

# A Glimpse of God the Father on His throne

A glimpse of the throne-room  
of the universe

An explanation of Revelation chapter 4

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## Introduction

It is important to notice that while Revelation Chapter 1 presents a vision of God the Son – the resurrected Christ – as a priest ministering in the Heavenly Temple, Chapter 4 is a vision of the Father enthroned in the same temple. Chapter 5 then demonstrates that both the Father and the Son are present in the temple together.

Since the book of Revelation is primarily a revelation of the Son of God, what is the significance of God the Father being brought to view in Chapter 4? The significance is that the Father, and in fact all heaven, is involved in the great plan of salvation and the restoration of this world to the Kingdom of God.

***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." Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. Revelation 4:1-2***

Some commentators claim that because Chapter 4 is introduced with the words *After these things*, the events of Chapter 4 occur subsequent to the events of Chapter 3. However, when we analyze Chapter 4, we find that the words *after these things* really mean after the vision described in Chapters 1 to 3. Chapter 4, therefore, is another, distinct vision. There are a number of parallels between Chapter 1 and Chapters 4 and 5, indicating that Chapter 4 is an introduction to a new series of scenes which were shown to the prophet John.

## Parallels between Revelation Chapter 1 and Chapters 4 and 5

| Chapter 1 references  | Chapters 4 and 5 references                                     |
|---|---|
| 1:10 I was in the Spirit                                      | 4:2 I was in the Spirit...                                      |
| 1:10 ...a loud voice, as of a trumpet                         | 4:1 The first voice...was like a trumpet ...                    |
| 1:12 ...seven golden lampstands                               | 4:5 ...seven lamps of fire...                                   |
| 1:4 ...from the seven Spirits who are before His throne       | 4:5 ...before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.   |
| 1:6 ...has made us kings and priests to His God and Father... | 5:1 And have made us kings and priests to our God...            |
| 1:19 Write the things...which will take place after this.     | 4:1 ...I will show you things which must take place after this. |
| 1:12-17 Description of Christ                                 | 4:2-3 Description of the Father                                 |
| 1:12 An introduction to the seven churches                    | 5:1-5 An introduction to the seven seals.                       |

These parallels indicate that Chapter 4, as with Chapter 1, is an introduction to a vision – a new vision. Chapter 1 describes the Son; Chapter 4 describes the Father. Revelation Chapter 1 is an introduction to the prophecy of the seven churches. Revelation Chapter 4 is an introduction to the prophecy of the seven seals.

## An open door in heaven

*...behold, a door standing open in heaven...*

What does this door which stands open represent? For over a century it was understood that it was the door to the Heavenly Temple, that is, the door into the *first* apartment. The view held by many today, however, is that this is the door into the Holy of Holies - the *second* apartment - where the throne of God is generally considered to be. This understanding is based on the message to Philadelphia:

*...I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it... Revelation 3:8*

The door referred to here gave entrance into the second apartment of the heavenly temple, through which Christ entered in 1844, and which the believer is invited to enter by faith.

A reference which clearly speaks of the open door into the second apartment of the majestic temple is found in Revelation Chapter 11:

*Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple... Revelation 11:18*

But is the door spoken of in Chapter 4 this same door? No. In fact the evidence is clear that it is the door to the first apartment.

***...seven lamps of fire burning before the throne... Revelation 4:5***

It is instructive that in the apartment John was viewing there existed seven lamps. In the earthly type - the sanctuary of Moses – which was *a copy and shadow of the heavenly* (Hebrews 8:2) the seven lamps were only located in the first apartment. The logical conclusion is therefore that John in vision was in the first apartment, the Holy Place of the heavenly temple, rather than in the Holy of Holies.

## God's dwelling place

It is accepted that the throne in the earthly temple was located in the Holy of Holies and that therefore Chapter 4 must be describing the second apartment. It is also agreed that in the earthly sanctuary, the Shekinah glory dwelt between the cherubim in the second apartment. Generally speaking, in the earthly sanctuary, God limited His presence to the Holy of Holies. Why did the Father confine Himself to this apartment? It was, in fact, intended as a mercy to human beings.

A veil, centimeters thick, separated the two temple apartments in order to conceal the glory of God. This was to protect the congregation, because God's presence is a consuming fire to anything tainted by sin. Unless God limited the glory emanating from His presence all humans within close proximity would be destroyed. Therefore, in order to enable man to approach God, to commune with Him, to get to know Him, God limited His presence to the Holy of Holies - the second apartment of the temple.

