

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: The plan of eternity

Chapter 4



Introduction to Chapter 4

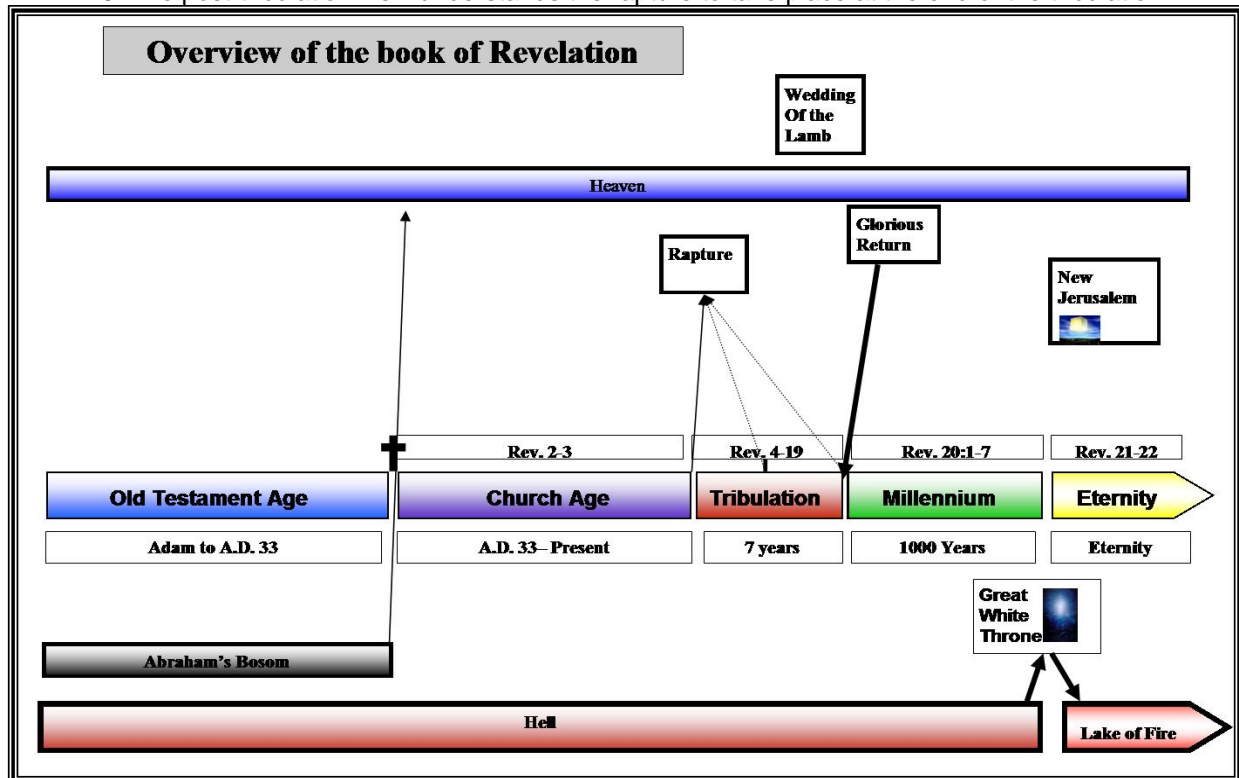
This chapter begins a new phase in the book of Revelation. The church plays a prominent role in the first three chapters, mentioned over 18 times. After chapter 3, the church is not referred to again until chapter 22 verse 16. In chapter 4, John the Apostle, called up to heaven, reports to the reader what he sees and hears. John is the eyes and ears of the believer.

Chapter 4 presents the reader with the throne of God and events taking place in Heaven. This begins a chain of events leading to the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who Revelation 19 pictures as conquering King. From chapter 4, we see God's throne and the events surrounding it. Chapter 5 continues from 4, and takes the reader to the throne itself and the opening of a scroll with seven seals. The opening of this scroll puts events into motion leading to the return of Christ in chapter 19.

Throughout Revelation, John is reporting to the reader what he sees and hears. John told to write what he sees; lets the reader see events through his eyes and ears. In Chapter 4, John is caught up to a scene taking place in heaven. Although not mentioned explicitly, John's call up to heaven by a voice sounding like a trumpet, parallels events in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, John represents a picture of the rapture. In the rapture, the church is "caught up" to the presence of Christ with a shout from Christ and the call of God's trumpet.

