

# And There Before Me was a Throne in Heaven

## 4: 1-11

**DIG:** Who is the figure on the throne? What is He like? Who are the twenty-four elders? What will they wear? What stones describe the appearance of the one on the throne? How does John envision the four living creatures throbbing with the eternal power of God? What is the reaction of the twenty-four elders to the praise and worship given by the four living creatures? What response does the central figure elicit? Why? What does this say about who ELOHIM is and how He relates to His creation? Was John's heavenly ascent a physical or a spiritual one?

**REFLECT:** Imagine yourself in this scene. What do you see? Hear? Feel? What impresses you about the LORD? How might this vision of God enhance your worship life? Your everyday life? Do you still see Him on the throne for you? Can you trust Him and bow down and worship Him? Is He worthy? Is He still in charge? Think about how you can refocus your worship from yourself and your surroundings to ADONAI and His glory.

There seems to be an uncommon attraction today among both believers and unbelievers about the afterlife. Books on the afterlife, near-death experiences, angels or demons (especially vampires and werewolves) are selling like there is no tomorrow. But in contrast to these, the Bible records of two people who actually took a trip to **heaven**. The Rabbi Sha'ul wrote of being transported to **the third heaven**, but he was forbidden to speak about what he saw there (**Second Corinthians 12:4**).

The apostle **John** also had the privilege of visiting **heaven**. However, unlike Paul, **John** was permitted to go into great detail about what he saw there in **chapters 4 and 5**. In these two chapters **he** recorded the second vision that **he** saw, the first being that of the glorified **Messiah** in **1:12-17**. The Bible refers to **heaven** more than five hundred times, and others such as Rabbi Sha'ul (**Second Corinthians 12**) and **Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1)**, wrote descriptions of it. Yet **John's** description is the most complete and informative in the entire Bible. Escorted by **Yochanan, the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23)**, we are carried beyond this mundane world to the realities of **heaven**.

After these things I looked and there before me was a door standing open in heaven (4:1a). The phrase **after these things**, or *meta tauta*, is used throughout the book to note the beginning of a new vision (7:9, 15:5, 18:1 and 19:1). So now the scene shifts from matters concerning the Church on earth to a dramatic scene in **heaven**, focusing on **the throne of God**. **Chapters 4 and 5**, then, form the prologue to the future events like the Great Tribulation, the millennial Kingdom and the Eternal State (see Fq - **The Eternal State**) that unfold in **Chapters 6 through 22**. In order to spare His bride from **the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world** (3:10), or the outpouring of wrath before **Messiah** returns, the Church will be raptured (see By - **The Rapture of the Church**), before the Great Tribulation (described in detail in **Chapters 6-19**) begins.

Even though **Christ** warned **John** in advance that **he** would see things to come, nothing could have prepared **him** for what **he** experienced that day. As **Yochanan** looked, to his amazement, **he** saw an **open door** (**Ezekiel 1:1** and **Acts 7:56**) that allowed **him** to enter the third **heaven** and the very **throne** room of **God**. The first **heaven** is the earth's atmosphere and the second **heaven** is the universe. **Yeshua**, ascended to **heaven** after **His** resurrection and **He** has been seated at the **right hand of ADONAI** ever since (**John 14:2-3; Acts 1:9-11, 3:20-21, 7:55-56; Romans 10:6; Colossians 3:1** and **First Thessalonians 4:16**). As a result of passing through this **open door**, **heaven** became **John's** vantage point for most of the remainder of the book.<sup>153</sup>

After becoming aware of the **open door**, the first **voice John heard** was the familiar **voice like** the sound of a **trumpet** that had spoken to **him** in his **first vision** (1:10). As stated earlier, this was the **voice of the Lord**. **His** voice sounded like a **trumpet** because of its commanding, authoritative quality. Then **Jesus** specifically ordered **John** to: **Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things** (4:1b). It is very important to understand that **John**, who is a believer, is in **heaven** during **chapters 4 to 22**, and not on the earth. In the book two key phrases will be found. One is **after these things**, and the other is simply **after this**. The first phrase, **after these things**, is *chronological*. What is described after this phrase follows chronologically the events found in the previous context. The second phrase, **after this**, merely refers to the next thing **John** saw and does not necessarily imply chronology. In other words, the next vision **John** saw may chronologically follow the previous context, or **he** may be describing something contemporary with it.<sup>154</sup>