In contrast, in the heavenly temple there is no sin and there are no sinners, so there is no need for the Father to be confined to protect the congregation. Therefore, in the heavenly context, we must not confine the throne of God to any one particular place. Any suggestion which restricts the Most High God to the Holy of Holies of the Heavenly Sanctuary must be dismissed out of hand.

It is important to note that even in the days of the earthly tabernacle, the presence of God was at times manifested in the first apartment in such a way that the priests were unable to enter into the sanctuary at all.

*This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD: where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. Exodus 29:42-43*

God met Israel at the door of the tabernacle – the door to the first apartment.

*Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34-35*

*Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. Numbers 12:4-5*

How impressive this concept is! God stood in the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

*So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them. Then the Lord spoke to Moses... Numbers 20:6-7*

*And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; because the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. 1 Kings 8:10-11*

It shows that God, at times, was known to abide in the first apartment of the earthly tabernacle. As a consequence, we can expect the presence of God in the first apartment of the great antitypical heavenly temple, as well as in the second apartment.

There have been futile attempts to explain away the fact that in chapter four the seven lamps are presented as being in the same apartment as the throne of the Father. It has been claimed that when John was given this vision, he was in the first apartment looking through into the second apartment, where the throne was situated, and that near him in the first apartment stood the seven branched candlestick, or the seven lamps. This view flagrantly conflicts with the vastness of the eternal temple.

As one author declares,

*As in vision the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne"... Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven.<sup>1</sup>*

It is crystal clear: the scene of Revelation Chapter 4 depicts the first apartment of the great heavenly temple.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1958), 356.

## A picture of God

We now come to a description of the Father Himself upon the throne.

**...a throne set (positioned) in heaven, and One sat on the throne. 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**

Here the prophet does not describe the actual form of the Most High. Rather, he describes the colours that surround the Father. *Like a jasper!* Jasper is usually a deep-red colour, although it is also known to be brown, yellow and even green. It is generally thought that here it denotes a deep red. The sardius – from the stone called Sard which was an orange or orange-red colour - undoubtedly refers to the glory that surrounds the Person of the Father. According to other scriptures, the Father is bathed in eternal fire, and fire has orange reddish hues. This is confirmed by the prophet Ezekiel who was also given a vision of the great God of the universe upon one of His thrones.

*And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone: (blue-white - a different throne from Chapter 4) on... the throne was...the appearance of a man high above upon it.... I saw... the colour of amber, with the appearance of fire all around and within it, and from the appearance of his waist and downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, with brightness all around. Ezekiel 1:26-27*

No doubt these colours describe the glory, the fire, which surrounds the Person of the Father in the great eternal temple.

## God's throne room

### A rainbow

As previously noted in Revelation 4:3, there is a *rainbow around the throne* (behind and to the sides of the throne) *...like an emerald*. This must present a magnificent backdrop to the eternal throne. *Like an emerald* denotes a greenish hue. How striking and beautiful this panorama must be.

Ezekiel also alludes to this backdrop –

*As the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Ezekiel 1:28*

Why is a glorious rainbow shown as a backdrop to the fiery presence of the Most High? In fact it is quite significant: the rainbow represents the union of mercy and justice. As one author declares

*As the bow in the clouds is formed by the union of sunlight and shower, so the rainbow encircling the throne represents the combined power of mercy and justice. It is the mingling of judgment and mercy that makes salvation full and complete.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, "Let the trumpet give a certain sound", *The Review and Herald* (December 13, 1892):par.7.

The second attribute that the rainbow represents relates to God's covenant. After the mighty Flood in the days of Noah, God set the rainbow in the atmosphere to reassure Noah that the earth would never be overwhelmed by water again. The rainbow is a sign of God's everlasting covenant with the repentant members of the human race that He would save them from destruction. Consequently it is a symbol, primarily, that our God is a covenant-keeping God.

The universe of intelligent life, gazing upon the rainbow, are reminded that the great omnipotent Creator is a Being in whom they can trust - a God who keeps His word - a covenant-keeping Creator.

Is there a need for such a symbol in heaven? We need to remember that the great enemy had brought God's character into question. Questions had been insinuated into the minds of the inhabitants of the unfallen universe, but the rainbow serves to continually reassure them that they can trust their God - that the slanderous lies spread concerning Him would not stand.

## The twenty-four elders

The Revelator now describes the scene around the throne.

***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***

Crowns denote kingship and authority. How is it that there are those around the throne who have kingly authority? Does this mean that God shares His rule with others? Does the Creator delegate authority? The fact of the matter is that He does. God permits others to share in His eternal counsels. But does that mean that God requires counsel? It emphatically does not: our God is omniscient.

*Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding? Isaiah 40:13-14*

However, while God does not need counselors, it appears that He shares His counsel with His created beings. God is a great sharer, not a dictator nor an autocrat. Intelligent creatures are permitted to share God's counsels so in a special sense they come to learn of and to know God. The Most High shares His rule with angelic beings. Lucifer, before he fell, shared in the ruling the universe. He declared

*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. Isaiah 14:13*

Lucifer possessed a throne and he had ruling power, just as many other angels also have power to rule in the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul says:

*...to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Ephesians 3:10*

What is a principality? A domain ruled over by a prince: in this case an angelic prince. Our God is a wonderful sharer. He shares His rule, He shares his counsel.

What is the identity of these twenty-four elders? It appears that they have come from the earth.

**... You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God and we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:9-10**

The twenty-four elders say: *You have redeemed us*, indicating that they must have come from earth. Not only that but they have entered into the scenario of the heavenly temple after the Calvary event, because they also say: *You were slain, and have redeemed us to God*. They have white robes, indicating that they are righteous in character, for the *fine linen* (or robes) *is the righteousness of the saints* (Revelation 19:8). On earth they had developed Christian characters. They were overcomers. This is the significance of their crowns.

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation: for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to those who love him.*  
*James 1:12*

Some of the elders may also have been martyrs.

*...Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10*

They may have been martyred for their faith in God before the first Advent of Christ.

They are *kings and priests* indicating that they are of the order of the priesthood of Melchizedek of which Jesus is High Priest. They are also priest-kings – assistant priests it seems – to Christ in the Heavenly Temple. The number twenty-four could correspond to the twenty-four divisions of the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament described in 1 Chronicles 24.

The twenty-four elders declare that they *were redeemed from the earth*. At what time, then, did this transpire? The apostle Paul, speaking of Jesus' ascension to heaven says

*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.*  
*Ephesians 4:8*

Alternative translations indicate that *captivity* indicates a multitude of captives. So when Jesus ascended to heaven, He led a multitude of captives. Our God never compels or forces anyone. These captives must be willing captives, no doubt captives of love. At His ascension He led them to the kingdom. But who were these captives? Scripture gives a clue:

*And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*  
*Matthew 27:50-53.*

What a dramatic event! After the resurrection of Jesus there rose from the dead a company which had been victorious Christians, saints who were possibly also martyrs. John the Baptist may even have been in this company.

*...they went into the holy city and appeared to many. v 53*

What was the purpose of their visits to many in Jerusalem? When Jesus rose from the dead, the Roman soldiers were commanded to spread the rumour that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. This was done to hide the mighty truth of Jesus' resurrection. To counter the rumour, the Lord raised up this special company who went into the city



and appeared to many, informing them of their own resurrection, but particularly of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, proving that Jesus was the true Messiah.<sup>3</sup> How fascinating are the ways of God!

The Revelator continues with a description of the atmosphere that surrounds the throne of God.

***And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices... v5***

What does this imagery mean? Several times in the book of Revelation we find a similar expression. It appears that this is a description of the unceasing, awe-inspiring activity connected with the administration of the universe. We are being given a glimpse here of the throne of God as the Control Centre. Our God is a God of action, a God of activity.

### Angelic messengers

When we read Ezekiel's vision, the movements of the angelic beings around the throne are a significant feature - they are the messengers of Jehovah. The description throws light on the expression of verse 5 above. Ezekiel speaks of

*...the living creatures...in appearance like a flash of lightning. Ezekiel 1:14*

*When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still they let down their wings. Ezekiel 1:24*

What a sensational atmosphere!

*And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when he speaks. Ezekiel 10:5*

As these mighty beings launch themselves from around the throne and then return, it is like a flash of lightning, accompanied by a sound like thunder. We experience just a hint of what this must be like when encountering the powerful force of a military aircraft taking off. Even greater visceral impact is felt before the throne of God, the centre of the universe, a place of tremendous activity. As the messengers of God, at the behest of the Infinite flash their way to and fro from the throne across the vast universe, there proceed *lightnings, thunderings, and voices*. This must be what the apostle is describing as he gazes at the activity and experiences the atmosphere around the throne.

### The Holy Spirit

The Revelator continues

***...And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. v5***

We have already referred to the seven lamps of fire, but what is meant by *the seven Spirits of God*? Are these lamps the same as the seven Spirits of God?

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 786.

*The seven spirits* is a term describing the Holy Spirit – the Third Person of the Godhead. But why are there *seven*? It is because seven denotes completeness and continuity. In fact Scripture ascribes seven qualities to the Holy Spirit:

*The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him (the Messiah) the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:2*

The *Spirit of the Lord* denotes Christ's

1. deity
2. wisdom
3. understanding
4. counsel
5. might
6. knowledge
7. entitlement to be feared (or the right to be given reverence).