There are three main views on the timing of the event known as the rapture;

1. The pre-tribulation view understands the rapture to take place before the seven-year tribulation period.
2. The mid-tribulation view understands the rapture to take place at the middle part of the tribulation.
3. The post-tribulation view understands the rapture to take place at the end of the tribulation.



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The timing of the rapture is hinged to the tribulation. Following the tribulation is the "Glorious return of Christ". (Matthew 24:29)

The tribulation is a seven-year period of God's judgment and wrath on the earth. This period known as *Daniel's 70th week* (Daniel 9:27), *the time of Jacob's trouble* (Jeremiah 30:7) and *the day of the Lord* (Isaiah 13:6-9, Jeremiah 46:10, Joel 2:1, Amos 5:18-20, Zechariah 14:1) is a period of testing (Rev. 3:10). This tribulation period coming on the earth is unparalleled, there was never a time like it nor, will there ever be a time like it again (Daniel 12:1, Jeremiah 30:7, Matthew 24:21). Jesus unveils (Revelation) events taking place in this tribulation period, in Revelation chapters 6 to 19.

These notes are from a *pre-tribulation*¹, *pre-millennium*² viewpoint. From this view, the events taking place on earth, the tribulation, exclude the believing Church, which is promised to be preserved from the "Hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" (Rev. 3:10). During the tribulation period, God deals with Israel and the world. At the conclusion of this period, Israel acknowledges Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah, and they call out to him. Christ then returns with the armies of heaven, including the raptured saints to establish the millennial kingdom. (Matthew 23:37-39, Zechariah 12:9-10)

The distinction between Israel and the church is very important in understanding Bible prophecy, especially in understanding the book of Revelation. The church after chapter 3 is not mentioned again until chapter 22. However, Israel, as a nation and a people are in clear view, during this period in Revelation. In chapter 7 and 14, we see 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel. In Chapter 11, we see the Temple and two witnesses' prophecy in Jerusalem. Chapters 16, and 19 the armies of the earth gather north of Jerusalem in the area known as Megiddo. In the tribulation, God deals with Israel and not the church. In chapters 4 and 5, we see the church in Heaven, surrounding the throne praising God. On earth God's judgment and wrath is poured out on sin, causing many to find Christ in the midst of the Earth's trial. (Revelation 6:9, 7:14-17, 13:10, 15:2)

John caught up to Heaven

Revelation 4

1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." **Revelation 4:1**

After these things... meta*Meta tauta Tauta*, John now begins to describe events following his letter to the seven churches. John was in the process of writing a letter to the seven churches in Asia, Jesus standing in the middle of seven candlesticks is dictating the letter to John. Following the completion of the letters, chapter 4 takes place. In Revelation 1:19, Jesus establishes the structure of the book of Revelation.

"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. **Revelation 1:19**

Christ established a three-fold time structure to the book, past, present and future. The *things which you have seen*, is what took place in the beginning of the first chapter. The *things which are*, is the present age the church age covered in the 2nd and 3^d chapters. *The things which take place after this*, refer to the time following the church age, the future.

Revelation chapters 6 to 19 detail events taking place in heaven and on earth during the tribulation period. John is in the position of a reporter, writing down what he hears and sees allowing the reader participate in the same events.

I looked. One Greek word used throughout Revelation is *eiōw Eido*, meaning to perceive with the eyes. John refers time and time again to what he "Saw". John is not speaking in metaphor but in reality. He is reporting to the reader what he actually sees. John actually saw a door standing open in heaven.

Heaven. This is not outer space, or just the clouds but the place of God's presence. According to Paul, the believer who dies goes right to Heaven. (Phil 1:23) John is taken into Heaven to witness a

¹ Pre-tribulation is the understanding the rapture takes place before the seven-year tribulation period.

² Pre-millennium is the understanding of a literal millennium where Christ reigns over the Earth from Jerusalem as Messiah and King. He rules from David's throne, and his servants the saints are appointed to positions of authority. (Revelation 20:1-7, Matthew 19:38-39, Daniel 7:13-14,27,)

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future event.

