

I JUST TOOK A TRIP TO HEAVEN Revelation 4:1-11

(Main Idea of the Biblical Text)

John was given a vision of the heavenly throne room where God is continually worshipped as the creator who is sovereign over all things.

(Main Idea of this Study)

We should be constantly worshipping God because He is the creator who is sovereign over all things.

I. Praise God because He is King over all things (1-5).

A. The plan of God demands our praise (1).

- *After these things*-This grammatical formula, with a slight variation, is also found in 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1 and possibly 19:1. Each of these begin a new section in Revelation. "These things" refers to the revelation of the messages to the seven churches.
- *door standing open in heaven*-This is a PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, meaning that the door was opened by God (PASSIVE VOICE) and remained open (PERFECT TENSE). The door is open and continues to remain open. The word "heaven" is used 55 times in Revelation and always in the singular except for one time in 12:12.
- *And the first voice which I heard*-A "voice," probably the glorified Christ's (cf. 1:10).
- *like a trumpet*-authoritative.
- *must take place after this*-"Must" indicates that the events God was about to reveal will indeed happen. The word indicates divine necessity. According to the outline given in 1:19, this begins the third and final section of the book, describing the events that will follow the church age.

B. The person of God demands our praise (2-3).

- *Immediately I was in the Spirit*-John is described as being in the Spirit in 1:10; 17:3 and 21:10. This may be similar to what happened to Ezekiel in Ezek. 8:1-4; 11:1, to Philip in Acts 8:39-40, and to Paul in 2 Cor. 12:1-2. Whether this is a spiritual trance or a physical transportation is uncertain.
- *a throne set in heaven*-Not so much a piece of furniture, but a symbol of sovereign rule and authority. It is the focus of chap. 4, occurring 13 times, 11 times referring to God's throne. Daniel saw this same scene in Daniel 7.
- *like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance*-Note the repetitive use of the word "like." John is using similes to describe what he saw. John is not going to describe the appearance of God because in Jewish thought, this was extremely inappropriate. But he will describe the glory of God in the colors of three precious gems. The exact color and

name of gems is very uncertain in ancient literature. The names of gems and colors were changed from country to country and period to period. The jasper was the first stone found in the breastplate of the High Priest which is mentioned in Exod. 28:17–21. This stone seems to be a clear stone. The sardis was a blood red stone. It was the last stone on the breastplate of the High Priest. This may be an allusion to God as being the First and the Last with the emphasis on the Messianic tribe of Judah (the emerald).

- *a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald*-The emerald is the stone for Judah on the breastplate of the High Priest. The emphasis of the rainbow has been greatly conjectured, but there are two main theories: (1) some see it as an allusion to Gen. 9:16, where the rainbow is a symbol of God's covenant protection, and a sign that the storm is over; in the midst of judgment there was promise and mercy; (2) others relate it to Ezek. 1:28, a symbol of the glory of YHWH. Whether the rainbow is a sign of judgment or of covenant is uncertain, but it obviously was an unusual rainbow because it was green in color and not simply a refraction of normal light.

C. The privileges of God demand our praise (4).

- *I saw twenty-four elders sitting*-John saw "24 thrones" surrounding the main throne, in what is obviously a subordinate relationship. The throne is a place of rule. Evidently these elders will have positions of authority under God. The identity of the "24 elders" (Gr. presbyteros) is difficult to determine. There have been two basic views: either they are men or they are angels. If they are human beings, they may be representatives of Israel, the church, or both groups. Their number may relate to the 24 priestly orders in Israel, whose priests worshipped and served the Lord in Old Testament times (1 Chron. 23:6; 24:7-18).
- *clothed in white robes*-purity.
- *crowns of gold*-These elders wore "golden crowns (Gr. stephanous) on their heads." This Greek word often refers to a victor's crown (2:10; 3:11), but John also used it to describe a crown that represents authority (6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14).

D. The power of God demands our praise (5).

- *lightnings, thunderings, and voices*-The "lightning" and "thunder" are evidently portents of the judgment to come, and symbolize God in the act of judging. This is also similar to Exod. 19:16–19, which describes physical phenomena that surround the presence of God on Mt. Sinai.
- *which are the seven Spirits of God*-These appear to be seven separate lamps (torches), not one bowl with seven wicks. The "seven spirits of God" will carry out this judgment. The picture is of these "torches," ready to go from God's presence to the earth, where they will consume wickedness during the Tribulation. Or this may be another allusion to the Holy Spirit in his sevenfold operation.

