



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Revelation 4:1-11 **New International Version** **April 22, 2018**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 22, 2018**, is from **Revelation 4:1-11**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Revelation 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."

After John wrote and sent the seven letters to the seven churches, he was called up into heaven and given a vision of the throne room and council chamber of God. There are

times when the sons of God present themselves to the LORD (see Job 1:6 & 2:1). A voice from heaven called him to come up to see the future. The Apostle Paul humbly wrote of his own experience, “I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows” (2 Corinthians 12:2-3).

[Different Bible translations and commentators interpret this verse differently. In the *King James Version*, we read: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.” In my opinion, the KJV and *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* give a fine interpretation with a spiritual application of this problematic verse: “We have here an account of a second vision with which the apostle John was favoured: After this, that is, not only ‘after I had seen the vision of Christ walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks,’ but ‘after I had taken his messages from his mouth, and written and sent them to the several churches, according to his command, after this I had another vision.’ Those who well improve the discoveries they have had of God already are prepared thereby for more, and may expect them.]

(Revelation 4:2) At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

Immediately after the voice spoke to John and gave him a command, he also came immediately under divine influence and power and was enabled to obey the command. He saw the throne of the LORD and someone sitting upon the throne, but John did not see an image that he could describe or write about because some might try to duplicate that image and make an idol or material representation of the LORD. The writer to the Hebrews revealed that Jesus also sits on that throne at the right hand of God the Father: “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). The Greek text does not capitalize “spirit,” so translations will vary between “spirit” and “Spirit.” In my opinion, he entered heaven with mind, spirit, and Spirit. The Spirit indwells Christians and will later be described as 7 blazing lamps representing the 7 spirits of God, the Holy Spirit.

(Revelation 4:3) And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.

Jasper can come in many colors and may be many colored; it is opaque, and it is often used as a gemstone. The ruby is a red clear gemstone similar to a diamond. Our human vocabulary is too limited to describe the beauties and wonders of heaven, so John did the best he could describing what he saw as inspired by the Holy Spirit. The rainbow can symbolize peace as well as the color green

that can symbolize life. God is the Creator of all, the author of life, and when He put his rainbow in the sky after the Great Flood, He promised not to destroy the earth by water again. The rainbow encircled the throne: God is a God of complete love and peace, and from His throne He makes laws for the nations, enforces His laws with wisdom and justice, and in love extends mercy. John saw a throne and a throne room that comforted him in the presence of the LORD rather than fill him with fear.

(Revelation 4:4) 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.

Those on the twenty-four thrones were representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples. Jesus promised His disciples: “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28). Those seated on these thrones were honored to sit in the presence of the LORD — God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They were dressed in white because they had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. By the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ they had been forgiven their sins and made righteous in Him. Their crowns of gold represent the fact that under God they reign with Christ; if we endure, we will also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:121).

(Revelation 4:5) 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.

When the LORD descended on the mountain to give Moses the Law of God, in Exodus 19:16 we read, “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.” As the Creator and Ruler over all, the LORD gave Moses the Law from His throne. John described a similar scene from God’s throne in heaven, but God’s grace had come through Jesus Christ to John, so he did not tremble in fear: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). John wrote that the seven blazing lamps before the throne are the seven spirits of God. Since seven is a perfect number in Scripture, he described the Holy Spirit, Who lives within Christians and has no form visible for us to see, as blazing lamps, as seven spirits of God. Among other things that the Holy Spirit does as He indwells Christians is to pray in our behalf: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Romans 8:26).

(Revelation 4:6) Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were

four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

In Exodus 30:18, Moses followed the pattern the LORD gave him and made a bronze basin to be used for worship at the tabernacle: “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it.” King Solomon made a bronze “sea” that stood in front of the temple where the priests could wash and purify themselves for the LORD’s service (1 Chronicles 18:8). What looked like a sea of glass in heaven might indicate that nothing unholy could come near to God. The four creatures remind us of some of the heavenly beings described in the Old Testament, and we would expect some continuity between John’s vision and some previous heavenly visions (See Ezekiel 1:4-21). The four living creatures around the throne were not there to protect God, but to be ever looking over all creation while also looking upon God to praise Him for His glory. They do not have the limitations of creatures on earth with limited vision. Their knowledge would far surpass any earthly creature because their vision is greater. Perhaps they see eternity future (in front) and eternity past (behind), and with the powers of reason offer their praises to God on the throne. Their purpose may also have been to make intercession for all God’s creatures. In a similar way, Jesus makes intercession for all His followers: “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

(Revelation 4:7) 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.

