

# Ministry of Grace

## Revelation Chapter 4 The Throne Room of God

### General

Now we enter into the third and most dramatic section of the book of Revelation. Here we will see, clearly displayed, the wrath of our loving God. Say what?! Yes, He is a loving God to those who recognize Him and accept His truth. However, those who reject Him and those who claim that there is no God will experience His wrath like no one else has at any time throughout the history of mankind.

But first – before we see seven years of His wrath poured out, we will be introduced to the Throne Room of God Almighty. Here we will see Him in His majesty, surrounded by angelic beings. But we will also see the church. Since the church is present and the events upcoming in chapters 6 through 19 describe what will happen during the Tribulation, the Rapture must occur before the Tribulation. Immediately after the Rapture (or as part of that amazing event) all Christians will appear before the Bema Seat of Christ. This is where our works will be judged. Immediately after our works are judged, we will be taken by our espoused husband (Jesus Christ) to be presented before the Father.

so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:13)

Once we have been presented to the father, we will sit on our thrones as depicted in chapter 4 of Revelation. See the studies on The Rapture and The Judgments to get a better understanding of these events.

### **What Happened to the Church?**

Throughout the first three chapters of Revelation the Greek word *ekklesia* is used repeatedly. This word is made up of *ek*, meaning “out” or “out of” and a form of the verb *kaleō*, meaning “to call out to someone, inviting him or her to come or to go somewhere.” Thus, *ekklesia* refers to “the called-out ones.” Originally, it was a reference to those who were called out by civil authorities for a public meeting. In the New Testament, however, it is always used as a reference to the church – those who have been called out of the world to follow Jesus Christ.

In the book of Revelation, the word *ekklesia* is not used at all after chapter 3, except as part of the postscript in the final chapter. This is one more piece of evidence that the church will not be present on the earth during the tribulation period. As we will see in this study, however, we will be present in God’s Throne Room. What an honor!

### **But First – the Majesty of God!**

As we go through this chapter, become very aware of the glory and splendor of our Mighty God! He sits enthroned over all of creation, his majesty on display for all in heaven to see, His power portrayed by thunder and lightning as every creature in heaven falls down before Him. Do not pass by this scene too quickly! This is our Father in heaven as only the sinless ones can see Him. And – He is about to pour out the wine of His wrath, poured full strength into the cup of His anger on all those who reject Him.

Majesty with mayhem, Wonder with wrath.

## Revelation 4:1

**<sup>1</sup>After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."**

Back in **Revelation 1:19** when John was given the outline for what he was to write about, he was told:

Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.  
(**Revelation 1:19**)

The phrase “that are to take place after this” is from the Greek *dei ginesthai meta tauta*, which literally translates to “which must be after these things.” The Greek text for **Revelation 4:1** starts off with *meta tauta* (after these things). In other words, the things described here are the things that are to take place after the things of chapter 3.

Chapters 6-19 of Revelation detail the 7-year period we call the Tribulation, or more correctly, Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week. Nowhere in these chapters is the church mentioned, since it will be kept “from [out of] the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” as Christ promised the church in Philadelphia back in **Revelation 3:10**.

“the first voice, which I had heard” is apparently the same voice that John heard in **Revelation 1:10, 11**

I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, ..."

And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here," This event sounds quite similar to the description of the Rapture given to us in **I Thessalonians 4:15-17**.

But - do not take two things which sound similar to necessarily be the same thing (though they may be). In the rapture we are changed from our earthly body to a heavenly body like Christ’s resurrection body. In this verse John is not transformed but becomes “in the Spirit” as we will see in the next verse. Also, John does not meet the Lord in the air; rather, he is transported directly to God’s throne room so that he can see the things that will take place “after these things. (*meta tauta*)”

Now, although this is not a description of the rapture of the church, it may very well be an implication of the rapture because, as we will see in the following verses, the church is in the next scene and nowhere referred to as being on earth for the remainder of the book of Revelation. We will talk more about this later.

## Revelation 4:2

**<sup>2</sup>At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.**

“I was in the Spirit” Literally, “I became in the Spirit.” This is the same expression that John used in **Revelation 1:10** referring to the altered state he was in through the power of the Spirit of God such that God could reveal this prophecy to him in a vision. This also sounds very similar to Paul’s description of his own vision:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - (**2 Corinthians 12:2-3**)

“Behold” = Greek *idou*, which means “look!” or “pay attention!” Whenever you see this word in the book of Revelation it is an indication that John was amazed or astonished at what he saw. It is his way of drawing our attention to what he sees.

