

After Jesus dictated the letters to John, John received a wondrous invitation. ¹ *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."*

John identifies the voice speaking as the voice of Jesus, the One who sounded like a trumpet (1:10) This door that John is about to step through is a door into the heavenly realms where the past, present and future is now. It is the eternal now of God where the future is currently visible. God transcends time. Time is the creation of the One who is eternally outside time and yet invades time. John received the invitation from the voice to enter into that realm to take a look at the future. We can see the certainty of God's plan in the word "must", what must take place after this. (1:1) We will see just what was to happen later in this message.

² *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.* Voom! He enters the heavenly dimension and sees a vision of One seated on a throne. In chapter one verse ten he already said he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. He is seeing what many of the Old Testament prophets had seen, Micaiah (1Kings 22:19), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:26), and others. Though we have the capital letter identifying the word "Spirit" as the Spirit of God, the Greek has no definitive article. It may be that John is saying that he is in his spirit as opposed to his body, what people call today an out of body experience. He is not the only one in the Old or New Testament that has described such an experience. (Ezekiel 3:14; 2Corinthians 12:2) In chapter one John was in Spirit and yet physically fell on his face.

He saw one on the throne. Who is he seeing? Paul tells us the visible manifestation of the invisible God is Jesus. After all, it was Jesus who said that He and the Father are one. (John 10:30) He was promised the place at the right hand of God. (Psalm 110:1) That is a position of authority more than it is a physical location. God has no hands. He is a spirit. **In seeing Jesus on the throne, John is seeing God on the throne**, for as Jesus said, "If you have seen me, You have seen the Father." (John 14:9)

What he described seeing is similar to what the prophets described. The book of Revelation probably has more allusions to Old Testament passages than any other book of the New Testament. Some commentators would say that John is copying these passages. I believe his mind was so full of the Word that when searching for a description he immediately sees the similarity to the words of those who have gone before him. Those whose minds are renewed by the Word of God often speak in Biblical expressions.

Commented [notes1]: Revelation 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

Commented [notes2]: Revelation 1:1 (ESV)

¹ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

Commented [notes3]: 1 Kings 22:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left;

Commented [notes4]: Isaiah 6:1 (ESV)

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Commented [notes5]: Ezekiel 1:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.

Commented [notes6]: Ezekiel 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me.

Commented [notes7]: 2 Corinthians 12:2 (ESV)

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

Commented [notes8]: John 10:30 (ESV)

³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Commented [notes9]: Psalm 110:1 (ESV)

¹ The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

Commented [notes10]: John 14:9 (ESV)

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

³ 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. Ezekiel also saw the throne encircled by a rainbow, and he fell on his face at the sight. (Ezekiel 1:28) John does not mention falling on his face as he did in chapter one. He may be so out of the body that, now present in this realm, his body is no longer in the way.

The use of gemstones as descriptions was simply something he could relate to in trying to explain what he saw. In our city, some ascribe power to crystals and stones. Our sister Cinthia even had some of those stones implanted in her teeth as she thought they gave her power, that is, until she came to know the real power, the Creator of the gemstones. That's when she had that tooth pulled! John wrote that they had the appearance of those stones, not that they were those stones.

⁴ 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. Some believe these represent the twelve apostles and the elders of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are not described as such so we can't say that with certainty. Perhaps they are twenty four elders from church history. You'll recall that James and John wanted to have the thrones next to Jesus. Jesus told them they didn't know what they were asking. He asked them if they could drink the cup He was about to drink. (Matthew 20:22) They said they could, not realizing it meant crucifixion. Then Jesus told them the Father had prepared those thrones for certain people. Considering what Jesus' said, I believe those thrones are reserved for elders who were a testimony in martyrdom.

We already saw in the letters that our white robes are a picture of being clothed with the righteousness of Christ. (Romans 13:14) He is our righteousness. The golden crowns may represent the crown of life. James wrote that those who remain steadfast under trial will receive a crown of life. (James 1:12)

⁵ 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, These descriptions of this heavenly realm invoke awe and wonder. They are similar to the description of God descending on Sinai. (Exodus 19:16) Later in this book they will preclude judgments that strike the earth. (8:5) We saw the seven spirits of God in the introduction to this book and in Jesus' self-description. (1:4) They are seen as eyes in 5:6. Here they are seen as torches of fire. Though seven spirits represent the whole or complete attributes of God (Isaiah 11:2), the sense here is of illumination and purification.

