

Introduction to the End of the World!

Revelation 4

Welcome to the end of the world! We as humans have been fascinated with the end of the world since, well, the beginning of the world.

My fascination with science fiction began as a young child. In 1968 I remember watching Charlton Heston escaping from apes only to realize that he was really on earth in the movie Planet of the Apes.

There is no shortage of ideas on how the world would end in the movies.

By disease in I Am Legend.

Earth quack in 2012.

Dragons in Reign of Fire.

Aliens in War of the World & Independence Day.

Climate change in Day after tomorrow.

Meteor or Comets in Armageddon & Deep Impact.

Lab experiment gone bad in Resident Evil. OK, that one isn't very realistic. Nothing bad ever comes out of pharmaceutical labs...in China...

Machines in Terminator & the Matrix.

And my personal favorite...Zombies in the Walking Dead & World War Z.

So much creativity in how we think about the end of the world, but none of it is as exciting, scary or awe inspiring as what will actually happen at the end of the world as described to us by the Apostle John in his Revelation.

So, join me as we begin to look at what is yet to come.

First, open with me to chapter 1 of Revelation. Let's look at verse 3.

Rev. 1:3, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."

Remember that at this time many didn't read so there needed to be someone to read the Scripture aloud to them. To read this book, Revelation, is the

only book in the Bible that has the promise of a blessing simply for reading it. Of course, being the only book with the promise of a blessing it's the book people stay away from for some strange reason. Come on, you are making it through Leviticus if you have been following the 2-year Bible reading, you can do Revelation!

Some commentaries divide the book of revelation into 2 major points, the first being chapters 1-3 and the second 4-22.

I am going to go with John MacArthur's 3-point outline which is:

- I. The Things Which You Have Seen 1:1-20
- II. The Things Which Are 2:1-3:22
- III. The Things Which Will Take Place After This 4:1-22:21

The first 3 chapters could be its own sermon series and if I am here long enough it will be. We are simply going to say that these chapters include 7 letters to the churches. Each of these churches represents a weakness that has crept into these churches and John's admonition to correct the issues.

Please simply read through these chapters as we move through the later part of the book.

So, we are going to jump into the third major portion of the book of Revelation.

III. The Things Which Will Take Place After This 4:1-22:21

Our goal will be to give you a mental timeline for the events of this part of Revelation. This should help you have confidence to discuss the end times and give you the perspective of how we are already victors of the great battle to come.

So, let's open to Revelation Chapter 4. As you are turning there, we are going to look at the first half of the first section of this part of Revelation.

A. Worship Before God's Heavenly Throne 4:1-5:14

And the section we will look at today:

1. The Throne of God 4:1-11

With the words, "After this I looked," John transitions to his 2nd vision.

Rev. 4:1, “After 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.”

In the phrase, “I will show you what must take place after this.” We see a clear statement referring to what will take place. Often you will hear phrases like “it’s only an allegory” in reference to Revelation. We will for sure encounter some passages as John describes what he is seeing that will make us ask “is this really real.” But remember, we have a man, John, from the first century describing what he is seeing in heaven, a place of indescribable beauty.

Imagine if John were dropped into the middle of Time Square on New Year’s Eve. How do you think he would describe the lights, video billboards, the clothing and the buildings. I suspect it would be with words that would be hard to believe.

So, here is how I approach Scripture. I take it literally, always literally, unless there is absolutely no other way to interpret it. What we have seen throughout history is the tendency to say Scripture is only simple stories that teach a lesson, but not real. If that is the

case, doesn’t it make it a lot easier to ignore Scripture? It’s not real, right?

Jesus took the Old Testament seriously, quoting from every book. Claiming that every letter and every part of a letter would be fulfilled. I wonder if Jesus believed that God created the world in 6 days or if Jonah was actually swallowed by a big fish?

So, for Revelation, as we walk through the prophecy of the end times, I will present it literally and wrestle with the images that seem hard to understand as they arise and we can all make our conclusions on what this book and its message means.

Rev. 4:2-6a, “At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 4 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. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also in front of the throne

there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”

OK, a lot of colorful language here, John is trying to describe what he is seeing in heaven. Let’s take a look at how Ezekiel chapter 1 describes the same scene.

Eze. 1:26-28, “Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 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. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”

What about Daniel, he was caught up into heaven in a dream and it’s recorded in Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:9-10, “As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire,

and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.”

