

APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

Session 11: John's Heavenly Vantage Point, Part I (Revelation 4)

REVIEW

Structure of John's Apocalypse:

1. Prologue (Rev. 1:1-20)
2. Part I: The Revelation of "what is "now" (PRESENT) (Rev. 2:1-3:22)
3. Part II: The Revelation of "what must take place after this" (FUTURE) (Rev. 4:1-22:6)
 - a. Introduction: John's Heavenly Vantage Point (Rev. 4:1-5:14)
 - b. First Vision of the Future (Rev. 6:1-8:1)
 - c. Second Vision of the Future (Rev. 8:2-11:19)
 - d. Third Vision of the Future (Rev. 12:1-22:6)
4. Epilogue (Rev. 22:7-21)

JOHN'S HEAVENLY VANTAGE POINT (REVELATION 4:1)

¹After 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."

GOD'S THRONE AND THE 24 ELDERS (REVELATION 4:2-6a)

²At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. ³And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. ⁴Surrounding 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. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. ^{6a}Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

A. "a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it" (compare Ezekiel 1; 1 Enoch 14; Daniel 7:9-10):

B. "And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne."

1. Compare Ezekiel 1:28:

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD."

2. Compare Genesis 9:8-17:

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

C. **"From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God."** (Compare Revelation 1:10-20.)

D. **"Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal."**

1. The "sea" is an ancient Near Eastern symbol for the forces of _____ and _____.

2. Examples:

a. The Babylonian Creation Myth:

b. The Canaanite Version of the Myth:

c. Adaptations of these symbols/imagery/ideas in the Old Testament:

¹²But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. ¹³It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. ¹⁴It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert. ¹⁵It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers. (Psalm 74:12-15; compare Exodus 14)

Compare Genesis 1:1-10; Job 9:13; 38:8-11; Psalms 89:10; 104:5-9; Proverbs 8:27-29; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9-10; Ecclesiasticus 39:17.

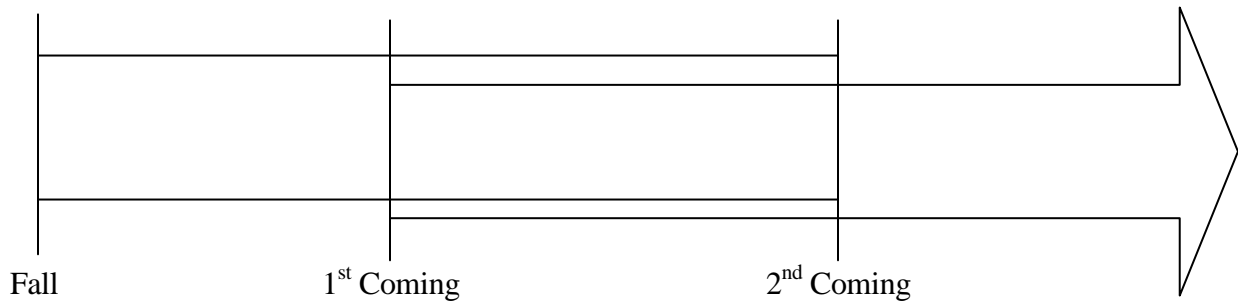
3. The Theme of the "Sea" in Revelation:

Rev 13:1—"I saw a beast coming out of the sea"

Rev 4:6—"before the throne...a sea of glass, clear as crystal"

Rev 15:2—"a sea of glass mixed with fire"

Rev 21:1—"and there was no longer any sea"



E. **"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."**

The 24 elders symbolize _____ because:

1. There are 24 of them.
2. They are "dressed in white" (compare Revelation 3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14).
3. They sit on thrones and wear "crowns of gold" (compare Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21).
4. In Revelation 5:8 they hold harps (compare Revelation 14:2; 15:2).
5. In Rev 5:8 they hold "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

So they are acting as _____ (compare Revelation 5:10), which gives further significance to the number 24 (compare 1 Chronicles 24).

6. They offer the same kind of _____ that the _____ offers in Revelation (e.g. praises to God as Creator in 4:11 and to Jesus as Redeemer in 5:9-10).

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (REVELATION 4:6b-8)

^{6b}In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷The 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. ⁸Each 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."

A. "In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures,...Each of the four living creatures had six wings..."

1. Compare the seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-8:
2. Compare the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10:

Background on Cherubim

Ezekiel 1:

"...a windstorm (v. 4)...four living creatures (v. 5)...when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels (v. 21)...Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne...was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (vv. 26, 28)

2 Samuel 22:10-11 // Psalm 18:7-10:

"He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind."

1 Samuel 4:4 (cf. Psalms 80:1; 99:1):

"...they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim."

B. "and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back, . . . 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." (Compare Ezekiel 10:12; 1 Enoch 39:12; 2 Enoch 21:1.)

C. **“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.”**

1. Compare *Midrash Shemoth*:

Four kinds of exalted beings have been created in the world. The most exalted of all living creatures is man; of birds, the eagle; of cattle, the ox; and of wild beasts, the lion. All of these received royalty and had greatness bestowed upon them, and they are set under the chariot of God. . . . (H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, 3d ed., trans. S.M. Lehrman [New York: The Soncino Press, 1983], *Beshallah* XXIII.13 [p. 291])

2. The Significance of the Number “4”:

3. The four living creatures represent _____ offering praise to Him.

4. The twenty-four elders represent _____ offering praise to Him.

THE HEAVENLY WORSHIP (REVELATION 4:9-11)

⁹Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰the 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.”

A. The Function of the Heavenly Songs in Revelation:

B. **“the twenty-four elders . . . lay their crowns before the throne”:**

Compare Genesis 1:26-27:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.