

Revelation 3:14-22

If we were to leave Philadelphia and travel some 35-40 miles to the southeast, we would come to the seventh and final city on our tour. The city today is called Goncali, but in John's day the city was named Laodicea. Laodicea was located about 10-15 miles north of Colosse and about 6-7 miles south of Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13). Clear back in the year A.D. 60, the Apostle Paul had a real burden for the people of this church (Colossians 2:1; 4:15-17) as it was a church that did have some believers in it at that time and he saw to it that God's Word made it into that church.

If you look at a map, you will notice that Laodicea is about 100 miles directly east of Ephesus. This is a very important geographical point because a major road ran from the Aegean Sea straight to and through Laodicea, thus connecting this city with the entire East. The famous name of this highway was "the great eastern highway." Naturally, this made Laodicea a prime location for business prosperity.

There are four historical facts and features that are critical to this address by Jesus Christ:

Historical Feature #1 - Laodicea was known for its banking.

Laodicea was a major financial center and was one of the wealthiest cities in the world. In A.D. 61, the city was destroyed by an earthquake and the leaders of the city refused to apply for any government financial help from the Roman Empire to rebuild. They underwrote the entire project by themselves. Laodicea was the only city in Asia with enough money to totally rely on her own resources. **This is a key historical fact that shows up in verses 17 and 18a.** This was a major contrast to a city like Philadelphia or Smyrna that was very poor (3:8; 2:9).

Historical Feature #2 - Laodicea was known for its manufacturing.

One of the great resources of this city was the manufacturing of clothes, particularly black woolen clothing. There are still black sheep that live in this area and black wool is a soft wool texture that is very desirable. This city mass-produced clothing for the entire world and **this fact is alluded to in verse 18.**

Historical Feature #3 - Laodicea was known for its medical research.

It was a city that featured a very progressive medical center. In fact, Strabo claims that there was a school of medicine that was located near Laodicea. There were two main contributions that Laodicea made to the medical world: 1) Eye salve - which was an ointment made to treat eye problems; 2) Ear salve - which was an ointment to treat ear problems. **This historical fact is referred to in verse 18.** Obviously, people were able to get good jobs that offered good pay.

Historical Feature #4 - Laodicea was known for its aqueduct .

Laodicea was an inland city. The nearest water source was approximately six miles to the south. A six mile aqueduct was constructed that brought water into the city. The problem in Laodicea was the water. If water was drawn from the cold springs in the mountains, but the time the water reached the city, it had warmed. If water were drawn from the hot springs of Hieropolis, by the time it reached the city, it had cooled. Even though this city was extremely wealthy, it did have a literal problem with lukewarm water. **This historical fact shows up in verses 15-16.**

The great lesson we learn from this historical background is self-reliant prosperity can be an indication of spiritual poverty . Physical prosperity can be an indication of spiritual bankruptcy .

Just because a church or person has a lot of money doesn't mean that he is right with God. Jesus Christ had some specific messages for this church and in these verses there are nine points of communication:

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #1 – Christ addresses the specific angel and church .
3:14a

Laodicea had its own Divine angels monitoring the church located in this specific city. There are a couple of points we want to make about this. **First**, it is obvious that angels monitor the action but do not dictate the action. **Second**, the name Laodicea comes from two words: Laos which means people and dikao which means rule .

The actual meaning of the name Laodicea is the people rule. What apparently existed in this church was a democracy in which the people were ruling, not the Word of God, and the people were leading this church to spiritual bankruptcy. This democratic church was an apostate church. When you have a leadership in a church or nation that lets the people rule rather than the Word of God, it will move to a spiritual bankrupt condition.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #2 – Christ commands John to write to this church. **3:14b**

Laodicea is the worst church of all the churches. Notice carefully what Jesus Christ says this church needs, the written Word of God. This is exactly the same thing Paul said (Colossians 4:16). It does not matter how spiritually bankrupt or carnal the church or people may be, they need the written Word of God. Do not ever forget this. Churches do not need entertainment, seminars, films, bands, concerts or coffee shops, but what they do need is solid systematic instruction from the written Word of God. That is why the book of Revelation opens by saying blessed are they who read, who hear and who heed the written Scriptures (Rev. 1:3).

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POINT OF COMMUNICATION #3 – Christ communicates specific features about Himself.
3:14c

There are three ways Christ identifies Himself to this church and one key thing He wants this church to understand is that “He is the factual truth and what He says is the factual truth.”

Feature #1 - Jesus Christ is the “ Amen .”

The word “the Amen” (ο αμην) mean that Jesus Christ is truth, He is the specific Person who reveals solemn, factual truth. Jesus Christ wanted His church to realize that what He says is always solemn, factual truth. When we use the word “amen” we are assenting to the fact that what we just heard is solemn, factual truth and we agree to it. Paul points out that all of the promises of God are fulfilled by Jesus Christ who is “our Amen” (II Corinthians 1:20).

Feature #2 - Jesus Christ is the faithful and true witness.

The people of the church of Laodicea were phonies. They were not faithful and they were not true. In contrast to them, Jesus Christ is a witness who is faithful and true in everything He says. His assessment of this church will be a faithful and true assessment. He cannot say or do anything false. It is very wise to take Christ’s words to a church seriously.

Feature #3 - Jesus Christ is the beginning of the creation of God.

