



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Revelation

Chapter 4

His Grace Bishop Youssef



Introduction

This chapter is like a "heavenly scene"

- The Open Heaven 4:1
- The Divine Throne 4:2-3
- What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8
- Praises 4:9-11



Introduction

- In the first three chapters, we have seen the Lord Jesus Christ revealing Himself to the seven Churches where He described Himself and gave Himself a title according to the spiritual condition of the community addressed; where He described the state of each church of the seven churches, the state of the believers; and where He provided a remedy; a promise; and a reward
- Chapter 4 and 5 are an introduction to chapter 6 where the revealing of the seven seals begins



The Open Heaven 4:1

- John's new vision is an open door to heaven
- Notice that he doesn't see it opening
- The door is already opened
- He concluded chapter 3 describing the state of the churches by the closed door in the face of the Lord, while the Lord has decided not to depart, but insisted on knocking and waiting patiently until the soul opens her heart for Him to enter and dine with her



The Open Heaven 4:1

- Isn't it amazing to think that the door into heaven stands wide open waiting to receive us?
- The Lord reveals to us that the gate of heaven is always "opened" in front of us, how comforting!
- When we are facing hardships and tribulation, we should trust that God's door is always open
- *door ... open* Spiritually revealing new spiritual things that were hidden, things a normal person cannot see



The Open Heaven 4:1

- Bishop Victorianus says: “The open door in heaven is the New Testament. It is wide open, for the Lord Jesus went up to the Father in heaven with His humanity”
- The incarnation of our Lord opened that door for us, *“Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’ (John 1:49-51)*



The Open Heaven 4:1

- St. Stephen saw, *“the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”* (Acts 7:56)
- St. Paul was, *“caught up to the third heaven ...how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”* (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)
- Ezekiel the prophet saw heaven, *“the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.”* (Ezekiel 1:1)
- Jacob saw a *“ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”* (Genesis 28:12)



The Open Heaven 4:1

- So it was revealed to the prophets and the Fathers some of the heavenly things as through an open door while they were outside heaven; only glimpses into heaven were given to them
- However, it was permitted to St. John to enter and see
- The way into the presence of God lies open, Hebrews 10:19-20; all who have faith may enter
- Some of the Church Fathers commented saying that those who cannot see the Kingdom of God here on earth, will not see it in Heaven; the Kingdom of God not the Kingdom of Heaven



The Open Heaven 4:1

- *the first voice* is the voice which the apostle had heard in the opening vision, Revelation 1:10; he heard, and recognized that trumpet-like voice again, the voice of Christ
- *Come up* He is asking St. John to come and see, and the church after him, some of the glory of Heaven
- The Lord went up to heaven as a conqueror and victor and as St. Ambrose states that the Lord went up ornamented with wonderful benefits; for who enters there is not one person but all the believers in the Person of the Savior. For this reason, the Lord never stops blowing the trumpet very loudly calling "*come up.*"



The Open Heaven 4:1

- Every Sunday the Church acts out St. John's experience in chapter 4 of Revelation when the priest, reflecting Christ's call "*Come Up!*" calls out to the assembly "*Lift up your hearts!*" And the assembly replies in unison, as one voice, "*We have them at the Lord!*"
- After the vision of the seven letters to the seven churches, Jesus Christ spoke to St. John and revealed to him a new vision
- *must take place after this* – in Greek, "after these things."
- The reference is to future events; and the meaning is, that there would be disclosed to him events that were to occur at some future period



The Open Heaven 4:1

- There is no suggestion here when they would occur, or what would be included in the period referred to
- All that the words would properly convey would be, that there would be a disclosure of things that were to occur in some future time
- The purpose of showing us some of the Heaven's glory is to encourage us and to make the hearts long to eternity, wait patiently the advent of the Lord to inherit and possess forever what no eye has seen nor an ear ever heard



The Open Heaven 4:1

It is important to note that

- John saw the highest heaven open when he was exiled in Patmos
- And Jacob while he was running away from his brother Esau (Genesis 28:12-13)
- Ezekiel while he was captive (Ezekiel 1:1)
- St. Stephen while he was lying to be stoned (Acts 7)
- In the middle of tribulations and hardships, God reveals to the soul His comforting power that she may rejoice and find pleasure



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- As soon as the Lord pronounced the word "*come up*," then the Apostle was "*in the Spirit*"
- Hence every soul that listens to the call of the Lord, will ascend immediately regardless of the ties and nature of the body
- Previously St. John mentioned that he was *in the Spirit* 1:10
- Here it is even in a higher degree than before, he reached this state gradually



