

Revelation

A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #13
Revelation 4:1-11
10/04/2006

“After this ... the things which shall be hereafter”
The Throne of God in Heaven
Part 2

INTRODUCTION

“After this” indicates a very significant and drastic change in the vision that Christ gave to John. In 1:19 Christ had given to John an outline of the vision he was to receive. **“After this,” “the things which must be hereafter”** is a translation of **meta tauta** emphasizing that from this point forward in the Revelation of Christ to John the view would be of things yet to come and from heaven’s perspective.

John was going to see both things on earth from heaven’s perspective and things in heaven. To emphasize this, the Lord had started verse one with the expression and also closed the verse with the same expression. Everything would be so drastically different from anything John had previously known and seen that, at times, there would be no human words to accurately describe what he was to see or to communicate the message he received from his Lord.

“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”

“The things which thou hast seen” (the past) were presented in chapter one.

“... the things which are” (the present and the church age until the rapture) were presented in chapters two and three.

“... and the things which shall be hereafter” (the future events of God’s judgment upon the Christ-rejecting world as well as Christ’s victorious return, His millennial Kingdom and matters pertaining to the blessings awaiting the believers) will be presented in the remainder of the book beginning in chapter four.

**And immediately I was in the spirit:
and, behold, a throne was set in heaven,
and one sat on the throne.**

“And immediately I was in the spirit” tells us two things:

First, John experienced a transformation, from being in a physical body in a temporal and material environment to being **“in the spirit.”** Even if a further description of what this means were to be communicated to us we would likely not comprehend it. None of us have had any experience of being **“in the spirit.”** All individuals live in a time-space-material environment with all of its characteristics and limitations. Perhaps the nearest thing to being out of the time-space-material environment is seen in what happens to the astronauts who go up into space for a few days and escape the pull of gravity on their bodies, only one aspect of this time-space-material environment, but not an escape from any one of its three aspects.

Second, what happened to John happened so quickly and suddenly that what he said simply indicated that, without the measurement of elapsed time, he was here in the time-space-material body and then he wasn’t. He was **“in the spirit.”** After telling us about this transformation to himself John began to describe what he saw.

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What he saw had never been described by any man, and likely never seen unless Paul saw the throne in his experience of being caught up into heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). However, what Paul saw he was neither able nor allowed to describe. John will describe, to the best of his human ability under the direct dictation of the Lord, what the Lord said to him.

“And, behold, a throne was set in heaven.” The first thing to be mentioned is **“the throne of God.”**

This was more than just a description of what John saw. It also indicated the priority and centrality of God’s throne. Everything, in all of both the spirit world and the time-space-material world, revolves around and is based upon the sovereign authority of God’s throne. From His throne God creates, sustains, regulates and rules over all that exists. It was against God’s throne that Lucifer rebelled (Isaiah 14:12-14) and it is the delegated extension of God’s authority flowing from His throne that is seen in the daily, practical operation of life within God’s creation (Romans 13:1). What John was to see in the remainder of the Revelation of Christ would be the exercise of that authority as God judged His creation and called each person in it to accountability, an act that only God could do and had promised to do.

From this throne God had offered grace to sinful man. From this same throne would now flow the wrath of God in judgment for those who had rejected His grace. Since, by the time John saw this throne of God in heaven the Word of God was complete, except for the inclusion of this Revelation of Jesus Christ, he may have recalled some of God’s statements about His wrath that was going to flow from that throne. Having already been used by the Holy Spirit to record God’s words in such books as his Gospel and his letters, John would have been fully aware that God had often spoken about pouring out His wrath from that throne. Surely he was aware of what God had said through Paul, such as in Romans 1:18, where God said that His **“wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness.”** He, himself, had been used of God’s Spirit to write that **“whosoever believed not was already condemned”** (John 3:18). However, not even John could have anticipated the awesome display of God’s wrath flowing from that throne that he was going to be called upon to describe. God had made it clear, over and over again, that if man rejected His grace he would have to face His judgment. Now, John was to be God’s scribe in describing the pouring out of that wrath. There were to be many scenes of God pouring out His wrath in judgment witnessed by John with the final and most awful scene being the **“great white throne”** in Revelation 20:11-15.