The grammatical stress of this phrase means Jesus Christ began creation. In other words, He is God, the Creator. It is interesting to note that in Paul’s letter to the Colossians which was just a few miles from Laodicea, he too emphasized that Jesus Christ is the God Creator of everything (Col. 1:13-17). Apparently the Deity of Jesus Christ was under attack in this vicinity and Jesus Christ specifically reinforces His Deity as God and Creator.

Everything He was about to say to this church had better be taken seriously, for He is God and everything He says is dogmatic, factual truth.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #4 – Christ’s assessment of things negative in the church.
3:15-18

I want us to observe that there is nothing Jesus Christ says that is good or positive about this church. In every other church, there was at least someone or something good in it, but not Laodicea. **This is a very important point to see because this church was praised by the community and was praised by the Roman world and it was despised by Jesus Christ.** This church proves that it is possible to be religiously praised by our family, friends and co-workers and not have any praise at all by Jesus Christ. This church had the applause of the Roman world and Jesus Christ did not have one good thing to say about it.

The words “I know” speak of full knowledge. There are three negative realities Christ reveals:

Negative Reality #1 - Christ knows their deeds . **3:15a**

Christ says “I know everything that is happening in this church.” Now this was a church with a lot of members and a lot of action. They had financial planning seminars and city beautification meetings. Christ says I want you to know that I know every negative thing that is happening in this church and My assessment is not positive. He knew this was a phony church filled with phony religious people.

Negative Reality #2 - Christ knows they are lukewarm . **3:15b-16**

The church was not hot or cold. This is imagery to which the people of this city could easily relate, because these people detested their water because it was lukewarm. It was lukewarm in its aqueducts and there was nothing refreshing about it. If you were cold and wanted a hot drink you got lukewarm water. If you were hot and wanted a cold drink you got lukewarm water. Lukewarm water was sickening to these people just like these people were sickening to Jesus Christ. Christ says I know your works and you are neither hot or cold. The church was blah. There was nothing refreshing about it whatsoever; it was useless.

Now I think there has been a great misunderstanding of what Christ is saying here. When Christ says that He wishes that they were cold or hot, He is not referring to a cold or hot spirituality. He is not saying I wish you were either saved or unsaved. He is not saying I wish you were either spiritual or carnal. All of Scripture testifies of God’s desire that people would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and then grow to become spiritually mature.

If we leave this in its historical context the interpretation becomes clear. **What Jesus Christ is saying to this church is that I wish you were cold or hot; that is, I wish you were refreshing and useful for something.** You are like lukewarm water and lukewarm water isn’t good for anything; you cannot drink it, you cannot bathe in it, you cannot sterilize anything in it; it is useless. Christ says that is my assessment of this church. It was a useless church and wasn’t good for anything.

Now because this was such a useless, lukewarm church Christ says, “I will spit you out of My mouth.” This warning would have meant something to these people because this is exactly what they had done time and time again with lukewarm water. In fact, William Barclay said lukewarm water has a tendency to make someone physically ill and a lukewarm mineral spring can actually cause one to vomit (*Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 98).

Now of course the question we must ask is, “What did Jesus Christ actually mean by this?” What exactly did He mean when He said that He would spit this church out of His mouth?

There is an O.T. reference that uses this exact imagery found in Leviticus 18:24-30.

In this context, this imagery refers to a punishment that would be handed out by God in the Promised Land because of evil. The land that should have been a welcome spot for Israel would become a specific spot of judgment, and God would remove her from the land and send her out into the Gentile nations. The actual idea of being spit out or spewed out is being spit out of land that should have been home. Just as lukewarm water is not welcomed in someone's mouth, so this sinful nation would not be welcomed in her land.

Now the image as it relates to the church is one of the church not being welcomed in the place it should have been welcomed. The image presented by Jesus Christ is that it is spit out in rejection and is not in the place where it should have been. **Eschatologically and theologically, the only thing that this can have church reference to is not being raptured but being thrust out into the Great Tribulation.** As Thomas said, this is a serious warning of "eschatological wrath" (Vol. 1, p. 309).

In other words, the people of this church were all lost and they would not be raptured, but would be forced to go into a world-wide wrath judgment of God known as "the Great Tribulation." This was a totally useless church in the eyes of Jesus Christ. It was very religious but it was not comprised of true believers who love the Word of God and who loved Jesus Christ. This was a very wealthy church comprised of all unbelievers, which is confirmed by **Revelation 3:17-18, 20. Christ was not in this church at all; He was on the outside looking in.**

Not all people who go to church are going to be raptured. Not all churches are going to be raptured, even those places that have Bibles. Laodicea had access to the written Word of God - this letter and the Colossian letter. Only believers who trust in Jesus Christ will be raptured and the rest are lost, no matter how rich they are or how spiritual they pretend to be; they will be thrust into the Great Tribulation. **There will be many religious people who went to church who will be in the Tribulation.**

Negative Reality #3 - Christ knows what they are saying. **3:17-18**

Jesus Christ knew what these Laodiceans were saying about themselves. The Greek verb "saying" (λεγειν) is present tense, which means these were things these church people were continually and habitually saying. **People who are not actually right with God can talk a good game and make it sound like they are right with God and are being blessed by God.**

There are three things the people of this Laodicean church were continually saying:

(Saying #1) - They were continually saying they were rich. **3:17a**

This is the same kind of thing Ephraim said about himself (Hosea 12:8) and Hosea said he "feeds on the wind and multiplies lies" (Hosea 12:1).