Returning to Revelation 4:5:

*...And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. v5*

Does this text imply then that the seven lamps are not really there at all, but instead represent the Holy Spirit's presence in the Heavenly Temple? This requires a detailed explanation.

Since the day of Pentecost in 31AD, the Holy Spirit has resided upon the earth. This Person, being divine, is omnipresent; however in a special sense He now resides upon this earth. Jesus said

*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Paraclete), that He may abide with you forever. John 14:16.*

To *abide* means to *dwell*. The dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit is upon this earth. Jesus said

*I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. John 14:18*

We have the Great Comforter with us continually. Again Jesus said

*Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. John 16:7.*

The Holy Spirit resides upon the earth as the Vicar of Christ. He is God on earth and the director of the work of God on earth. Thus the seven literal lamps of fire in the heavenly temple represent the Holy Spirit upon the earth.

### **A principle of interpretation - spiritual vs literal**

It is appropriate at this point to enunciate an important principle of interpretation. This principle has been neglected but if it understood and applied it will save much confusion and misunderstanding.

Since Pentecost, that is, since the beginning of the Christian era, we have been living in what the Spirit of Prophecy describes as *the dispensation of the Spirit*.<sup>4</sup> In this era the things of the kingdom of God have two main applications – literal and spiritual. In the heavenly realm they have a *literal* application but in the earthly realm of the kingdom of grace, they have a *spiritual* application.

Today we find that this principle is often reversed. Often when the heavenly temple is spoken of, it is spoken of as a spiritual temple. Things in heaven are described as being spiritual or wholly symbolic. This is incorrect: the opposite is true. To illustrate:

**The Godhead** - In heaven we have God the Father, a literal God. On earth we have God the Holy Spirit, a spiritual God, the third Person of the Godhead. In heaven Jesus Christ is present literally, but on earth Jesus Christ is present spiritually - *...Io, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Matthew 28:20.*

**City of God** - In heaven we have the Holy City - a literal city, but on the earth now we also have a *Holy City*. Scripture speaks of it in Hebrews 12:22-23 and in the book of Revelation, referring to the time of Papal supremacy. Is this a literal city or a spiritual city? It is a spiritual city, the city of the Christian church.

**Temple** - Again, in heaven there is a literal temple, on earth a spiritual temple of believers (Ephesians 2:20-22). In heaven there is a literal throne. On earth there is a spiritual throne, the throne of the heart. In heaven the Holy City is comprised of literal stones. On earth the Christian church is formed of spiritual stones (believers) (1 Peter 2:5).

**Priesthood** - In heaven there is a literal priesthood consisting of Christ and the twenty-four elders. On earth there is a spiritual priesthood – the priesthood of believers. In heaven there is a literal intercessor – Jesus Christ – *the one mediator between God and man*. On earth, there is a spiritual intercessor, the Holy Spirit, who *makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*. (Romans 8:26).

**Altar** - In heaven there is a literal altar of incense. On earth there is a spiritual altar of incense, the altar of the human heart. In heaven there is literal incense, on earth there is spiritual incense (prayer). In heaven there are literal offerings of Christ's blood and righteousness. He pleads before His Father, "My blood, my blood". His blood and character are literally in His person. His righteousness is literally in heaven – a living righteousness. On earth, now, there are spiritual offerings – the offerings of prayer, of praise, of thanksgiving (1 Peter 2:5 and Heb. 13:15). The righteousness referred to is a spiritual righteousness received through the Holy Spirit.

**Lampstands** - In heaven there are literal lamp stands, or lamps. On earth there are spiritual lamps. They symbolize the seven churches, that is, the Christian church through history (Revelation 1:20). In heaven there is literal light in the lamp stands. On earth there is spiritual light in the lamp stands – the light of the Holy Spirit – the light of truth.

**Shewbread** - In heaven there is literal shewbread. On earth in the spiritual temple there is spiritual bread – the Word of God by which alone man can live. In heaven there is a literal river of life. On earth there is the spiritual river of life: according to John 7:38-39, this river of life is the Holy Spirit.

**Tree of Life** - There is a literal tree of life in heaven. On earth at this time there is a spiritual tree of life – the Word of the living God. In the kingdom of glory at the Second

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, Manuscript Release No.99, *The importance, work and influence of the Holy Spirit*, 30:1.

Advent there will be a literal resurrection of believers. On earth now, there is a spiritual resurrection of believers – the rebirth – the fact of being *born again*.