Come up here. John now hears the voice like a trumpet calling him, this is the same voice which identified itself as “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1;10-13). This is Jesus, telling John to come up into heaven. Similarities between the John’s call into Heaven and the rapture are striking when we compare the two.

Rapture <i>αἴραζω Harpazo</i> I Thes. 4:13-18	John’s caught up
At the end of Church age	At the end of the letters to the churches
Shout from Jesus to believers	Jesus calls John up
Trumpet of God	Voice like a trumpet
Believers on earth	John on earth
Immediate translation	Immediately John was in the Spirit
Believers taken into the Lord’s presence	John taken into the Lord’s presence

After this. Jesus calling John into Heaven explains to John the things “Must take place. The words here are nearly identical to the words used in Revelation 1;19, establishing the three part division in Revelation.

God’s Throne in Heaven

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.
 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. **Revelation 4:2-3**

In the Spirit.. John on the island of Patmos is taken to Heaven, in the Spirit. Paul explains a similar experience in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows-such a one was caught up to the third heaven.
 3 And I know such a man-whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows
 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.
2 Corinthians 12:2-4

Paul is not sure if his body was there or just his spirit. The word Paul uses for being “Caught Up” is the same word used to describe the rapture in I Thes. 4:13-18. John like Paul is caught up into the third heaven. The first heaven is the sky, the second heaven, space beyond the atmosphere and the third is the presence of the Lord. Ezekiel like Paul and John also experienced being “in the spirit” and seeing visions from God and writing about what he saw. (Ezekiel 8:3, 37:1)

Throne set in heaven.. John is immediately ushered to the center of Heaven, and to the throne of God. John then describes the scene for his reader. John, literally taken to the throne of God in Heaven describes what he sees. Daniel saw the “Ancient of days” on his throne and one like the “Son of man” approach the throne(Daniel 7:9,13), Ezekiel saw “Glory of the Lord” as a glorified man, seated on His throne (Ezekiel 1:27) and Isaiah also so the Lord seated on his throne (Isaiah 6:1), in descriptions similar to John’s.

One sat. John sees a vision of God sitting on his throne. There is a debate whether this is Father or the Son sitting on the throne. The dilemma here is the one seated on the throne is described as Creator of all things which is the work ascribed to Christ. (John 1:1-3, Col. 1;16-17, Heb 1;2-3,10-12, 3:3,4, Rev. 4;11).



The one seated on throne is distinguished from the Lamb in chapter 5, who is Christ, because he is the only one able to open the scroll.

However, in Revelation 22:1,3 both the Lamb and God the Father are pictured as being on the throne of God.

Jasper.. The one who sits on the throne is described as having the appearance of Jasper. In the Old Testament, the High Priest would wear a breastplate with 12 stones. Each of the 12 stones represented one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The priest would bear Israel on his chest as he ministered before God in the Temple. (Exodus 28:15-20) Jasper was the last stone of the 12, and took on shades of different color. The Jasper stone referenced here is clear like crystal.(Rev 21;11) Jasper would represent the tribe of Benjamin. The crystal clear represent the purity and holiness of God.

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Sardius.. Sardius was the first stone on the breastplate and represented the tribe of Reuben. Sardius was a red stone, like a ruby or carnelian. This would have represented the redemption of humanity by the blood of Christ. Here we see the last stone and the first stone of the Jewish Priesthood pictured on the throne of God.

Revelation chapter 1, Christ is also described in terms reminiscent of Israel's High Priest. Hebrews (Heb. 9:11,25 10:11,25) describes Christ as our High Priest, who is at the right hand of God the Father. Here we see Christ in the very role as High Priest seated on the throne.

Rainbow. The fourth stone on the breastplate was an Emerald, the emerald represented the fourth son, Judah. John describes a rainbow around the throne with the appearance of an Emerald. Through Judah, the Messiah came and took away the sins of humanity. In Noah's day, God established the rainbow as a symbol of his agreement to not destroy the earth with a flood. Here the rainbow with an emerald appearance represents the peace between man and God, the result of the Jesus the Messiah's death, who came from the tribe of Judah.

The Twenty Four Elders

4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. **Revelation 4:4**

Around the throne... John who was caught up into heaven now begins to describe the surrounding events taking place in Heaven. He describes something never described in heaven before this chapter, twenty-four thrones with people seated on them.