The Laodiceans put a lot of stock in their money. They believed they were right with God and the proof was they had lots of money. They considered this to be a sign of great blessing. They probably got their “prosperity gospel” concept from bits and pieces of the O.T. But what we will see is that their perception of themselves and Christ’s perception of them were poles apart.

(Saying #2) - They were continually talking about their wealth . **3:17b**

The perfect tense of the verb “have become” indicates that the people of this church continually looked back in the past to the point of their financial success and continued to believe that this was a Divine sign of God’s favor at the present.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said the Laodicean board could show the latest annual report with impressive financial statistics (*Be Victorious*, p. 46). This probably was a church that took in millions and could have taken you on a tour of their impressive facility.

(Saying #3) - They were continually talking about the fact that they had need of nothing .
3:17c

They believed they were so prosperous that this meant they were in great spiritual shape in the sight of God. They could underwrite any financial project they wanted. If they needed a new sanctuary, they could write a check.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #5 – Christ assesses their real spiritual condition. **3:17d-h**

Immediately after Christ says I know what you are saying He says, I want to tell you what you don’t know. **It is not what you have that is the problem; it is what you don’t have that is the problem. What you don’t have is a true perception of your spiritual condition.** When Christ says “you do not know,” He uses the word oida again, which means they do not have a full, accurate knowledge of their spiritual condition.

Before we move on, we need to see an important point. **It is possible to have a great deal financially and believe you are blessed by God when in all reality you are spiritually bankrupt.** It is possible to think you are really blessed by God when you are actually being cursed by God.

There are five true assessments Christ makes of their real spiritual condition:

- Assessment #1** - You need to know you are wretched - one of distressed misery (**3:17d**).
- Assessment #2** - You need to know you are miserable - one of a pitiable sight to God (**3:17c**).
- Assessment #3** - You need to know you are poor - one of spiritual beggars with nothing (**3:17d**).
- Assessment #4** - You need to know you are blind - one of not seeing their real condition (**3:17e**).
- Assessment #5** - You need to know you are naked - one of not having spiritual clothing (**3:17f**).

There was a major difference between the way God saw this church and the way it saw itself.

Woe to any person who equates financial prosperity with spiritual prosperity.

God has promised to meet our needs but He has not promised to make us rich. If we keep in mind that this is a world that is dominated by the influence of Satan, we must be very cautious in equating financial prosperity with spiritual prosperity.

William Newell said that entire denominations are filled with this spiritual poverty (*Revelation*, p. 77). People go to church and look at buildings and towers and instruments and facilities and don't realize the place is spiritually dead and doomed. Many are as blind as the people in the church of Laodicea.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #6 – Christ's advises the church to take immediate action.
3:18-19

Jesus Christ has some very serious warning and council for this church and the essence of it is this - **you had better come to terms with your true spiritual condition right now and repent.** This church was advised to immediately recognize their spiritual poverty and come to Christ. He warns the church to purchase two things that no amount of money could buy and one anointing that no money could buy.

It is important to observe that all three figures, two buying and one anointing, are given to show the Laodiceans authentic need for salvation. Everyone in this church needed to be born again. Not one person in this church was actually saved. They had been going to church for years - singing, giving, fellowshiping, but no one was saved. So Christ gives them three pieces of advice:

Piece of Advice #1 - Jesus Christ advises them to buy gold. **3:18a**

The construction in Greek is very emphatic stressing they are to **buy gold from Him**. Since this city was a banking capital and many people in this church already had lots of gold, this piece of advice would strike home.

We may notice that Christ qualifies the gold they are to buy, gold "refined by fire." Jesus is telling them to buy gold from Him that is refined and pure that can make them spiritually rich. **This kind of purity comes by faith in Him. These people needed to stop trusting in their money and in themselves and trust solely and only in Jesus Christ.** They needed to buy pure gold from Him by faith.

Piece of Advice #2 - Jesus Christ advises them to buy clothing. **3:18b**

Laodicea was known for its black clothing. Christ says you need to buy from me the kind of clothing that is white that will cover over your sinful condition. White clothing in Revelation is a symbol of the righteousness of God found in Jesus Christ (Rev. 4:4; 6:11; 19:8). What Christ is saying is that this church needed His righteousness that comes by faith in Him.

Piece of Advice #3 - Jesus Christ advises them to anoint their eyes. **3:18c**

What He is suggesting here is that they open their spiritual eyes to their own need for salvation. The anoint of the eyes is a spiritual anointing which is produced by the Holy Spirit (I John 2:20, 27). What John is saying is that these members of this church needed to yield to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and believe on Jesus Christ.

Now the key question is how could the Laodiceans buy these things? They obviously had lots of money, but their money could not buy one thing on this list. **The answer is by faith. The only way these Laodiceans could get any of these things was by faith in Jesus Christ. They trusted in themselves and not in Jesus Christ.**

Verse 19 is tricky. This verse is used by some to defend the thesis that the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ is limited to “those” whom He does love. Some conclude that the atoning work of Jesus Christ is limited based on this verse.

What Christ says is that he reproveth and disciplines those He loves. The Greek word “love” is phileo (φιλεω), not agape (αγαπη), which is the love God has for His own. This word indicates an emotional/friendship kind of relationship. The word “reprove” is strong and means to treat with contempt and to expose their faults. The word “discipline” refers to treating people in a disciplinary and chastising way.

