**Revelation 4—Prototypical Scenes in Heaven**

Pastor Joe Fuiten, November 3, 2019

The first chapters of Revelation are messages to seven churches in what is now Western Turkey, messages meant to prepare them for the future. With chapter 4 the door to the future is opened.

*1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this*."

I underline the words that speak of the future. At the time this was written, it was about the future. I know that some disagree, but I think most of what follows chapter 4 and beyond has not yet taken place.

There are three ideas I want to highlight today. Each is a prototype in its own way. First, the story of this book begins in heaven not the earth. Second, the temple in heaven and its’ worship serves as a model or prototype for worship from God’s people on the earth. Third, the cherubim in this chapter are the guardians of the divine in heaven and they will be the guardians of those who are holy on the earth.

*2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.*

My first observation is the story of this book begins in heaven not the earth. The throne of God is the centerpiece of it all. The rule of God in and from heaven’s throne is going to be restored everywhere. God’s kingdom and order will be restored. The long rebellion is about to end once and for all.

When you read Revelation, you should have Ezekiel and Daniel nearby. Revelation is filled with over 400 Old Testament images and references, averaging about one per verse. In Daniel there is a description of a throne in heaven. There are striking similarities between what Daniel saw and what John is seeing in this chapter. Where this appears in Daniel’s sequence is another reason to think it is yet future. "*As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat…. The court was seated, and the books were opened*. .[This is Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. The books are the book of the righteous, the book of the wicked, and the book of remembrance] *11 "Then I continued to watch...13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man* (This is Jesus, Matthew 24:30; 26:64), *coming with the clouds of heaven* [the clouds may well be the believers in the Messiah, Hebrews 12:1; Revelation 1:7].*...* *He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Revelation 4:5 continues “*Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.”* These seven lamps or seven-fold spirit of God are part of the opening greeting of the entire book. Back in chapter 1 we have this. “*To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth*.” This would seem to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit greeting the churches through John. What we have here in chapter 4 fits that description.

We can further evidence that the seven fires are the seven-fold Spirit of God from Zechariah 4:1-10 “*Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." I asked the angel who talked with me,* ***"What are these, my lord?"*** *He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied. So he said to me,* ***"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty****…...* ***"These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth.)"***

The seven branched lampstand is somehow related to the Spirit of God. This is what verse 6 tells us. Verse 10 tells us that the seven are the eyes of the Lord which survey the earth, looking at the people there.

The menorah was built according to the pattern given by the Lord. It was designed according to the heavenly reality. This heavenly temple is described elsewhere in the Bible.

Hebrews 8:5 says *"They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'"* Jesus himself ministered in the temple which is in heaven according to Hebrews 9:24 *"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."*

The Apostle John was able to look into heaven and see some of this. Besides Revelation 4:5we also have it in Revelation 5:6. *"Then I saw a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."*

They use different words but each of the following describes ONE common reality: Golden Candlestick, the Holy Spirit, the seven eyes of God, the seven spirits of God and the seven lamps before the throne.

If those seven flames represent the Spirit of God, we gain a better understanding of the important role God assigned to keeping the fire going. God told Aaron the High Priest “*to tend the lamps before the Lord from evening till morning, continually.”[[2]](#footnote-2)* He was to add oil every day to keep the fire going.

If we can understand all this, it will help us understand God’s working at present. The Greek word for "oil" is "*Chrisma*", which is also translated "anointing," as in 1 John 2:20, 27.[[3]](#footnote-3) The oil represents the gifts of the Spirit, given by Jesus, for the work of ministry. The instruction of God to Aaron is not really different from Paul’s instruction to Timothy: “*For this reason I remind you to* ***fan into flame the gift of God****, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline*.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Holy Spirit goes out into the world. He is the one that fills us now. He empowers us. He gives us wisdom and strength. From God’s throne to our heart, the Holy Spirit works through us. If that is so, it also falls into the category of awesome.

The nature of heaven which served as the model for the temple on earth then moves to the second idea which is that the nature of worship is heaven which provides the model for worship here on the earth.

*6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

When I read of these creatures I am reminded of Ezekiel’s Cherubim. They have the same features.

Of all creation, Cherubim are the first spirit beings to be observed. They were present at the Garden of Eden. Cherubim were used by God as guardians of his sacred place. They play that role in the Revelation passage. They surround God’s throne. In Orthodox churches you frequently see the Cherubim in the upper corners. When we built the Chapel of the Resurrection in Bothell I had the artists create more than 100 Cherubim surrounding the entire space. They are always the guardians of the sacred space as we see in the heavenly scene.

When ancient cultures are examined, there appear to be creatures that bear striking resemblance to what the Bible tells us about cherubim. It is one of my favorite studies and might be one of the best largely undiscovered proofs for the Bible.

If you are anxious about the future then you need to know about the cherubim. God wanted people to know about the Cherubim and he wanted them represented in art. He gave specific instruction for the tabernacle of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, and Ezekiel’s yet to come Third Temple. He wanted them to have images of the Cherubim but forbade images of Himself.

When you think about the heavenly scene, you shouldn’t want to stop there. God wanted John to see heaven because it sets the stage for all that follows on earth. Fearsome things will come upon the earth. But God himself along with his angels can hold their own and protect you against the evil to come.

1. Daniel 7:9-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lev. 24:1-4. See also: Exodus 27:21 “In the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the LORD from evening till morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I Jn 2:20 “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.”

   I Jn 2:27 “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-- just as it has taught you, remain in him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)