Twenty-four thrones John describes 24 thrones surrounding the throne of God, the Greek word *Thronos* means, throne seat, a chair of state having a footstool. There has been debate about these 24 thrones. Some have argued they represent angelic authority over God's creation. While others argue they represent New Testament saints. To understand these twenty-four thrones, we need to ask who is sitting on them. What is their background? What do they say?

Twenty-four elders. One of the arguments put forward is the 24 elders sitting on the throne are angels. The problem with this argument is in the description of the 24 elders. Five arguments against the elders being angels are;

1. The Greek word for elder is *presbutero* *Presbuteros* means elder, of age. The reason this cannot apply to angels is all angels are the same age, there is no elder angel.
2. The term "elder" in the Bible is always used to apply to men, not angels.
3. Elders are always representing people, in both Israel and the church
4. There are no visions of elders in both Ezekiel's vision of the throne (Ezk.1-10) and Isaiah vision of the throne (Isaiah 6). Christ had not yet paid for the sins of humanity.
5. These same elders sing the song of redemption in Revelation 5:9-10, angels were never redeemed.

White robes. In addition to the above arguments, the clothing the elders wear, "white robes", is the dress of "Overcomers" (Revelation 3;4,5,18; 6:9, 7;9,13,14; 19:14). White robes are promised to the victorious saint.

Crowns. There are two types of crowns mentioned in the New Testament. One crown is a rulers crown a *Diadema* the other is a victors crown known in the Greek as *stefano* *Stephanos* meaning victors crown or wreath. This crown was given to victors in the public games. The type of crown the 24 elders have is the "Stephanos" crown.

Its clear from the context, the 24 elders are not angels but redeemed saints. The next question is who are these 24 elder "Saints"? Since they are sitting on thrones they are in position of authority. Christ promised his saints positions of authority over his coming kingdom. Jesus in fact promised the 12 apostles they would be sitting on 12 thrones ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel.

28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matthew 19:28

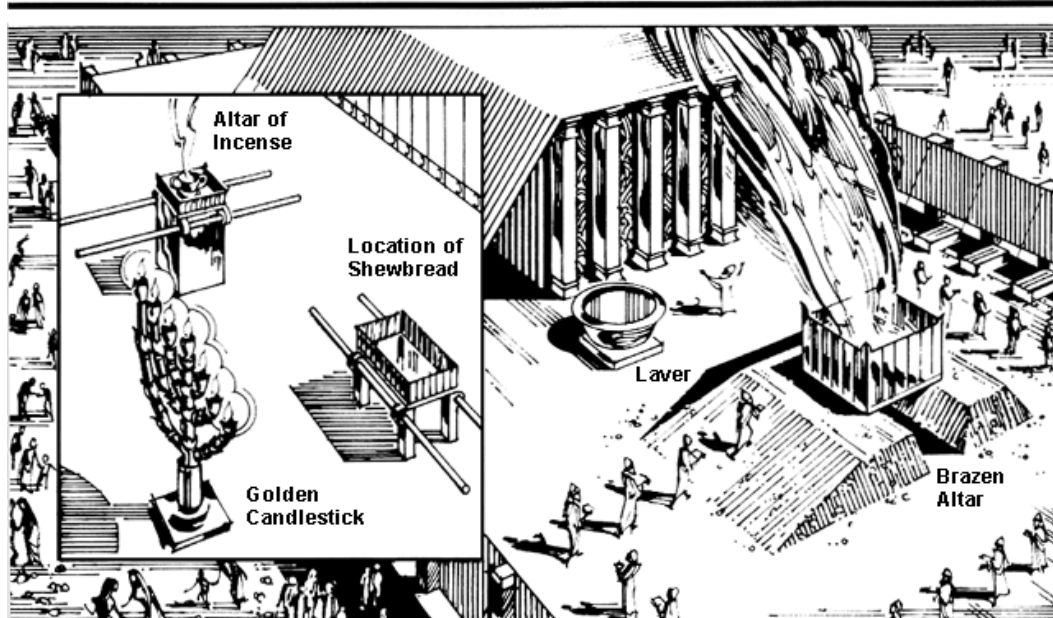
The number 24 matches the 24 orders of priests in Israel (1 Chronicles 24:7-19). Since the apostles are promised positions of authority ruling over Israel (Matthew 19:28). And Old Testament saints, such as David, are also promised positions of authority in the coming kingdom (Ezekiel 34:24). It is reasonable to assume the 24 elders are the 12 apostles representing the church and 12 elders from Israel representing Israel, people such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, David, Isaiah.. etc.