The basic meaning of all of this is that just because one belongs to a church and seems to be prospering does not mean that person is in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. There will be just as many churchgoing people who were lost as who were saved. In the end, they will be exposed as having been false and they will be disciplined.

William Newell points out something interesting when he said very few faithful ministers will risk offending people by rebuking as many as they befriend. But reproving and rebuking is all part of a faithful ministry. People may not like to be reproveth, but sometimes that is precisely what is needed (II Timothy 4:2).

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #7 – Christ’s gives His command to the church. **3:19c-20**

Christ gives His command to the church and it is straight forward - be zealous and repent right now. In other words, your time is running out and the people in this church need to believe right now and by faith purchase My righteous white clothing.

Now Revelation 3:20 is one of the most misunderstood verses in the entire Bible and one of the saddest verses in the entire New Testament. Although it certainly has an application for one who is lost outside the church, it is specifically addressed to one who is in the church who appears to be very religious and thinks he is right with God and his money proves it, when in all reality he is completely lost.

The only cure for a lukewarm lost condition of the heart is to have Jesus Christ in the heart.

If we leave this verse in its proper context, it is addressed to the Laodicean church and apparently the entire church is lost. In other words, there is not one person in the church who is saved. There were many who were rich and successful in the church, but Jesus Christ was not in anyone in the church. **Revelation 3:20** is an evangelistic verse aimed straight at those in the church who have not believed on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ knocks at their hearts every Sunday and they will not let Him in.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #8 – The message to the unbeliever. **3:21**

Christ promises one who will believe on Him will be able to someday reign with Him.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #9 – The message to the believer. **3:22**

The one who has ears in the church need to hear what the Spirit has said here; specifically, not all people at church are saved, and physical and financial prosperity is not ever a sign of spirituality in one's relationship with God. A person can be financially successful and spiritually destitute.

Historically - Laodicea was a literal church with a literal problem which was her wealth. She became so financially wealthy that she couldn't even recognize her own lost condition. The church was useless. Unless there was real conversion there would be judgment. There is no evidence that the church ever repented even though the church continued to be a wealthy church until the 19th century.

Prophetically - Laodicea fits the time period of 1900 until the Rapture. It has been during this era of history that liberalism, skepticism and unbelief have totally infiltrated the church. Some of the largest denominations do not carefully teach the Scriptures and even deny them and some have allowed very satanic things to enter the church. This is the lost church and it is a financially wealthy church and as we near the end, more and more of them will surface. The people of this church will be thrust into the Great Tribulation.

Representatively - Laodicea represents any church in any age that equates physical prosperity with spiritual prosperity. Huge offerings do not mean God is blessing the church. He could be condemning it.

Individually - This church represents religious people without Christ who continually go to a church and think they are right with God because of their prosperity. In God's mind they are useless and heading to judgment. Without a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, they are nothing regardless of how much they have.

Revelation 4:1-11

We may recall that the book of Revelation gives us its own inspired outline in Revelation 1:19: John is told to write things past (Revelation 1), things present (Revelation 2-3) and things future (Revelation 4-22).

Revelation chapters 4-5 give us a breathtaking view of the throne of God and introduce us to the events that lead up to “The Great Tribulation.” No two chapters are more worshipful than these two.

The main question that is crucial to these chapters is the question of time. The time question is this: “When do the events of these chapters occur and how do they relate to the Rapture and the Tribulation?”

The second part of the question is the easiest to answer as to how these events relate to the Great Tribulation. The beginning of the Great Tribulation starts in chapter 6. The Great Tribulation begins when Jesus Christ breaks open the first seal (Revelation 6:1). Since chapter 5 is the prelude which introduces Jesus Christ as being worthy enough to break open God’s wrath seals (5:1, 6-7) and since the Tribulation does not begin until the first seal is broken (6:1), it is obvious that this particular scene takes place just prior to the Tribulation period. **Chapters 4-5 occur just before the Tribulation begins.**

Now in determining how these chapters relate to the Rapture, there are five observations we may make:

- 1) These events obviously occurred after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:6).
- 2) These events obviously occur in the third part of the book (Rev. 1:19 / **4:1**).
This begins the future section of the book defined by the phrase “after these things.” The “these things” specifically refer to the things of the church. **In other words, after the Church Age these are the things that will happen.**
- 3) The Church is promised deliverance from the Tribulation (3:10) and it is very clear that these chapters are a prelude to the Great Tribulation.
- 4) The Church is not mentioned as being on earth after chapter 3 and is not mentioned again until Revelation 22:16.
- 5) The Lord is no longer viewed as being connected to the “lampstands on earth” (1:13; 2:1), but is now seen as operating a program of God’s wrath judgment out of heaven (5:6; 6:1).

Our conclusion is that the events of Revelation 4-5 occur after the Rapture of the Church just prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation. After the Church Age is over, immediately before the start of the Great Tribulation, the events described in these chapters occur and the Church is in heaven to witness them.

In Chapter 4, John gets his first glimpse of heaven. John is transported to heaven and writes down exactly what he sees.

What John sees is God the Father sitting on His throne and He has a scroll in His hand which contains the seven seals of wrath judgments to be poured out in the Great Tribulation. No one is worthy to approach the throne and take the scroll and start breaking the seals and that is when Jesus Christ enters. He publicly approaches the throne, takes the Scroll and starts breaking the seals, showing that He alone is worthy of pouring out God's wrath judgment. It is a stirring scene.

