

TEXT

Revelation 5:6-9

REVIEW

The beasts, called by the name *cherubim*, and described as *seraphim*, “burning ones,” are mentioned several times in the Bible. Surveying those instances, we have learned that when they are mentioned, God is telling us that He is here. He is here

- 1) to be worshiped by us (Gen 3:24-4:4; Is 6:1-3)
- 2) to speak to us
- 3) to deal with sin in us; either
 - a) by judgment and punishment for those not in Christ; or
 - b) by mercy and forgiveness by the shedding of blood for those in Christ

LESSON

But when John saw the four beasts in the vision of God on the throne, Revelation chapters 4 and 5, what are the beasts, or who are they? Why don't I just say, “the beasts in John's vision are the cherubim; they aren't symbols of something else; they're just the cherubim”?

Symbolism in this vision

Immediately to conclude that the beasts in the vision simply are the cherubim doesn't seem to accord with the method of interpretation we are taught here in chapters 4 and 5. Important figures in this vision are not to be taken for what they are seen to be.

In some cases this is explained.

Revelation 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.

In at least one other case, it is not explained.

Revelation 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Note that in both of the items I just mentioned, the thing in the vision is from the Old Covenant. It now appears in this vision.

Seven lamps in the OT - seven lamps in this vision symbolizes the Holy Spirit
Lamb slain in the OT - lamb slain in this vision symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ

Cherubim in the OT - do the cherubim in this vision symbolize someone or something else? It seems like they might.

I read an interpretation of the four beasts, in several of the old books I have been reading. The interpretation I read used to be very widely held by Christians, but has fallen out of popularity in the last hundred years or so. I did not accept it at first, but I kept reading and thinking about it. Eventually, I saw how much that interpretation agrees with several other things in Revelation, and elsewhere in the Bible. So now, I consider that interpretation of the meaning of the four beasts to be right. But I have not wanted to spring it on you, without the benefit I have had in getting ready for it.

Toward a good interpretation of the four beasts

We have taken some steps toward making a good interpretation of the four beasts in the vision, as we studied our Lord's gracious dealing with His disciples, His saints, in His congregations, with a simple three-part organization.

- when we learned, right at first, about the blessing of studying this prophecy (1:1,3)
 - the revelation is from Jesus Christ
 - there are those that read it
 - there are those that hear it
- when we studied the glorious vision in chapter 1
 - Jesus Christ walk among candlesticks with stars in His right hand
 - the stars in His right hand are the pastors of the congregations
 - the candlesticks He is walking among are the congregations
- when we noticed what John saw the beasts doing. They were taking the lead in worshipping God: worshipping Him for who He is as God; for what He has done in creation; and for what He has done in redemption by Jesus Christ the Lamb.
 - the Lord is on the throne
 - the four beasts are nearest the throne, and start the worship
 - the twenty-four elders are next out from the throne, and join in the worship
- when we reviewed the metaphor of the flock of sheep
 - Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd
 - He provides ministers to watch over the congregation like shepherds
 - the congregation is like a flock of sheep
- when we reviewed the metaphor of building the temple
 - Jesus Christ Himself is the chief stone of the foundation
 - He provides ministers who preach and teach like builders
 - the saints are like living stones being built up into a temple for the Holy Spirit

This evening we work toward that interpretation by hearing what the four beasts say about their relationship with Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain.

The song of redemption in this vision

A new song is sung to the Lamb, praising Him for how He was slain, and by His blood has redeemed.

Revelation 5:8-9 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. (9) And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

One way we know that the four and twenty elders represent the saints, the church, is that they sing “redeemed us to God by thy blood.”

W.A. Criswell *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, p. 31

[Begin reading p. 30 second paragraph “Who are these...” end reading top of p. 33 “...redeemed of humanity.”]

Then if we accept the Textus Receptus, the Greek text used in the translation of the King James Version, in the fifth chapter, these elders sing to the Lamb of God: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. And has made us kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” Whoever these twenty-four elders are, they were once sinful people, redeemed unto God by the blood of the Lamb. Such a thing could never be said of angels. Who, then, are these four and twenty elders? They are God’s saints. They are the redeemed of mankind. They are His blood-bought people.

Bibles in which the New Testament was translated from the body of manuscripts known as the *textus receptus* or Received Text records the elders singing, “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us.” Bibles in which the New Testament was translated from the body of manuscripts known as the critical text” or “Westcott/Hort” does not have the word “us.” Those translators have inserted the word “men” or the word “people.”

TR: Geneva, KJV, NKJV, KJV2000

CT/WH: NASB, NIV, ESV, CSB many others

So, the 24 elders must be the saints, because they sing that the Lamb has redeemed “us.”

But we are not studying the 24 elders, really, this evening. We are studying the four beasts. The main reason I made that observation with you this evening is to point out that the four beasts are singing that song with the 24 elders.

W.A. Criswell *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, p. 48

[Read the first paragraph of page 48.]

“But most of the ancient Greek manuscripts include in that song not only the four and twenty elders, but also the four *zoa*...”

That those singing the song, both the 24 elders and the 4 beasts, are singing to the Lamb, “Thou hast redeemed us,” tells us that, in the vision, the 4 beasts cannot be understood as being the cherubim themselves, but as being the cherubim as symbolic of a certain type or group of redeemed men.

This is no small matter to interpreting this vision, because many interpreters, including several of the best classic commentators that I read all the time make a point of this.

So, the four beasts are to represent or symbolize those who lead the saints in worshipping God, and who communicate that God is making His presence known among us

to be worshiped

to speak to us

to deal with our sin, either

by judgment and punishment or

by mercy and forgiveness

Therefore the four beasts, the cherubim, in this vision, are to symbolize the ministers or pastors, leading the saints to worship the Lord.

That accords with what we had in chapter 1, the candlesticks were the churches and the stars were the pastors of the churches. The Lord Jesus was pictured, with the pastors and the churches close to Him.

APPLICATION

There are scary times ahead, whether considered in the following pages of Revelation, or in the big events of history regarding countries, wars, empires, rulers, droughts, famines, diseases, etc., or in the troubles each person will face in his own personal life involving himself, his family, his friends. How are we to have the faith, the hope, the courage, the peace, the joy to face all of that?

The one true and living God---Father, Son, and Holy Spirit---has set us in a simple order: God is on the throne in heaven, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The pastors, who are fewer in number, lead the rest of the redeemed, in worshiping God. The pastors proclaim that God is to be worshiped, and the saints worship Him. The pastors read the word of God to us, and the saints hear it and keep it. The pastors proclaim both God's law, with its threatentings of judgment and punishment, and God's gospel, with its promises of mercy and forgiveness; and the saints repent and believe and hope in Jesus Christ. That simple arrangement or structure is ordained by God; He will keep us by use of it.