This is another reason to affirm the departure of the church of the redeemed saints of God from the earth. The judgment of God had already flowed from that throne to punish the holy, perfect Son of God in the place of the guilty sinner. Each and every one of the redeemed had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ’s death on the cross as his substitute, as being judged in his place and atoning for his sin. Thus, before God poured out His wrath upon those who had rejected His grace, God removed, called up into heaven, raptured His redeemed into heaven, into a place of safety, just like He had done with Noah before the flood, so that they would not be in His way as He judged and punished the unbelievers.

Therefore, before he was called upon to describe the wrath of God, John was to describe the first thing the redeemed see and do when they get into heaven. That is the scene before us in chapters four and five and it is a glorious scene indeed.

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“**and one sat on the throne**” is the way John began to describe God. The “**one**” we have in our translations is not actually written by John. It is as if he had no word to use and simply wrote “**... sat upon the throne.**” Even with the Holy Spirit dictating to him the words to write, John was faced with the impossible. What human words can be used to describe God? There is no earthly, human language that can adequately describe heaven, much less the eternal, holy triune God. First, his earthly eyes were not capable of seeing the triune God. Second, his earthly mind was incapable of comprehending the triune God. And, third, his earthly language was not designed for or capable of describing what he saw. God is “**other than**” anything earthly, which is what the word “**holy**” means. Though it is a truth largely ignored today we are reminded of it in a stark way when we read these verses.

Even when John saw God upon His throne he could not describe a form, he could only describe a brilliance and he used terms related to the most beautiful things on earth. “**Like a jasper and a sardine stone**” is the first reference used by John. The jasper stone was the last stone identified in the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28:20). It was first in the foundation of the New Jerusalem and also the first in the wall of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18-19). It was a many-colored stone with purple predominating. Some identify it with a diamond. The “**sardine stone**” is the sixth stone in the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:20). Its color was a fiery red and it was the first stone in the breastplate of the high priest, representing the tribe of Reuben, the first-born of Jacob.

Then John said there was “**a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.**” While most rainbows have a spectrum of colors, here it is an emerald, green. Of course, we remember that God set a rainbow in the sky after the flood to confirm His promise that He would not again destroy the earth by flood (Genesis 9:13-15). Here it is likely used before the pouring out of God’s judgment to indicate that God will not use a flood to destroy mankind in the great tribulation. Green has always been a symbol of life and perhaps Christ was reminding John that He is the source of all life. Surely, each part of John’s description of what he saw is significant even if we are not able to fully discern that significance.

As we read this description in verse three of God upon His throne we are certainly reminded of our inability to see God and our lack of ability to comprehend God. No form, just brilliance of His presence constitutes John’s description of God upon His throne. This passage leaves unanswered the question, “**Will we see God in heaven?**” Rather than pretending to know more than we do or demanding answers to our questions, we should be content with what God has told us.

The next thing John began to describe was the first of several worship services in heaven (Rev. 5:11-14; 7:9-17). Each of these worship services would be completely different from what is commonly described as worship services in most churches. The worshippers are going to be seen prostrating themselves before God (4:10; 5:14) rather than energetically bouncing around waving their arms and clapping their hands. The focus of the worshippers will be the holiness of God and what He has done to deal with man’s sin. The attitude of the worshippers will be one of humility and unworthiness.

Notice what John describes as he draws a picture of the first thing facing him in heaven. “**And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.**”

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John saw twenty four individuals, **“elders,”** on seats around the throne. These **“elders”** represent all believers from Pentecost to the rapture, the entire church of the redeemed of God. Each of these **“elders”** is clothed in **“white raiment,”** which **“is the righteousness of Christ”** (2 Corinthians 5:21) covering their own sinfulness. **“On their heads were crowns (4735) stephanos of gold.”** These **“crowns”** were the type given to a victor in a contest. Paul had said that **“a crown of righteousness was laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me in that day,”** and he was speaking of this type of **“crown”** that is given to an overcomer, a victor (2 Timothy 4:8). These **“crowns”** were given to the **“overcomers”** to be used in a very special way (4:10) as John was to see.

