVOT, "Yahweh reigns; ... He is dwelling between the cherubim."

That the living ones within and around the throne are cherubim is confirmed in Ezk. 10:15, "Then arose the cherubim -- the same was the living one which I had seen by the river Chebar." (Roth.) See also vs. 20. Note also Ezk. 1:14, "And the living ones ran and returned -- like the appearance of a flash of lightning."

The seven Spirits of God (the shining ones, the torches) correspond to the seven lamps (flames of fire) of the lampstand in the Holy Place. The worship and praise which the 24 elders offer to God in Rev. 4:9-11, corresponds to the altar of incense. The table of the bread of the presence, having one loaf for each tribe, represented Israel, God's people, and corresponds to the 24 elders (a figure of the combined 12 patriarches & the 12 apostles; God's universal called out group, the "church" of the old covenant joined to the "church" of the new). The rainbow around the throne is represented in the colors woven into the veil. The sea of glass can figure 1) the brazen sea which Solomon made -- I Chron. 18:8, and speak of the washing of the water by the Word, the cleansing aspect of the work of Christ; 2) a host of mankind -- the sea being often a figure of people -- having been calmed (no longer raging -- Jude 13) by the sacrifice of the Lamb being slain (Who we meet in Rev. 5) at the brazen altar.

"Read through ch's. 4&5 in one sitting & you will see that what John saw was what Moses saw." (Malcolm Smith)

Now to more of the specifics of the symbols. The lightnings, the light of the shining ones: I Tim. 6:15,16, "... the King of kings and Lord of lords ... continuously dwelling in inaccessible light ..." Ps. 104:2, "Putting on light as a robe, stretching out the heavens as a curtain."

"We do not know what exactly these stones were. The three names here are the jasper, the sardian and the emerald. One thing is certain; these were typical of the most precious stones ... they were a part of the rich array of the king or Tyre (Ezk. 28:13); they were among the precious stones on the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28:17); they were among the stones which were the foundation of the Holy City (Rev. 21:19)." (Barclay)

The 24 Elders: ---here Smith says that "numbers" in the book of the Rev. are "ideas," not arithmetic. 24 is an idea. The idea is 12+12, as noted above. 12 is 3 (God in His triunity) X 4 (the complete coverage of the world; the 4 corners or directions of the earth; the totality of the universe). Thus, 12 = the triune aspect of God working out His purpose in the whole world. "When God was working out the totality of His purpose in the O.T., you had the nation of Israel. When unfolding His purposes to man in the N.T., He did it through 12 apostles." (M. Smith) I would also suggest that since 24 is also 6X4, that it could represent God's universal plan for man.

So this picture is of the universal church ruling and reigning with Christ. These are one figure of the overcomers of the old and new covenants. Notice that they are seated: "And raised us up together, and seated us together within the heavenlies, within Christ Jesus." Eph. 2:6. They are clothed in white garments (a promise to the overcomer -- ch. 3:5). They are crowned with golden wreaths: a symbol of having won the race or the contest; a symbol of "the overcomer." They are those who continually worship and praise. It echoes the picture in Job 1:6 and 2:1 where God's sons meet with Him. "It may be that the idea of the elders has something to do with the idea of God's council surrounding Him." (Barclay)

Another possibility for the significance of 24 is the 24 different courses of the priests, I Chron. 24:7--18. Each course had an "elder" (called princes or governors of God's house in vs. 5). The Levites were also divided into 24 courses for the work in the Temple, and they praise God with harps & cymbals (I Chron. 25:6-31; see also Rev. 5:8). Recall that God's people are called a kingdom of priests (Rev. 1:6).

Next we have the Four Living Ones, or the 4 cherubim. The number 4, remember, signifies the complete coverage of the earth, or land. But what is a cherub a symbol for? According to Young's Concordance the word cherub means, "one grasped, held fast." The plural, cherubim, means "those grasped; those held fast." Now imagine if the translators had "translated" these words instead of "transliterating" them. We would realize that when Ezekiel described the living ones, he would have been describing those who are grasped and held fast by God. I suggest the same applies here. Paul, in Phil. 3:12-14, says, "Yet I am pursuing, if I may be grasping also that for which I was grasped also by Christ Jesus stretching out ... toward the goal am I pursuing for the prize ..." (CLNT). Again, in I Cor. 9:24, "... those racing in a stadium are, indeed, all racing, yet one is obtaining the prize? Thus be racing that you may be grasping it." (CLNT) Here I see grasping and being grasped associated with winning, overcoming your opponents. I would thus suggest that the grasped ones, the cherubim, are another picture of the overcomer. Let us consider their description.

The cherubim are mentioned first in Gen. 3:24 where they are caused "to dwell at the east of the garden of Eden [Paradise]" along with "the flame of the sword which is turning itself round to guard the Way of the Tree of the Life." (Young) This setting would seem to be at the entrance of the garden. It would correspond to the entrance of the temple which also faced

with its entrance to the east.