⁶ 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: A sea of glass like crystal, utter calm, in the midst of lightning and thunder.

Commented [notes11]: Ezekiel 1:28 (ESV)

²⁸ Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Commented [notes12]: Matthew 20:22 (ESV)

²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able."

Commented [notes13]: Romans 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Commented [notes14]: James 1:12 (ESV)

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Commented [notes15]: Exodus 19:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Commented [notes16]: Revelation 8:5 (ESV)

⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Commented [notes17]: Revelation 1:4 (ESV)

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

Commented [notes18]: Revelation 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Commented [notes19]: Isaiah 11:2 (ESV)

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

God is undisturbed by all the rebellion of mankind. His throne is in no danger. He is at perfect peace. He already sees the outcome of it all. These creatures are the cherubim /seraphim of Isaiah 6 (verses 2-3) and Ezekiel 1 (verse 5-6). They are not cute little chubby blond haired babies, but unique creatures that are flying around the throne of God uttering constant praise for what they are beholding.

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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!" John was only given the glimpse of one face of each creature, but Ezekiel describes each as having all four faces. (Ezekiel 1:6) If John were merely copying Ezekiel, he would have used his description. The creature faces represent ferocity, power, wisdom and oversight. The eyes represent their ability to see everything. They don't miss any feature of God's glory. That is why they never cease giving praise.

Nor does John copy Isaiah's version of what is said. Isaiah heard them say to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3) Here these beings are praising God's eternal nature, who He is in the past, who He is in the present, and who He is in the future.

I'll never forget a young pastor in Tucson describe this scene. He acted it out as he preached it. Imagine these beings designed to be in the presence of God, and yet even they must shelter their eyes from the full glory of God with one set of their wings. (Isaiah 6:2) As they peek through their wings, they get another glimpse of just a facet of the perfections of God and burst forth with praise that shakes the thresholds of the doorposts of the Temple in heaven. (Isaiah 6:4) It's as if they can't help but respond to the wonder of what they've seen.

Whatever attribute they are praising, they begin with the three fold "holy!" In Hebrew the double repetition means especially so. The triple repetition means the ultimate expression of the word. There is none holy like the Lord! (1Samuel 2:2)

With two wings they fly around the throne as they sing these powerful praises. Their other two wings cover their feet, their creaturliness, as if embarrassed to be created beings that have the honor of being in the presence of the uncreated eternal One. Revelation after revelation of the Creator's greatness and glory overwhelms them again and again forever. What a scene! And if you have placed your trust in Christ, one day you will see it too.

Commented [notes20]: Isaiah 6:2-3 (ESV)

² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Commented [notes21]: Ezekiel 1:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness,

⁶ but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.

Commented [notes22]: Ezekiel 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.

Commented [notes23]: Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)

³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Commented [notes24]: Isaiah 6:2 (ESV)

² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Commented [notes25]: Isaiah 6:4 (ESV)

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

Commented [notes26]: 1 Samuel 2:2 (ESV)

² "There is none holy like the LORD; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. It helps to see John's perspective. He has seen Jesus in His glory in chapter One. What a contrast this present vision would have been to even seeing Jesus' resurrected body on earth! Now He is seeing Jesus' prayer being answered. *⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.* John 17:5 (ESV) Jesus is back to His pre-incarnate glory, but now having been given all-authority and the name above every name (Philippians 2:9), and having secured the salvation of all that will come to Him by grace through faith. His glorious heart was manifested in creation and incarnation so that humankind might be able to see the greatness of His love and grace. (Psalm 103:11)

The living creatures are constantly giving glory, honor, and thanks to the Eternal One. To give glory is to speak of the goodness of someone. In this case they are proclaiming the perfections of God's nature. They see a little more with each look and proclaim it to all within the sound of their mighty voices. (Psalm 115:1)

