

John begins the next stage of his vision as he is caught up to heaven in the spirit to witness the continuous worship by those in God's presence. He sees God on His throne, surrounded by 24 elders and other heavenly beings that worship and give glory to God night and day.

¹ After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

"After this I looked" - After the letters to the seven churches had been dictated, the next step in the vision is revealed to John.

"and, behold, a door was opened in heaven" - It's hard to imagine what John was seeing, but this was apparently an opening in the sky through which he could see into the realm beyond.

"and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me" - This "first voice" is apparently the voice of Christ which John heard in Rev. 1:10-20. We saw then that a voice like a trumpet means that it was loud and distinct like a trumpet.

"which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter" - Some have associated this invitation to "come up hither" with the rapture of the church but most likely it is merely an invitation for John to see the things that "must be hereafter" (future events). Christ may have been merely saying "I have some things to show you and you can't see them from down there" and thus marks a transition between the vision being on earth to being in heaven. This chapter begins the third division of the book of Revelation that John has been instructed to write (**Rev. 1:19** "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter").

² And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. ³ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

"And immediately I was in the spirit" - The Lord did not need a "door opened in heaven" to transport John, so likely seeing the door was to help John understand that the things he was about to witness were happening in heaven. John says he was "immediately" in the spirit; he did not experience himself passing through the door into heaven but was instantly transported there. He also says he was "in the spirit," meaning that he wasn't physically in heaven but under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God was controlling John's senses so that he saw, heard, smelled, etc. exactly what the Lord wanted him to.

"and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne" - The first thing that catches John's attention upon his arrival is God the Father sitting on His throne. John does not attempt to name the One sitting on the throne because it is obvious Who it is.

"And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone" - The "jasper" stone is quite likely a diamond for John describes jasper being "clear as crystal" later in Revelation (Rev. 21:11). The sardine stone is named after the city of Sardis where it was discovered and is a fiery red stone. These stones reflect two characteristics of God: the clear and shiny diamond speaks of God's holiness and purity while the ruby red sardine stone speaks of His justice and wrath.

"and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" - A "rainbow" may be John's best attempt at a description of the halo of color surrounding the throne, conveying the shape and radiance rather than the colors. Instead of all the colors of the rainbow John describes this rainbow as having an emerald color, perhaps having varying shades of that color. Commentators suggest that the color represents God's mercy. God gave the human race a rainbow as a reminder of His mercy and promise to never again destroy the world with a flood.

Notice that John never describes a form or figure of what God Himself looked like. Apparently the form of God was so obscured by the brightness of His glory that John could only describe the shine and halo of colors that he saw.

⁴ 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.

"And round about the throne were four and twenty seats [thronos: thrones]" - Next, John notices 24 "seats" (thrones) surrounding God's throne. They are apparently laid out in a circle or perhaps a semi-circle with God's throne at the center. These are lesser thrones for, as we will see shortly, the occupants of these thrones submit and humble themselves before God the Father.

"and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting" - Although commentators debate on whether these 24 elders are glorified human beings or angelic beings, the evidence seems to support the idea that these are glorified human beings. Their clothing suggests they are redeemed human beings and in the next chapter they praise Christ for redeeming them to God by His own blood out of every nation and kindred on earth (Rev. 5:9).

Why 24? This number is also debated, but it seems likely that 12 elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the other 12 represent the 12 apostles. However, this assessment is speculation since John doesn't identify them for us.

"clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold" - The white raiment suggests the righteousness of Christ given to redeemed saints (Rev. 19:7-8 "⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. ⁸ And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.").

The crowns reflect the authority that Christ promises to His redeemed to rule and reign with Him (**Rev. 20:6** "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.").

⁵ And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

“And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices” - The lightnings, thunderings and voices foreshadow God’s wrath on the inhabitants of the earth that will be soon poured out in upcoming chapters. These manifestations of God’s holiness and wrath against sin is reminiscent of the scene in Exodus 19 when the children of Israel are encamped at Mt. Sinai in preparation for the giving of the Law. They were forbidden to set foot on the mountain except for Moses and certain representatives of the 12 tribes. **Ex. 19:16** *“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.”*

“and there were seven lamps [torches] of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” - The Greek word for “lamps” is not the same as is used for the “candlesticks” back in Rev. 1:12, 13, and 20. Here the emphasis is on the fire and not the holder, if there was one. It may be that John saw seven pillars of fire without any instrument holding the fuel. John tells us that the fire was the seven Spirits of God (the Holy Spirit). Perhaps there is an association with the “pillar of fire by night” that indicated the presence of God to Israel in the OT and/or the “tongues of fire” on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. We saw back in Rev. 1:4 that the “seven Spirits of God” represented the fullness of the Holy Spirit and His ministry. The Holy Spirit is perpetually in the presence of God the Father.

⁶ 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. ⁷ 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 before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal” - The word “sea” can be used to describe any body of water. A large brazen basin of water was made for Solomon’s temple while it was being built and this basin was called a “sea” (1 Kings 7:23). Apparently the area around God’s throne appeared to John to have a shiny transparent surface similar to the surface of a pool of water, but it was made of glass and not water. The description “like unto crystal” probably refers to its transparency since in Rev. 21:11 and 22:1 John describes both the New Jerusalem and the river of the water of life as being “clear as crystal.”

“and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts [living creatures] full of eyes before and behind” - John sees four creatures moving about the throne area. He recognizes that they are not inanimate objects but are alive; they are not men so he describes them with the only terminology he has left: beasts (living creatures). Most commentators believe these are angelic being and are the same ones that Ezekiel saw in his first vision: **Ezek. 1:5, 10** *“⁵ Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. . . . ¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.”* Ezekiel does not mention the multitude of eyes, however. The fact that these angels are covered in eyes indicates their alertness and watchfulness as they minister before God.

“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” - There are many theories about the number of beasts and what each one looked like. Some think the four beasts represent certain characteristics of Christ as presented by each of the four gospels. Others attempt to associate the four beasts with groups of the tribes of Israel, the elements, four personalities of ministers, and other such silly ideas. The theory that makes the most sense to me and seems to fit the context here is that the four beasts represent the categories of creation and how they are all under God’s sovereignty. The lion represents the wild animals, the calf represents domesticated animals, the beast with the face of a man represents mankind, and the eagle represents birds. The response of the 24 elders to the worship initiated by the four beasts seems to support this interpretation (v. 11).

⁸ And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

“And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within” - Each of the beasts had six wings and each wing was full of eyes on both the top and the underside.

“and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” - The job of these four beasts is apparently to give constant praise and glory to God. The fact that they declare God to be holy 3 times could imply the Trinity, however most likely it is because God is so holy that saying it once does not do Him justice. They also declare His eternal nature.

⁹ And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, ¹⁰ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

“And when those beasts give glory and honour...The four and twenty elders fall down before him...and worship him” - When the 24 elders hear the beasts praising God, they cannot help themselves and so join in the worship and praise of their God.

“and cast their crowns before the throne” - In a further act of submission they cast their crowns before the throne of God, acknowledging that He was the One Who gave them their crowns.

“saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” - The 24 elders give praise to God and acknowledge His worthiness of receiving glory, honor and power from His creation because He is the One Who created it. God created all things and so He is free and just to do whatever He wants with it. We humans sometimes want to talk about our “rights” as if God has to give us a certain amount of respect. However, the exact opposite is true. The human race as a whole is in rebellion against God and He would be perfectly just to destroy us and yet He sent His Son to redeem us.

Rom. 9:20-21 *“²⁰ Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? ²¹ Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”*