

## 4. The Open Door into Heaven

### Revelation 4

In my teens and early twenties, I worked with my father on his commercial fishing boat, the *Why Worry*, which was quite a joke because I was always worrying about what would happen next. Commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous jobs on the planet, and I had extra to worry about because our nets were trawling for fish on the bottom of the North Sea and the English Channel. These fishing grounds are where two world wars have been fought with unexploded magnetic German mines occasionally caught in our nets. After handling several, good-condition mines caught in our nets, I would hear that quiet voice in my mind asking me, “What would happen to you if the mine had gone off?” That soft, inner voice motivated me to search for the meaning of life and for answers as to what would happen to me after I died. I read books of people who claimed they had gone to heaven, and they just never rang right to me. When I came to a point in my life where I began to search the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, only then did I have an awareness that I had found the truth. I put it to you, the reader, that only in the Bible will we see the truth about heaven and hell and find out about eternity.

After John the Apostle wrote down Christ’s message to seven specific churches in Asia Minor, now known as Southwest Turkey, the Lord had something special for him, i.e., a trip to heaven. He described what he saw in heaven:

#### The Throne in Heaven

<sup>1</sup>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 ruby. A rainbow that shone like 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 (Revelation 4:1-4).

After John wrote down the letters to the seven churches, he saw before him a door standing open. In the previous chapter, John had witnessed a closed door symbolizing how closed in spirit the Laodicean believers had become to the Lord and His desire for a close relationship with His church (Revelation 3:20). The intimate relationship John had with the Lord Jesus was perhaps the reason that he was chosen to see what will yet take place on earth. Intimacy with Christ precedes revelation as to God’s purposes. Any so-called prophet should be scrutinized as to the fruit of the Spirit in his life and the intimacy that he has with Christ.

The call of the Lord to come up through the open door immediately brought John into an experience of being “in the Spirit.”

What do you think John means by being “in the Spirit?” Did he leave his body on earth? What do you think?

We should not think that this is "astral traveling" or anything that New Age thinking would have us believe. Neither is John taking drugs or occult means to have an alternate reality. John was always in full control of his spirit. This experience was similar to the Apostle Paul, who did not want to boast about himself and the experiences he had with God. He writes in the third person about being caught up to the third heaven:□

<sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—<sup>4</sup>was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

In the case above, Paul was not permitted to share what he saw, or maybe, what he saw was beyond words for him to communicate. What John witnessed was also hard for him to describe. The first thing he notices is the booming voice speaking to him like a trumpet (v. 1), recalling what it was like for Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai when God spoke from the mountain to them like a loud trumpet that made them quake with fear at the sound of His voice (Exodus 19:16-25). Israel pleaded with Moses that God's voice, like a trumpet, was too overpowering for them. They asked Moses to speak instead of them to God (Exodus 20:19-20). When John writes about what he saw, he doesn't describe what God looks like. He writes in terms of the colors of the glory emanating from the throne of God. This inability to see God is similar to Paul's statement about the glory of God in his letter to his protégé, Timothy:

who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:16).

God is spirit and invisible and unseen (1 Timothy 1:17). Moses was allowed only to see the backside of the Lord:

<sup>18</sup>Then Moses said, "Please show me Your glory." <sup>19</sup>"I will cause all My goodness to pass before you," the LORD replied, "and I will proclaim My name—the LORD—in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." <sup>20</sup>But He added, "You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live." <sup>21</sup>The LORD continued, "There is a place near Me where you are to stand upon a rock, <sup>22</sup>and when My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup>Then I will take My hand away, and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen" (Exodus 33:18-23).

The only one who has seen God in His fullness is the Lord Jesus, Who said, "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father" (John 6:46). John the Apostle was aware that a person was sitting on the throne, but John described His appearance as having the colors of jasper (*ἰασπις*) and ruby (*σάρδιον*) (some translations have carnelian).

Scholars have difficulty with the color of the jasper stone, for the color varies greatly. The modern jasper stone is somewhat dull and opaque; whereas, the jasper referred to in the Scriptures is called "a very precious jewel" in Revelation 21:11, and "clear as crystal." Our best

understanding of Jasper, therefore, could be that of a diamond that has the appearance of different colors depending on one's perspective.

