

Rev 25-12-17a

Greetings, fellow members of Grace & Truth Bible Church and other interested students of the Word of God. This is Wednesday night, the 17th of December 2025. We are continuing our study in the book of Revelation.

We are in chapter 4 at this fascinating scene in heaven, viewing the throne of God and those who surround it, the characteristics of the glory that define it and explain it. And we are going to move forward tonight. We're going to continue ascertaining the identity of the 24 elders.

We're going to take a close look at the four living creatures and then we are going to hopefully move into chapter 5. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we will begin. Father, what an exciting privilege it is to be invited into your very throne room, not just by means of prayer, although that is no small privilege, but to have a visual representation from the Apostle John given to us at the behest of your plan and purpose communicated through the Lord Jesus Christ for our benefit to enable us to make application and preparation for service now and in the future. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that the Holy Spirit will enlighten us through the illumination of these concepts and doctrines and principles and promises.

We pray that as a result, we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work and ready when the Lord Jesus comes to receive us to himself. We ask it in his name. Amen.

Looking at our passage after these things, which is the letters to the seven churches and being sort of brought into the melee of conflict, persecution, challenge, in some cases from within the church as well as outside the church. Some of these challenges are doctrinal in nature, are false teaching, false teachers. Others are internal where there is distraction or apathy or involvement in compromise with the world.

And having seen that in chapter two and chapter three, every one of those letters, every single commendation and criticism has pertinence for us. It is either something to continue to avoid, something to identify in ourselves. And if it is a good feature to encourage it and to do more of it, to manifest it in a greater way.

If it is a criticism, if it is a shortfall, a shortcoming to use the scriptural remedy, which begins with repentance, change of mind. And as you know, from Hebrews chapter six, the best way to eliminate bad habits and establish new ones is to put the new ones in place of the old. It is not enough to eschew and avoid and try to not practice something that is bad.

It is much better to, as Paul says in Hebrews chapter six, change of mind away from works that partake of death, works that lead nowhere, works that are involved at best in gratifying ourselves, pleasing ourselves, entertaining ourselves. Change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God. Paul says that is the foundation.

That's the beginning. How many times in these letters does the Lord Jesus say, change your mind, repent, metanoeo, metamorphose your mind, change your mind. But we not only say, I'm going to change my mind about these things that are failures and shortcomings, bad practices, bad habits, sinful, sometimes evil behavior.

We have to replace that. Leaving a vacuum. You remember the old study on mataiotes, the vacuum in the soul.

And it is what Jesus described when someone has their demons eradicated and the person cleans and sweeps the house, but there's no occupancy. There's no residency. And so the demon is going to return and bring a bunch of his friends to reoccupy this empty dwelling.

It needs to be filled with the fullness of God. That was chapters two and three. We have been informed.

We have been exhorted. If we have an ear, we should hear what the spirit says in every word, every line, every phrase of chapter one, chapter two, and chapter three. That is where we come from.

That is where we are now. Things which were things, which are now after these things in chapter four, verse one, John says, I looked, he says, I looked something like three dozen times in this book. And looking is important.

Observing detail is important. When we get to our Christmas Eve special a week from tonight, we are going to be doing some careful observation of the details of the Christmas narrative. We've done this in the past, but I think it's a good time for a refresh and a review.

Some of these things we haven't looked at in 15 or 20 years, and we want to keep them alive and active in our mind, in our reflections, and in our application. After these things, I looked. After these things that we've seen in the first three chapters, we should look.

We should not say, well, wasn't that interesting? What is coming next? We need to look. What is the view that is unfolded before us by the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the spirit? I looked, a door open in heaven. This is opportunity and revelation.

We saw this. Doors in scripture primarily speak of opportunity and revelation. You think of 320 in this very book.

When the Lord Jesus is standing at the door and knocking, if someone hears that appeal and opens the door, what happens? The Lord Jesus comes in. There is a fellowship meal where there is discussion, there is revelation, and there is the potential for close personal fellowship. How could you engage in bad habits? How could you perpetrate faulty behavior and mental attitude sins and sins of the tongue and other things that drag us away when the Lord Jesus is at the table? I doubt that very many people committed very many sins at the table with the Lord Jesus.