**God's Law** - In heaven, God's law is inscribed on literal tablets in the literal ark in the literal temple. On earth, God's law is inscribed on the spiritual tablets of the human heart, in the spiritual temple of the believer.

**Eternal life** - In heaven there is eternal life for the believer - literally. Now, on earth, there is eternal life for the believer, but only in a spiritual sense.

Again, believers in heaven will literally sit with Christ

*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne. Revelation 3:21*

According to Ephesians 2:6 in a spiritual sense believers on earth sit with Christ in heavenly places.

**God's Kingdom** - There is a literal kingdom of glory in heaven and there is a spiritual kingdom of grace on earth. Jesus is a literal king in the kingdom of glory; however on earth He remains a spiritual king.

Here, we believe, is a great principle which is very relevant. When properly applied, it will help to avoid error and confusion, particularly in regard to the heavenly sanctuary and the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to clarify this principle further examples of its application are provided the table found in Appendix A.

## The sea of glass

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

This sea of glass is a vast shining area before the throne of God. When travelling through what were previously communist countries in Eastern Europe, one was reminded of this imagery. The practice of the communist governments once they took over a country was to demolish the buildings in the centre of the main cities to create a vast square. The purpose of the square was to provide for their massed parades, vast assemblies and where the leaders received obeisance from the populace.

In God's kingdom, in the first apartment of that awesome sanctuary, there is a mighty assembly area called *the sea of glass*. Who is it who will assemble on that vast sea? Revelation describes one group which will be there.

*And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb...  
Revelation 15:2-3.*

Isn't that thrilling? One day, if faithful, all the saints will stand upon that sea of glass.

*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. Revelation 7:9*

Millions upon millions of redeemed will stand on the sea of glass, as well as multiplied millions of angelic beings (Revelation 7:11). They will join the great heavenly choir in

praise of the Most High. This reveals the vastness of the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary and confirms the description penned by Ellen G. White:

*The heavenly temple, the abiding place of the King of kings, where "thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him", that temple filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration - no earthly structure could represent its vastness and its glory.*<sup>5</sup>

## The four living creatures

### Description

The next scene around the throne is rather strange when it is first read.

***... And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 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. And 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! Revelation 4:6-8.***

This is truly an impressive but intriguing scene! Who are these four living creatures?

They are described as being *full of eyes in front and back*. Knox's translation reads *they had eyes everywhere, to see before them and behind them*.

Ezekiel, in his vision of the throne, also described these living creatures as...

*...full of eyes, all around the four of them. Ezekiel 1:18*

*And their whole body, with their backs, their hands, their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, and the wheels that the four had were full of eyes all around. Ezekiel 10:12*

For this characteristic to be mentioned frequently means it must be a significant trait. One commentator states that they were *teeming with eyes*. When Zechariah predicted the coming Messiah, he likened Him to a stone with seven eyes:

*... upon one stone shall be seven eyes. Zechariah 3:9*

Again in Revelation Chapter 5 where it speaks of the Lamb before the throne, it says He had *seven horns and seven eyes*. Eyes always denote perfect intelligence, but in all likelihood the meaning is deeper than that. Perhaps the key to this mystery is found in the book of Daniel, a book which is closely coupled with the book of Revelation. When Daniel described the heavenly beings about the throne, he employed a significant word:

*I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was a **watcher**, a holy one coming down from heaven.... And inasmuch as the king saw a **watcher** and a holy one coming down from heaven... This decision is by the decree of the **watchers**, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones. Daniel 4:13, 23, 17*

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<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 357.

These heavenly beings are spoken of as *watchers*. What is it they watch with? They watch with their eyes of course. What would they be watching? Usually, the heavenly host is very observant of what transpires on earth, but here, in this verse, it refers to watchfulness in heaven. Perhaps it represents the eternal vigilance, the unwearied watchfulness, the infinite sensibility of the heavenly beings that wait upon God, the One who *neither slumbers nor sleeps*.

Jesus alluded to these heavenly beings when He said,

*Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones (children); for I say to you, that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 18:10*

The angels of God around the throne appear to be the highest order of angels with a function of administering the purposes of the Deity. These living beings are continually conscious of God, always aware of every expression on the face of the Divine. Perhaps this is the significance of the phrase that *they are full of eyes*. The expression could mean that they are so designed that they continually observe the face of God and are alert to His every request. They are supremely sensitive to every sign and every expression of the Eternal One so that they can be the special messengers of the Most High. As the Psalmist said:

*The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do his word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure. Psalms 103:19-21*

As such it becomes understandable that they are described as being *full of eyes* and consequently eternally watchful.

