

THE REVELATION

APRIL 14, 2024

Chapter 4:5b - 11

6. The Seven Lamps in Heaven (4:5b)

Rev 4:5b And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

Looking around, John sees, “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.” In our first two lessons, we presented an overview of people and places in the whole book of REVELATION. In both lessons we interpreted the “seven Spirits of God” who were before the throne as “seven lamps of fire burning.” Through chapter 3, these “seven Spirits of God” were the only things not defined by the LORD in the text. Even though we know who they are because we have studied the entire book of REVELATION, to this point in the story, the seven Churches would still have wondered who they were just as we did upon our first reading. If we were reading this book for the first time, here, we would have finally come to the first description of the “seven Spirits” with John saying they looked like “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.” Some commentators immediately jump to the conclusion that these “seven Spirits” represent the Holy Spirit, but they do not. As we travel through the rest of this book, we will discover that John has more to say about these “seven Spirits.” We will soon see that John will tell us that they are actually seven angels, the same seven angels who will blow the seven trumpets and pour the seven bowls of wrath on the earth.

7. The Sea of Glass in Heaven (4:6a)

Rev 4:6a and before the throne ~~there was something~~ like a sea of glass, like crystal;

The floor in the throne room looked “like a sea of glass.” The oceans and seas on earth are never still; they are constantly moving, sometimes ever so subtly, at other times ever so raging, but never fixed and never dead still. Glass on the other hand is always fixed, never moving to the naked eye. And so it was with this “sea of glass” before the throne of God – fixed or permanent. But this “sea of glass” was “like crystal.” The word is *krustallos* in Greek and it means *frost*. From this word we get our word *crust*. When we see *frost* on the ground, it is like a crust that has a twinkle about it that is hard to explain, a *sparkle*, a *gleam*, a *glimmer*, a *flicker*, a *shine*! That is exactly what John meant when he said this sea of glass looked “like crystal.”

8. The Four Living Creatures in Heaven (4:6b)

Rev 4:6b and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

Looking back at the throne of God, John saw “four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind” “in the center and around the throne.” We must conclude here that these creatures were at their posts on all sides of the throne – one each to the front, back, left and right because they were “around the throne.” But these creatures were also “in the center.” This statement must mean they

were right next to the throne with the “seven lamps of fire burning” directly in front as God faces east. How do we know God is facing east on His throne? In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for front actually means *facing the east*. The position of the tribe of Judah was facing the east as the sun rises in the camp of the Nation of Israel. Back means to the west, left means to the north and right means to the south. Even though John is writing in Greek, he is still writing with a Hebrew mindset. God was on His throne; the four living creatures and the seven lamps were all sitting inside the circle of “twenty four elders.” These creatures were covered from head to toe with eyes all the way around them. Eyes in their wings and eyes on their flesh.

a) Their Look (4:7)

Rev 4:7 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. ^{8a} And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within;

The four living creatures had four faces – a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle. The prophet and priest Ezekiel was fortunate to see these same four living creatures twice and he wrote about both encounters. In the first chapter of his book, he explained how God approached him for the first time. He recorded the following about that meeting.

Ezekiel 1:4 As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. ⁵ Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form. ⁶ Each of them had four faces and four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, ⁹ their wings touched one another; their faces did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. ¹⁰ As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. ¹¹ Such were their faces.

We are thankful that Ezekiel gives a fuller description of the four living creatures, but we also notice two discrepancies between his version of these cherubim and that of John's. Ezekiel states that each cherub has all four faces with the man's face facing out, the lion to his right, the bull to his left and the eagle to the rear. This statement seems to disagree with John who seems to give a single and different face to each creature. The second discrepancy is found in the number of wings on each cherub. Ezekiel states that there are four, John states that there are six. Before we delve into these discrepancies, let us take advantage of Ezekiel's second encounter with these creatures in the tenth chapter of his book.