What is amazing for us is that we will be in heaven and see this happen just as John wrote it. We get to study this scene from Scripture and then we get to go to heaven and watch it play out.

Revelation 4:1 begins with a prepositional phrase which occurs twice in the verse, "after these things" (μετα ταυτα). This is the exact same construction that occurs in Revelation 1:19. This is important to see because this begins the section when the Church Age is over and we move into things future.

Dr. C. I. Scofield wrote: "Beginning with 4:1 the viewpoint of John is from heaven. Since the word "church" does not appear again in Revelation until 22:16, the catching up of John from earth to heaven has been taken to be a symbolic representation of the translation of the church as occurring before the events of the Tribulation described in chapters 6-19" (*The Scofield Study Bible*, NASV, Revelation 4:1 note, pp. 1726-1727).

There are some key similarities between what happens to John in these two verses and what will happen to us when we are raptured, but there are also five main differences which we may see from I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

Difference #1 - An archangel will announce the Rapture (I Thess. 4:16), whereas John heard a voice and we are not certain whose voice it was (**Revelation 4:1**).

Difference #2 - The "dead in Christ" are resurrected and caught up first at the Rapture (I Thess. 4:16), whereas only John was caught up to heaven in **Revelation 4:1** and there was no resurrection.

Difference #3 - The believer meets loved ones who died and instantly meets Jesus Christ at the Rapture (I Thess. 4:17a), whereas John first meets a throne (**Rev. 4:2**).

Difference #4 - The first heavenly thing the believer sees at the Rapture is Jesus Christ (I Thess. 4:17b), whereas the first heavenly thing John saw was the throne of God the Father (**Rev. 4:3**).

Difference #5 - The believer who is raptured will never be separated from Jesus Christ and will remain with Him forever (I Thess. 4:17), whereas John had to return to earth to die.

In verses 1-2, the actual process of getting John to heaven involved three main actions:

Action #1 - What John saw . **4:1a**

The first part of the process of transporting John to heaven was that he looked and saw a door . that had been opened in heaven. This point will shatter the theology of many people because one who goes to heaven does not see pearly gates but an open door. The twelve pearly gates show up when Christ creates a new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:21).

In the Greek text, there is an article “the” before the singular noun “heaven.” This means that John saw an open door that enabled him to look at “the heaven” that is the place where God’s throne is located. There are three heavens in Scripture: 1) Our present atmosphere where the birds fly; 2) The outer atmosphere where the planets are; 3) The heaven where God’s throne exists. All who have sight can see the first two heavens every day, but in order to see the third heaven, God must open the door. In fact, the participle “open” is perfect, passive in Greek, meaning that the door had been opened by God for John to see this and John had nothing to do with the action. A key point here is that no one will see heaven unless God opens the door of the heart and the door of heaven. There is only one way to heaven - faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Now the noun “throne” is used some thirty-seven times in Revelation and occurs thirteen . times in **chapter 4 (4:2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 9, 10, 10)**. This throne of God is something that really captures John’s eye. He sees what is “on the throne” (**v. 2**); what is “around the throne” (**v. 3**); what comes out “from the throne” (**v. 5**); and what is “before the throne” (**v. 6**).

Action #2 - What John heard . **4:1b-d**

In close proximity to what John saw, John heard a voice that was “like the sound of a trumpet.” A trumpet was used for signaling major military and religious events. The trumpet was a very distinct sound which pierced the air with great authority. When a voice is like the sound of a trumpet, it is a very commanding voice which rings with authority and in this case it is the authority of God .

The voice John heard communicated two main messages to John:

(Communication #1) - The voice commands John to “come up here.” **4:1c**

(Communication #2) - The voice promises to show John future things. **4:1d**

There is a tremendous parallel to what happens to John and what will happen to us at the Rapture, which is given to us in I Thessalonians 4:16-17:

- 1) We will look up and see a door in heaven open and we will see Jesus Christ come through that door up in the clouds.
- 2) We will hear a commanding voice probably first addressed to the dead “in Christ.”
- 3) We will hear a commanding voice of the archangel say “come up here.”

It would appear that even in early Scriptural data that the words “come up” are key words to going into the presence of God. Those were the very words God said to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12).

Action #3 - What John experienced. **4:2**

The Greek text indicates that there was no time gap in these actions - John saw, John heard and “immediately” he was in heaven. By means of the spirit (possibly the angelic spirit who is showing John these things or some special spiritual state of John), John immediately and instantly found himself in heaven.

When John got into this heaven, there were five sights that he immediately saw (4:2-8):

(Sight #1) - John saw a throne standing in heaven. **4:2b**

The emphasis here is that God’s throne was standing in the heaven. The imperfect tense of the verb indicates it is a throne that has been standing in heaven throughout all of past time. John was seeing it for the first time, but it has existed throughout all of time.

(Sight #2) - John saw One sitting on the throne. **4:2c-3**

The first thing that catches John’s eye about the One sitting on the throne is brilliant color. This is no coincidence because Ezekiel was impressed with exactly the same thing when he saw God’s throne (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

John specifically says the One sitting on the throne was like a “jasper stone and sardius.” We are not exactly certain what these colors are. Most scholars agree the sardius is a beautiful deep fiery red and the jasper is like a crystal clear brilliant shining diamond based on Rev. 21:11.

Encircling the throne was a “rainbow.” The throne is standing suspended in heaven and all around it is this rainbow which has the appearance of an emerald. This rainbow was a beautiful green, emerald color and John was seeing a display of supernatural, sovereign beauty.

