

10Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

As we saw so clearly, this is a promise to keep the faithful from the Tribulation by removing them in the Rapture.

And what John is seeing here in v. 1 of chapter 4, *is* the Rapture.

After the things of the church age, represented by the messages to the church in chapters 2 & 3, John sees a door open in heaven and hears a voice calling him to *come up*.

It's interesting that the word "church" is used 19 times in chapters 1-3, but isn't used again from Chapter 4 all the way through the visions of the Last days.

In fact, it isn't used again until the end of the last chapter (22:16) and one of the titles of Jesus.

The reasons we don't find the word "church" in all the visions of the last days judgments is because the church is not present on earth during that time.

It's in heaven – which is where we see John going in his vision here in 4:1.

1After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

"The first voice" John heard was in 1:10 –

10I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet

As we read what this voice says we realize it's the voice of Jesus.

Here in 4:1, Jesus again speaks to John and calls him up through the open door to heaven.

Jesus' voice is once again likened to that of a trumpet.

And it's fitting that this voice which rallies John into heaven sounds like a trumpet because trumpets were used for precisely this purpose in the ancient world and in the nation of Israel in particular.

The sound of the trumpet was notable as the summons to the nation of Israel to gather for a solemn assembly.

The trumpet announced to the nation during the Exodus that it was time to strike their tents and move on to their next camp.

And here John hears the voice of the Lord like a trumpet, calling him to come up to heaven.

We're reminded of Paul's words about the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 –

16For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Jesus tells John that once he's come up, He will show him "things which must take place after this."

And again we have the word "meta-tauta."

Don't miss this point – John will be shown things that **MUST** take place after the things of the church age.

His vantage point is heaven – but he will be shown things that will take place on earth.

And all of it is "after these things – after this."

The preterist interpretation of Revelation says that almost all of the book of Revelation, all but the very last chapters, *were fulfilled* in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Yet here Jesus says that the things of chapters 4 & on will take place "after this" meaning *after* the time John lived and wrote.

It's a settled fact that John penned Revelation in the early 90's, well after the destruction of Jerusalem!

So the only way the preterists can make this interpretation work is to assign an *earlier* date for Revelation – sometime PRIOR to 70 AD.

There is simply no way to justify this since we know John was banished to Patmos by Diocletian and he didn't reign till the 80's!

So folks, as the Preterist view of Bible prophecy grows and becomes more popular, instead of getting caught up in answering it line by line, just remember this simple fact, in Rev. 4:1, Jesus tells John he will show him things which must take place after this – and John wrote *after* the destruction of Jerusalem.

At this point, John is caught up to heaven and describes for us what he saw there.

He attempts to describe heaven, but has to use *symbols*.

He uses the word, “like” a lot, which indicates he's using words for earthly things to describe what he sees in heaven.

Since he uses a lot of symbolic language here – it's important we clarify a couple things.

1) When using *symbolic* language, the symbol always stands for a *real* thing.

Those who interpret the bible primarily *spiritually* or *symbolically* tend to dismiss the fact that John actually saw *something*.

They turn John's words and descriptions of heaven and of the visions he had into something completely other than what he says.

Interpreting the Bible *literally*, which is the proper way to interpret, means to understand that when John describes a vision he had and uses symbolic or figurative language, we understand that he is describing something he REALLY saw, and that the visions are meant to portray real events and real things.

2) Symbols almost always end up *coming short* of the thing they are attempting to describe. The real thing is greater than its symbol.

So as we read John's descriptions of what he saw in these visions, realize that while they may appear pretty wild, the reality they portray will be even higher and greater.

²Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.

As soon as the voice of Jesus issues the command to come up John says he was “in the Spirit.”

Once again we see a foreshadowing of the Rapture – for that is precisely what 1 Cor. 15 says will happen to us.

We will be instantly transformed from mortal to immortal; in a moment, like the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed, and as Paul describes it, this physical body will be changed into a spiritual body.

Then John is immediately aware that he's in heaven, where He sees a throne.