If you focus on Him, if you listen to Him, if you observe His example, if you look and follow, this replaces the things of the world and the tawdry, tacky, temporary, ephemeral, passing fancies of our fleshly life, and it leads us to things eternal. I looked, a door standing open in heaven. Here is possibility.

Here is potential. Here is opportunity. Here is revelation, revelation of what is to come.

We know that throughout the scriptural record, there have been revelations not only of what is currently going on, not only of the need to reform and repent and prophets coming and convicting God's people, but there is prediction. There is forecasting for the purpose of preparation. You need to be ready because here is what is upcoming.

The first voice which I heard. What was the first voice that John heard in chapter one when he was in the day of the Lord and heard a voice like a trumpet? The first voice was the Lord Jesus, right? This is the first voice. The first voice which I heard like a trumpet.

Notice was is in italics. You can scratch that out. What is John saying here? Remember that first voice before we got into the seven churches that sounded like a trumpet? I heard a voice behind me.

This is that voice. It's the first voice. It's the Lord Jesus.

This should be red ink. I'm going to get a red marker and redify this in my Bible, which is otherwise quite good. Like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, come up here and I will show you things which must take place after this.

Metatauta. The exact same combination of words we saw in Revelation chapter one, verse 19. Things after this.

What a wonderful opportunity to be able to anticipate based on the signs of the times, based on the fields being white for harvest, based on the situation in the sky. You observe the sky. Why can you not observe the signs of the times? We don't want to be fanatical prophecy nuts.

We don't want to be victims of rapture-itis. At the same time, we do want to be aware of where we are in the plan and purpose of God. I am so encouraged when I see Simeon and Anna and others who were waiting for the salvation of Israel.

They knew the time. The Magi, the wise men who came from the east and had been observing the sky and they knew we have seen his star. We have come to worship him.

I'm going to be looking at that again a week from tonight. So come up here. I will show you things.

John is qualified. Why is he qualified? Because he is a brother and companion, chapter one, verse nine, in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. When we look at ourselves in the mirror, when we think about how our life is passing, how we are employing our

energy, how we are investing our time, our efforts, looking for opportunities to exercise our spiritual gifts, how do we stack up? Are we patient? We don't fade.

We don't fall. We don't quit. We keep on keeping on.

Patience, endurance, perseverance, right in the middle of the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Patience. And he is a brother and companion.

There are other believers with whom John keeps in touch. I'm your brother. I know you and you know me.

And we have the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. This is a phrase that Paul uses. I may come to know this experience, enter into something of what the Lord Jesus went through in his ministry, in his first coming.

So I am your brother. I am your companion in the hardships, in the testings, the perosmos, trial. Things are not easy, but we go through it together.

I'm your companion. I'm your brother. We're a family.

We're a team. We're on the same side. We're pulling for each other.

We're praying for each other. We're supporting and encouraging each other. We don't forsake the getting together with one another, as the habit of some is.

We rely on each other. We benefit each other. We bless each other by God's power and God's grace in fellowship.

We don't want to let it slide. We don't want to get busy, get distracted, get disinterested, get subjective, get our eyes on ourselves, eyes on other people, eyes on politics, eyes on world events, eyes on whatever's scrolling past the little rectangular screen. Fellowship.

I'm your brother and your companion. That's a pretty emphatic statement by John. You can trust my testimony to you in hardship, patience, and the kingdom.

We have often noted that the New Testament never says that Jesus is our king, but we do look forward to a kingdom. In fact, we look forward to two kingdoms. In which we can participate.

Jesus is the king. But our citizenship is in heaven. And the messianic kingship of the Lord Jesus is on earth.

The millennial kingdom is not heavenly. Our citizenship is in heaven. And that determines how we understand what's coming up in chapter four here.

What must take place after this? I was in the spirit and behold. John says, I was looking, you need to behold. Behold in verse one.

Behold in verse two. There is a throne set in heaven. Throne set in heaven.

