

# REVELATION

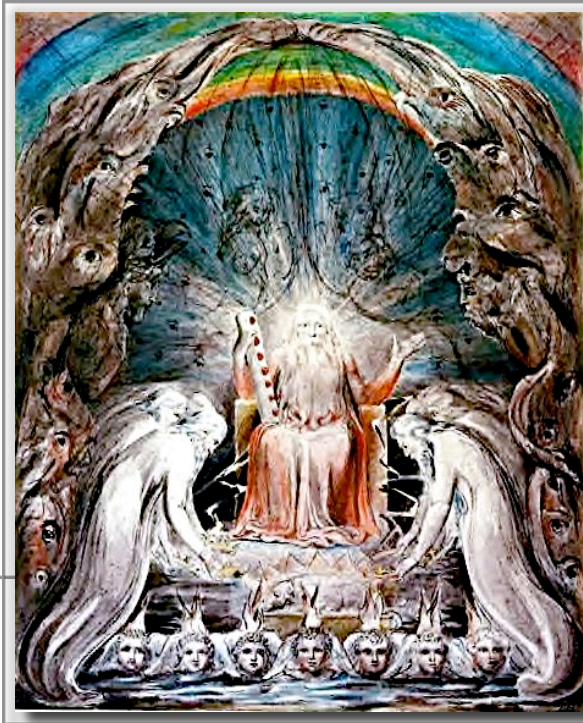
Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ  
Today at the Edge of History

## Chapter 4

### Text: Revelation 4:1-11 - Look! A Throne!

#### *The Throne in Heaven*

**4** After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup> And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of



**William Blake: *The Twenty Four Elders Casting Their Crowns before the Divine Throne***

#### Ezekiel 1:1-14

**1** In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

<sup>2</sup> On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin — <sup>3</sup> the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was upon him.

<sup>4</sup> I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center

thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

of the fire looked like glowing metal,

<sup>5</sup> and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, <sup>6</sup> but each of them had four faces and four wings. <sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, <sup>9</sup> and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

<sup>10</sup> Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. <sup>11</sup> Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body. <sup>12</sup> Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. <sup>13</sup> The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. <sup>14</sup> The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.

**Read & Reflect - 4:1-11**

**First Reading/First Impression:** The focus of Revelation makes a dramatic shift in chapter 4, from churches and earthly struggles to heaven. How is John’s strange vision of heaven similar to your own personal vision(s) of heaven? How is it different?

**Second Reading/Main Idea:** How does an accurate, though mysterious, picture of heaven help a follower of Jesus here and now? What part of what John saw, recorded in chapter 4, do you think is most comforting?

What purpose(s) does a throne serve? What purpose(s) does heaven’s throne serve?

*“The finite languages of earth are incapable of defining the infinite realities that John saw in heaven; hence he must use earthly analogies, but always with the understanding that the heavenly reality far surpasses the earthy symbol.” - Bruce Metzger, Breaking the Code, p.48*

**Search**

**Vs. 1-11** - In this scene, everything is related to the throne at the center and the One one it. Using the chart below, look at this passage and see what John saw through the door to heaven and how each element relates to God’s throne.

THE THRONE	Who/What?	Described How?	Does this element suggest anything to me about the nature of the universe? What?
“On it” (verses 2-3)			
“Behind/Encircling it” (v. 3)			
“Around it” (vv. 4, 6-11)			
“From it” (v. 5)			
“Before/In Front of it” (vv. 5-6)			

Verses 8-11 - In this heavenly vision, whom do the “four Living Creatures” talk about? What do they say?

What do the twenty-four elders do in response to this? What do they say?

### Apply - 4:1-11

What clues do these activities (in vv. 8-11) give you about what authentic worship of God might be about and what it might look like?

Which of the “nature of the universe” responses in the far right column of the chart on page 2 do you find most comforting? Which do you find most challenging?

*“The similarity between the hymns in Revelation and imperial hymns composed in honor of the emperor provides evidence that attributes used of the emperors were also used by John of God in the hymns of Revelation... 1. Holy One,*

- 2. Glory, 3. Salvation, 4. Authority,*
- 5. Worthy to Receive Power,*
- 6. Righteous are Your Judgments,*
- 7. Our God, the Almighty.”*

- David Aune, Revelation: Word Biblical Commentary, v.52a, p.316

*My prayer of praise to God for today:*

#### Another heavenly throne room vision...

#### Isaiah’s Commission (Isaiah 6)

**6** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had

taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

*“The single most reliable indication that our vision is clear is that we are a worshipping people.” - Darrell Johnson*



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### Introduction...

Now the focus shifts from earth to heaven. Now the strange visions begin in earnest. What John is conveying (God's throne room and

the Almighty Himself!) is ultimately indescribable in human terms! John is taking pains simply to *describe* what he is able to *see* and *not* what he understands his visions to *mean*. The meaning Jesus intends for us to have, I believe, is found in the overall effect of the images working on our human imaginations quickened and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the deeper realities are unveiled. To know what John knew we must first strive to see what John saw..