Again, as Paul says in 1 Thess 4 in talking about the Rapture, we will be caught up to meet the Lord and will be with Him thus forever.

Where is Christ? He is in heaven – seated at the right hand of the Father!

And that is what John beholds – a throne with a glorious occupant!

Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like?

We get a picture of it here and we would do well to study it.

A few years ago, a group of us went to Kauai.

Now, for several months, Kauai was nothing more than a name of one of the Hawaiian islands to me.

Then, as the time for our trip grew closer, I started reading the Tour book.

It told about the history of the island and the sights to see.

There were pictures and maps and the more I studied the more excited I got about going.

When we finally arrived, as my eyes fastened on things I had only *read* about, I got excited because I understood their significance so much better.

One of the blessings of the Book of Revelation is that it gives us a great picture of what heaven's going to be like.

The more we study it, the more familiar we become with the glory that awaits us and the more it will prime our hearts to worship God.

As we diligently study John's visions of heaven, we won't be walking around heaven like a bunch of country bumpkins and goofy tourists saying, "Wow, what's that?"

A man was driving through a mining region one Sunday when he noticed a large number of mules in an open field. When he stopped for gas at the next town he asked about the mules and was told that the animals had been brought up from the dark passages of the mines below to preserve their eyesight. Unless they were regularly exposed to the sunlight they would eventually go blind.

We need similar experiences to keep us from losing our spiritual vision.

We live in a spiritually dark world and need to have our vision of heaven renewed regularly so we can be reminded of our destiny and the glory that awaits us.

The first thing to occupy John's attention is a throne and the One who sat there.

This *throne* is the main theme of chapter 4.

The word is used 12 times in these 11 verses.

In fact, it's used 46 times throughout the entire book!

John's attention is arrested by this throne, and everything else is described in relation to it.

Please take careful note of this. John is caught up to heaven – and what's the very first thing that occupies his attention? = **The Throne of God!**

In light of all the turmoil and trouble that we are about to see in the visions of John, he wants to remind us that above and behind it all is the throne of God!

He is *sovereign* and no matter how bad things may get, God is still on His throne and in control.

History is *His Story* from beginning to end, and at the center of it all is the throne of God.

³And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

John *tries* to describe what he saw, but his words fall short so he repeatedly says, "It was like . . ."

He doesn't describe a *form* for God; instead he speaks of the glory that emanated from the One who sat on the throne and describes it as *light* reflected from precious gems.

The word "jasper" is the Greek word *νάοδέοδ* (*iaspis*) and is not the jasper of our modern day.

It was a precious stone that came in many different colors.

The sardius was a stone that came in two colors, flesh and red.

The flesh colored stone was known as *carnelian* while the red was *sardine*.

The sardius was often a *blending* of these two; swirled flesh and red.

If we try to visualize what John saw we'd picture light that shimmers with a multitude of hues, that's the jasper, but shooting through it are rays of light that are swirls of flesh and red.

The jasper speaks of the fullness of God's glory, embracing all the colors, while the sardius represents humanity of Christ, who became flesh and show blood was shed to grant us access to the glory of heaven.

Around the throne John saw a *green* rainbow.

The rainbow was a sign of God's covenant of mercy, that He would never destroy the earth by a flood again. (Gen 9: 13)

To the ancient world, the color green speaks of life and refreshment.

Being an agricultural society, green was the color of the crops and fields.

It spoke of life and prosperity.

Green was the color of renewal and refreshment, just as today, we find rest in the shade of a tree and the picture of someone stretching out on the grass speaks of peaceful repose.

What John is seeing is that the throne of God is the *origin of life* and *final place of rest*.

Just as Paul says in Ephesians; Christ has finished His work and is now seated at the right hand of Glory, so we are seated with Him in heavenly places.

And Jesus promises to the overcomers in 3:21 – that they will sit with Him on His throne!

What a striking image this is – a throne surrounded by a rainbow!

A throne is a place of rule and speaks of *sovereignty*.

A rainbow is a symbol of a promise and speaks of *faithfulness*.