And there's one seated on the throne. This immediately made us think back to Ezekiel and Daniel and Isaiah, as well as the throne vision on partway up Mount Sinai, all the way back in Exodus. He who sat on the throne like a Jasper.

This is a diamond, as we know from a later portion of the description here in Revelation. Sardius stone, bright, brilliant red. Speaking of both judgment and redemption.

The clarity of the Jasper, like a brilliant diamond. Purity, holiness, no flaw, no discoloration, no soiling, no defilement. And this bow around the throne.

Not necessarily rainbow. Rain is not in there. It's a bow.

It is an iris. Iris is the word. This spherical or circular, beautiful iridescent green glow.

And we saw the significance of that color green representing that which is partaking of life and growth and benefit. Around the throne, 24 thrones. On the thrones, I saw 24 elders sitting, clothed in white robes.

They had crowns of gold on their head. These are human beings. Angels are never depicted sitting.

They are never depicted with white robes. They are never depicted with gold crowns anywhere in scripture. And they are never called elders.

All of these are attached to and are used in other places in association with people. So now we just have to figure out who the people are. From the throne proceed lightnings, thunderings, and voices.

God is not passive. He's not a freeze. He's not a bas-relief.

He's not a picture chiseled in stone. He is active. He has an ongoing plan and purpose.

And these lightnings and thunderings are the activity of God. He's not rumbling just to make a noise. The voice of God is like thunder.

And He is speaking. He is commanding. He is ruling His creation and beyond.

Seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. And human beings are never said to be burning ones. The Holy Spirit is singular.

This is sevenfold. I have a new thought about this I wanted to share with you. There are some who have actually, and I think by not paying real close attention, wanted to use these seven lamps before the throne, these seven flames, as evidence of the rapture.

Do you notice that in chapter one, the lampstands are on earth and the Lord Jesus is walking

among them? Now there are seven lamps in heaven. This is the transfer of the church. It's an interesting idea.

And I think there is an element of it that is pertinent. It's amazing what you can think about when you're driving familiar roads. Think about this.

Why are the lampstands in chapter one that represent the seven churches? Jesus says, I will tell you the mystery so that it's not a mystery anymore. The mystery of the stars, those are the messengers. The mystery of the lampstands, those are the churches.

Why and how are these lampstands burning with fire? Think about it. Why aren't they little granite monuments, seven granite monuments? Why aren't they seven trees or seven of some other thing? They are lampstands and there is a flame on each of the lampstands. What do we understand about that? What is the source and the power that causes these lampstands to have something to hold up and display? What is that? It's the Holy Spirit, right? You go back to the vision in Zechariah of the olive trees with the tubes that feed the lamps.

And we understand that the oil is the fuel and you have this flame. You think of the wise and foolish virgins and the metaphorical meaning of those lamps. Do you have oil in your lamp? And so could we say, would you go along with me in believing that the import of the lampstands in chapter one is that the Holy Spirit is present in the churches.

This is the Spirit of God that gives energy and light and illumination. I think it's a safe assumption. It's not us incandescing in our flesh.

The power of God comes in our lives by the word and the Spirit. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Why? Because the Holy Spirit enables us to discern it spiritually.

The carnal mind can't do it. So the presence of the Spirit is essential to the light on these lampstands. So, when we come to the seven Spirits before the throne, and a lot of people say, well, let's go back to Isaiah where there's the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding and all the rest of it.

And that's just the one Spirit. Think of this. There are seven angels who are going to occur later on.

You have angels who blow trumpets. You have angels who do all kinds of things. There are seven angels that accomplish God's work and God's will.

Here's an idea for you. This is a speculation on my part. I have nothing other than pattern recognition here to support my idea.

How do the angels accomplish God's purpose? He makes his angels' spirits and his ministers a flame of fire. Suppose that, let's think about the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit, the triune God has existed in eternity past, in the present, and for all eternity future, right? What did the

Holy Spirit do before the church? Was he sitting around for the occasional prophet or the occasional king or the occasional judge? He hovers over the waters at creation, but he would be largely unoccupied. I would speculate, this is my guess, that God the Holy Spirit has been energizing the angelic creation, the unfallen angelic creation, even before he started doing that for human beings.