### **Revelation 4:3**

**<sup>3</sup>And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.**

“He who sat there had the appearance of” It does not say “He who sat there was.” This is a simile, comparing two things that are similar, not a definitive description.

“Jasper” If you research the precious stone that is known today as Jasper, you will discover that it is a red semi-precious, non-translucent stone. However, based on how it is described in other Scripture passages, the stone referred to here is most likely the diamond. Here is how it is described in **Revelation 21:11**,

... its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

This stone represents the holiness and purity of God

“Carnelian” or, sardius. This is a fiery, blood red stone which most likely got its name from the city of Sardis where many of these were found. This stone may be representative of the impending judgment and wrath of God that is about to be poured out on the inhabitants of the earth.

As we mentioned earlier, our God is a God of love, but he is also a God of vengeance and wrath. These may also be implied by his appearance as the clear jasper and the blood red carnelian (sardius).

“Rainbow around the throne” The word translated “around” is the Greek word *kuklothen*, which is derived from *kuklos*, meaning “a circle.” Therefore, *kuklothen* means “to encircle.” It is not like the half circle rainbow that we see, but it apparently completely encircled the throne.

“In appearance like an emerald.” Unlike the rainbow that we are familiar with, this rainbow was in shades of green like an emerald. The presence of a rainbow may be an indication from God that He has not forgotten His promise to never destroy the world again with a flood. This is significant since, instead of a flood, He will cause fearful, cataclysmic events as He pours out his wrath on the permanent earth dwellers.

### **Revelation 4:4**

**<sup>4</sup>Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.**

“Around the throne” Again the word translated “around” is the Greek word *kuklothen*, meaning “to encircle.”

“twenty-four elders” There has been much discussion and debate as to who these twenty-four elders represent. There are three prevailing opinions, 1) they are angels, 2) they represent Israel and the church, and, 3) they represent the church. We will address each of these in order.

1) **Angels** – This opinion is primarily based on **Revelation 5:8-10** which says:

(According to the English Standard Version translation)

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You

were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made *them* to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and *they* will reign upon the earth." (Revelation 5:8-10)

(According to the New King James Version translation)

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. And 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, And have made *us* kings and priests to our God; And *we* shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:8-10) [NKJV]

Based on the fact that these elders proclaim in verse 10 "you have made them ..." [ESV] the belief is that they could not themselves be the ones that they are singing about. Therefore, they must be angelic beings. Nearly all of the Greek manuscripts, however, use the personal pronoun *hēmas* (us) not *humas* (them) in verse ten. Thus, it is more likely that they were saying "You have made *us* to be a kingdom of priests to our God."

So, the question becomes, "Who are the ones singing?" Since the Angels around the throne are sinless, holy creatures, they have no need to be redeemed or purchased with the blood of Christ. Even though the four living creatures (angelic beings) have fallen down before the Lamb, they most likely are not the ones singing. Therefore, it is best to see only the elders as singing here.

Also, the grammatical structure of the Greek text of verse 8 indicates that it was only the elders, not the living creatures, who hold the harps and bowls. Also, notice that these elders have crowns on their heads. Nowhere in Scripture are angels said to have crowns. These crowns are victor's crowns (see discussion of "crowns" below), which are those given as rewards to the church and not promised to any others in the Bible. Also, notice that the elders are sitting on thrones, which is indicative of their position as kings and judges, both attributes which are promised to Christians, never to angels.

2) **Representatives of Israel and the church**. There are those who claim that the 24 elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel (descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob) and the 12 apostles. Hence, they must be a representation of the combined people of Israel and the church.

The first issue with this is that there are at least 13 apostles named in the New Testament (Paul was not one of the twelve, but is repeatedly called an apostle). Also, there is indication in the New Testament that others were called apostles, such as Timothy and Sylvanus (Silas) (1 Thessalonians 2:6) and Barnabas (Acts 14:14). These other apostles were not named among the twelve in Matthew 10:2-4.

In all fairness, however, in Revelation 21:14 there is mention of "the twelve apostles of the Lamb." So, the fact that more than 12 apostles are mentioned in the New Testament is not definitive proof that these 24 elders don't include representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel.

But – just as we mentioned above about angelic beings, God never promised Abraham or any of his descendants that they would rule with Him. The closest thing to this was when Moses first met with God on Mt. Sinai. There Moses was instructed to tell the children of Israel,

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6)

But we know that the Israelites did not keep the covenant and that entire generation was killed in the wilderness. Therefore, they did not become a kingdom of priests.

As one final piece of evidence against identifying the elders as both the children of Abraham and the church, the descendants of Abraham are never said to be given crowns (victors' crowns). So, we must conclude that these 24 elders don't include representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel.

