

**3A. “AND THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER”
The Scene In Heaven, (4-22)**

1B. The Church In Heaven With Christ (4 & 5)

Preliminary to my consideration of chapters 4 & 5 are two excerpts from well-known commentators:

Alva J. McClain wrote,

(3) *The “four and twenty elders” in Rev. 4 and 5*

The careful reader of these two chapters will already have noted that the atmosphere of the scene pictured here is *judicial* in character. The “throne” of 4:2, like the throne of 20:11, speaks of judgment; God as judge sits upon the throne. In His hand there is a seven-sealed book which no one can open except “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David,” who appears here as “a Lamb” bearing the marks of having been sacrificed (5:1-6). After an outburst of universal adoration and expectant joy the Lamb begins to break the seals of the book; and the judgments of God begin to fall successively upon the world (5:8-6:1). A very striking feature of this judgment scene is the presence of “four and twenty elders,” sitting in a circle immediately surrounding the central throne, and who display at least four marks of identification.

First, they sit upon “*thrones*” (4:4, ASV ... rendered “seats” in the KJV) is the same as used of the judgment-seat of God. Thus the elders sit with God as assessors or associate judges in the judicial acts about to be inflicted upon the world. This means that they cannot represent angels, for the latter appear in Scripture always as servants, and never as *judges*.

Second, the “four and twenty elders” are clothed in “*white raiment*” (vs. 4). Such raiment doubtless speaks of both regal splendor and moral character, a fitting symbol of the unimaginable glory for which the redeemed are even now being prepared.

Third, these elders wear on their heads “*crowns of gold*” (vs. 4). Both the crown and its costly substance represent the regal or reigning function at its highest level. While the ideas suggested by “*thrones*” and “*crowns*” respectively are not ordinarily wholly separable, yet in Scripture the “*crown*” seems to have the meaning of *executive* function, whereas the “*throne*” is reserved as a symbol of that aspect of rulership which appears in its *judicial* activity. Of the latter there is an excellent example in the promise of our Lord that His disciples are to “sit on *thrones judging*” (Luke 22: 30, italics added).

Fourth, the twenty-four elders sing a “*new song*” (5:9-10). Although the four “*living creatures*” (ASV) join the elders in falling down before the Lamb in worship (vs. 8), it is significant that the song, the harps, and also the prayers of the saints, seem limited to the elders. Hengstenberg says dogmatically that the words of verse 8, “*having every one,*” etc., refer to the elders only, not to the living creatures, rightly identifying the latter as cherubim (cf. Ezek. 10:20). Moreover, the Greek *hekastos*, rendered “*every one*” here, is masculine and therefore points back to “*elders*” with which it agrees in gender; whereas *zoa* (KJV “*beasts*”) is neuter. By the very

redemptive nature of the song which follows, the cherubim would be excluded, for angelic beings are not subjects of redemption. There is a textual problem, however, in connection with the pronouns of verses 9 and 10. On the basis of weighty manuscript evidence, the textual editors have properly changed the “*us*” and “*we*” in verse 10 (cf. KJV) to the third person “*them*” and “*they*” (cf. ASV). Then feeling it desirable to bring verse 9 into forced conformity with these changes, but finding no evidence of any alternative pronoun to the “*us*” there, a few editors simply dropped the pronoun altogether, leaving the verb “redeemed” without any proper object. Not understanding the relation of these elders to the redeemed, they failed to see that there was no necessary conflict between a first personal pronoun in verse 9 and the third personal pronoun in verse 10. As Hengstenberg pointed out long ago, the elders speak of *themselves* with the redeemed in verse 9, whereas in verse 10 they speak objectively of the Church as *its representatives*, which they are in chapters 4 and 5.

In summarizing the four marks of identification outlined above - the thrones, the white raiment, the golden crowns, and the redemption song - it may be said that among all the saved there is only one body in the universe of which *all* these things are true. Others may be redeemed, walk in white, even reign with Christ, but only the Church which is the body and bride of Christ will enjoy these special privileges and also sit with Him in judgment of the world (I Cor. 6: 1-3; Rev. 3:21).

