

Text: Rev 4.1-11

The first thing we need to do for today's study is recover the outline of Revelation from Rev 1.19.

Rev 1.19 "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things."

- The things which you have seen: the vision of Jesus in Rev 1
- The things which are: the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2-3
- The things which will take place **after these things**...

"This phrase introduces a new vision most of the times we find it in Revelation (Rev 4.1, 7.1, 9; 15.5; 18.1; 19.1, compare Rev 1.19, 9.12, 20.3)."¹

Compare Rev 4.1:

Rev 4.1 ¶ **After these things** I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

I. The invitation to see things of the age to come (1)

A. The mark of the new vision: "after these things"

B. The vision of a door in heaven

1. The door is standing open: a mute invitation to enter
2. The "first voice I heard" (like the sound of the trumpet) offers an invitation (compare 1.10)

C. The wording of the invitation

1. "Come up here"
 - a. Some take this to be the same as the "shout" in 1 Thess 4.16, that is, the Rapture
 - 1) The invitation is to John alone

¹ Donald C. S. Johnson, *Thru the Bible Notes* (unpublished, 2005).

- 2) The church disappears from Revelation until near the end of the book
 - a) Rev 19.7: Amid the Fourth Hallelujah “His bride has made herself ready”
 - b) Rev 21.9: One of the angels offers to show John “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” — and he shows the new Jerusalem coming out of heaven back to the earth
 - c) Rev 22.16: Jesus reminds John he sent his angel to John to testify these things to the churches
 - d) Rev 22.17: The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” — inviting hearers to believe
- 3) The focus of Revelation shifts from the churches to heaven and judgement (Rev 4.1ff.)

b. “I will show you what must take place after these things.”

- 1) The Lord’s purpose is to unveil the future
- 2) The Lord’s agent for this unveiling is John

II. The vision of the throne (2-5)

- A. John’s state: “in the Spirit” — an ecstatic experience where his body remained on earth, but his soul sees a vision of heaven
- B. The center of the vision is a throne, with a great figure occupying the throne
 1. The “One on the throne” is unidentified, but described
 2. He was like gemstones in appearance
 - a. Jasper: may refer to brilliant diamonds rather than the stones called jasper today (compare 21.8)
 - b. Sardius: some translations say “carnelian” — a kind of brilliant red ruby
 3. A “rainbow” encircles the throne, like an emerald in appearance (the glory of God?)

The various colours speak of the glory, majesty, holiness, and beauty of God. (We shouldn’t try to read symbolic meaning into

these items, the point is the brilliance of the figure's appearance.)

C. Around the central throne are twenty-four subsidiary thrones (4)

1. Twenty-four "elders" are seated on these thrones

- a. They are clothed in white
- b. They wear golden crowns

2. Interpretation

a. Some suggest that these are angels

- 1) Nothing in Revelation would contradict this notion
- 2) There is a possibility that they are distinct from the saints – see 5.9-10

b. However:

- 1) They are elders – a term never used in the Bible to describe angels
- 2) The number 24 is significant: 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 24 priestly orders in OT worship
- 3) They also appear to be of a lower rank than the four living creatures
- 4) The white robes are usually symbolic of redeemed people in Revelation
- 5) They wear crowns which they will cast before the throne (10), symbolic of willing subjection to God's authority

c. Conclusion: I believe they are representatives of all the redeemed both OT and NT saints

Note: though Rev 4 doesn't describe the Rapture, if these elders represent believers in heaven, the Rapture must have already taken place.

D. The further manifestations of the throne (5)

1. Flashes of lightning and peals of thunder: these are portents of judgement, or the presence of the judge (8:5; 11:19; 16:18; cf. Exod. 19:16)
2. Seven lamps of fire burning about the throne, identified as “the seven Spirits of God”

We previously associated this term with the Holy Spirit

III. The vision of the four living creatures (6-9)

A. The sea of glass

1. In the OT temple, there was a “sea” in the Holy place (the laver) where the priests would cleanse themselves in worship
2. This sea has no water – it is ‘glass’ – probably meaning cleansing is now complete through the work of Christ

B. The four living creatures (6b-8)

1. Similarity to OT visions

- a. Seraphim (Isa 6)
- b. Cherubim (Ezek 1)

2. Their disparate appearances (lion, calf, man, eagle)

- a. Interpretations all over the map: attributes of God, classes of creation praising God, etc. [early church fathers, as representing the four Gospels]
- b. No information on what these appearances mean

3. Their activity: very similar to Isa 6

- a. They surround the throne
- b. They worship the holiness of God
- c. Their words quote the Seraphim (angels) of Isaiah 6

Thus, to me, they must be angels, but not much more can be said of them.

IV. The worship before the throne (10-11)

A. The elders respond to the leadership of the creatures

1. They prostrate themselves before “Him who sits on the throne”
 2. They cast their crowns at his feet: their victories are completely due to Him, and His enablement
- B. The words of their chorus identify the figure on the throne
1. Our Lord and our God
 2. Only our God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power
 - a. Because he created all things
 - b. Because all things exist by his will and for his will

Conclusion:

There is a great temptation to assign meanings to all the symbols.

- There is no doubt that each of the symbols does mean something.
- Without an interpretive key, it is unwise to attempt to discern the meanings.

However, we can say this:

God is presented in this vision as worthy of the worship of all creation, and all of these beings, powerful and authoritative as they may be, alike offer praise and submission to the One who sits on the throne.

Our obligations to God can be no less.