

The Revelation – The Vision of Heaven

As we continue our study of the Revelation we find John's vision changing course. The first part of the Revelation is an introduction to what is coming. It let's us know who the Revelation is for and tells us that though there may be tough times Jesus is there for the Church. In Revelation 4 the vision changes settings to the throne in Heaven. There are several reasons for this. First of all, it is a reassurance to John that the things that he is about to see are given by God himself, much like the Isaiah in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1. Next, in Revelation 1 Jesus told John to write the things which are, and the things which are to come. The transition from "the things which are" appears to occur at this point, and this change in the vision clearly signifies this change.

Some have claimed that this represents the Church being "caught up" from Earth to Heaven. They claim, therefore, that the Revelation does not apply to the Church from this point until the very end. As we go through this study, however, I think that we'll see that there are clear indications that Christians will be present upon the Earth during this period. Furthermore, the fact that these things were hidden from the Jews in Daniel 12 and opened to the church in the Revelation is an even greater indication that this Revelation, which was given to the Church, is for the Church. Also, to each of the seven churches Jesus said that they needed to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He also includes a curse to those who take away from the words. This curse is directly related to the church. Finally, he reiterates in 16th verse of the 22nd chapter of Revelation that this book is given to the churches. Why, then, would the majority of the book be unimportant to the Church?

Let's look at the 4th chapter of Revelation. This Scripture says:

- (1) After this I looked, and, behold, a door *was* opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.
- (2) And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne.
- (3) And he that sat *was* to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.
- (4) And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.
- (5) And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.
- (6) And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind.
- (7) And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle.
- (8) And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

- (9) And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,
- (10) The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
- (11) Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

In the first verse we get a voice like a trumpet calling John into Heaven so that he can be shown the things which must be hereafter. Now this is not “the last trump” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 which is associated with the return of Jesus at the rapture because there are other trumpets which are blown after this. This voice is just to let us know the power and majesty of the voice that is speaking. It is the voice of God Almighty.

As John looks upon the scene in heaven he has trouble describing what he saw. He first says that God looked like jasper. He then says that he looked like a sardine stone. He was on the throne in blood red majesty.

Next we see that John saw a rainbow in Heaven. This is significant as we go into these stages of Revelation. You see, God made a promise to Noah after the flood that the earth would not be destroyed again by water. The rainbow was given as a sign of his covenant, and the covenant exists in Heaven as well as on Earth. God is reminding us that his promises are constantly before his face. It would appear that this, though, was no ordinary rainbow as it completely circled the throne, showing that all is already completed in Heaven. The circle is unbroken. Also, this rainbow is in sight like jasper. This could be thought to mean that green is the predominant color, which would be sensible since green is the central color of the rainbow. I think, though, that this description is signifying the brightness and majesty of this rainbow is like none he has seen before. It is more like that of an emerald than that of a rainbow.

After this description we begin to be introduced to some of the characters which will play important roles in the Revelation. First of all we see 24 elders seated around the throne. It is not clear about as to the significance of everything related to these elders. It is not likely that they are the 12 patriarchs of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lamb since John himself would be part of that group. It is more likely that these are representatives of the Church before God, not literally being people, but being figures of the entire priesthood in worship of God. The number 24 might, in this case, represent the 24 orders of the priesthood. It is clear that they are related to the Church because they are clothed in white, a sign which is only given to the redeemed. The Elders claim that they are the redeemed in Revelation 5:9.

The next characters which are introduced are the seven spirits of God. Now these seven spirits should not be confused with the Holy Ghost, sometimes called the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God. These are special angels whose designation is to minister before the throne and to shine forth the light of truth. Angels, after all, are referred to as ministering spirits in Hebrews 1:14. The number 7 refers to the perfect completion of their work.

The next characters that we are introduced to are the four beasts. Once again, the significance of the symbols used here is not entirely clear. That the beasts are symbolic, as

is virtually everything else in this image, is utterly clear. They appear to join in the song of the redeemed later on, so it is likely that they are in some way related to humanity. Now literal animals can not join in this song because animals do not have souls, and therefore their life ends at death. The fact that they are animals links them directly to the earth. Perhaps we are being shown that all of creation is given in worship of God.

Much could be said of the symbol of the lion, the calf, the human face, and the eagle, but it would only be thoughts. I believe that it is more fruitful to recognize that these varying factions have come together in worship.

The fact that they are full of eyes is also impressive. It would lead us to believe that, if this is representative of all of creation then the eyes of creation is upon all things, and is giving glory to God in all things.

There is one more thing in this chapter that I want to briefly discuss. There is a sea of glass before the throne. Once again the symbol is not clear. However, it is notable that people are often represented in Scripture as water. This cannot, though, represent the saints as they are later said to stand upon the sea. It is more likely that it is representative of Gods overseeing power over the earth throughout all time. In all its brittleness God has it before him in perfect harmony.

Next week we'll continue this series as John's vision transitions once again to things which must happen on earth as a result of things which happen in heaven.

Yours in Christ,

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