

# THE TRIBULATION THRONE

Revelation 4:1-11

Courtrooms are a very sobering place to me. The wood panelled walls, the banister separating spectators from litigants, jurors, lawyers and judge, the armed bailiff – all these impress upon me the seriousness of the courtroom. I have witnessed, firsthand, the power and authority of a judge, robed and seated above all delivering life changing judgments.

Revelation chapters 4 and 5 usher us into God's courtroom from which the most severe, earth shattering judgments will be delivered.

Please turn in your Bibles and read along with me as I read Revelation 4:1-11.

## Revelation 4:1-11 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> After this (these things) 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." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. <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. <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. <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, <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!"

<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."

Revelation chapters 4 and 5 usher us into God's courtroom which, I believe, is specifically setup to render divine judgment upon the earth during the Tribulation (Rev. 6-19). Revelation chapters 2 and 3 deal with the Church Age, that period of human history from Pentecost 33 A.D. to the Rapture of the Church (2014 + x years). Following the book's outline, Revelation chapters 2 and 3 constitute the second division of the book, *the things... that are* (1:19). Presently, we are living in this period of time; we are living in the Church Age prior to the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Chapters 4-5 transition us into the third division of the book of Revelation, *the things... that are to take place after this*. (1:19).

## The Throne of Things to Come (4:1)

The opening words of chapter 4 indicate chronological progression from the period of time addressed in chapters 2-3 to a period of time following, to things future. We know what follows in chapters 4-19 are future prophecies for two reasons. Consider the opening phrase of Revelation 4:1, *after these things*. *After* is the preposition *meta*; which shows sequence and refers to that which follows. *Tauta, these things*, refers to the things of chapters 2 and 3, the Church Age. All that follows, then, is chronological in that these events follow the Church Age. The second reason we know that chapters 4-19 refer to events that follow the Church Age is because Jesus says so in verse 1.

**Revelation 4:1 (ESV)**

<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 (these things)."*

Who was speaking to John?

John identifies the speaker as *the first voice, which I had heard... like a trumpet*.

Who had spoken previously to John with a voice like a trumpet? Turn back to chapter 1 beginning with verse 10.

**Revelation 1:10–13 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

<sup>12</sup> *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,*  
<sup>13</sup> *and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.*

Returning to Revelation 4:1, who was speaking to John? It was Jesus.

**Revelation 4:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> *After this (these things) 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 (these things)."*

In chapters 2 and 3, Jesus had spoken to John about the things *that are*; specifically, the church during the Church Age. Now, beginning with chapter 4, Jesus is showing John the things that must take place *after* the Church Age. Chapters 4 and 5 reveal God's courtroom from which the judgments of the Tribulation will be executed upon the earth. Chapters 6-19 reveal the outworking of those judgments during the seven year Tribulation.

**The Throne and the One Seated Upon It (4:2-3)****Revelation 4:2–3 (ESV)**

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

John says that he *was in the Spirit*. What does that mean? It means that John was seeing these things in a vision mediated by the Holy Spirit. In this vision he saw a throne and One seated on the throne. I believe a more accurate rendering of the Greek is that John saw that a throne *had been set* in heaven meaning that this throne had been set in place for the specific purpose of executing the Tribulation judgments.

God had already revealed the setting up of this throne to the Old Testament prophet Daniel. Turn to Daniel 7:9.

In verses 1-8, God reiterated the rise of four kingdoms on earth all of which would dominate His chosen people, the nation of Israel. Beginning in verse 9, God revealed that in the time of the fourth kingdom, God's throne would be set up in order to execute judgment upon one of the kings that will arise from the fourth kingdom and the fourth kingdom itself.

**Daniel 7:9–14 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> *"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

<sup>11</sup> *"I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. <sup>12</sup> As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.*

<sup>13</sup> *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

Now drop down to Daniel 7:21-22. The *little horn* is the Antichrist and the *saints of the Most High* are God's chosen people, the Jews.

**Daniel 7:21-22 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> *As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.*

Finally, look at Daniel 7:25-27 and again see that it was revealed to Daniel that in the latter days God would set up His courtroom and mete out His judgments during the Tribulation.

**Daniel 7:25-27 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> *He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. <sup>26</sup> But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. <sup>27</sup> And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'*

The courtroom John was privileged to see in 96 A.D. was the same courtroom Daniel was privileged to see in the 6th century B.C.!

John describes the One sitting upon the throne as having the appearance of jasper and carnelian. The Bible teaches us that it is God...

**1 Timothy 6:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> *who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

So these stones are used to portray something of God's eternal glory, awesome holiness and majesty.

John also describes a rainbow encircling the throne. The passage doesn't state this, but perhaps the rainbow around the throne serves as a reminder of the last time God brought judgment upon the whole earth in the form of the Great Flood. The rainbow is a sign of God's faithfulness to keep the covenants He has made with man. One purpose for the Tribulation is to fulfill for Israel the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

## **Those Around the Throne (4:4-8)**

### ***The Twenty Four Elders (4:4)***

**Revelation 4:4 (ESV)**

<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.*

Who are these twenty-four elders? Some believe them to be angels. Some believe they are redeemed representatives of all ages meaning they represent both Old Testament and New Testament saints. Some believe they are redeemed representatives of the church only, meaning that they represent New Testament, Church Age believers only.