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The timing of this event, follows the rapture and precedes the tribulation period.

Since the elders, the redeemed saints, wear crowns, the event known as the "Judgment seat of Christ" (I Cor. 3:11-15) might have taken place. This judgment is not for salvation but for rewards. Similar to an award ceremony in the Olympics when the winners are given their "Stapanos" crown of victory.

The Furnishings of the Tabernacle and the Brazen Altar



The Seven Spirits of God

5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. **Revelation 4:5**

Lightnings, thunderings. Israel on the exodus journey also experienced the lightnings and thunder from top of Mt. Sinai when the presence of the Lord was on the mountain. (Exodus 19:16) The nation trembled before God and asked Moses to talk to them rather than God.

The thunder and lightning from the throne also demonstrate the coming judgment about to fall on the earth in the coming chapters.

Seven lamps. John also describes seven lamps of fire burning before the throne of God. These seven lamps are different from the seven lampstands which Jesus Christ stood in the midst in chapter one. These seven lamps of fire represented the seven spirits of God or the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 11:2 lists the sevenfold characteristic of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit of the Lord
2. The Spirit of wisdom
3. The Spirit of understanding
4. The Spirit of counsel
5. The Spirit of power
6. The Spirit of knowledge
7. The Spirit of the fear of the Lord

In the tabernacle and the Temple the seven lamps of the golden candlestick before the Holy of Holies was a type of the reality in Heaven. (Hebrews 9:23) The whole tabernacle and Temple was a microcosm picture of God's throne and heaven.

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The Sea of Glass

6a Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. **Revelation 4:6a**

Sea of glass John also reports on a sea of glass like crystal before the throne of God, those familiar with the Temple would immediately recognize this as the antitype for the Bronze Laver before the Tabernacle and Temple. (Exodus 30:17-21, I Kings 7:23-26).

The laver was placed between the altar and the tabernacle and the priests of the Lord were to wash their hands and feet before they minister in the tabernacle or at the altar.

Christ before His death, washed the feet of disciples, Peter who at first refused then requested Jesus wash his hands and head, Jesus replied, those who are bathed only need to wash their feet. (John 13:9) The water pictured the cleansing of sin, the repentance of the believer. When we are baptized, the believer is pictured dying and rising with Christ (Col. 2:12). Paul in Ephesians calls the water the word which washes us from our sins.

The four living creatures

6b And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.

8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **Revelation 4:6b-9**

Four living creatures. John now focuses his attention to four living creatures. The Greek word used here, ~~zōon~~ *Zoon* means a living being. Ezekiel and Isaiah give similar descriptions of the living creatures at the throne of God. These four living creatures are the Cherubs. Two are pictured on the "Arc of the Covenant" covering the "Mercy seat". (Exodus 25:17-24) The "Mercy Seat" is a picture of God's throne, there the "Glory of the Lord" would appear to the priest ministering before the Temple. The Arc was a picture of what was taking place in Heaven. (Hebrews 9:23) The living creatures are the reality while the image on the arc was only a type to represent the reality.

Isaiah who also witnessed the throne of God describes the Seraphim

2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.



3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"

Isaiah 6:2-3

Ezekiel, like Isaiah and John also witnessed the throne of God and reported a description very similar to John of the "Living creatures" at the throne of God. (Ezekiel 1:4-25)

The living creatures lead heaven in giving praise to the Lord God and his work. They are proclaiming the reality of God's being. They are the choir directors of heaven leading the saints and angels in praise.

The Heavenly worship of Christ

10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

11 "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created." **Revelation 4:10-11**

Twenty-four With the "Living creatures" leading praise, the 24 elders representing all of saved humanity at that point, cast their "Stephanos" or victors crown before the throne. The saints in heaven acknowledge the one on the throne is worthy of all the praise.

The scene in chapter 4 continues in 5 where the saints the saints along with angels praise the Lamb, Jesus Christ who died for the sins of humanity.