**Yochanan** was not physically taken to **heaven**, but only saw it in a vision is clear from his statement, **at once I was in spirit**. In the *Greek* text the word "the" is not there. It simply says: **I was in spirit**, not **the Holy Sprit**, but in the realm of **spirit** (1:10). **There before him** was a real, tangible **throne in heaven with ADONAI, God the Father**, sitting on it (4:2). **He** rules with sovereignty (**Psalm 11:4-5, 103:19; Isaiah 66:1**) from **His Temple** in

heaven (7:15, 11:19, 14:15-17, 15:6-8 and 16:17). He does not change, and is in complete control of the universe. The random chance of evolution does not rule the universe. Instead, the sovereign, omnipotent **Creator** sits on **His throne** and governs. The **throne of God** is central to this book, indeed, to the whole Bible. For the word **throne** appears 45 times in this book alone, while occurring only 15 other times in the entire Bible.

*He is ELOHIM, the enthroned One. When we come before the One who is sitting on the throne in all of His glory and honor and power, and we see Him face to face, we will fall down before Him and worship Him. For who can stand before ADONAI our God?*

John does not name the One sitting on the throne, but it is clear that He is ADONAI. Chapter 4 describes **YHVH the Father** and Chapter 5 describes **God the Son**. This is the One Isaiah saw in his vision: **I saw God seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the Temple (Isaiah 6:1)**. The prophet Micaiah also saw Him there: **I saw ADONAI sitting on His throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on His right and on His left (First Kings 22:19)**. Dani'el also saw a vision of this heavenly throne (Dani'el 7:9-10), but perhaps the most detailed description of ADONAI on His throne is given to us by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:26-28). The word **sitting** is in the present tense. He has never stopped sitting on the throne.

In trying to describe the indescribable John wrote: **And the One who sat there had the appearance of sardis (NKJ) and jasper**. The sardis and the jasper were the first and the last stones on the breastpiece of the high priest (see my commentary on **Exodus Ga - Fashion a Breastpiece for Making Decisions**). The sardis was a fiery blood red stone found near **Sardis (3:1-6)**, for which the city was named, and represented Isra'el's first-born Reuben. The jasper stone is described in **21:11** as **crystal clear** like a diamond, representing Benjamin, which means *son of my right hand*. So the two stones picture **Jesus**, the first and only **Son of God**, who sits at **the Father's right hand**. In addition, **a rainbow**, with green as its dominant color **resembling an emerald, encircled the throne (4:3)**. The stones brilliantly intensify the light around the throne by reflecting the **unapproachable light**, or glory, surrounding ADONAI Himself (**Second Timothy 6:16; Psalm 104:2**).

**A rainbow, resembling an emerald, or green appearance, encircled the throne**. The rainbow is very important. The Bible refers to it only four times. The first was a sign after the Flood that **God** would never destroy the world again in that manner (see my commentary on **Genesis Da - Never Again Will There Be a Flood to Destroy the Earth**). Thus, the rainbow speaks of the **LORD's** mercy toward mankind even in the midst of judgment. The second is found in **Ezekiel's** vision where he saw ADONAI with a **brilliant light** surrounding Him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the

radiance around Him (Ezekiel 1:28). The third and fourth occasions are found here and in 10:1. Evidently the rainbow perpetually surrounds the throne of ADONAI, or at least at such times (as in Noah's day, Ezekiel's day and John's day) when ELOHIM's judgments are being visited upon the earth. The rainbow, as it were, continually points to the remnant of believers in the midst of an ungodly world ripe for judgment, and that He, as the God of all grace (First Peter 5:10) will in wrath remember mercy (Habakkuk 3:2).<sup>155</sup>