God is sovereign – yet has given us precious promises.

He will exercise His control over all things to make sure each and every one of His promises are fulfilled.

The *green* rainbow reminds us God's promises are not old and stale; they are fresh and new – just as it says in the Psalm, His mercy is new every morning.

You and I can take great comfort in the sovereignty of God, because we know God's sovereignty is *on our side*.

No good purpose or promise of God relating to the believer will ever be left undone. ^[1]

Now, John's vision widens out -

⁴Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

John sees other thrones arrayed in a circle around the throne of God.

On each of these 24 thrones he sees an elder sitting.

He can tell they're elders just by looking at them and we might ask, "How?"

Elders played a crucial role in the ancient world, especially in Israel.

In every city, town and village, the elders were the town council – the leaders.

They were always older men who had proven themselves successful in living and business.

As befitting their station, they wore clothing and groomed themselves in such a way that if they were in a crowd, you could pick them out as an elder.

When one town was negotiating with another over some issue, it was the elders who did the negotiating.

They were the *leaders* and *representatives*.

John takes one look at these 24 thrones and sees men sitting on them who are clearly elders.

The throne speaks of authority and rule.

That they are arranged *around* the throne of God means that their thrones are *extensions* of His and that He over-rules their thrones.

What we are seeing here is the fulfillment of what Jesus said in 3:21 when He promised the overcomers they would sit with Him upon His throne.

But why 24 – what's the significance of that number?

Commentators have ventured many guesses but once again, we need to take our cue from the OT.

In 1 Chronicles 24 we learn that by the time of King David, there were too many priests to let them all serve at once – so he divided them into 24 divisions; each with its own schedule for service and each with its own representative.

It was the duty of the priests to lead the nation in the worship of God, and in Revelation 5, we find the 24 elders engaged in the same activity -

^{5:8}Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

The 24 elders are representatives of *all* God's people, from all ages.

The number 24 probably speaks of the 12 tribes of Israel along with the 12 apostles who laid the

foundation of the Church.

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus told the apostles they were going to sit on 12 thrones in the Kingdom.

That the 24 elders are *redeemed believers* is proven by what they wear – white robes, which in 3:5 & 18 are promised to those who overcome.

They also have golden crowns, which reminds us of the numerous promises in the Bible about the crowns that are given to the people of God as heavenly rewards.

(1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4)

⁵And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Lightning, thunder, voices and fire are all things that were part of God's presence at Mount Sinai in the Exodus. (Exodus 19:16-19 & 20:18-19)

One of the tools in the arsenal of hostage rescue teams is what's called a *flash-bang grenade*.

It's not like a regular grenade which tears everything apart by flying shrapnel.

A flash-bang temporarily stuns it's victims by exploding with a very loud noise and a bright flash of light.

The combination of sound and light overwhelm the senses of the target and incapacitate them for several seconds.

As we read John's description of heaven, we wonder if he wasn't totally overwhelmed by what he heard and saw.

Now, coming from the throne of God he sees lightnings, and hears thunderings and voices.

If you've ever experienced a thunderstorm in the Midwest, then you have a good idea of what John was seeing.

The storms we get here on the west coast are nothing like the thunder & lightning storms you get in Missouri, Kansas and Illinois.

Lightning will strike again and again in rapid bursts and the thunder is so intense it shakes that ground and causes the very air to pulse.

There's something notable about these storms too – no matter where you are, the light from the flash pierces even to the darkest recesses and the thunder vibrates through any wall.

That's the idea here – there is no place in all creation that isn't affected by the rule of God.

There is no darkness that will escape His light and no place where the sound of His voice will not reach.

John then sees seven lamps of fire before the throne, which are described as the seven Spirits of God.

We already encountered this in both 1:4 & 3:1

Seven is the number of completion and this refers to the Holy Spirit in His fullness.

Isaiah 11:2 gives us the 7-fold fullness of the Holy Spirit -

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.

It's interesting that the Holy Spirit is represented by lamps of fire.