To this may be added the argument from the term itself. The elders are *presbuteroi*. It would be hard to imagine any symbol which could better represent the Church than a company of these *presbuteroi*, so familiar to the early Christians. They were in every congregation (Tit. 1:5). It was their proper business while on earth to represent the *ekklesia* in various ways. If one of its members fell sick, he was instructed to send for the “elders” who would represent the Church in the solemn service prescribed by the Epistle of James (5:14-15).¹

John Walvoord wrote,

“Chapters 4 and 5 are the introduction and background of the tremendous sweep of prophetic events predicted in the rest of the book. If chapter 4 and succeeding chapters relate to the future, they provide an important clue concerning the interpretation of the vision and the prophetic events that unfold in those chapters. One of the principle reasons for confusion in the study of the book of the Revelation has been the failure to grasp this point. If Revelation has no chronological structure and is merely a symbolic presentation of moral truth, its prophetic significance is reduced to a minimum... The events anticipated in the angel’s promise to ‘shew thee things which must be hereafter’ (4:1), should be regarded as a prediction of events which shall occur at the end of the age.”²

(4.1) 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.

1. Revelation 1.19:

¹ Alva J. McClain *The Greatness Of The Kingdom*, (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), pages 469-471.

² John Walvoord, *The Revelation Of Jesus Christ*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966), page 102.

“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter”

- a. A good foundation is vital since it is at this juncture many Bible students make mistakes interpreting prophetic portions of John’s Revelation and deviate from Scriptural truth.
 - b. Revelation 1.19 is John’s outline of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In addition, recalling what has been covered thus far, chapter 1 deals with “the things thou hast seen,” and chapters 2 and 3 deal with the “things which are.”
 - c. Therefore, by the process of elimination, chapters four and following have to do with “the things which shall be hereafter.”
 - d. Consider circling the word “hereafter” in verse 19, and write “see 4.1” next to it as a memory aid.
2. Revelation 4.1 again:

“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.”

- a. In this verse, circle the phrase “After this” and the word “hereafter.” The word “hereafter” in Revelation 1.19 and the phrase “after this” and the word “hereafter” in Revelation 4.1 each translates the Greek phrase “μετὰ ταῦτα.”
 - b. It is essential to note that the construction of the statements into which this phrase is nestled is such that we are forced to understand that what is referred to in these instances is not a logical sequence of concepts but a chronological sequence of events.
 - c. What takes place from this point onward occurs chronologically, after the events of chapters 1-3 have passed into history. There is no overlapping of the events in these chapters with anything mentioned in the first three chapters of this revelation. From this point forward, there will be no further mention of Churches on earth.
3. “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven”
- a. Consider, once more, what “After this” means.

“The expression “after this” (Gr., meta tauta), with which verse one begins, identifies the revelation as subsequent to that of chapters 2 and 3.”³

³ Ibid.

b. “I looked, and, behold”

“Ἐἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ” is the Greek phrase translated as “I looked, and, behold.” It means, “I saw and beheld,” and serves “to introduce a new vision of special importance.”⁴

c. “a door was opened in heaven”

i. “John, having been the channel of revelation to the seven churches existing in the first century, now is being introduced to a new field of prophecy. As he beheld, he saw a door opened into the very presence of God in heaven. The reference to heaven is not to the atmospheric heavens nor to the starry heavens but to that which is beyond the natural eye which the best of telescopes cannot reveal. This is the third heaven, the immediate presence of God.”⁵

ii. Notice something about John observing the opening of a door in heaven. This is the fourth mention of a door in this book of Revelation. The first door was the door of opportunity presented to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia in 3.8. The next time doors are mentioned is the door mentioned twice in Revelation 3.20.

iii. The first door is a door of opportunity, much like the door of opportunity that God gives to Churches. The second door would apply to our Lord’s invitation to unsaved Church members to respond to Christ’s invitation, resulting in them being saved from their sins.

5. “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.”

a. Though John does not identify whose voice he hears first, we have a good idea from its description, “as it were of a trumpet,” and the content of what was said, “Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.” I am persuaded that this is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Who is speaking. I believe this because the voice we know to be the Savior’s voice is described in similar terms in Revelation 1.10:

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet”

⁴ Fritz Reinecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1980), page 822.

⁵ Walvoord, page 102.