Now the rainbow is a reminder of the faithfulness of God to keep His promises (Gen. 9:12-16), specifically to never destroy the world again by a flood. This rainbow does immediately connect us to the grace and mercy of God and the judgment of God coming from God’s throne (Ps. 29:10).

It is also noteworthy to point out that the jasper stone is the last stone which represents the last tribe of Israel (Exodus 28:9-10, 20, 21) and the sardius or ruby is the first stone that represents the first tribe of Israel (Exodus 28:9-10, 17, 21).

So these colors and this rainbow would clearly testify of the fact that God is faithful to keep all of His covenants and promises with Israel and with all humanity. We may expect that when we have the privilege of going to heaven, we too will see a beautiful majestic display of color at God’s throne.

(Sight #3) - John saw twenty-four other thrones around God's throne with twenty-four elders.
4:4

There were six specific realities John saw about these twenty-four elders:

- 1) They were twenty-four in number - there is a plurality of leadership and this number only shows up in Revelation (**4:4, 10**; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4). We cannot look to any parallel texts for help.
- 2) They were elders (πρεσβυτερος) - this term denotes an official leadership position.
- 3) They were sitting (καθιμα) - the present tense indicates a continual sitting (**4:2**), a permanency.
- 4) They were clothed in white garments - they had the righteousness of Jesus Christ. These clothes represent their purity.
- 5) They wore golden victor's crowns (στεφανος) on their heads - they had been judged and rewarded. These crowns represent their victory.
- 6) These twenty-four elders do various things: **1**) Sit on thrones; **2**) Fall down and worship God (**4:10**; 5:14; 11:16; 19:4); **3**) Know the precise program of God (5:5; 7:13-14); **4**) Are very close to Jesus Christ (5:6); **5**) Fall down and worship Jesus Christ (5:8; 7:11:16); **6**) Know the importance of prayer (5:8); **7**) Are able to sing praises to Jesus Christ (5:9-10); **8**) Know special worship songs no one else knows (14:3).

Now the real debate is who are these twenty-four elders? Truth is, we do not specifically know and apparently it is not necessary that we do specifically know. There are four main views:

(View #1) - Some say they are twenty-four angels.

Some say this is a special class of angels who have high authority at the court of God in heaven. The problem with this is that the word "elders" (πρεσβυτερος) is **never** used in reference to an angelic being. According to Moulten and Gedan this word is used some fifty-four times prior to Revelation and it **always** refers to humans. Furthermore the noun "crowns" (στεφανος) refers to a victor's crown which never is given to angels, but to an individual who has been judged faithful and victorious.

(View #2) - Some say they are twenty-four elders out of the Church Age.

These twenty-four elders represent the N.T. Church which has been resurrected and raptured. We do know that Jesus Christ promised that those who would believe on Him would receive "white garments" (3:5), "crowns" (3:11), and "thrones" (Rev. 3:21). We learn from Revelation 20:4, that the saints of the Church Age are given thrones and judgment responsibilities. The white clothing meant they were clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and the crowns meant they were highly rewarded with this privileged position. The biggest problem with this view is connecting the number twenty-four to the Church.

(View #3) - Some say they are twenty-four elders who represent God's program with both Israel and the Church.

This view says that there are twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles for the Church and the number of twenty-four represents the leadership of the program of God in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. According to Revelation 21:11-12, 14, the New Jerusalem will feature the names of the twelve tribes and the names of the twelve apostles. The problem with this view is that we must divide the number twenty-four by two and how did the O.T. saints received a resurrected reward when their resurrection does not occur until after the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2; Isaiah 26:19; John 11:24)?

(View #4) - Some say they are twenty-four priestly elders from Israel.

This view suggests that these elders are the completed priesthood elders connected to the final program of God in regard to Israel. In the O.T. economy there were twenty-four divisions of the Levitical priesthood (I Chron. 24:7-19), so this allows for a literal interpretation of the number. This certainly fits the flow of the book of Revelation, because much of what is about to occur is aimed at Israel. It also would mean that this would be a special moment when the highest leaders of Israel would recognize the importance of the Church. The problem is the same as above.

What we do know is that God's throne features high positions of structured and numbered leadership. There will be structured authority and submission to that authority.

(Sight #4) - John saw a lot of visual and audible activity coming from God's throne. **4:5**

- 1) John saw "flashes of lightening" - the most powerful and perfect lightening display ever seen.
- 2) John heard "sounds and peals of thunder" - lightning and thunder are often a prelude to God's judgment (8:5; 11:19; 16:18) and the intimidating presence of God (Exodus 19:16).
- 3) John saw seven lamps before the throne which represented the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit (conviction, regeneration, baptism, indwelling, filling, sealing, sanctifying). The Holy Spirit is typically not visible just like the wind (John 3:8), but at God's throne there are visible manifestations.

(Sight #5) - John saw a sea before the throne of God. **4:6a**

Before the throne of God was a "sea of glass like crystal." The Biblical image portrayed by crystal is one of something pure, clear and unhidden (Rev. 21:11; 22:1). What stands out to John is that before God's throne was a sea that was totally pure with nothing hidden. **This is critical to see about God's throne; it is a throne of total purity and nothing is hidden from Him.** We know from Revelation 15:2 that Tribulation martyred saints are standing on this sea, so we may assume that any person who is before God's throne is standing there in total purity and nothing is hidden.