So, 3 different people record their vision of heaven in similar language. Later we will also see Isaiah, Zecharia, Nahum and others who had this same experience.

So many people having visions of heaven I begin to wonder why I can’t have such an experience.

Now, I’m not going to go into explanations of what the rainbow represents, what the jasper and ruby represent. We could spend weeks getting into that level of detail.

For example, the sea of glass in front of the throne is not a literal sea. It says what looked like a sea of glass. We all know what a lake that is completely still looks like. That is what I see in my mind’s eye when I read this passage. What the ground actually is in front of the throne could be gold, so refined that it appears transparent like water. This one idea we could spend an entire message explaining, but how

would that affect your life? I think we can simply conclude that the ground in front of the throne of God is going to be pretty cool to see.

So, what is important in this passage? It says there are 24 elders on thrones around the throne of God. Again, we could go into speculation on who sits on those thrones, but John doesn't even name them.

Then we get to the 7 lamps, which John says are the 7 Spirits of God. We just studied the Trinity and know of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit...now we have 7 Spirits of God?

Amir Tsarfati in "Revealing Revelation" addresses what these 7 Spirits represent. He writes, "The seven spirits that John describes represent the Holy Spirit. The number seven throughout this book communicates completeness or perfection, so in the throne room of God, the fullness of the Holy Spirit is in evidence."

Isaiah 11:2-3a, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord."

Here, Isaiah names some of those spirits of the Holy Spirit.

Last week I finally quoted from Zechariah 4. In that same chapter Zechariah describes his experience in a vision of heaven in which he too saw 7 lamps.

Throughout Scripture we see torches or lamps associated with war. Judges 7:16 & 20 and Nahum 2:3-4 for example. This is all getting us ready for what is to come.

In verse 6 you first see the description of the 4 living creatures. That is a poor translation because we tend to think of creatures as animals. These are not animals. They are exalted cherubim, a type of angel.

Let's go back to Ezekial 1 again.

Eze. 1:4-5, "I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, 5 and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human,"

Sound familiar? Look a bit later in Ezekial.

Eze. 10:15, "Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River."

As we look at the whole of Scripture we begin to see the consistent telling of the same story. Multiple authors over a thousand years write of their experience in heaven and they all line up. So let's go back to Revelation:

Rev. 4:6b-8, "In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 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. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come."

Again, we could spend weeks on these 2 and a half verses. But let's just do a fly over.

Some say the 4 living creatures represent life on earth. The lion being the wild animals, the ox

domesticated animals, man for humanity and the eagle for the birds of the air.

Then what do you do with all the eyes? Eyes everywhere, that would really spook me out. The concept I think they are making here is that these creatures know what is going on as eyes imply seeing and being covered with eyes they see all.

Great details, but let's not lose the important thing that is going on...they are worshipping God. We all know these words: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come."

How many hymns or songs use these words?

The later part of this phrase can be used as an outline for the book of Revelation.

800 years earlier Isaiah is caught up in a vision of heaven and in Isaiah 6:3 he records the exact same praise.

Let's go back to:

Revelation 4:9-11, "Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the 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.”

We know that Jesus sits on God the Father’s right hand on His throne. Then there are the 24 elders on their thrones. I don’t know who they are, but I suspect some of the disciples make it to those seats. Some great Old Testament saints...Abraham? David? Moses? Whoever they are, they are high up, VIP’s in heaven and when the 4 living creatures sing they fall down and worship God.

Do we understand the implications of this? Do we fall down before the Lord in worship? We will someday.

The elders lay down their crowns before the throne and they sing in praise more words we have heard in many songs.

“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.”

So, as we have seen today and as we will see next week, John is caught up in heaven in a vision for the most dramatic events of history. 19 chapters which describe the end of the world and God’s creation of the new heaven and earth. Of those 19 chapters the very first 2 chapters center on the glory and beauty of heaven resulting in great worship of God. More than 10 percent dedicated to what should be our focus...worship.

We are called into a relationship of worshipping our heavenly Father. That is what we are called too. The judgement of the earth that we will see shortly is not for the believer, it is God’s judgement upon an unbelieving world, a world that rejects His Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The message for us that know Him is how will we live knowing the end of the story. Will knowing the end motivate us to live like we know what is coming or do we think of it as something that doesn’t apply to us. Do we treat it like the zombie apocalypse or the AI takeover of the world or some other fiction? Or do we let it motivate us to righteousness and repentance?