- b. When John comes up hither, he is transported, in the Spirit, to heaven. “This is not a veiled reference to the rapture of the church, but a command for John to be temporarily transported to heaven ‘in the Spirit’ to receive revelation about future events.”⁶
- c. Nevertheless, there are similarities between what happened to John and what Christians will experience when the Lord meets us in the air at the time of the actual Rapture. The Apostle Paul writes, in First Thessalonians 4.15-18:
 - ¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.
 - ¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
 - ¹⁷ Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.
 - ¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.
- d. Does this passage sound strikingly similar to John’s experience? It is, except that John is not physically transported as believers will be in the Rapture. John’s seems to have been a purely out-of-body experience. More on this in a moment.
- e. And the reason behind all of this? John is to be shown the things “which must be hereafter.”
 - i. Notice that word “must.” The Greek word δεῖ. It is a powerful little word that very forcefully conveys the idea of necessity or compulsion. Fritz Rienecker writes that the word in this context means, “it is binding” or “it is necessary.”⁷
 - ii. The events recorded in Revelation chapters 4-22 must happen! They have to happen because God has determined them to happen. So, no matter how badly things get in the middle chapters of Revelation, remember that a great ending will come about because God has written it into the script.
- f. The verse closes as it began, with the Greek phrase μετά ταῦτα, translated here by the word “hereafter.”

(4.2) And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne.

⁶ See footnote for Revelation 4.1 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1998.

⁷ Rienecker & Rogers, page 822.

1. “And immediately I was in the Spirit”
 - a. This phrase lets us know that John’s experience was not identical to the experience Christians would have at the time of the Rapture. The Rapture, for every living Church Age saint, is the resurrection. The actual resurrection, different from John’s experience in Revelation 4, will also include our mortal bodies being changed into immortality and transported to heaven.
 - b. Notice the speed at which John’s transportation took place. It will be faster than the transporter aboard the starship Enterprise. Engineer Scott would be envious.⁸
 - c. Paul indicates that the time required for us to be transported from this planet to a location in the third heaven, which is in God’s presence outside this material universe, will be “the twinkling of an eye.” This means that we will travel at a velocity far above the speed of light to traverse such distances in the twinkling of an eye.
 - d. You want to know the most remarkable detail about all of this? No effort will be required on our part. But notice again that John’s experience, somewhat unlike ours will be, was “in the Spirit.” That is to say, his physical body probably never left the isle of Patmos.

5. “and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne”
 - a. A throne first caught John’s eye when he was transported out of body in the Spirit to heaven. The tense of the verb tells us that the throne was already sitting in place when he arrived on the scene. A T. Robertson writes, “As the vision opens John sees the throne already in place as the first thing in heaven. This bold imagery comes chiefly from 1Ki 22:19; Isa 6:1; Eze 1:26-28; Da 7:9. One should not forget that this language is glorious imagery, not actual objects in heaven. God is spirit.”⁹
 - b. “And *one* sat upon the throne.”
 - i. Who is the Person sitting on the throne? We cannot be sure at this time. What about the throne? What can we say about the throne? “Not so much a piece of furniture, but a symbol of sovereign rule and authority (7:15; 11:19; 16:17, 18; cf. Is 6:1). It is the focus of chap. 4, occurring 13 times, 11 times referring to God’s throne.”¹⁰

⁸ Scottie was the engineering officer aboard the starship Enterprise in the television series *Star Trek*.

⁹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol VI*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1930), page 326.

¹⁰ See footnote for Revelation 4.1 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1998.

ii. “It is remarkable that John gives no description of him who sat on the throne, nor does he indicate who he was by name. Neither does Isaiah or Ezekiel attempt to describe the appearance of the Deity, nor are there any intimations of that appearance given from which a picture or an image could be formed. So much do their representations accord with what is demanded by correct taste; and so sedulously have they guarded against any encouragement of idolatry.”¹¹

c. Could this throne be the throne of grace? Could it be that throne that Christ sits on? Could it be that throne that we approach in prayer when we pray to God through the mediation of His Son, Jesus Christ, Who sits at His Father’s right hand? Could it be the throne mentioned in Hebrews 4.16? Let us read that verse:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

d. Though we cannot be dogmatic, I believe this throne is not the throne of grace that Christ now sits on in this present age of grace. I think this throne that caught John’s attention when he arrived “in the Spirit” in heaven is different. If it is the same throne, then I think it is that this time for a further use, for I believe that it is a throne of judgment because the book of Revelation is a book of judgment, as you shall see.