(Sight #6) - John saw unusual creatures in and around God's throne. **4:6b-11**

The noun "creatures" (ζωα) refers to living beings. These are some kind of living being with both animal and humans features that exist at God's throne. **Three things are very clear, they are very unusual, they are real and they are living.** Both the O.T. and N.T. writers describe seeing these beings so they must be very important (Ezekiel 1:5-14; 10:10-14, 19-22; Isaiah 6:1-6; Revelation 4:6-11).

From the book of Revelation, we may conclude the following about these living creatures:

- 1) These beings always appear near the throne of God. **4:6; 5:6; 14:3**
- 2) These beings are particularly involved in worshipping God for His Holiness and Mercy, specifically in regard to sinful man. **4:8; 5:9, 14; 7:11; 19:4**
- 3) These beings are closely connected to the actual process of judgment. **6:7**
- 4) These beings are involved in knowing and revealing God's final program. **6:1, 7**
- 5) These beings were not hostile to the Apostle John. **6:1, 7**
- 6) These beings are in a position of recognizable authority. **4:9-10; 14:3**

There are three very peculiar attributes that are given to us about these beings:

- 1) They have several eyes and are able to look in all directions - front and back. **4:6**
- 2) They each have a distinct feature of an animal, a human or a bird. **4:7**
- 3) They each have six wings. **4:8**

Attribute #1 - They have several eyes able to look in all directions at the same time. **4:6**

This is obviously a reference to the fact that nothing escapes their eyesight. These beings can continually guard and monitor the throne of God and the Holiness of God and at the same time see everything that is happening. Never do these angels lose their focus on God, but they also never miss anything else either.

Attribute #2 - They each have a distinct feature. **4:7**

In Revelation, the four living beings each have one face - lion, calf, man and eagle.
In Ezekiel the four living beings each had four faces - man, lion, ox and eagle (Ezek. 1:6, 10).

Attribute #3 - They each have six wings which are used for covering and speed. **4:8**

In Revelation, the four living beings each have six wings and one face.
In Ezekiel, the four living beings each have four wings and four faces (Ezek. 1:6, 10).

When we compare Revelation with Ezekiel, there are five main differences:

Difference #1 - There is a difference in the number of the wings - six versus four.

Difference #2 - There is a difference in the number of faces - one versus four.

Difference #3 - There is a difference in the order .

Revelation - lion, calf, man, eagle

Ezekiel - man, lion, ox, eagle

Difference #4 - There is a slight difference in the content .

In both books, the lion, man and eagle are the same.

In Ezekiel there is an ox and in Revelation there is a calf.

Difference #5 - There is a difference in function .

In Ezekiel these beings are involved in much movement (1:14-21).

In Revelation these beings are involved in more monitoring (6:1, 3)

This raises several questions:

- 1) Who are these beings?
- 2) What do their faces mean?
- 3) Why are there differences between Ezekiel and Revelation?
- 4) How do these beings relate to Israel and the Church?

(Question #1) - Who are these living beings?

Another way to ask this question is this: “Are these living beings in Revelation Cherubim or Seraphim angels?”

Actually there are two major prophets in the O.T. who give us some insight into this question:

- 1) The prophet Isaiah ; 2) The prophet Ezekiel .

Isaiah describes the fact that he saw angelic beings he calls “seraphim” who have six wings - Isaiah 6:2. Two wings were used to cover the angel’s face , two were used to cover the angel’s feet and two were used to fly . All we know about the seraphim is what we see here. These angels are exalted angels who worship God at His throne and it is clear that **the four living beings in Revelation have a similar wing structure.**

Ezekiel is the prophet who gives us much more insight and information concerning these angelic beings (Ezek. 1:5-14; 10:9-14, 19-22). It is clear that he classifies these creatures as “cherubim” not “seraphim.” The “cherubim” angels are the highest ranked angels and it is clear that **the angelic beings in Revelation are “cherubim” with all the attributes of the seraphim.**

We do know that wherever God’s worship and presence existed, there were special designated angels. This was true in the O.T. temple and it is obviously true at the throne of God.

According to Exodus 25:17-22, cherubim were to completely guard the mercy seat of God.

According to Genesis 3:24, cherubim kept Adam and Eve away from the tree of life.

According to I Kings 6:21-28, cherubim were part of the decoration of Solomon’s temple.

According to Exodus 26:31-33, cherubim shut off the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

(Question #2) - What do these faces represent?

Ever since the early days of the Church, Bible interpreters believe that there is a very special New Testament Church Age meaning and representation of the order of the four faces. There have been various attempts to relate the four faces to the four Gospels and four different portraits of Jesus Christ.

The Lion represents Jesus Christ as King which is portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew.
The Calf represents Jesus Christ as a servant which is portrayed in the Gospel of Mark.
The Man represents Jesus Christ as a man which is portrayed in the Gospel of Luke.
The Eagle represents Jesus Christ as heavenly God which is portrayed in the Gospel of John.

To actually know what these faces represent, we must take a look at each one:

Representation #1 - The Lion. **4:7a**

The lion is referred to more than 100 times in the Bible and the vast majority of these uses are found in the O.T. and are closely connected to Israel. The lion is used two ways:

- 1) Literally - it refers to the literal animal known as the lion - i.e. Daniel 6:16-24
- 2) Metaphorically - it refers to various characteristics which a lion symbolizes.