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- The first time he saw the Son of Man, then he grew in spirit so God opened to him the door of Heaven
- God has given him a new spiritual feeling proper to the new vision
- It is also the case for any one who listens to the Lord's voice
- God will grant him a distinct spiritual feeling hard to be explained to others



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- He saw a throne and upon it sits, "The Glorified God."
- Any word of the human language would fall short to describe what he saw
- And because of the magnificence of His majesty he did not know how to call God, so he called Him, "*One sat on...*" and this what Isaiah 6:1 and Daniel 7:3 had done



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- God is constantly described, in the prophetic visions, as sitting upon a throne, to denote His power and dominion, that He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords, Daniel 7:9
- Here, is described God, the Almighty the Father of heaven in His majesty glory and dominion
- *One sat on the throne* is in accordance with what the church describe the Heaven by, the Kingdom of God
- It signifies the absolute authority of our Lord



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- St. John will use the expression of the Kingdom of God many times in the coming chapters
- *sat on the throne* also is a symbol of stability
- God is not like the world's kings, those who can be overthrown by revolutions or coups, get defeated, and ran away because of fear
- He is to reign forever and His kingdom has no end



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- In verse 3 he began describing *He who sat there*
- There is here no description of the Lord so as to point out any similitude, shape, or dimensions
- The description rather aims to point out the surrounding glory and brightness than the person of the almighty King
- The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel also described this scene of God's heavenly throne room, Isaiah 6:1-4; Ezekiel 1:1-28



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- Chapter 4 of Revelation is the beginning of the amazing parallels between John's vision in the 1st century A.D. and Ezekiel's vision in the 6th century B.C.
- He saw the Lord as jasper and sardius stone, the first and last two precious stones that mounted the front vest of the high priest (Exodus 28:17-20)
- These stones point out to the tribes
- All humanity is kept in His heart, for it is the work of His hands



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- Jasper is extremely transparent, and it is the symbol of God's glory and purity (Revelation 21:11)
- It shows His amazing holiness and the simplicity of His love for human beings
- The sardine stone, or sardius, is red like fire and indicates His fear and His justice
- The rainbow completely encircled the throne, as mercy encompassing judgment



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- Wherever we meet with God, we see the covenant binding Him with man (Genesis 9)
- He always desires to reconcile all people with Himself
- It is an evident symbol of the divine mercy
- The rainbow was a covenant remembrance, bearing witness to God's faithfulness in dark times, God's care for the ark of His Church, and His mercy shining forth after storm



The Divine Throne 4:2-3

- Some have found a difficulty in the association of a rainbow with its varied colors, and the single green hue of the emerald
- But of course it is the form only of the rainbow which is alluded to, not every quality which a rainbow may possess
- A circular green appearance was seen round the throne, which perhaps may be described as a green halo
- If the purity of the jasper be allowed to symbolize God's purity and spirituality, and the sardine His justice, the green emerald may fitly represent God's goodness displayed in nature and He is the source of life

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Twenty-four elders or presbyters:

- From earliest times in the Church the term elder has stood for those who have power and authority within the sacred assembly of the Old Testament and the New Testament: Exodus 12:21, 17:5-6, 18:12, 24:9-11; Numbers 11:16-17; Acts 15:23, 22:5; Romans 9:12; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:14-15; and 2 John 1
- The word “*presbyter*” in the Greek text means the priestly work
- God gave them a special honor by making them sit around His throne

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Twenty-four elders or presbyters cont ...

- For this reason, and since the first centuries, the Church has never disagreed with the *twenty four elders'* regard, but understood the height of their position as a heavenly and priestly host
- Therefore, she arranged a special memorial feast and doxologies, or hymns of praise for them, and put them in a special rank among the heavenly hosts, after the four Living Creatures

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Twenty-four elders or presbyters cont ...

- St. Cyril of Jerusalem has said about them, “The Fathers commanded that all Christians should keep their memorial, for what they have seen of their dignity and high glory...Great is their glory in the Lord’s sight,...They do not cease praising and rejoicing in front of the Lord of Hosts together with the four Living Creatures...”
- Yet we should not, as St. Ambrose says, think of the thrones and sitting on them in a materialistic way; for it is only to express the highness of their dignity

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Twenty-four elders or presbyters cont ...