The four living beings are also described as having the faces of four different creatures and having six wings each. This corresponds with Isaiah's description:

*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, with two he flew. Isaiah 6:1-2*

With two wings the seraphim covered their faces, denoting reverence for the Most High; with two wings they covered their feet, denoting humility; and with two wings they flew, denoting their response to God's commands.

*And one cried unto another and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. v3*

No doubt these are the same beings that John saw in Revelation Chapter 4.

Ezekiel declared

*This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim. Ezekiel 10:20*

Isaiah called them *the seraphim*, which denotes a special order of angels. The special orders of angels who continually attend the throne of God are designated as either seraphim or cherubim. They are described as having the faces of a lion, an ox (or calf), a man and an eagle. Ezekiel indicates that they each have four different faces

*...each had the face of a man, each...had the face of a lion...each had the face of an ox...each had the face of an eagle. Ezekiel 1:10*

Our initial reaction to this image is that these creatures must be somewhat grotesque in their appearance. However we need to remember that these are simply descriptions used by the authors, based on their limited experience, which enabled them to distinguish the different types of faces observed on these beings. In any event they surely would have been impressive in appearance.

### Significance of the four faces

Let us now consider the significance of the four faces of these fantastic seraphim and cherubim. We will apply the principle *literal in heaven and spiritual on earth*. The passage tells us that in heaven there are four literal creatures, beings with four actual faces which are like those of a lion, man, ox and eagle. We cannot be certain of the significance of these faces, but the following notion may give us an insight.

Perhaps these four faces present the four aspects of the Deity, particularly of Jesus Christ, God the Son. The lion denotes kingliness or royalty while the man represents humanity, which involves mediation and priesthood. The ox represents service and sacrifice while the fourth, the eagle, soaring into the heavens, denotes divinity.

The four faces could also represent other aspects of the Godhead. In the lion we have bravery and courage; in the man we have sympathy and reason; in the ox we have strength and patience; in the eagle we have inspiration.

Notice also that the face of each of the four creatures is representative of the head of its family. The lion is *king* of the beasts; man is the *head* of humanity; the ox is the *chief* of cattle; and the eagle is the *ruler* of birds. These creatures may be portraying the royalty and headship of our great God of the universe. He is *King of kings and Lord of lords*.

On earth, however, these four faces would have a spiritual application and Scripture reveals this to be so. When Israel tarried in the wilderness the twelve tribes were divided into four groups around the tabernacle of God. Each of the four groups had a standard. Judah's standard was the lion, representative of a kingly tribe. Ephraim's standard showed an ox or calf. Reuben's standard had the face of a man. Dan's standard had an eagle. These standards were the symbols of the coming Messiah.

When we come to the New Testament, after the Messiah had arrived, we find in the four gospels that the same symbolism is found. In the gospel of Matthew we have Jesus presented as a king - the lion. In Mark's gospel we have Jesus presented as a servant and sacrificial victim - the ox. In the gospel of Luke we have Jesus presented as the Son of man, denoting his humanity. In the gospel of John, the emphasis is on Jesus' deity, His divinity.<sup>6</sup>

These symbols also represent in the Lord Jesus the traits of courage, bravery, patience, sympathy and aspiration. Jesus, in His earthly existence, lived out completely these beautiful characteristics.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jukes, *The characteristic differences of the four Gospels* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1853), 23.

## Roles of the living creatures

What is the role of the living creatures, the seraphim and cherubim?

*This is the living creature that I saw...under the God of Israel. Ezekiel 10:20*

They are *under God*: that is, they uphold God.

*Above the firmament (or platform of the throne) that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone: on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Ezekiel 1:26*

In Ezekiel Chapters 1 and 10 the prophet describes a vision of the throne of God. He saw a gigantic chariot-like vehicle approaching from the northern heavens. It was comprised of mighty wheels that were as high as the sky. These wheels were living wheels, formed of cherubim. On top of these gigantic living wheels was a firmament, a platform, and on this foundation was a throne. On this throne was One with *the appearance of a man*. The Spirit of Prophecy states that this was *The Eternal One*.<sup>7</sup>

One of the roles of the cherubim and the seraphim is to transport the Deity. This seems to be God's chosen method when He travels *in state*.

*He rode upon a cherub and did fly. Psalm 18:10*

Such language was once thought to be simply poetic. We now realize this is the exact truth. Our great God is enthroned upon the cherubim, and as they flash their way through the vast regions of space. God, as it were, flies as He travels *in state* upon His throne.