(4.3) 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.

1. There is no indication that the One sitting upon the throne looks anything like a man. This may mean that John was looking upon some representation of the essence and glory of Almighty God, Who, being a spirit, has no human form. John's descriptions are highly informative; however, the impressions he gets observing Him, Who sits on the throne, are impressions of color.
2. The two stones are pretty interesting. Jasper is thought by some scholars to be the present-day diamond. If that is so, the jasper might be a symbol of the transparent holiness and crystalline purity of the Lord God.^{12,13}
3. The red sardine stone, possibly a ruby color, could symbolize the saving work of the Lord Jesus, which was accomplished by the shedding of blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission.
4. The stones could also represent other things. You might remember the garments worn by the high priest of Israel during the age of the Mosaic Law. The high priest

¹¹ Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes’ NT Commentary*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com

¹² Reinecker & Rogers, page 822.

¹³ See footnote for Revelation 4.3 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1998.

wore a breast pouch with twelve stones on it, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

5. The sardine stone was the first stone, representing Jacob's first son, Reuben.¹⁴ The jasper stone represented the last son of Jacob, whose name was Benjamin. Reuben means "behold a son," and Benjamin means "son of my right hand." Maybe this means that although Christ represents Israel, as indicated by Reuben and the meaning "behold a son," He also is the Son of God, symbolized by Benjamin, meaning "son of my right hand." Nothing definitive, but something to ponder.
6. "Rainbow is the Greek word iris. It can mean halo. While the rainbow polychrome, here it is emerald which is green (Ezekiel 1:28). After the judgment of the flood the rainbow appeared as a reminder of God's covenant not destroy the earth again with a flood (Genesis 9:13-15). It appears here before the judgment of the Great Tribulation as a reminder that a flood will not be used in judgment. Green is the color of earth. The suggestion is that of Habakkuk: 'In wrath remember mercy.'"¹⁵
7. "The difficult problem of identification has been solved in various ways. Actually both the Father and the Son are properly on the throne as Christ Himself mentioned in Revelation 3:21. One explanation would have Christ on the throne in chapter 4 and the Father on the throne in chapter 5. Another point of view is that both chapters picture God the Father on the throne in the special character of the God of Israel. The seeming contradiction may also be resolved in the doctrine of the Trinity as Christ expressed it in John 14:9: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It is significant that God is not given an anthropomorphic figure in this revelation and does not appear as a man. Apart from the fact that He is said to sit on the throne, no description is given except the colors which impressed John. It is evident that the glory of God was the intent of the vision rather than an anthropomorphic representation."¹⁶

(4.4) 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.

1. Who are these elders mentioned in verse 4? Could they be angels? Could they be Old Testament believers gone to heaven? Could they be New Testament believers gone to heaven? Could they be both Old Testament and New Testament believers gone to heaven? The way to discover who they are is to eliminate who they cannot be, leaving who they really are left over. That is the Sherlock Holmes method of Bible study.
2. We know these twenty-four elders cannot be angels or heavenly beings. There are several good reasons for this. Let me give them to you:

¹⁴ Exodus 28.17; 39.10

¹⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Reveling Through Revelation, Part I*, (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Books, 1979), page 15.

¹⁶ Walvoord, page 105.

- #1 These elders are clothed in white raiment, which commonly speaks of redemption. Angels are not saved creatures, according to any indication given in God's Word. Holy angels, having never sinned, do not need to be saved. Fallen angels are not given God's hand of saving grace by any indication in God's Word. Their fate is sealed.
 - #2 The elders are wearing crowns. Nowhere in Scripture is there any mention of angels wearing crowns. But there are several places in the New Testament in which believers are promised crowns of the sort mentioned here.
 - #3 The elders are seated in seats. The Greek word for those seats is the word *θρόνοι*, which is the same word for thrones. These are royal seats the elders are sitting on. Angels do not sit on these kinds of stools. Angels are never pictured as sitting in God's Word.
3. Since the elders mentioned in verse 4 are sitting, they must be believers from either the Old or New Testament eras. However, there are reasons for believing that Old Testament believers are not a part of this particular group.
- #1 Old Testament believers are never mentioned as wearing or earning crowns of this type.
 - #2 Old Testament believers do not experience resurrection until after the Tribulation period. Therefore, they could not, at this time, be in heaven with their glorified bodies. Note the sketch below and examine Revelation 20.4-6:
 - 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.
 - 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection.
 - 6 Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The first resurrection, which we will deal with at greater length later on, will occur in three distinct parts. *First*, there was the resurrection of Christ. *Next*, the Church Age believers are resurrected during the Rapture. *Finally*, the Old Testament saints and the Tribulation period martyrs will be resurrected at Christ's Second Coming. All three of these events comprise the first resurrection. (See figure #6)