That the twenty-four elders are representatives of the Church seems to best fit the description in this passage and other passages in Scripture. First, they are called *elders*, which, in the New Testament is a technical term for the leaders of the church. Second, they are clothed in *white garments* which are

promised to overcomers of the Church Age (Rev. 3:5; 19:8). They are wearing *golden crowns*. The *crowns* here are the *stephanos* crown – the victor's crown which is promised as a reward to be given New Testament believers (1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4). Finally, this is consistent with a pretribulational Rapture in that the Church will be in heaven at the time the Tribulation judgments begin on the earth. There are a few more reasons supporting the identity of the twenty-four elders as representatives of the Church; the full list is included in the footnotes.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Seven Spirits of God (4:5)**

**Revelation 4:5 (ESV)**

<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,*

Who are the *the seven spirits of God*? This is the Holy Spirit and this way of referring to the Holy Spirit comes from Isaiah 11:2. In modern English we would say, "the seven-fold Spirit", referring to the seven attributes of the Holy Spirit listed in Isaiah 11:2.

The flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder that are coming from the throne indicate that God is moving and about to act in judgment upon mankind's rebellion (cf. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

### **The Four Living Creatures (4:6-8)**

**Revelation 4:6-8 (ESV)**

<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!"*

What are the four living creatures?

This is not the first time the four living creatures are mentioned in the Bible. Turn with me to Ezekiel 1:4.

**Ezekiel 1:4-10 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> *As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. <sup>5</sup> And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, <sup>6</sup> but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. <sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> Under their*

<sup>1</sup>Hampton Keathley III lists the following reasons for identifying the 24 Elders as representatives of the raptured church (*Studies in Revelation*, pp 111-112.)

(1) David divided the priesthood into 24 orders. There were hundreds of priests, and obviously all could not serve at once, so each order was represented by one. By Scripture's own use, the number 24 has a representative character to it (cf. [1 Chron. 24; 25; Luke 1:5, 8, 9](#)). Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us his family was "of the first course of the four and twenty." So there was one high priest, 24 orders of priests with 24 who served as representatives of the whole.

(2) In the New Testament believers are a spiritual house, a holy and a royal priesthood ([1 Pet. 2:5, 9](#)). So the elders could easily be functioning as representatives of the church.

(3) [Revelation 5:11](#) clearly distinguishes the elders from both the four living creatures and the many angels.

(4) They are called "elders" which is the Greek word *presbuteros*. In the New Testament this is virtually a technical term for officers and leaders in the church of Jesus Christ.

(5) They are seen with golden crowns. "Crowns" is *stefanos*, the victor's crown and the same term used throughout the New Testament for the rewards given to New Testament believers ([1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4](#)).

(6) They are clothed in white raiment. In Scripture this is consistently associated with and promised to the believer, the overcomer. This is terminology of the saints not angels ([Rev. 3:4-5; 19:8](#)).

(7) A share in Christ's throne or rule is promised to believers by our Lord in [Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21](#).

(8) Finally, only the church is raptured before the events beginning in chapter 6 (the Tribulation) and is in heaven, glorified, and eligible for reward. Israel or Old Testament believers could not be represented here until after Daniel's 70th week. Israel's resurrection and rewards come then, "after the time of distress such as never occurred ..." which is undoubtedly a reference to the Great Tribulation ([Dan. 12:1-2](#)).

wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: <sup>9</sup> their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. <sup>10</sup> As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel 10 identifies these four living creatures as *cherubim*. These creatures are angels, specifically, they are cherubim serving at the throne of God.

Both Ezekiel 10 and Revelation 4 report that the four living creatures are full of eyes in front and back. These eyes signify unceasing vigilance. The four living creatures, in this sense, are God's "eyes" overseeing God's creation. Like a teacher who has "eyes in the back of her head", nothing can be hidden from the four living creatures as they oversee God's affairs in the world.

What is the meaning of the four faces: the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle?

As you can imagine, there are a variety of explanations. The most plausible to me is that the lion, ox, man and eagle represent the whole of animate creation perhaps representing what is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in God's creation. What we can know for certain is that they represent the highest order of angelic beings and that they lead in worship and in the implementation of God's judgment (Rev. 6:1-7; 15:7).

### The Worship Rendered At The Throne (4:8-11)

Revelation 4:8-11 (ESV)

<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!"*

<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."*

The worship of the four living creatures exalts God's holiness, His sovereignty and His eternity.

The worship of the twenty-four elders exalts God as Creator and the sole motivation for creation.

### REFLECTIONS

- *The value of the Book of Revelation is not that it provides a lot of new information, but rather that it takes the scattered Old Testament prophecies and puts them in chronological order so that the sequence of events may be determined.*

*However, the material found in the last two chapters is totally new material which describes the Eternal Order. The Old Testament prophets never foresaw anything beyond the Messianic Kingdom. Indeed, the Kingdom was the high point of Old Testament prophecy and no prophet ever saw anything beyond that. But the Eternal Order is the high point of New Testament prophecy, and Revelation 21 and 22 provide new information, as they describe the Eternal Order.<sup>2</sup>*

- Do you wholeheartedly worship God as Creator? Or do you have doubts? It's time for you to settle this issue; not by blind faith, but by an informed faith. Rather than disproving God as Creator, both science and philosophy are increasingly supporting the truth that God is the Creator. Here are helpful resources to become informed: *Answers in Genesis* ([answersingenesis.org](http://answersingenesis.org)); *Institute for Creation Research* ([icr.org](http://icr.org)); *Logos Research Associates* ([logosresearchassociates.org](http://logosresearchassociates.org)) and *Reasonable Faith* ([reasonablefaith.org](http://reasonablefaith.org)).

<sup>2</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: a Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 10-11.