- Various reasons have been suggested why they should be described as twenty-four in number
- They are the twelve tribes doubled, to signify the union of the Gentile with the Jewish Church
- They are the two sets of twelve, to represent the two Testaments
- They are the twelve Patriarchs co-joined with the twelve Apostles
- The twenty-four elders represent the complete Church of God in the past and in the future

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Twenty-four elders or presbyters cont ...

- As for the white robes, Ibn-el-Assal says that these robes point to their splendor, their glory, their righteousness and their holiness
- *white robes* It is also the garments of the priests
- *crowns of gold on their heads* to denote that state of dignity and glory to which God had advanced them

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Lightnings, Thunderings, and Voices

- Expressive of the majesty and glory of Him that sat upon the throne
- These words denote also a very glorious and terrible appearance of God, denoting not only His majesty, but His power over His enemies
- We are at once reminded by this representation of the magnificent scene that occurred at Sinai Exodus 19:16
- *“Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne”* (Psalm 97:2)
- They are the constant symbol of that power of God

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Seven Spirits of God

- *Seven lamps* Now we use the candle-stands in front of the Lord's altar, because He in fact is in our midst
- It is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold fullness of work
- The Holy Spirit in His seven-fold dispensations of grace, 1 Corinthians 12:4-5, by which He enlightens, quickens, heals, and comforts the members of His church
- The Holy Spirit illuminates the Church and works in her through the seven sacraments, so that she may be reconciled with God and obtain the eternal glory
- All that will not be realized except through baptism

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Seven Spirits of God cont...

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a baptism of fire Matthew 3:11-12
- The Holy Spirit consumes evil
- It is an unquenchable fire against all evils, whether in men's hearts or in men's lives, or in the world, 1 Corinthians 3:13 and Hebrews 12:29
- As in chapter 1 we have the combination of the 3 aspects of the Glory-Cloud imagery in Revelation 4:1-5
- The Voice in 4:1; the brilliant Glory of God in 4:3; God the Holy Spirit in 4:5

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



A Sea of Glass

- Bishop Victorianus says that this sea points to "baptism" and everyone who desires to meet the One who is sitting on the throne, has to wade through it, so that the grace of God penetrates his soul to get him prepared for the kingdom
- The symbol ended, the shadow vanished, and "*the brazen basin and the brazen sea*" (Exodus 30:18-20; 1 Chronicle 7:39) do not exist any more
- Now we are given "baptism," with which we get the adoption, and without which we do not cross to the divine throne; without it no one can see the kingdom of God, John 3:5

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures

- They are heavenly rank, the divine vehicle that carries the divine throne
- They are the two ranks of the Cherubim and the Seraphim, to whom the Church always requests their intercession, and celebrates their feast on the 8th of Hatour
- It is a memorial feast and the Church calls them, *The incorporeal carriers of God's vehicle*
- Without thrones or crowns like the presbyters, for God is their crown and they are His chariot

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- *Full of eyes*, Ibn-el- Assal states that they point to their understanding of the present and future mysteries which the Lord reveals to them
- The prophet Isaiah saw their glory and spoke of their honor 6:1-3
- The prophet Ezechiel as well saw their glory and spoke of their honor (1:4-28)
- Also David, the prophet and king, saw the honor of those spiritual creatures and spoke of their glory, Psalm 18:9-10, 80:1

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- St. John Chrysostom says of them: “I tell you my dear children that nothing is like them in honor, neither in heaven nor on earth, because they are carrying God's throne, and they cannot look at the face of the Eternal Living One. They are created of light and fire. They are very strong and powerful. They appeal to God for the forgiveness of sins of mankind, and for having pity on them.”

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- They are incorporeal and invisible powers, but they appeared to the beloved John and to the prophet Ezekiel in the following way:
The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man
- The Fathers of the Church saw a symbolic link between the 4 Living Creatures and the 4 Gospels with each creature representing a one of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Bishop Victorianus says,

“The Living Creature that is like the lion points to Mark in whom you hear the voice of the lion shouting in the desert (Mark 1:3)

The one in the likeness of a man is Matthew, who did his best to make known the Virgin Mary's genealogy, from whom the Lord Jesus took the body

Luke relates Zachariah's priesthood, who presents a sacrifice on behalf of the people. He carries the calf

John the Evangelist like a flying bird is fluttering his wings up to the great heights speaking about the Word of God.”