Ezekiel 10:9 Then I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like the gleam of a Tarshish stone. ¹⁰ As for their appearance, all four of them had the same likeness, as if one wheel were within another wheel. ¹¹ When they moved, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went; but they followed in the direction which they faced, without turning as they went. ¹² Their whole body, their backs, their hands, their wings and the wheels were full of eyes all around, the wheels belonging to all four of them. ¹³ The wheels were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels.

¹⁴ *And each one had four faces. The first face was the face of a cherub, the second face was the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.*

Ezekiel's second recollection seems to disagree with his first concerning one of the faces. In his first chapter one face is a bull; in his tenth chapter that same face is a cherub. Which is correct? The first is the Hebrew word *shor* meaning *the head of cattle*; That is a bull or ox. The second is the Hebrew word *kerub* meaning *the ox's face*. Therefore, even though Ezekiel used two different Hebrew words to describe the face in question, the definition of each word shows that there is absolutely no conflict. This discovery also justifies Ezekiel and John's account concerning that single face of the ox and cherub.

As for the number of faces, Ezekiel states that each creature had all four faces; John does not. But that does not mean that they did not have all four faces. From John's view, as he saw these four creatures around the throne, each facing straight ahead, we must remember that John was looking at them from one point of view. If these creatures were around the throne of God with one facing east, one facing west, one facing left and one facing right, and the face of the man was always looking to each point on the compass, then John would have seen a different face looking at him from his perspective. For instance, if John was seeing the face of a man looking straight at him, he might not have noticed the other three faces. As for the creature looking to the right of God, John would have seen the face of the lion looking at him exactly as Ezekiel did. Looking at the creature to the left of the throne, John would have seen the face of the ox looking at him. Finally, for the creature looking toward the back, John would have seen the face of the eagle. All four eagles were looking at God on the throne. All four faces of man were looking away from the throne of God. The lions were always looking to the right and the bulls were always looking to the left. This explanation solves the discrepancy, but it is only a conjecture. John simply did not give enough information about these creatures to close the gap in the three accounts.

Now for the issue of John saying the creatures had six wings and Ezekiel saying they had four. For this discrepancy, God's Word remains silent.

And then we come to the eyes as John says, they "are full of eyes around and within." With eyes on every part of their bodies, these creatures could see everything around them all at one time. Some of their eyes were always looking at God the Father, others were looking at the Lamb of God, the Son. Still others were gazing at the seven Spirits, others at the twenty-four elders, and still others are looking at all the heavens, which we have not encountered yet in this story that reside around the throne of God and in His creation.

b) Their Duty (4:8b)

Rev 4:8b and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

The four living creatures are not silent at any time as they render their service to the LORD. In glorious worship they constantly say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." Three times they say "Holy," - once for the Father, once for the Son and once for the Spirit. It was through Isaiah that these words were first spoken (Isaiah 6:3). "THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY" is found in Revelation 1:8

and “WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME” in Revelation 1:4. The words of the song the four living creatures were saying were not their own words. Those words dictated by God refer to the LORD God! John was seeing the worship in progress in heaven. It just so happened that he had just described the four living creatures when he noticed their praise and worship of God begin. The creatures were saying their praises outward from the throne where God the Father is sitting. The praises are directed toward God the Son, the LORD God, Who existed from eternity past, Who came to earth and died for the sins of humanity, Who overcame earthly death and rose from the grave, Who lives forever more! He is worthy to receive that praise; He is Jesus. But John has not noticed Jesus yet.

9. The Worship in Heaven (4:9-11)

Rev 4:9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

How amazed John must have been when the four living creatures were joined in their worship of God by the twenty-four elders. The act of worship was in full throttle as the elders left their seats to fall prostrate before the LORD God and toss their crowns of gold toward the throne. As the ensemble of four living creatures said, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME," the two dozen men's chorus answered with "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." The elders had their duty, too, to worship the LORD, the Creator Who willed everything into being. Both the living creatures and the elders gave thanks to God the Father for God the Son!