

# Living Word Fellowship Church

## An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 4

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### Part II

#### A. General Description:

The churches enjoyed the church they created while ignoring Christ headship. Christ describes this when He told the story of the owner of a vineyard. In that context the Son of the vineyard was killed. In a similar manner the son in this case was not heard or respected when He came and talked to workers in the vineyard (Luke 20:8-23; the people in the church represented by the seven churches). No matter what chapter 4 portrays, Christ day in court will be when every knee bows.

This is a fulfillment to what was said in Philippians 2:8-11; “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (NASU)

#### B. Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions (continued):

1. “*a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne...*” (vs. 2-3):

a) θρόνος (“throne”) as God’s throne occurs 17 times in chs. 4–5 (of 38 occurrences in chs. 4–22). The high frequency in chs. 4–5 emphasizes that,

although God's realm is separated from the earthly, He is nevertheless in control over earth's affairs.<sup>[1]</sup>

b) Regardless of how rampant evil seems to run and to cause God's people to suffer, they can know that His hand superintends everything for their good and His glory.<sup>[2]</sup>

c) This is demonstrated by the fact that all the judgments in chs. 6–16 are issued from God's throne (e.g., 6:1–8, 16; 8:3–6; 16:17).<sup>[3]</sup>

d) The throne's overall appearance was one of great beauty and color, enhanced by a rainbow, resembling an emerald, which encircled the throne. The green color of the emerald added further beauty to the scene.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2. An Explanation of Apocalyptic Depictions (vs. 3):

a) Individual meanings are not to be assigned to each of the stones; collectively they represent God's sovereign majesty and glory since they appear in OT theophany scenes in which divine glory is manifested and because they are directly linked to God's glory in Rev. 21:10–11, 18–23.<sup>[5]</sup>

b) The three stones in 4:3 are a summary and an anticipation of the fuller list of precious stones in ch. 21, where the glory of God is revealed, not only in heaven, as in 4:3ff., but in consummated form throughout the new creation. This first mention of "jasper" highlights the summarizing nature of the threefold list, since it is the first precious stone mentioned in ch. 21 (twice: 21:11, 18) and is at the head of the list of the twelve foundation stones of the end-time city's wall in 21:19. The placement of "jasper" at the beginning of the list in 4:3 underscores the association of divine glory, since it is the only stone in ch. 21 that is explicitly linked to glory (in 21:11 the latter-day city has "*the glory of God*, her luminary like a precious stone, as a *jasper stone* shining like crystal; see further on 21:11). The stones intensify the light around the throne by reflecting the unapproachable brightness, and hence glory, surrounding God Himself (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16; Ps. 104:2).<sup>[6]</sup>

c) This jasper (cf. 21:18) is a clear stone in contrast to the opaque jasper stones known today; it may have resembled a diamond. The carnelian, also known as ruby (the niv trans. its “ruby” in the OT), and sardius, were a ruby-red color. The jasper and the carnelian were the first and last of the 12 gemstones worn on the high priest’s breast (cf. Ex. 28:17–21). Jasper and sardius were used in relation to the king of Tyre (Ezek. 28:13) and will be in the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:19–20).<sup>[7]</sup>

d) *The rainbow:*

- The only rainbows mentioned in Scripture are these: the beautiful but fleeting covenant rainbow of Noah’s time (Gen. 9:13–16) and the beautiful but everlasting rainbow surrounding beings in heaven (Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3; 10:1). When God made the rainbow a sign of His covenant with humanity, He took something from His eternal throne and endowed it with fresh meaning. At the same time, the rainbow around the throne of heaven has become an eternal reminder of God’s covenant promise to humanity.<sup>[8]</sup>

e) “*Four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind*” (6-8):

- The “four living creatures” (Rev 4:6, 7) answer to the cherubim over the mercy seat.<sup>[9]</sup>

- But here the context best suits the view which regards the *four living creatures* as representing the *redeemed election-Church* in its relation of ministering king-priests to God, and ministers of blessing to the redeemed earth, and the nations on it, and the animal creation, in which *man* stands at the head of all, *the lion* at the head of wild beasts, *the ox* at the head of tame beasts, *the eagle* at the head of birds and of the creatures of the waters.<sup>[10]</sup>