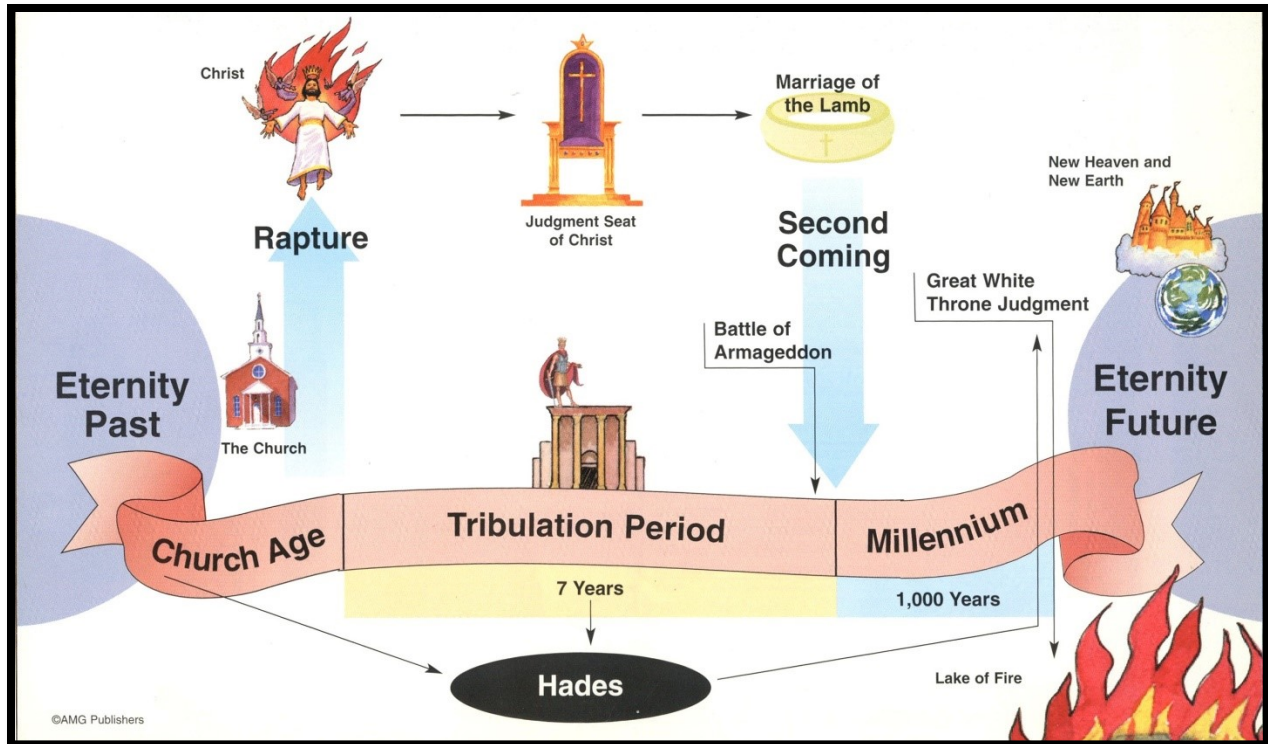


Figure 6: Future Events

4. What are the reasons for believing that these twenty-four elders represent Church Age believers only? There are several reasons:

#1 They wear crowns. These crowns are not diadems, which are the kinds of crowns worn by kings. Rather, these crowns are $\sigma\tau\acute{\epsilon}\phi\alpha\nu\omicron\iota$, which refers to a victor's crown. These kinds of crowns are placed on one's head as a reward for winning a battle or a race. These elders represent overcomers wearing the symbols of the rewards given to them by Jesus Christ for their faithful service down here on earth.