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- St. Gregory Nazianzus and Origen believe that this creation that carries the throne carries the meaning of the four forces of the soul, which is sanctified by carrying God within, namely:
 1. The forces of rage, which are referred to by the likeness of a lion
 2. The carnal desires are referred to by the likeness of a calf
 3. The gift of logic is referred to as one who has the likeness of man's face
 4. The spiritual energies are referred to by the likeness of a flying eagle

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- St. Jerome believes that it also points to the redeeming works of the Lord
 1. The one who has the likeness of man's face points to the incarnation
 2. The one who is like the calf points to the slaughter on the cross
 3. The one who is like the lion points to the resurrection
 4. The one who is like a flying eagle points to the ascension

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- *Each having six wings*, As we praise the Lord in the liturgy saying, “You are the One around whom stands the Cherubim and the Seraphim, six wings to one and six wings to the other. With two wings they cover their faces...”
- The “six wings” are taken to express reverence, Isaiah 6:2
- *with two he covered his face* humility
- *with two he covered his feet* obedience
- *and with two he flew*
- If understand all the wings here for flight, they signify the readiness of God’s ministers to move every way that God will send them

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- Thus, it is proper for the priest to be like them
- St. John Chrysostom advises us saying, “I, your father, John the poor, ask you my dear children the priests and the deacons not to approach the altar when you are not clean; so keep your bodies and souls pure if you want to approach the pure service. For you are like the heavenly Seraphim. They do not dare looking at the face of the Living God, but they are standing faces down covered with their wings!”

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- St. John Chrysostom continues saying, “You, servants of God, see the Body of the Son of God and His pure Blood, which are put in front of you on the pure altar. You touch Him and eat Him, and you know the greatness and honor they deserve, so you have to stand with happy faces, fearful hearts, eyes looking at the ground, and heads bowed, for you are like the Cherubim and the Seraphim who are carrying the throne of Majesty.”

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- *Were full of eyes around and within*, this denotes that large measure of knowledge, and diligence, and watchfulness, which should be in a minister of Christ
- *They do not rest day or night*, actually it is day permanently because there is no night with the light of God
- They are constantly employed; there is no intermission, the works and ways of God are constantly bringing praise to Him
- The resemblance to Isaiah's vision may remind us that the voice of God's creation has in every age proclaimed His eternal holiness

What is Around the Divine Throne 4:4-8



Four Living Creatures cont...

- *“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,”* As St. John Chrysostom says: “The Living Creatures shout ceaselessly day and night. They praise the eternal living One, Holy, holy, holy.”
- They glorify Him for His might and His works with them and with all His creation, especially mankind



Praises 4:9-11

- The twenty-four presbyters cannot endure this view until they stand up; take off their crowns, cast them at the Lord's feet and kneel in front of Him for His greatness, His holiness, His love and His care
- By taking off their crowns they acknowledge the infinite supremacy of God, and that they have derived their being and their blessings from Him alone
- The view is repeated not once or twice or one thousand or two thousand times, but it remains the same forever



Praises 4:9-11

- *You are worthy, O Lord ...*, Thus all creation acknowledges the supremacy of God; and we learn from this song that He made all things for His pleasure
- “*Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You*” (Jeremiah 32:17)
- “¹⁶ *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*” (Colossians 1:16)



Praises 4:9-11

- The Book of Revelation unveiled to us the amount of love the heavenly creatures have for us, for they praise God on our behalf, or praise Him for His deeds for us
- The Book of Revelation opened a new door for the Church which is the teaching of "the life of praise," for it is the melody of the Book of Revelation, the language of heaven



Praises 4:9-11

- Let us behave in the spirit of our church, and always offer praises of thanksgiving she taught us
- They are all taken from the Holy Bible with its two Testaments, or from the book of praises and songs "Psalms," or from the praises of heaven recorded in the Book of Revelation, or from the writings of the Fathers under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, etc
- Thus, heaven and its praises are not alien to us when we depart from this world, we have already practiced its language and touched its spirit and lived in its atmosphere

Discussion



- John saw a door standing open in heaven and heard the invitation to enter. What does an open door suggest? Relate how you think Jesus' call to John is similar to Jesus' call today.
- God is sitting on the throne, How does this relate to John's situation? Why was this vision important to John at this time?
- Who do you think the twenty four elders in this chapter represent?
- Describe the Four Living Creatures



Discussion

- Compare the living creatures of John's vision with the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision and the six-winged seraphim in Isaiah 6:1-4.
- The rainbow around the throne (4:3) reminds us of what about God? (See Genesis 9:12-16)
- What was the dominant *activity* of heaven?
- In this visit to the throne room of heaven, what was the Holy Spirit inspired to “take to heart?”