John's gaze moved from God the Father as the center of attention to others in the throne room. Surrounding the throne of God were twenty-four lesser thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders (4:4) who are in heaven during the entire Great Tribulation period (5:5, 7:13, 11:16, 14:3, 19:4). They are not angels (4:10, 5:8 and 11, 7:11); they are not the 144,000 (14:3); and they are not the great multitude (7:13-14). The number twenty-four occurs six times in the TaNaKh. In every case, it is associated with the priests of Isra'el (1 Chron 24). The word elders is used sixty-seven times in the New Covenant and they were also the key leaders and representatives there. Messiah said to the church in Laodicea: To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne (3:21). Thus, just as the priests represented all of Isra'el, these twenty-four elders, will surround the throne of God as representatives of a nation of kings and priests, and will represent all overcomers from Shavu'ot to the Rapture (4:8-9).<sup>156</sup>

They were dressed in white, as are the faithful in heaven. Jesus had said to the church in Sardis: He who overcomes will be dressed in white (3:5, also see 3:18, 7:9 and 19:8). Being dressed in white symbolizes Christ's righteousness transferred to believers at salvation. In addition, the elders, who represent all believers, had crowns of gold on their heads (4:4). These are the crowns (James 1:12; Second Timothy 4:8; Second Corinthians 5:10; First Peter 5:1-4; First Thessalonians 2:19-20) of those who have overcome the world through Messiah and are given to believers at the bema seat of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:10). The crowns indicate that the twenty-four elders had been judged and rewarded. It is very important to note that the Bride of Christ (19:6-9) will be dressed in white, will have received their crowns and begun their reign with Him in heaven before the Great Tribulation begins.

After the elders, Yochanan's attention returned to God the Father as thunder boomed and lightning flashed from the throne of God (4:5a). John saw a preview of the Lord's wrath about to be hurled on a sinful world in Chapters 6-19. Flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder are related with ADONAI's presence (Exodus 19:16). But they are also related with ELOHIM's judgment during the Great Tribulation. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightening and an earthquake (8:5).

Again, **God's Temple in heaven was opened, and within it came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm (11:19).** And again, when the seventh angel pours out his bowl of wrath there will be **flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake (16:18).**

**The Holy Spirit is also seen before the throne as seven blazing lamps, which are the seven Spirits of God (4:5b).** We have already seen the symbolism of the **seven** to represent the fullness of **ADONAI'S Spirit (1:4 and 3:1).** These are best understood as a representation of the **Ruach HaKodesh** in a sevenfold way rather than seven individual spirits. Normally **the Holy Spirit** cannot be seen unless embodied in some way. When **the Spirit of God** descended on **Christ** at His baptism, the people saw a **dove** descending. If it had not been for **the dove**, they would not have been able to see **the Holy Spirit.** In a similar way on the Festival of Shavu'ot, the coming of **the Ruach** would not have been visible if it had not been for the **tongues of fire (Acts 2:3).** **The seven blazing lamps** are therefore the means by which we are informed of **His** presence. **He** is continually ready to serve; **He** never ceases to minister. The number **seven** is characteristic of the perfection of **the Holy Spirit** and is in keeping with the revelation of **Isaiah 11:2-3.** Each of the three **Persons of the Trinity** are present at **the throne**, each in **His** particular form of revelation.<sup>157</sup>

**Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal (4:6a).** There will be no **bronze basin** in the true Tabernacle in heaven. **The bronze basin**, the only piece of furniture in the Tabernacle without any specific size dimensions (**Exodus 30:17-21**), will become a **sea of glass**, because at that time we will no longer need to be cleansed of our sin. **John** saw this vast **pavement of glass**, shining brilliantly as crystal. When **Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders of Isra'el** saw **God**, under **His feet** was something like a **pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself (Exodus 24:10).** **Ezekiel** saw the same thing (**Ezekiel 1:22**). Later, **John** will see this same **sea of glass**, but then it will be **mixed with fire.** Before the second half of the **Great Tribulation**, **John** will see a vision of victorious martyrs standing on it, singing the song of **Moses** and the song of **the Lamb.** They will be holding harps, and worshipping **God (15:2-3).**<sup>158</sup> So the **sea of glass** will be **mixed with** the judgment of those in rebellion against **Jesus** before we see it again.