The other issue is that not all of Israel is saved at this point in John's narrative. Many of them will be cast into the lake of fire.

But, even if 12 of the elders represent all of "saved" Israel, it is difficult to reconcile this since this event occurs before the salvation of Israel through the Great Tribulation. So, part of the remnant of Israel would still be on earth while their representatives would at the same time be sitting on thrones in heaven. (MacArthur, 2005)

- 3) **Representatives of the church** – This interpretation makes the most sense, since the church has been raptured and is in heaven at this time, and the number 24 is used elsewhere in the Scriptures to indicate a representation of the whole. For instance, there were 24 officers of the sanctuary representing the 24 courses of the Levitical priests (1 Chronicles 24:4-5 and 7-18), as well as 24 divisions of singers in the temple (1 Chronicles 25).

They are seated on thrones, indicating they are rulers and judges, both functions that have been promised to believers, but not to Israel or to angels. And, we will not only be part of the judgment of the world but of angels as well:

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! (1Corinthians 6:2,3)

We will also rule with Christ:

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6)

“With golden crowns on their heads” – There are two types of crowns spoken of in the New Testament. The first is from the Greek word *diadēma*, which is a crown of authority, a ruler's crown, which must be inherited. Technically, a *diadema* (from *dia*, meaning “around” and *deō*, meaning “to bind”) refers to a strip of cloth tied around the head as a symbol of royal dignity.

The second type of crown mentioned in the New Testament is from the Greek word *stephanos*, which is from the root *stephō*, meaning “to twine” or “to wreath.” This is often referred to as a victor's crown. This is the type of crown (typically a woven wreath) that was awarded to the winners of athletic events by the judge of the games. The judge of these events awarded the crowns from an elevated seat called a bema seat.

The word in the current verse that is translated “crown” is *stephanos*, which is another indication that these 24 elders represent the church as we are promised *stephanos* crowns when we appear at the bema seat (see study of judgments.)

“White garments” – This is another indication that the elders are members of the church. Although angelic beings are sometimes depicted as wearing white clothing, in Revelation 3:5 the overcomers (all Christians) will have white garments.

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments (Revelation 3:5)

## Revelation 4:5

**<sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,**

“flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder” – This is an indication of the majesty and judgment of God. Three days after God appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai, He appeared to all the children of Israel. His majesty is described this way.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. (Exodus 19:16)

The thunder and lightning are also an indication of God’s judgment:

Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. (Revelation 8:5)

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. (Revelation 16:17-18)

“before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God” – As we discussed in the previous chapter, this is representative of the Holy Spirit. However, unlike the lampstands (Greek *luchnias*) mentioned in Revelation 1:12-13, these are outdoor touches, literally “torches of fire burning” (*lampades puros kaiomenai*). This describes war torches, which are indicative of judgment as in Nahum 2:3-4.

“John’s vision depicts God as ready to make war on sinful, rebellious mankind, and the Holy Spirit as His war torch. The Comforter of those who love Christ will be the Consumer of those who reject Him.” (MacArthur, 2005)

## Revelation 4:6-8

**<sup>6</sup>and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup>the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. <sup>8</sup>And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"**

“a sea of glass, like crystal” – This is a description of the floor of God’s throne room. When one looks at the sea (the ocean), whether from the shore or from the midst of the sea, it appears to go on forever. Thus, the description of a “sea” indicates that the floor goes on as far as one can see. It is described as *hualinos*, that is, “clear” or “glassy.” And it is described as being “like crystal.” This is from the Greek word, *krustallos*, which means “resembling ice.” We will learn later, in Revelation 6:9 that martyrs are seen underneath the altar. But, since an altar is solid, not having legs, the only way to see beneath the altar is if the floor is clear as crystal. (See the study on “heaven” for further explanation of what is beneath God’s Throne Room.)

“Four living creatures” – The word translated “living creatures” is the Greek word *zoa*, meaning “living ones,” not masculine, not feminine, but neuter. Some translations have this as “four beasts” but the word for “beast” (as used to describe the antichrist) is *therion*, meaning “a beastly wild animal” which is not used in this verse.

In **Ezekiel 1:4-25**, in his vision by the river Chebar, Ezekiel gives a detailed description of similar angelic creatures and in **Ezekiel 10:15** he specifically identifies them

And the cherubim mounted up. These were the living creatures that I saw by the Chebar canal. (Ezekiel 10:15)

The cherubim were first mentioned in **Genesis 3:24** where they were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to prevent anyone from entering there after the fall of Adam and Eve. Satan is one of the cherubim, a magnificently beautiful creature, in fact “perfect in beauty” according to **Ezekiel 28:12-14** (metaphorically there called the King of Tyre.)

Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an **anointed guardian cherub**. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. (Ezekiel 28:12-14)

According to Ezekiel’s description, however, the cherubim had four wings and each had four faces, whereas the creatures identified here in **Revelation 4:8** have 6 wings like the creatures identified in **Isaiah 6:1-3** and only a single face each.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:1-3)

These creatures above God’s throne, according to Isaiah, are seraphim, whose responsibility it is to proclaim God’s holiness (both in Isaiah and here in Revelation). Thus, the four living creatures of **Revelation 4:6** most likely are seraphim.

## **Revelation 4:9 – 11**

**<sup>9</sup>And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup>"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."**

When the four living ones announce God’s holiness, the 24 elders (the redeemed ones - God’s church) fall down before him and cast their crowns at his feet.

The purpose of casting the crowns at the Lord’s feet is to show that He is really the one who deserves the rewards, not them. Remember that these crowns were awarded to members of the church for good works which they had done for God. Here, they are proclaiming that even though they are the ones who did the good works, the credit for these deeds goes to God alone!

## **So What?**

First of all, let me say that members of the church (born-again Christians) have a special place in God's eternal plan, just like the descendants of Abraham have a special place in God's plan for the ages. Of all the humans to whom God shows His love, of all those who are singled out as having a special relationship to God (this includes those who are favored in the Old Testament such as Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham & his descendants, the Prophets, and others both pre- and post-flood), only Christians are referred to as the bride of Christ. Only Christians are said to be adopted heirs of God. Only Christians will appear before the Bema Seat of Christ to receive victors' crowns. Only Christians are said to be overcomers. And, only Christians are promised that they will rule with Christ.

Now, before I am accused of being an elitist, claiming Christians to be better than everyone else, that's not what I'm saying. I believe that God has a special position and place in heaven for descendants of Abraham who are true believers. I believe that true believers before Abraham will also have a special place in God's eternal realm. I believe that believers during the Tribulation will have a special place in God's plan of the ages. I believe that those who get saved during the Millennial Reign of Christ have a special place in God's eternal plan. What I'm saying here is that Christians appear to be the only humans (other than John, the author of this book) who, in addition to the other things just mentioned above, are represented in John's vision as being in the Throne Room of God. That is a special privilege, and a great honor!

Now, let's talk about angels for a second. Angelic beings clearly have a special place in God's eternal plan. Notice, however, that angelic beings don't all have the same responsibilities as part of God's plan. Just consider the many different types of angelic beings:

- Angels (messengers)
- Cherubim
- Seraphim
- Archangels
- Elohim
- Other high ranking angelic beings as identified by Paul

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*  
(Ephesians 6:12)

Since there are many different functions and classes of angelic beings, why shouldn't there be many different functions and classes of humans in heaven.

In the Old Testament, Israel is presented as the wife of God, albeit an unfaithful wife. In spite of that, Abraham and his descendants have played a key role in God's plan for the ages. It was through them that the Messiah, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, entered into the world as a human. But you, my Christian friend, have been adopted into God's family as a son, as an heir. This was never said about anyone in the Old Testament. As a child of the King of Kings, you will sit in judgment over angels. This was never said about anyone in the Old Testament.

Knowing that we have a special place in God's plan for the ages as His adopted children, and knowing that we will be present in the Throne Room of God before and during the Tribulation, we should be humbled. I don't mean that we should be humbled when we get there. We should be incredibly humbled right now. Stop for a moment and think about that! How can we as Christians go on blithely living our



lives to satisfy our own desires? How can we not be compelled to humble ourselves before our magnificent God right now?! How can we not offer all that we have to Him and all that we are for His use as humble, submitted and committed servants?

### **God's Glory**

Think about the image of Almighty God that we have just talked about. He is sitting on the throne on which only He can sit, resplendent as diamond and ruby jewels, surrounded by a glorious emerald rainbow, with flashes of lightning and rumbles of thunder announcing His presence. He is surrounded by the entire angelic host and four angelic creatures who spend day and night proclaiming His glory, majesty, and holiness. And – in the midst of the angelic host, his adopted, redeemed heirs sitting on the only other thrones present in the scene, but not sitting for long because when His holiness is proclaimed, they fall down in humble obeisance, casting their crowns of reward at His feet proclaiming that only He is worthy of all glory and honor!

This is our God, fellow Christians! This is our Heavenly Father. This is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is His Majesty, and you will be there to see Him in all His glory.

What do you have to say to Him right now?

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