John also describes the glory of the One on the throne in terms of the color of a sardius stone, also known as carnelian, and translated as a ruby in the NIV. Both stones were part of the ephod that the high priest wore (Exodus 28:18). Surrounding the throne was a rainbow of emerald colors, perhaps meaning different hues of green. Ezekiel the prophet also saw this same rainbow around the throne:

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking (Ezekiel 1:28).

John then describes seeing twenty-four other thrones encircling the throne of God, with twenty-four elders in white robes with crowns of gold on their heads (v. 4). We should not think of these elders as angels, for it would be inappropriate to call angels elders, for angels do not age; they are eternal beings (Mark 12:25). Angels are never described in the Scriptures as having crowns on their heads, but believers who overcome self, sin, and Satan, are described as wearing crowns of victory. We must remember that John was taken outside of time and space to view a scene that in our time and space has not happened yet. These elders could be representatives of those throughout the church age that God alone knows.

Some say that the twenty-four are representative of the twelve sons of Israel (Revelation 21:12) and the twelve Apostles (Revelation 21:14), and that is a possibility. We should be reminded, though, of Jesus' words to James and John when they were looking for a position to the right and left of Jesus. He said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,<sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (Mark 10:39-40). It is possible that these elders could be believers alive today and being much used by God. It could also be that the figure of 24 is taken from 1 Chronicles 24:1, where David divided the priesthood of Israel into twenty-four courses of priests. The priests in that scripture could be a type, picture, or shadow of the body of Christ called to be "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). The white linen robes that the overcoming elders are wearing symbolize "the righteous acts of God's holy people" (Revelation 19:8), with the crowns [*stephanous*] representing the crowns given to overcoming believers now made kings and priests to our God (Revelation 5:10; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 2:10; 3:11).

In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, what were some of the promises given to those who overcame? How should it encourage believers all over the world who are going through persecution and possible martyrdom?

## **Worship of the Creator**

What John saw then was a scene reminiscent of the time when the people of Israel stood together at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18) after the nation came out of Egypt:

<sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup>Also in front of 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 its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come!”

John now experienced the glory of the Creator God as an awesome sight of lightning, rumblings, which this writer takes to be a vibration that causes the ground under John’s feet to quake, along with peals of thunder. What an awesome thing it will be to stand before this holy God in that day when all men will give account to Him: “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak (Matthew 12:36), So then each of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:12). Thank God that all who believe have a Savior who has paid our account for us! In the next chapter, Revelation 5, comes the opening of the seven-sealed scroll, i.e., the opening of which leads up to the judgments of God. What a terrible day it will be for those who are outside of Christ. □

John then noticed a sea of glass, clear as crystal before the throne (v. 6). John may see the reflection of the Lord's glory in the sea of people standing before the throne. These believers had overcome the enemy: “And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name” (Revelation 15:2). This sight of God's people could be the answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus in the upper room when He prayed, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22).

Some things in the Book of Revelation are symbolic or representative of something in the natural world. What could the description of the living creatures represent? How does their activity affect those before the throne?

John then writes about four living creatures that are continually worshipping the Lord. These living creatures could represent all of creation, the lion being noble as the king of beasts, the eagle as being the highest of the birdlife, the ox is the strongest of animals, and the living creature having the face of a man representing the crowning creation of God, man. We see all of God’s creation standing before the Lord in worship and adoration for all He has done. Up until this time, the whole creation has been groaning in travail (Romans 8:19-23) for God’s crowning creation, man, to come into God’s fullness: “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:25 KJV). In the day in which we live, we are watching God at work in shaping and calling the Gentiles from all tribes, peoples, and languages (Revelation 7:9) into the fullness of the covenant of faith spoken to Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

John then saw the expression of thanks to God from His creation, i.e., the taking off of the crowns of victory and laying them before the Lord, for He alone is the One who gives us the victory (1 Corinthians 15:57). □

<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; by Your will they exist, and came to be” (Revelation 4:5-11).

Whenever ancient kings were defeated, the sign of their submission was that of the giving of their crown to the victor of the battle (2 Samuel 12:28-30). In more recent history, it became the sword of the opposing general. John saw a picture of all overcomers who have gained crowns of victory, laying their crowns before the Lord, Who alone has given them the victory.

We all bow our heads to You, Lord God Almighty, for all You have created, shaped, and molded to reflect Your glory. Grant that each of us on that day to be all that You desire us to be. Amen!

Keith Thomas

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