*The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands (angels); the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the Holy Place. Psalm 68:17*

Not only is this the chosen method of transport for God the Father, it is apparently that of God the Son as well. When Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, how was it that He ascended? He was surrounded by a cloud of angels and disappeared from sight as He traveled toward the kingdom. What mode of transport did He employ? Notice this statement from the Spirit of Prophecy:

*He slowly ascended from among them, drawn heavenward by a power stronger than any earthly attraction. As He passed upward, the awe-stricken disciples looked with straining eyes for the last glimpse of their ascending Lord. A cloud of glory hid Him from their sight; and the words came back to them as **the cloudy chariot of angels** received Him, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."<sup>8</sup>*

The angels of God in the form of a mighty chariot transported the Lord Jesus back to heaven. How marvelous an event, these angels fulfilling their appointed role! But it doesn't stop there. When God's people ascend to heaven, they too will travel by this special mode of transport.

*The risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels "gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers' arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend*

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948),

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 830-831.



**together to the city of God. On each side of the cloudy chariot are wings, and beneath it are living wheels; and as the chariot rolls upward, the wheels cry, "Holy," and the wings, as they move, cry, "Holy" and the retinue of angels cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." And the redeemed shout "Alleluia!" as the chariot moves onward toward the New Jerusalem."**<sup>9</sup>

Isn't the notion of this occurring marvelous! When God's people ascend to the Father's house, they too will ascend in a mighty, living, angelic chariot. A similar picture is presented by the prophet Daniel. In his seventh chapter he tells of the Most High moving His throne from one location to another.

*I watched till thrones were put in place and the Ancient of Days was seated. His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool: his throne was a fiery flame, its wheels as burning fire. Daniel 7:9*

Notice the description of the same scene.

*I saw the Father rise from the throne and in a flaming chariot go into the holy of holies within the veil, and sit down.*<sup>10</sup>

Even in the heavenly sanctuary, the Father is transported by the cherubim in the form of a glorious, fiery chariot. The prophet then describes how after the Ancient of Days had been transported to the second apartment of the vast temple, where *the judgment was set*, the Son of Man, Jesus, was taken by *the clouds of heaven* into the presence of the Father.

*Behold, One like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they (the clouds) brought Him (the Son) near before Him (the Father). Daniel 7:13*

The *clouds of heaven* is a term which describes the angels of God. Notice how one author confirms this:

*Then a cloudy chariot, with wheels like flaming fire, surrounded by angels, came to where Jesus was. He stepped into the chariot and was borne to the holiest, where the Father sat.*<sup>11</sup>

What a description this is, and what glory! The angels of God travel as the lightning. How vast must the heavenly sanctuary be!

This special order of angels associated with the throne also engages in ceaseless praise of God, declaring: "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*" *Revelation 4:8*

This state of affairs is not an easy one to imagine. It is difficult to comprehend how intelligent beings could ceaselessly cry *Holy, holy, holy*. Surely the time must come when such a cry would become tiresome, monotonous and meaningless? Could the great and supremely intelligent God permit what could become simply an empty ritual? It should be patently obvious to us that praise of the Almighty could not possibly become tiresome and monotonous, for that would be contrary to the spirit of heaven.

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 645.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1882), 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Firstly, undoubtedly the praise would be spontaneous: God would accept nothing but genuine praise. The question then arises as to how ceaseless praise could be continually spontaneous? The only possible answer is that the Person of the Deity is so awe-inspiring, so impressive, so moving, so overwhelming, that the cherubim cannot contain themselves as they behold their great and wonderful God.

A person's face best exhibits their character and God's character is one of absolute perfection. And, although we can never imagine the face of the Father, one day, indisputably, *we shall see His face*. When we see that face we too will be unable to contain ourselves and our voices will also burst forth into praise. What is being described in this passage, therefore, is the spontaneous praise of the living beings due to their association with God on His throne.

A second consideration is that this continual praise must undoubtedly also express itself in the most delightful and moving music which would produce a beautiful atmosphere, and in all probability provide a theme to be sung in countless variations.

We come now to the concluding verses of Revelation Chapter 4. Here the living creatures are depicted as leading the rest of heaven's inhabitants in worship and praise.

***...And they do not rest day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.... Whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne...the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne... Revelation 4:8-10***

The four living creatures lead heaven in worship. They proclaim three *holies*. They use three terms for Deity: *Lord, God* and *Almighty*. They depict God's eternal existence in three tenses - *which was, and is, and is to come* - yesterday, today and forever. They give glory, honour and thanks; and the twenty-four elders follow the example of the four living creatures and cast their crowns down before the throne.