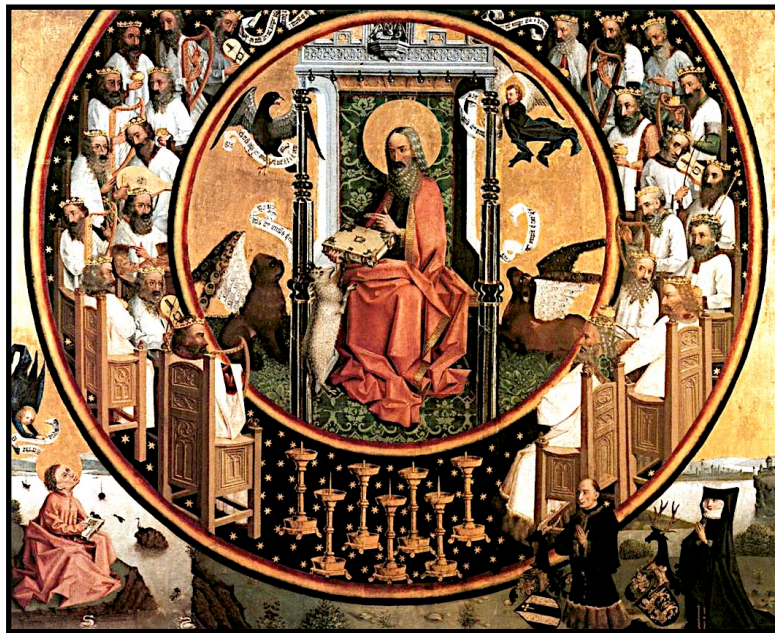
Verse 1 - **"there before me"**... actually this is an imperative voice (command) word *"Look! See! Behold!"* (*IDOU* in Greek). It's the same word in v.2... For John, heaven is not a faraway place... **"open"**... This word, here referring to the "door in heaven," may be a key to the overall structure of this book (see 11:19, 15:5 & 19:11)... **"what must soon take place after this"** could refer to coming world events or simply the rest of John's vision (see 1:19)

v.2 - John's pattern of hearing a voice & then seeing something continues, & what John sees first & at the center of heaven is a **"throne"** (this word occurs 47 times in Revelation - see 3:21) with **"someone sitting on it."**

v.3 - John's description of this One who is seated (the Living God!) is one of glorious imprecision using the word "like" and referring to the reflected brilliance of precious stones... **"jasper and carnelian"**... the type of **jasper** John probably means is translucent like a crystal reflecting sparkling movement of light... **carnelian** is usually a deep

red and looks as though it has a fire smoldering within... powerful symbols for God's beautiful holiness and maybe also His wrath against sin... **"rainbow"**... calls to mind the sign given to Noah after The Flood (Genesis 9:13), a sign of God's mercy and grace... **"emerald"**... John's imprecision is bathed in soft, comforting, peaceful green...

v.4 - **"twenty-four elders"**... the number could indicate fullness (like 24 hours in a day), or it might beg an encouraging comparison to the 24 bodyguards that Emperor Domitian regularly employed (see Aune, *Revelation*, p.292). Most likely, though, it refers to the 12 patriarchs of the tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles of Jesus (the two Covenants of God's people, so representing the whole of redeemed humanity). They have **thrones and crowns of gold** indicating they have authority in relation to God, and their purity is symbolized by their **white robes**...



Unknown German Master: *The Vision of St. John*

v.5 - **"lightning... thunder"**... similar to the scene on Mt. Sinai before Moses received the Law (Exodus 19:16)... God's power is awesome... No one with any wisdom would play games with God!... [Note that we see "lightning and thunder" again when God's judgments are executed with the

7th seal (8:5), the 7th trumpet (11:19), and the 7th bowl (16:18)]... **"seven lamps"** indicate the purifying, healing, illuminating and/or revealing consequences of being with God... **"seven spirits"** may refer to the Holy Spirit in all His fullness...

v.6 - **"sea of glass clear as crystal"**... similar to the sapphire pavement upon which the Lord was seen by Moses and his elders in Exodus 24:10, it may simply indicate that there was still some distance between John and the throne room, It is also possible, and much more wondrous, to see that what is meant here is something about the forces of chaos, all that opposes God (so often symbolized in ancient myths by the sea). Often original creation was thought by the ancients to have been the result of a contest between the Creator and the evil forces of chaos found in the sea. Interestingly, later in chapter 13, it is from the sea that the wicked beast emerges... And what is the sea, symbolic of all that opposes God, doing here? Nothing. It is calm, flat as glass, as the Lord has commanded. Evil and chaos have their mysterious place under God. but they cannot prevail. We need not fear... What a picture!...

v v. 7-8 - **"four living creatures"**... (see Ezekiel 1) symbolizing power over the entire created world (the noblest, strongest wisest and swiftest creatures, respectively)... **"six wings..."** **"Holy, holy, holy"**... like the cherubim in Isaiah 6... The four creatures (all creation!) are prompters for worship... **"eyes"**... symbols of constant watchfulness...

vv.9-11 - **"You are worthy, our Lord and God"**... This is a phrase (*dominus et deus*) that Emperor Domitian usurped (see list on p.3). Here the elders apply it where it rightly belongs: attached to the One on heaven's throne!... And again, what's the goal? Worshipping the Living God!...