#2 The elders are sitting on thrones. Christians have been promised that we will reign with the Lord Jesus Christ. John shows these twenty-four elders occupying royal thrones. Our reign with Christ will take effect immediately after the judgment, and rewards to the believer take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which John passes over without comment in his Revelation, but which Paul deals with quite extensively in his writings.

These two reasons are sufficient to establish that the twenty-four elders represent the Christians of our present era.

5. Why, then, are twenty-four elders mentioned? Twenty-four refers to the number of courses of priests that Israel had to minister in the Temple. By the time David was

king of Israel, there were too many priests for them to all minister in the Tabernacle, and later on in the Temple, at one time.¹⁷ Therefore, to keep them from falling all over each other, David devised a rotating schedule whereby each course, comprised of certain families whose descendants would always serve in a particular course, would serve for one month every two years. John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, was serving in one of these twenty-four courses when the angel Gabriel informed him that he would have a son, Luke 1.5-20.

6. These elders are not priests of Israel. However, this number of elders might signify New Testament believers' priestly office. Remember, Revelation 1.6 reads, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."
7. How remarkable it is that God's Word paints a genuine picture of what John saw; what he saw was evidence of our being what Revelation 1.6 said we were kings and priests.
8. I am confident that the white raiment and gold crowns substantially prove these men to be New Testament-era Christians. The seats they are on show them to be ruling. The number of elders, twenty-four, suggests priestly courses.

(4.5) 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.

1. Imagine yourself a Jewish Christian, which many believers were during the first century. Even the Gentile Churches had a much stronger Jewish flavor than most congregations today. But imagine reading this verse from the perspective of someone with a robust Jewish perspective.
2. What would lightning, thunder, and voices remind the Jewish person of? Would that not cause him to reflect on Mount Sinai and the very presence of Almighty God? That would indicate that it was the Almighty sitting on this throne John saw set before him in heaven, among the twenty-four elders.
3. We are told that the seven lamps of fire in the vicinity of the throne are the seven Spirits of God. But what is referred to by the phrase "seven Spirits of God"? Do you remember Revelation 1.4 and Isaiah 11.2? Let us read those two verses again:

Revelation 1.4: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne."

¹⁷ It should be kept in mind that David assembled the materials to construct the Temple, but its actual construction was left to Solomon, 1 Chronicles 28.2-3.

Isaiah 11.2: “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 of the fear of the LORD”

John’s symbology refers to the Holy Spirit of God and the sevenfold aspects of the Spirit’s glorious ministry.

4. Allow me to summarize at this point: John’s attention is also directed to seven lamps of fire which are seen burning before the throne. These are identified as “**the seven Spirits of God**” mentioned earlier in 1.4 and 3.1. These are best understood as a representation of the Holy Spirit in a sevenfold way rather than seven individual spirits, which would require that they be understood as seven angels. Ordinarily, the Holy Spirit is not humanly visible unless embodied somehow. When the Holy Spirit descended on Christ on the occasion of His baptism, only John the Baptist saw Him descending in the form of a dove. If it had not been for that representation, John could not have seen the Holy Spirit. Similarly, on the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit would not have been visible if it had not been for the “**cloven tongues like as of fire**” (Acts 2.3). Therefore, the seven lamps of fire are the means by which John is informed of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The number seven is characteristic of the perfection of the Spirit and is in keeping with the revelation of Isaiah 11.2-3. In the heavenly scene, it may be concluded, based on both chapters 4 and 5, that all three Persons of the Trinity are in evidence, each in His particular form of revelation.¹⁸

(4.6) 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.

1. What is the sea of glass? Or, what does the sea of glass represent? Let me read from John Walvoord:

Occupying an important part of the scene before John is a sea of glass described as “like unto crystal,” and in the background are four living creatures. Apart from indicating that the sea of glass is like crystal, John gives us no explanation of the meaning of this sea. As in other portions of the book of Revelation, however, John expects the reader to draw conclusions from similar scenes elsewhere in the Bible. There seems here to be an analogy or comparison to the sea of brass in the Tabernacle in Old Testament or the molten sea in the Temple. Both were lavers, or washstands, designed for the cleansing of the priests, and contained water used for various ceremonial rites. This may represent typically the sanctifying power of the Word of God.