Why is it that the elders cast down their crowns? The reason is that this is their acknowledgement that their victories have been derived through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. They then proclaim the worthiness of the Father.

## God our Creator is worthy

***You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things...***

Here is revealed the real reason for giving glory to God - the rationale for our worship, the underlying reason why God deserves our all. It is because He made us. He created us. He alone is entitled to call for our complete obedience. This is our reason for worship, for submission to our God.

Following this we are given God's reason for the creation. Why did He create us? Here is the most beautiful point of the whole chapter.

***...and by Your will they exist and were created. v11***

When God made this world, when He formed the human race, when He made you and me, it was done for His pleasure. He made all things to enjoy the experience it gives and

continues to give Him. What an inspiration the knowledge of this fact is! And even though human beings have departed from God, they can be reconciled to Him through the Gospel. We can be restored to favour and recreated in God's image. And our recreation and restoration is also for God's pleasure.

When we reach heaven, we will witness the marvelous delight that God experiences as He receives us. Oh that mankind could realize the depth of desire in the heart of God to receive us back! He has pleasure in us, and as a consequence we will have unbounded pleasure in Him. Isn't that a thrilling concept!

One of life's great satisfactions is to be desired, to be accepted, for someone to take pleasure in us. What an inspiration to believe, to follow, to obey, to be faithful to our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## Appendix A

### Literal and spiritual applications of aspects of God's kingdom

| The heavenly Kingdom of Glory - Literal  | The earthly Kingdom of Grace – Spiritual                                     |
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| 1. God the Father – a literal person   | God the Holy Spirit – a spiritual person                                     |
| 2. Christ in is present literally heaven   | Christ is present spiritually on earth (Matt 28:20)                          |
| 3. A literal holy city (Rev. 21)   | A spiritual holy city – the Christian church (Rev 11:2)                      |
| 4. A literal temple (Heb 8:1-3, Rev 11:9)  | A spiritual temple of believers (Eph 2:20-22) <sup>12</sup>                  |
| 5. A literal throne (Heb1:3)   | A spiritual throne – the heart of the believer (Rev 22:1)                    |
| 6. Literal stones (Rev 21:19)  | Spiritual stones - individual Christians (1 Pet.2:5)                         |
| 7. Literal priesthood (Heb 2:16-18, Rev 5:8-10)  | Spiritual priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:5,9)                              |
| 8. Literal intercessor <i>The man Christ Jesus</i> (I Tim 2:5)                             | A spiritual intercessor – the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26)                         |
| 9. Literal altar of incense (Rev 8:3)  | A spiritual altar – the heart <sup>13</sup>                                  |
| 10. Literal incense (Rev 8:3-4) <sup>14</sup>  | Spiritual incense <sup>15</sup>  |
| 11. Literal offerings of Christ's blood and righteousness in His person (Heb 8:3; 9:12-13) | Spiritual offerings - prayer, thanksgiving, praise (I Pet 2:5; Heb 13:15-16) |
| 12. Literal lampstands (Rev 1:12) <sup>16</sup>  | Spiritual lampstands – the seven churches (Rev 1:20)                         |
| 13. Literal light in lampstands (Rev 4:5)  | Spiritual light in the church – the Holy Spirit                              |
| 14. Literal showbread <sup>17</sup>  | Spiritual bread – the Word of God (John 6:51,63)                             |
| 15. Literal river of life (Rev 22:1)   | Spiritual river of life -The Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39)                      |
| 16. Literal Tree of life (Rev.22:2)  | Spiritual Tree of life – the Word of God <sup>18</sup>                       |

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Boise, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1962), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* 3:296, 337. See also E.G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962), 334.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* 32, 252, 256.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc, 1958), 1:344.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* 251.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> F.D.Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington DC, Review and Herald Pub Co, 1957), 7:989.

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|---|---|
| 17. Literal resurrection of believers<br>(I Thess 4:16-17)              | Spiritual resurrection of believers - born again<br>(Eph 2:1; 2 Cor 5:17; John 3:3) |
| 18. Eternal life for believer, literally (Rev 21:4)                     | Eternal life for believer spiritually (John 5:24)                                   |
| 19. God's law on literal tables in the literal temple (Rev 11:19; 15:5) | God's law on spiritual tables of the spiritual temple of the believer (Heb 8:10)    |
| 20. Believers will sit literally with Christ (Rev 3:21)                 | Believers sit with Christ in heavenly places, spiritually now (Eph 2:6)             |
| 21. A literal kingdom of Glory  | A spiritual kingdom of Grace.   |
| 22. Jesus will be king literally  | Jesus is king spiritually - now.  |

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