Having described what he saw, John then described what he also heard: **“And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices.”** What he saw and heard were the signs of a storm of the approaching judgment!

Lightning and thunder precede the storm. What John saw was the coming storm of God’s anger and wrath, long restrained (2 Peter 3:8-11), but now coming upon all those upon the earth who had chosen to follow Satan in his rebellion against God. **“Voices,”** (5456) **phone**, indicated that it was not some haphazard, meaningless noise, but a pronouncement of judgment directed by the One upon the throne exercising His sovereign authority over all, both sinners, saints and Satan. The same voice of authority that had brought all things into existence through His creative powers, that had called out to sinners to come unto Him for forgiveness, now calls out in a thunderous, mighty sound of imminent and certain, fearful judgment to those who had rejected His calls of grace.

In addition, John said **“...and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”** The **“seven lamps, (2985) lampas or torches, of fire burning before the throne”** introduce one of the instruments of God’s judgment, i.e., fire. Whereas God had previously used water, in the final days He will use fire to consume and to cleanse this earth of its pollution and sin. These **“lamps”** are identified as **“the seven Spirits of God,”** i.e., the Holy Spirit whose previous ministry has been to convict men of sin and call them to saving faith following their repentance, but now whose ministry will be one of applying God’s judgment upon those who had rejected His previous calls to salvation.

John then proceeded to describe the setting: **“And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.”** **“A sea of glass”** denoted its appearance, not its constitution. The **“sea”** was before the throne emphasizing the **“otherness”** or **“set-apartness”** or holiness of God. In the Old Testament the priests, under the threat of death if they violated God’s instructions, had to wash themselves in a **“laver”** (Exodus 30:18-21) before they could enter the presence of God in the Tabernacle. Now, what John saw was a scene of purity and calmness, a **“sea”** before and around the throne of God so steady and peaceful that the worshippers could walk upon it. This was because they had been cleansed by the blood of the lamb and were clean in the eyes of God. In Hebrews 10:19-22 we read, **“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a high priest over the house**

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of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith”

John continued in his description of the scene before him: **“And round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within...”**

The statements here have led to many fanciful interpretations, but it is not hard to understand the passage. The word for **“beasts”** is **zowa** (2226) or **“living creatures.”** These are not **“beasts”** as we think of them, but angelic beings as you will see when we consider what they do. Each one represented one of the gospels. The **“lion,”** a regal creature, represented Matthew which emphasized Christ as King. The second creature, a **“calf,”** or **“oxen,”** a beast of burden which had been domesticated, represented the gospel of Mark. There Christ is pictured as the servant of man. The third creature, **“with the face of a man,”** represented the gospel of Luke which emphasized the humanity of Christ. The fourth creature, **“a flying eagle,”** represented the gospel of John which emphasized the deity of Christ.

Like the **“seraphims”** or angelic beings in Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6:2 each of these had **“six wings.”** The word **“seraphim”** means **“fiery ones,”** which probably applies here also. Their wings probably symbolize their maneuverability as well having something to cover themselves with in the presence of God (Isa. 6:2). These creatures each had many eyes symbolizing their ability to see everything and they continuously served God and praised Him, **“saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”** Their service focused upon the holy and unique character of God, of Christ.

Each of the gospels is about Christ with each one telling of His ministry and service in redeeming mankind. Each of them describe Him through different human eyes, but each one tells the same story about how God the Son incarnated Himself in human flesh and came to redeem helpless, hopeless, sinful man from his deserved damnation. Christ could do this only because He is God. Only God could pay the price that God demanded for our sinful rebellion against Him.

He is holy. He is other than anything or anyone else. When we worship Him He expects us to recognize and respect His holiness — not to attempt to approach Him as if He were common or someone out of our sinful culture. All through His holy Word God emphasized that He would not accept any worship that was polluted by the sinful culture of this world — nothing! When we get to heaven and worship Him we will recognize Him as holy and different, other than anyone or any thing else. Not only will we worship Him that way in heaven it is reasonable to do that here. He is holy! Approach Him that way today because that’s the way we will have to approach Him in heaven.