Next we see the cherubim in Ex. 25, and there are two of them, one on each end, as a part of the ark in the Tabernacle. They each face toward the presence of God (the Mercy Seat), and face "a man towards a brother" (Ex. 37:9, lit.). Here they each have two wings. Two is the number of witness. In Ex. 26 we also find them in the curtains of the Tabernacle.

Now lets move to Ezk. 1:5 to see, "... a likeness of four living ones, -- and this was their appearance, the likeness of A MAN (Heb., Adam)." (Roth.) "And they had four faces each, and four wings each." (vs. 6) Here the faces are of a man, a lion, an ox, and a vulture (or, eagle). In Ezk. 10:14 the face of the ox is replaced by the face of a cherub.

When John saw these living ones, the faces are the same as Ezk. 1, but they now have six wings apiece. In Ezk. 1:9, the wings were joined "a woman to a sister" (Heb., lit.) These are balanced beings, having both masculine & feminine qualities; having four faces speaks of their universal aspect, they face the cardinal directions, they cover the earth. Six wings speaks of man (his number is 6) having attained to the heavenlies. We see no wheels here (wheels are used upon the earth) for Christ has lifted those of His body and given them access to the heavens.

Historically, the four faces have been associated with the four gospels, each face representing the central aspect, or focus, of one of the gospels. I agree with Andrew Jukes in his book, *Four Views of Christ*, that the lion represents Matthew whose central theme is the kingdom of God; the calf (or, ox) speaks of His sacrifice and servanthood, and represents the theme of Mark; the man is associated with Luke, where the expression "Son of man" is most frequently found; the vulture (or, eagle) is a creature of the heavens and speaks of the Divinity of Christ, where the main theme is the Son of God.

Ken Earl points out that the faces of the four living ones represent "the pattern" of the layout of the encampment of the tribes of Israel. Num. 2:2 says, "Each man under his standard, under the ensigns for their fathers' house, so shall the sons of Israel encamp. From a distance round the tent of appointment shall they encamp" (CVOT).

"The four sides, North -- South -- East -- and West, had a center ensign, or standard:

East -- center -- Judah, ensign = Lion

South -- center -- Reuben, ensign = Man

West -- center -- Ephraim, ensign = a calf

North -- center -- Dan, ensign = an eagle." (Earl)

See also Bullinger's Companion Bible notes on Num. 2:2 & 32.

However, I would like to consider the symbolism as it would relate to God's people, specifically to the body of Christ. The lion, most readily associated with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, speaks of the kingly, or ruling, aspect of the living ones. The calf, or ox, speaks of the sacrificial nature of this calling, and perhaps one of the qualifying factors, and speaks of those who, having His great love, lay down their lives for their friends.

The man speaks of the last Adam, man in Christ's image restored to Paradise (the realm of the spirit; heaven). The vulture, or eagle, signifies their access to, and movement in, the heavenlies, their ability to rise above the realm of earth, and symbolizes the divine nature having been implanted in their hearts.

The eyes speak of vision, the ability to see and perceive. The circle of eyes and the internal eyes signify total vision, both internally and externally. That the eyes are "in front and behind" describes their ability to prophetically discern the future and that which lies

before them, and also understand the past and the purposes of those ages and events. Eph. 1:18 prays that "the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to perceive what is the expectation of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance within the holy ones (the set-apart ones --- the ones whose very being continuously says, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God, the Strong Holder-of-All").

Note that the living ones have not rest or intermission DAY & NIGHT in their continuous praise. Although they are in the heavens within, they must be on earth without, for earth is the place where there is day and night.

9. And whenever the living ones will give glory and honor (value) and thanks (gratitude; good favor) to the One continuously sitting upon the throne -- to the One continuously living into the ages of the ages,

10. the twenty-four elders will fall before the One continuously sitting upon the throne, and will worship (kiss toward) the One continuously living into the ages of the ages, and they will cast their wreaths (symbols of victory or celebration) before the throne, repeatedly saying,

11. "You are constantly worthy (or equal value), O Lord and God, to receive (or: take) the glory (or: the reputation), and the honor, and the power, because You create all things (or: You framed, founded and reduced all things from a state of disorder and wildness), and because of Your will (intent; purpose) they were and continued being, and they are (were) framed (created).

Note that not only do the living ones give glory and honor, but also thanks to God; they express their gratitude. Why? I suggest it is because of what He has done for them. They are thanking the One Who is continuously living. Jesus said to His disciples, "Because I am continuously living, you also shall live." (John 14:19) And we see that these, too, are living ones.

In vs. 10, as part of their worship of God, the 24 elders cast their crowns before the throne, as they prostrate before Him. The casting of the crowns is a figure to say that He is the one Who did the overcoming in them, that He gets the credit for these victories. Thus do they say that He is worthy to receive the glory and the honor for what brought them to these thrones, and that it was His power that has done all. Then they acknowledge that it was He Who created every situation, formed all circumstances, created all the ages and everything within them, and did it all for His own purpose ("... according to the purpose of the One Who is operating ALL in accord with the counsel of His will ..." Eph. 1:11 CLNT). Everything and everyone exists because it is His will and purpose for them to exist!

This chapter has been a prelude to what will take place in chpt. 5.