They give honor to Him by declaring the greatness of His nature and deeds. No wonder this goes on forever, for He is continually doing glorious things and manifesting His mercy and love, as well as His righteous judgments. (Psalm 92:5)

Finally, they give thanks. They thank Him for who He is and what He does and probably for being so privileged to be front row witnesses of His greatness. **Heaven resounds with thanksgiving.**

We celebrated Thanksgiving this last week. Most of us probably thanked God for family and friends, for provision and health, and especially for salvation and a relationship with Jesus. Did you thank Him for being so gracious and merciful? Did you thank Him for His faithfulness to you? Did you thank Him for loving you enough to die for you, so that you might be with Him forever? That is the kind of praise that is heard in heaven. It's not so much for what we have received as it is for His very nature, for the greatness of His heart. Heaven is filled with the sound of glory, honor, and thanks. Our lives will be filled with a little more heaven if we do the same right here!

As these elders that are before the throne hear the seraphim declare another aspect of the glory of God, they fall on their faces and worship God for who He is. In our present state, we would imagine that this could get quite old after some 1000 years or so. Our lack of being able to relate comes from the fact that we have never heard a seraphim sing or seen with our eyes the glorified Christ. I imagine if you asked John after this revelation if he thought it would get old after some time, that he would laugh at you, or maybe cry for you. The wonder of God is so great that it will take forever. One glimpse

Commented [notes27]: Philippians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

Commented [notes28]: Psalm 103:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

Commented [notes29]: Psalm 115:1 (ESV)

¹ Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

Commented [notes30]: Psalm 92:5 (ESV)

⁵ How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!

of God caused Moses to give every day of the rest of his life. (Exodus 33:23) The Apostle Paul had the same reaction to the glorified Christ. "Lord, what would you have me do?" (Acts 22:10) Then he gave himself in a radical, all-out way in service to Jesus until the day he was beheaded.

You might say that we don't have that blessing of seeing Jesus in His glory, and so we just can't be expected to be so dedicated. But that is why we have the Bible. It is the revelation of the glorified Jesus. John has described Him. See Him with the eyes of your spirit and catch that passion to know Him more, to get another glimpse of the wonder of who He is so that you might declare from your heart the glory, honor, and thanks that are due Him. (Hebrews 12:2)

They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ "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." Overwhelmed with the wondrous nature of God, the elders grab the one thing of eternal value, what they received as a reward, their crowns of life, and cast them at the feet of Jesus. They give their lives over and over because they know that He alone is worthy. They declare the seraphim to be right in giving God glory and honor and add that power should and does belong to Him. (1Peter 1:7)

Yesterday I was surprised to hear a secular anthropologist declare that all cultures have an inner desire to give glory. We were created to give God glory and He alone is worthy of eternal glory.

When we are finally there, we will see the top side of the tapestry. As Ravi says, **now we see the threads underneath and can't quite make out the images that are being woven.** Then we will see from above the glorious design in all its beautiful detail. We catch an occasional glimpse even now of the incredible orchestration of details and are in awe. I doubt we will be able to speak.

Why? It's because everything is created by God and exists by His will and for His purposes. (Romans 11:30) In the end, everything will bring Him glory. The reason for all things will be manifest, and they will all point to the wonder of our glorious Lord. Every detail of every life will be revealed for the purpose which God designed it, and the glorious picture in all its fine detail will have us eternally awestruck, forever thankful for His nature, forever enraptured to be the bride of the eternally glorified Lamb. (21:2)

Questions

- 1 Is the future a uncertain?
- 2 Whose throne does John see?
- 3 How do we describe things we've never seen before?
- 4 What should the thunder and lightning remind us of?
- 5 Where else in the Bible do we see these creatures? How do they differ?

Commented [notes31]: Exodus 33:23 (ESV)

²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Commented [notes32]: Acts 22:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do."

Commented [notes33]: Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Commented [notes34]: 1 Peter 1:7 (ESV)

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes35]: Romans 11:36 (ESV)

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Commented [notes36]: Revelation 21:2 (ESV)

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

- 6 Describe the scene.
- 7 Why are the creatures there?
- 8 What motivated the Bible heroes?
- 9 How do the elders respond?
- 10 Why does anything exist?
- 11 Discuss the tapestry parable.