These four creatures might in some way represent the wild animals, the domestic animals, humans, and the birds in God's creation. Perhaps each one looks over or cares for his own species. Much later, the Church used these four faces to represent the four gospel writers: the Lion=Matthew — the Ox = Mark — the Human = Luke — the Eagle = John. Among other opinions, the four creatures might represent courage, strength, reason, and speed. Humans admire all of these qualities that God has given His creatures.

(Revelation 4:8) 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."

In his vision, Isaiah described what he saw when he saw the Lord high and exalted on His throne: "Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying" (Isaiah 6:2). John added the detail of the eyes which never stop seeing the wonders and the activity and the Persons of the LORD displayed in heaven and on earth; therefore, they praise the LORD continually. God the Father is Holy, the Lord Jesus Christ

is Holy, and the Spirit of God is Holy. The One God in Three Persons is Almighty. God is eternal, reigning over the past, the present, and the future. Having eyes on the inside enable self-examination or self-judgment to know if one is loving the Lord God with all of one's heart, mind, soul, and strength, to properly honor God with the totality of one's being. Having eyes on the outside and all around enables the creatures to see all of God's acts in all of history and throughout all of creation. We can join in grateful and joyful song with the four living creatures as they proclaim: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!"

(Revelation 4:9) Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,

The four living creatures never stop praising God and all God's creation continually praise the LORD (see Psalm 148). To give God glory with heart and mind is to remember and declare the truth about God continually with thanksgiving to God and to lead others to praise God too. These four creatures continually declare the truth about God's character and His other attributes. To honor God means to bow before Him and praise Him as the Lord and King over all, for God is worthy to receive our absolute loyalty and immediate obedience as the living creatures demonstrate. God will always take only right and holy actions. Even when Satan rebelled, and Adam and Eve were tempted and sinned, these creatures saw that God

responded in a way that was glorious, honorable, and worthy of thanksgiving. All of God's creatures have good and sufficient reasons to trust God in all things forever. God loves us and is worthy of our love, respect, and reverence as demonstrated by these four living creatures. Following the example of the living creatures, in addition to thanking God for life and every manifold blessing, we can thank God for the blessed opportunity to serve Him as faithful followers of Jesus Christ throughout eternity.

(Revelation 4:10) 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:

The four living creatures lead the worship of God and the twenty-four elders respond appropriately. These four living creatures probably also lead the animals they represent to praise the LORD. Any positions of honor or rewards these elders have, as represented by their crowns, they attribute to the grace of God who has given them the abilities, the talents, the resources, the life, all they have and are to achieve what they have done; therefore, they lay their crowns before the throne with gratitude.

(Revelation 4:11) "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."

The twenty-four elders agree unanimously; so they join in the worship of God unanimously with the four living creatures. All those who love God and trust in Jesus Christ for eternal life and salvation also agree, and they proclaim that the true God, the God of the Bible, is their Lord and God. God is worthy of our total allegiance and immediate obedience when we learn our duty from the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit leads. By His actions and attributes, God is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power and all the glory, honor, and power that we possess we attribute to God and praise Him for these gifts. God created all things, and God created us for His glory, so we can glorify God because He created us for that purpose. We are alive today and will live forevermore as followers of Jesus because of God's choices, God's will. We exist moment-by-moment because God sustains our being. God is glorified by our total dependence on Him, and we glorify Him when we acknowledge our total dependence on Him in everything we do and say and praise Him for His wonderful work in our lives, in the lives of others, and in all creation.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How did John get before the throne of God?
2. Would someone reading John's Revelation be able to draw a picture of God? Why or why not?
3. In addition to the throne of God, what beings did John see?

4. How did John describe these beings?

5. What were these beings doing?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.