II. Praise God because He is holy in His nature (6-8).

A. His creatures show His holiness (6-8).

- *was a sea of glass, like crystal*-The clear 'crystal'-like, or 'glass'-like "sea ... before the throne" may represent the need for cleansing before approaching God. The laver (called a "sea" in the Old Testament, e.g., 1 Kings 7:23, et al.) served this need for cleansing in the Israelite tabernacle and temple. This sea is removed in Rev. 21:1, showing the curse (cf. Gen. 3) of mankind's sin and separation has been removed.
- *four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back*-These living creatures are described in vv. 6–8. They are a combination of the cherubim of Ezek. 1:18 and 10:17 and the seraphim of Isa. 6:2, 3. Their many "eyes" ("in front and behind") evidently symbolize their penetrating intelligence, that makes them immediately aware of whatever is happening that affects their judicial responsibility.
- *like a lion*-The four creatures probably represent four classes of created beings: wild beasts, domesticated animals, human beings, and flying creatures. Together, these four creatures may picture all creation glorifying and praising God, or God's sovereign control over all aspects of His creation, or both. Lions are strong and the kings of the animal world. This may be communicating that God is perfect in His authority.
- *like a calf*-Cows and oxen are servants used to pull plows and wagons. This may represent that God is perfect in His activity.
- *a face like a man*-Mankind is the pinnacle of God's creation. Only man has a "face" in this vision. This may be communicating that God is perfect in His majesty.
- *like a flying eagle*-Eagles are majesty and are often used to represent deity. This may be communicating that God is perfect in His deity.
- *full of eyes around and within*-all seeing, omniscient.
- *do not rest day or night, saying-*
- *"Holy, holy, holy*-The living creatures are repeating the song of the seraphim in Isa. 6:2, 3. This is the first of many 14 hymns and 20 doxologies that are found in the book of the Revelation. In Hebrew, the double repetition of a word adds emphasis, while the rare threefold repetition designates the superlative and calls attention to the infinite holiness of God—They ascribe holiness to God "day and night," namely, constantly, though not necessarily without stopping.
- *Lord God Almighty*-These were OT titles for God (cf. 1:8): (1) LORD = YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:14; Ps. 103); (2) God = Elohim (cf. Ps. 104); and (3) the Almighty = El Shaddai, the patriarchal name for God (cf. Exod. 6:3). This title for God is found 10 times in the New Testament and 9 of those times is in Revelation.
- *Who was and is and is to come*-This phrase is a recurrent title (1:4; 4:8). This is a play on God's covenant name, YHWH, which comes from the verb "to be."

B. His creatures tell of His holiness (8).

III. Praise God because He created everything that exists (9-11).

A. Show Him you believe He is worthy of your worship (9-10a).

Verses 9–11 are one sentence in Greek, which shows that ultimate worship is due Him who sits on the throne and lives forever.

- *glory and honor and thanks*-Whenever it is appropriate and possible, the four "living creatures give" praise ("glory and honor and thanks") to the eternal God ("Him who lives forever and ever").
- *fall down before Him who sits on the throne*-The "24 elders" likewise "fall down before Him" out of reverence.

B. Tell Him you believe He is worthy of your worship (10b-11).

- *cast their crowns before the throne*-When the crowned elders prostrate themselves before God, and "cast their crowns" at His feet, these rulers "worship Him," humbly acknowledging His sovereignty and His right to receive worship. Casting their crowns at His feet symbolizes the willing subjection of their power to His superior authority. A victor's crown is symbolic of the fact that the judge has declared the athlete victorious.
- *glory, honor and power*-The elders extol God as worthy of threefold tribute (glory, honor, power) because he exerts his sovereign will in creating and sustaining all things. God receives "power," not in the sense that an omnipotent being can become stronger, but in the sense that the strength of his creatures is used to honor him.
- *For You created all things*-The elders and living creatures praise God as the Creator, Sustainer and Provider of all things.