

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapter 4 begins with the apostle John's ascension into heaven (see previous notes relating this to the Rapture). He enters it in the Spirit, in a vision rather than bodily, because a living man cannot physically enter heaven and see God, "*the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see*" (1 Tim. 5:15-16).

What a vision! What a place! Ordinary language seems to fail John when he tries to describe it. He resorts to similes, saying the objects before him have the appearance of, or are like, gemstones or glass. It seems he has been transported not just from the surface of the earth but beyond the boundaries of created reality.

This is one of several descriptions of heaven in the Bible. In 2 Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul tells of being caught up to the "third" heaven. We can see the first two heavens by looking up: First the atmosphere populated by birds and weather, then the sun, planets, and stars stretching to the furthest reaches of the universe.

The third heaven is the dwelling place of God, visible and accessible only through faith. It is a place of power and majesty described in similar terms in Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6. Filled with rumblings of thunder and flashes of lightning, these glimpses of heaven overawe the prophets who see them.

But the same heaven is also called paradise in the Old Testament, Luke 23, and Revelation 2. Paradise is a place of unequaled bliss and comfort. This is the present heaven, the place to which believing souls are transported at the moment of death. The thief on the cross is an example.

To unbelievers heaven is unendurable. To believers still in the tent of the body, it is unsettling. To believers "asleep in Christ," it is joyous.

But there is one more heaven in Scripture: the future eternal heaven. We will learn more about it in Chapters 21 and 22. It may be a new creation or a transformed creation, but it will be

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pure and undefiled: "*Behold, I am making all things new*" (Rev 21:5). In it we will have bodies: the resurrection bodies reunited with souls at the rapture as told in 1 Corinthians 15. "*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*"

Notes on Chapter 4

4:1 John's entrance into heaven at the sound of a voice like a trumpet coincides with the Rapture, according to many commentators.

4:2 In 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul does not even know himself whether he is in the body or out of it. It may be that John has a body of some type during this visit to heaven. He sees, hears, speaks and even eats (Rev. 10:10), implying a physical body different than his earthly one but not yet the resurrection body.

4:3 Here and elsewhere sights in heaven are described using various gemstones. Perhaps this is because the colors of gemstones are among the most pure and brilliant of all natural objects. Both Jasper and carnelian (or sardius) are brown-red stones. The emerald rainbow may be emblematic in heaven of God's faithfulness as the rainbow on earth symbolized His promise to Noah.

4:4 "Elders" is a term associated with the church, and twenty-four is the number of divisions of priests appointed to serve God in 1 Chronicles 24. The twenty-four elders are engaged in eternal worship before the throne. They appear to represent the raptured church, wearing crowns as the royal priesthood of Revelation 1:6.

4:5 The four creatures resemble the cherubim of Ezekiel chapters 1 (where they also are called living creatures) and 10. Cherubim (Hebrew plural of cherub) are created beings, distinct from angels, and appear to have the function of

guarding and declaring God's glory. Before his fall Satan was a guardian cherub (Ezekiel 28:14) and walked among "stones of fire" before God's throne, similar to the torches before the throne in Revelation 4.

The arrangement of the creatures' wings also suggests they may be seraphim, mentioned only in Isaiah 6.

The creatures are full of eyes – they are ever vigilant. It was cherubim who guarded the entrance to Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve.

4:11 The chief attribute of God inspiring our worship is His singular act of creating the universe.