The majority of uses of the noun lion are metaphorical and when it is used this way in Scripture it is specifically used of a fierce anger and ferocious judgment of God against God's enemies (Isaiah 31:4; Jeremiah 25:37-38; Hosea 5:14).

As we relate this face to these living creatures, we conclude that the lion element represents the fact that these living beings are closely involved in the fierce anger and ferocious judgments of God against God's enemies. In Revelation, this part of the being would specifically praise and worship God for His judgments.

Representation #2 - The Calf. **4:7b**

The calf is referred to some twenty-five times in the O.T. It is used in two ways:

- 1) Literally - it refers to a literal calf, the kind one would eat for food (Gen. 18:7; I Sam. 28:24).
- 2) Metaphorically - it is used in three different ways:
 - A. As a symbol of idolatry concerning the nation Israel - by far the most uses.
Exodus 32:4, 8, 19, 24, 35; Deuteronomy 9:16, 21; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19;
Hosea 8:5-6
 - B. As a symbol of millennial peace. A calf dwelling with the young lion. Isaiah 11:6
 - C. As a symbol of the future Promised Land. Jeremiah 34:18-19; Genesis 15:7-17

As we relate this face to these living beings, we conclude that these three points specifically connect this living being to Israel and the idolatry that has kept her out of the land, but also the Grace of God that will give her the land. This beast praises and worships God because Israel will receive her land and all idolatry and immorality will be eliminated. It is more than coincidental that just before Israel gets her land, the world in the Tribulation will be dominated by idolatry and immorality (Revelation 9:20-21).

Representation #3 - The Man . 4:7c

It is important to see that this living being as the “face like that of a man.” The emphasis in the Greek is on the noun “face”; literally the text reads “the face as of a man” (το προσωπον ως ανθρωπου). This too is an important concept that relates to God and Israel.

In the O.T., the idea of face specifically has to do with being in a favorable or unfavorable position with God. For example, when Israel was living in sin, God hid His face from her; that is she was no longer the object of His blessing (Ezekiel 13:17). When Israel was in captivity, she would wait for God’s face to turn toward her, thus restoring her blessings which included forgiveness and deliverance (Isaiah 8:17-18).

This “living being” becomes very active during this time period of Revelation. **He is particularly involved in praising God for the fact that God is about to favorably shine His face of blessing on Israel and bless her forever.**

Representation #4 - The Eagle . 4:7d

We need to observe that this fourth living being is not just any eagle, but like a “flying eagle.” There are five O.T. passages that are specifically related to this picture: 1) Deuteronomy 28:49; 2) Jeremiah 48:40; 3) Jeremiah 49:22; 4) Hosea 8:1; 5) Habakkuk 1:8. In examining these texts we may observe the following:

1. The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment against rebellious Israel . Deuteronomy 28:49-50
- 2) The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment against Israel’s enemies . Jeremiah 48:40; 49:22
- 3) The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment by raising up nations against Israel . Hosea 8:1
- 4) The flying eagle represents God’s final , swift, devastating judgment by rising up nations to come against Israel just before He delivers her. Habakkuk 1:8

Collectively speaking, the flying eagle represents the swift judgment of God against His own rebellious nation and against all of Israel’s enemies. This living being worships God because the final and swift judgment of God is about to hit the world, and in the end Israel will stand and all nations who were against her will be quickly destroyed.

These living beings worship God continually in regard to His holy judgments, and at this point, there is much action because God is about to take over everything.

(Question #3) - Why the differences between Ezekiel and Revelation?

Why are their four heads in Ezekiel and one head in Revelation? Why four wings in Ezekiel and six wings in Revelation?

The difference in the number of heads may be discovered by the number of major judgments which remained pertaining to Israel. We may notice in Ezekiel 1:5-15 that each living being had a connection to the earth. In Ezekiel's prophecy, it was during the time of the Babylonian activity, which was the third major political power used by God to dominate Israel (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon). After the Babylonian captivity there were three more major powers that would dominate Israel - Persia, Greece and Rome. If we connect these four heads to four judgments yet to come, then there is still one left which is the power of the Antichrist during the Tribulation. As each judgment of God decreases so do the head numbers.

The six wings of Revelation show that this final judgment will be unusually swift. It will be faster than any of the other judgments. The thing to see about these living beings is that all judgment is authorized from God's throne.

According to **Revelation 4:8**, these living beings do not cease day and night to worship God in this very context of judgment. They sing about God's holiness, they sing about God's might and they sing about God's eternity.

The threefold repetition of "Holy, Holy, Holy" clearly is a reference to the entire Trinity.

We also may observe that at God's throne there is a reference to "day and night" which would mean there are observable time divisions in eternity. There is a day/night time division at God's throne.

It appears from **Revelation 4:9**, that when these living beings praise God because He is the Almighty Eternal God, the twenty-four elders do the same thing, only they fall down before Him and cast their crowns at His feet. It is clear that the living beings are high ranked because the elders do not do this until the living beings do. More than likely, these elders recognize the high rank of the living beings and they submit to their rank and do the same thing.

According to **Revelation 4:11**, the elders sing somewhat of a different song. They are worshipping God specifically for His creation.

It is one thing to worship God for what He does; but it is another thing to worship God for who He is. This is the highest form of worship. Worship God for who He is.

Any who take a serious look at the fourth chapter of Revelation cannot help but be moved with the majesty of heaven.