**In the center nearest to the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back (4:6b).** **Ezekiel** gives us a detailed description of these incredible **creatures** and calls them **cherubim (Ezekiel 1:4-25).** They are an exalted order of angels frequently associated in the Bible with **God's** holy power (**First Samuel 4:4; Second Samuel 6:2, 22:11; Psalm 80:1, 99:1; Isaiah 37:16**). **Ezekiel's** description of these **cherubim** notes that each one had four different facial features (**1:10 and 10:14**). However, from **John's** vantage point **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 (4:7). These four cherubim, who are reflected in the four standards in the camp of Isra'el (see my commentary on **Exodus Ep - The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el**), will play an important role in coming judgments of the Great Tribulation. They are there at the beginning as **one of the four living creatures** calls on the rider of the white horse to begin his destruction (6:1-2). Another will announce economic disaster upon the earth (6:6), while another will give **seven golden bowls of wrath to seven angels** (15:7).

The scene before the throne of **God the Father** culminates in a crescendo of praise. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around them, **even under their wings**. They will praise **God** continually. **Day and night they never stop saying: Holy, holy, holy is ADONAI, the LORD of heaven's armies, the One who was, and is, and who is coming** (Revelation 4:8 CJB, and also see **Isaiah 6:2-3**)!

**Chapters 4 and 5** contain five great hymns of praise, where the size of the heavenly choir gradually swells. The hymns of praise begin here with the four cherubim as a quartet. Then their worship triggers a response from **the twenty-four elders**. **Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives for ever and ever** (4:9-10a). Later all the other angels add their voices (5:11). Finally, **every creature** in the universe joins in a mighty climax of praise to **ADONAI**.

Amazingly, after they **fall down before ADONAI the twenty-four elders lay their crowns before the throne**. Suddenly the beautiful crowns with which they had been rewarded for faithful service will somehow pale into insignificance and become meaningless in **His** presence. They will realize that **their** faithfulness has been made possible by **His** faithfulness. They have nothing that was not given to them; they had accomplished only what **He** had willed. All is of **God**. As a result, **their crowns** will really not be **their** own, and they must return them to Him.

They cry out: **You are worthy (axios), ADONAI Eloheinu, to receive the glory and the honor and the power** (the definite article is present in the Greek), **for You created all things (Genesis 1:1), and by Your will they were created and have their being** (4:10b-11). Worthiness stands out as a major theme in **Chapters 4 and 5**. The Greek word *axios* means *deserving*. **God the Father is worthy or fit to receive glory and honor and power because He is the Creator**. Before **YHVH** can be truly known as **Redeemer**, **He** must first be believed and acknowledged as **Creator**. It is probable that **their** action is in turn followed by

millions of redeemed men and women whom the elders represent, who also **fall down** in adoration before **the One on the throne**.<sup>159</sup>

The imagination is a wonderful tool **God** has given us. With it, we can envision possible paths we might take in our lives. When faced with a challenging task, we use our imaginations to plan how we will proceed. Our imaginations are also vital for our sense of play - from the games of "make believe" we played as little children to the complex puzzles and mind-teasers we delight in solving as adults. Ever think your imagination could help you with prayer?

This section of Scripture gives you a great opportunity to experiment with our imagination. As you pray, close your eyes and picture the scene described here. Imagine yourself looking through an **open door** that leads to **the throne** of **ADONAI Eloheinu (CJB)**. **His** light shines brilliantly. Everything is made of precious jewels and costly fabrics. The beauty is overwhelming. Picture **the twenty-four elders, the seven spirits of God and the four living creatures** surrounding **the throne** with voices raised in majestic praise.

As you enter into **God's throne** room, imagine yourself joining in the heavenly praise and worship. Recount **the LORD's** attributes one by one and praise **Him** for each of them. Praise **Him** for **His** majesty and glory, for **His** justice and holiness, and for **His** love and compassion. Praise **Him** for every aspect of **His** creation as well. Remember the blessing **He** has given you and your family and praise **Him** for each one. Given all eternity, we will not exhaust the reasons to praise **Him**.

When you pray today, be sure to use your natural gift of imagination to aide you. Praying like this has the power to lift us from a limited, natural set of expectations into an encounter with **the LORD** on a spiritual plane that can transform our hearts and fill us with peace. Let **God** reveal His mind to you. As you do, your heart will soften, and His love will begin to move you.

*Gracious **Father**, you live in glorious light. Holy is Your name. All praise and thanksgiving belong to You, **ELOHIM!** We bow down before you, for You are worthy.*<sup>160</sup>