No sure interpretation of the sea of glass may be advanced. As Alford states, ‘All kinds of symbolic interpretations, more or less fanciful, have been given.’ Alford supports this by citing a long number of complicated and conflicting interpretations. He prefers the following view:

The primary reference will be to the clear ether in which the throne of God is upborne and the intent of setting this space in front of the throne will be, to betoken its separation and insulation from the place where the Seer stood, and indeed from all else about it.

¹⁸ Adapted and altered from John Walvoord, *The Revelation Of Jesus Christ*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966), page 108.

The fact is that no explanation is given in the text.

John, however, is not occupied at this point with the sea of glass, but rather with the four living creatures described as in the midst of the throne and round about the throne. He records that they are full of eyes, before and behind, and each of them has six wings. Further, each of the four beasts is to be distinguished according to verse 7. They are described respectively as like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle. Their ministry before the throne of God is that of ceaselessly ascribing holiness to the Lord.¹⁹

2. John Walvoord gives us the opinion of a Gentile Christian scholar. I would not disagree with him at all. But listen to what two Jewish Christian commentators say about this sea of glass before the throne. I think you will find them quite interesting, hearkening as they do back to the Old Testament:
 - a. First, there is Sale-Harrison: “A sea of glass like unto crystal” (v. 6). It will be remembered that both the Laver in the Tabernacle (Exod. 30.18-21) and the Molten Sea in Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 7.23-37) were for the purification of the priests, and were symbolic of the Word of God which is the Holy Spirit’s instrument to keep the life, and walk clean. Here the sea is of glass, not of water, for the cleansing of the saint is not needed after the church is home with the Lord (see Eph. 5.26, 27). This sea being of glass symbolizes the fixed state of holiness and purity, while crystal (which is a natural product), symbolizes that this fixed state is in perfect harmony with the holy nature of God.”²⁰
 - b. Next, there is Lehman Strauss: “The laver in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:18-21), and the sea in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:23-27) were for priestly purification. But in Heaven the sea is solidified. In Heaven, where there is a fixed state of holiness and purity, there is no need for cleansing. Heaven is the place of perfection. There saints will have entered into perfect sanctification. The backslidings of the heart and the failures of the flesh are forever past.”²¹
2. Some things need to be cleared up for the beasts that surround the throne. Adam Clarke tells us that “Wiclif” first translated this word using the English word “beasts,” and every English translation since then has followed his lead.²² The word “beasts” does not refer to some ugly or hideous creature. It translates the Greek word ζῷα, and relates to something full of life. These are beings, living things created by God, which have many eyes.

(4.7) 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.

1. There are several interpretations about these beasts that surround the throne. They are guesses. Since no one has provided substantial proof that their guess is any better than anyone else’s, allow me to share this particular version with you.

¹⁹ Walvoord, pages 108-109.

²⁰ L. Sale-Harrison, *The Remarkable Revelation*, (New York: Sale-Harrison Publications, 1930), page 66.

²¹ Lehman Strauss, *The Book Of The Revelation*, (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1963), page 134.

²² Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke’s Commentary, Vol VI*, (New York: Abingdon Press), page 989.

2. One fellow believes that the beasts are real beings who represent the divine attributes of God. From verse six, the eyes before and behind would represent omniscience.
3. The lion would represent the king of beasts and stands for the sovereignty of God and omnipotence, or His total power.
4. The calf, or young ox, represents patience and continuous labor. This would mean that God is long-suffering and continuously working in His universe.
5. Man, the greatest of all created beings, stands for intelligence and rational power.
6. The eagle, one of the greatest birds, symbolizes sovereignty and supremacy.
7. Obviously, there are a few holes in this view of verse 7, but it is a starting point toward developing what you think the proper interpretation might be.

(4. 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.

1. Notice that these beings do continually worship the Almighty. They say, “Holy, holy, holy” continuously. They also have six wings. These beasts John mentions might be angels known as seraphim in Isaiah 6.2-3:
 - ² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
 - ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory.
2. Think of the whole scene John saw. He was taken up in the Spirit into heaven, where he saw a throne set down before him. On that throne sat Almighty God, Whom John could not describe except by colors and sensations. Around this throne sat 24 elders decked out in royal garb, with golden crowns that they were awarded on their heads. Near these 24 elders were four beings that were apparently created for no purpose but to sing praises unto the holy God. What a scene!
3. What do we learn of God from these praising creatures? We know two things: First, we understand that God is thrice holy. That suggests a triune God of holiness. Second, we learn that God was, is, and is to come. That is, God is eternal.