In Acts 2:3 when the Holy Spirit came in power on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, we read that He appeared as *tongues of fire* resting on them.

Fire is a symbol of *refining* and *purifying*.

He is called the HOLY Spirit; the goal of His indwelling is to make us more like Christ by making us Holy.

⁶Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. [Stop]

Stretching out before and around the throne of God is a vast sea that looks to John like the finest glass.

The glass of that day was of rather poor quality, being rather discolored and bubbly.

It light through but was not clear as we know it.

Clear glass was made of crystal and was highly prized.
John sees the ground of heaven like the finest glass.
When Moses came down from Mt Sinai with the 10 Commandments, he also came with plans for a special building called the tabernacle.
God told him to be careful to build it just like he had seen it.
Then in the book of Hebrews we learn that the earthly tabernacle was a copy of heaven.
In the tabernacle there was a large bronze basin called the “laver,” or “sea.”
It was used for *washing* in preparation to enter the Holy of holies, which is the model of the throne room of God.

Here in v. 6, John sees the *real sea* the laver only symbolized.

This heavenly sea represents the forgiveness and cleansing God offers us.

But instead of a large basin, it's an *entire sea*, signaling the fact that His mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing are limitless and beyond exhausting.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from **ALL** unrighteousness.”

But now think – what's the medium of our cleansing – it's the Word of God!

Psalm 119:9 says -

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says –

¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Then in Ephesians 5:25-27 we read this -

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

It's God's Word that shows us where we err, and then corrects us and establishes us in righteousness.

You could say the Word of God is our foundation, the spiritual ground we stand on – and that is precisely what we see in the crystal sea of heaven.

[⁶]And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. ⁷The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. ⁸The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”

We find these creatures at several places in the Bible

They play an important part in Ezekiel's visions of God in chapters 1 & 10 where they are called *cherubim*. [10:20]

Isaiah saw them in his vision of the throne room of heaven in chapter 6.

Every time we encounter the cherubim, they're around the throne of God (4:6 5:6 14:4)

In fact, they're so intimately tied to the presence of God that He's referred to as the God who dwells between the cherubim. (2 Kings 19:15 Psalm 80:1 99:1 Isa.37:16)

Figures of the cherubim were woven into the design of the curtains in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31)

We find them on the top of the mercy seat over the Ark of the Covenant. (Exo. 25:18-21)

They seem to function very much like *ceremonial Heavenly bodyguards*.

As John sees them, they are **full of eyes**, speaking of their *eternal vigilance*.

The first of the 4 cherubim looks like a lion, the second like a young ox, in the peak of its strength.

The third looks like a man, while the fourth looks like an eagle.

In Ezekiel's description of the cherubim, each of them has 4 faces, with these 4 different creatures making up one face.

John is probably describing the side of each cherub as it was facing him.

But he sees a lion, a man, and ox, and an eagle.

These creatures represent the noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest of natural creation.

When they, along with the 24 elders, worship God, which they constantly do *together*, it represents *all of creation*, both nature and man, worshipping God.

There has been no end to the conjecture as to what the 4 creatures represent.

In the book of Numbers ^[2] we're told how the camp of Israel was arranged around the tabernacle when they camped.

There were 3 tribes on each side, N, S, E, & W.

In front of each group of 3 tribes a standard or ensign was raised, and on these 4 ensigns reliable Jewish tradition tells us were these 4 creatures.

Judah's standard had a lion on it. Ephraim's had an ox, Reuben had a man, Dan an eagle. ^[3]

If the tabernacle was a model of heaven and the center of the camp of Israel was the Holy of holies, then it's fitting that around the tabernacle would be these standards, representing the cherubim.

There's one more rather provocative thing to consider about the arrangement of the camp of Israel as we see it recounted in the Book of Numbers.

As the name of the book suggests, Numbers gives us a census of the tribes of Israel.

As we plot the layout of the camp by their population, we discover that the shape of the camp would have been a cross!

Another popular view of why these four creatures are represented is found in very early Christian tradition that the four gospels are *symbolized* by these four creatures.

Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies and the *Lion* of Tribe of Judah.

Mark presents Jesus as the perfect servant, represented by the *young ox*.

Luke's gospel makes pains to present Jesus as the perfect *man*, while John goes to equal pains to present Jesus as the one from Heaven – so the *eagle*.

Some of the earliest of Christian art depicts Jesus as one or all four of these creatures.

What's noteworthy is their song in v. 8

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”

This is called the *“trishagios; the “thrice-holy”*

If the Bible says something *once*, it's important.

If it's *repeated*, it's of special note and attention.

But when we find something spoken three times in succession – it's elevated to a place of primacy!

God is Holy!!! This is the *main declaration* of the cherubim, of those creatures which surround God's throne.

Day and night, without rest they utter this declaration and word of worship - **“Holy, holy, holy.”**

The *holiness* of God is a truth that needs to be emphasized today!

I'll have a lot more to say about this in our study on Sunday.

Some see in the *trishagios*, the thrice-holy, a reference to the Trinity.

The cherubim call God the “**Lord Almighty.**”

He is “Lord;” the supreme authority.

And he is “Almighty;” it’s that word “Pantokrator” that we looked at in Chapter 1.

He is the One Who has His hand on *everything*.

Who was and is and is to come. He is eternal.

This is the song of the cherubim, and though John’s description of them sounds bizarre, we can only conclude that these creatures are not barbaric or uncouth – on the contrary, they are *super-intelligent*.

They are all eyes, speaking of mental alertness and awareness.

They have 6-wings, meaning they are *mobile* and *purposeful* in their movement.

And what is it we see them doing every time we encounter them?

They are *worshipping* Him who sits on the throne.

These most intelligent, refined, and powerful creatures spend their time doing what?

All failure to *truly worship* is rooted in nothing less than a lack of *seeing* and *understanding* what is real.

If we could see God in His glory right now – our response would be to worship.

And the more we grow in the knowledge of God, the more we will be mobbed to worship.

He who says he knows God and is not a worshipper does not know the God of the Bible, or the God of heaven.

⁹Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”

Since the living creatures are worshipping God constantly, so are the 24 elders!

They vacate their thrones to prostrate themselves before God's.

They remove their crowns, the rewards handed them for their faithfulness, and cast them at God’s feet as acts of adoration.

Have you ever gone to a party only to discover that you were supposed to bring a gift and didn’t know it?

In heaven, the rewards we’ve received from the Lord for our faithfulness will only become the emblems of our love and devotion back to Him.

We will take what is our best, and expend it on Him.

In the casting of their crowns at God’s feet, there’s also an allusion to a practice known in the Roman Empire.

Caesar ruled over many lesser kings, and these kings were occasionally commanded to come

before the Emperor and lay their crowns down before him in homage. ^[4]

Then he would give them back, as a demonstration that their right to rule came from him.

So the elders cast their crowns at God’s feet, He gives them back, and they once again heave them forth as signs of their utter dependence on Him.

Soon after Queen Victoria ascended her throne, she attended a concert in which Handel’s *Messiah* as performed.

She was told, “Your Majesty, it’s customary for royalty not to stand when the *Hallelujah Chorus* is rendered. Though everyone else stands, Your Majesty is to remain seated.”

When the orchestra and chorus came to the part where they proclaimed Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, the queen, against custom and protocol, stood and bowed her head in

worship and adoration.

She was not afraid to break convention of England's court to honor the higher custom of the Court of Heaven.

The word "worship" in both Hebrew and Greek comes from the word meaning "to bow down."

Worship involves the whole person: body, soul, spirit.

It's not just our voices raised in song.

Worship involves all we have and are.

V. 11 will be the focus of our study on Sunday, so we'll leave further comment till then.

[1] Guzik, David

[2] 2:3-25

[3] Seiss, Clarke, and Poole each mention this approach, and cite "Jewish writers" (Seiss), "the Talmudists" (Clarke), and "the learned Mede . . . from the Rabbins" (Poole)

[4] Guzik, David