- The only other creatures in Scripture with six wings are the creatures Isaiah saw in his vision of God (Isa. 6:2). While John does not describe these living creatures as flying, surely that was part of the purpose of their wings.<sup>[11]</sup>

- The prophet Ezekiel described an angelic order of four *cherubim*, each with four wings and four faces—human, lion, ox, and eagle—also full of eyes (Ezek. 1:10–11; 10:12). John’s language is not identical but is similar enough for us to think that he and Ezekiel are describing the same fantastic beings. These are covered with eyes, in front and in back (v. 6), repeated as covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. This is as symbolic as the sword coming from the risen Lord’s mouth (Rev. 1:16). These eyes mean that the creatures see unceasingly and are ever-watchful protectors of the divine throne. Ancient potentates had their guardians, but never like these.<sup>[12]</sup>

- The lion is the king of the untamed animals, while the ox (usually translated *calf* in the New Testament) was the domesticated animal used for sacrifice. The flying eagle was the king of the birds, while man is a separate kind of being. (The third living creature is said to have a face like a man rather than the form of a human.) All nature is called on to declare the praises of God (Ps. 150), so God has designed the creatures nearest His throne to serve as constant reminders of this.<sup>[13]</sup>

f) “*And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God... (vs. 5):*

- seven lamps ... seven Spirits—The Holy Spirit in His sevenfold operation, as the light-and-life Giver (compare Rev 5:6, *seven eyes ... the seven Spirits of God*; Rev 1:4; 21:23; Ps 119:105) and fiery purifier of the godly, and consumer of the ungodly (Mt 3:11).<sup>[14]</sup>

- “The seven lamps of fire before the throne” (Rev 4:5) are antitypical to the seven-branched candlestick also in the holiest, emblem of the manifold Spirit of God: “the sea of glass” (Rev 4:6) corresponds to the molten sea before the sanctuary, wherein the priests washed themselves

before entering on their holy service; so introduced here in connection with the redeemed “priests unto God” (compare *Note*, see on Rev 15:2).<sup>[15]</sup>

3. ....*twenty-four elders*...” (vs. 4):

a) The number 24 is the number of representations, illustrated in the fact that in the Law of Moses there were 24 orders of the priesthood. (For further discussion of the identity of the 24 elders see the comments on 5:8–10.)<sup>[16]</sup>

b) The *twenty-four elders* are reminiscent of Isa. 24:23, where the “elders” were viewed as Jewish leaders. These *elders* have often been interpreted as representatives of Israel and the church (twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles). In 1 Ch. 24:4, however, we read of twenty-four priestly orders, and in 1 Ch. 25:1 of twenty-four orders of Levites appointed to prophesy and praise with harps and cymbals. Since in 5:8 the elders present the prayers of God’s people and in 4:6–11 are linked with the four living creatures, they are evidently to be understood as exalted angelic beings, worshipping and serving the Creator. 5 The *flashes of lightning* and *peals of thunder* recall the theophany at Sinai (Ex. 19:16) and portray the awesomeness of God.<sup>[17]</sup>

c) It is probably best to regard the twenty four elders as human or celestial beings who have some responsibility for leading in heavenly worship (4:9–11; 5:8–12). Whatever their actual identity, their function in the book is clear. They were to reveal to the readers of John’s revelation the proper response to God—ceaseless praise and worship.

d) They are not angels, for they have *white robes* and *crowns* of victory, implying a conflict and endurance, “Thou hast *redeemed us*”: they represent the *Heads* of the Old and New Testament churches respectively, the Twelve Patriarchs (compare Rev 7:5–8, not in their personal, but in their representative character), and Twelve Apostles. So in Rev 15:3, “the song of *Moses*, and of the *Lamb*,” the double constituents of the Church are implied, the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>[18]</sup>

e) The heavenly beings connected with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus—variously called *men or angels*—wore white (Mark 16:5; John 20:12;

Acts 1:10). Apart from the conquering Lord, these are the only beings in heaven with crowns of gold on their heads (see Rev. 14:14). Here, the crowns certainly suggest the power and majesty of these creatures. John saw what they do with their crowns later in the chapter.<sup>[19]</sup>

f) The crowns were similar to those given victors in Greek games (*stephanos*), in contrast with the crown of a sovereign ruler (*diadēma*, “diadem”). The crowns seem to indicate that the elders had been judged and rewarded.<sup>[20]</sup>

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