(4.9-11) 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.
1. When these four creatures began to praise God in a special way, the 24 elders could not contain themselves. They cast themselves before the throne of God and joined in the praise saying, “Thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”
 2. As they did this, they cast their crowns at His feet. Does anyone know why the 24 elders might have been moved to do that? Why did they take the crowns, which were symbols of the rewards they had earned, and cast the crowns before the throne?
 3. Remember that these crowns are almost undoubtedly representative of rewards for earthly service rendered to Christ during their Christian lives and ministries. Throwing these crowns before the throne, these elders acknowledged that all praise and glory belong to God. Those men would not be saved and in heaven, escaping the wrath of the Tribulation, were it not for the grace of God. Neither would they have any crowns for service unless God’s grace had continued in abundant supply to work in their lives after they were saved. How we should constantly sing praises unto God.
 4. Now, for a personal observation related to Revelation 4.11, my personal life verse. Take note of that word “receive.” It translates the aorist tense of the Greek λαμβάνω, a commonly used word that refers to the reception of something, either passively, receiving something, or actively, taking something. Consider what the elders are saying in this verse. They are saying that God is worthy to λαμβάνω glory, and honor, and power. We can imagine someone giving glory to God and even giving to God honor. But can you imagine anyone giving power to God? I cannot. I can imagine, however, God being so worthy as to take glory, honor, and power, which is what I think is meant here.
 5. Let us briefly review some facts about the rewards that I am confident these golden crowns represent.
 - a. As to the earning of the rewards these crowns represent. Does it need to be established that only Christians can earn rewards from the Savior? No. This is well understood already. However, to keep matters straightforward, remember these two points: *First*, while salvation is always shown in Scripture to be a gift, rewards are consistently earned by those who have trusted Jesus and have already received the gift of God, which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Second*, salvation is always shown to be a present possession of the Christian. In contrast, rewards are shown to be the anticipated prize of the believer at the judgment seat of Christ immediately following the Rapture.

- b. But in what context is the Christian to earn rewards for service to Christ? Insight comes from Corinthians 3.9-4.5:

- 9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.
- 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.
- 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;
- 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.
- 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.
- 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.
- 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
- 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the *temple* of God is holy, which temple ye are.
- 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.
- 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.
- 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.
- 21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;
- 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;
- 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ *is* God's.
- 1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.
- 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.
- 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.
- 4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.
- 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

This passage addresses Christian service that the Lord Jesus Christ will judge. Close attention to First Corinthians 3.12-17 reveals that Paul understands Christian service that leads to rewards within the context and setting of the local Church congregation.

- c. Several crowns that will be given by the Savior in the future. Paul refers to his crown of rejoicing in First Thessalonians 2.19 when referring to his Thessalonian converts: “For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” It appears the Savior gives special rewards for evangelism.
- d. Second Timothy 4.8 names a crown of righteousness, given to those who love His appearing: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” This would seem to be a reward for those who are particularly conscious of and looking forward to the return of the Savior.
- e. James 1.12: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” The crown of life, given to those that love Him, is probably given to those who have demonstrated exceptional obedience to Christ since love equals obedience.
- f. First Peter 5.1-4 speaks of the faithful pastor’s crown:
 - ¹ The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:
 - ² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;
 - ³ Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.
 - ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.
- g. Revelation 2.10 speaks of a crown of life, which is given to those faithful unto death, the martyr’s crown: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” This might be a specific example of the generality seen in James 1.12.
- h. Each crown given for service and ministry is earned by the believer employing the grace that God gives to His children to serve Him.

6. We conclude Revelation chapter 4 by revisiting verse 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.”
 - a. He is worthy. He is worthy to receive glory. He is worthy to receive honor. He is worthy to receive power. In addition, as God is praised by the angels who shout, “Holy, holy, holy,” the elders respond by singing that He is worthy of glory, honor, and power.
 - b. This is the One Who is the Creator of all things. And why did He create all things? For what purpose and to what end have we, have you, have I, been created? What is the end of our existence, that which makes us happiest, which is most fulfilling? To give Him pleasure.