The power of God comes into the life of believers by the Spirit and the Word. If God delivers his Word to his angels, would you not think that those ministers of fire would be energized by the very Spirit of God itself? If that seems reasonable, when you look at these seven spirits that are before the throne, think of it, the lampstands of the church on earth energized by the Spirit, the angels who carry out God's will from heaven also energized by the Spirit of God. So it's not totally wrong to see the Holy Spirit in the presence of these seven spirits before the throne, but I think that they are Spirit-enabled and Spirit-energized angels.

Angels can't go take credit for pouring out a bowl or blowing a trumpet or accomplishing some purpose of God in the earth and say, well, I did that in angel power. I would expect that the angelic creation would do what they do by God's power, just as we are able to do. And this would explain their seven-fold presence as seven individual angels, but they have in common this flaming energy and ability.

And of course, they are going to be angels of judgment in this context. Fire represents judgment. You have the Lord Jesus characterized by fire in His glorified state.

So just a thought, and we're going to see these angels return in upcoming chapters. Seven spirits which are before the throne burning. They are burning wands.

They are seraphim, but I think they're energized in their proximity and in their connection to God through the Holy Spirit. That's my opinion. Verse six, before the throne, there is a sea of glass.

And by the way, just as an added-on thought, this tells me that we will not be done with the Holy Spirit necessarily in the kingdoms to come. Would you expect that because we are glorified, we no longer need God's spirit? Or is it going to be an ongoing badge? Is this something to do with the name and the seal and the other rewards that the Lord Jesus bestows on overcomers that we have something like a double portion of the spirit? Remember when Elisha said, I would love to have a double portion of the spirit of God that rests on Elijah? And Elisha is an adumbration, an anticipation, almost a prophetic pattern of the Lord Jesus. Elijah, Old Testament.

Elisha, New Testament. Elijah has many difficulties, has some failures. Elisha never fails.

There's nothing negative ever said about Elisha, just like there's nothing negative said about Elihu, the fourth friend of Job. And I think these are Old Testament anticipations of the Lord Jesus. Job does not have to offer a sacrifice for Elihu and yet Elihu speaks for a couple of

chapters there.

How come he isn't rebuked by God and told that Job needs to offer a sacrifice for him the way he does for the others, Bildad and Eliphaz and so on. Anyway, I think that God the Father is going to be present and a central focus of our worship and our appreciation in the kingdoms to come. The Lord Jesus Christ obviously is going to be.

God the Holy Spirit is no less God. He is no less functional. He is no less worthy of appreciation.

And He is functional. He enables and empowers. He reveals.

He clarifies. He brings to our mind the scriptures. He leads us into all truth.

He is the means by which. And I see no reason for Him to need to retire just because we reach a glorified state. I think if anything, we will be a much more fitting target for the ministry and the power of God's Spirit.

And that makes me think that wouldn't it be something to discern in the scripture that this has been how the angels have been functioning all along. Around the sea, sea of glass, around the throne I should say, there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal, and in the midst of the throne and around the throne four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The living creatures, what do we know about these living creatures? This is a fascinating picture.

We go back to Ezekiel and we see that in Ezekiel you have four living creatures that have four faces each. This is Ezekiel 1.6 and again in Ezekiel 10.14. They move as one. They accompany the moving chariot throne of God.

In Revelation we have four living creatures, but you see a single face on each one. Let's just turn back to Ezekiel. Keep your finger in Revelation.

We'll be right back. Go to Ezekiel 1. These faces are important because they represent something. They had the likeness of a man in Ezekiel 1.5. Each one had four faces and each one had four wings.

Their legs are straight. They've got feet and so on. Verse 10, as for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man.

Each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side. Each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side and each of the four had the face of an eagle. Lion, man, ox, and eagle.

These have been understood various ways. People like to say that this is the completeness of creation, that you have the wild animals represented by the lion, you have domesticated animals represented by the ox, you have intelligence and sentience represented by the man, and you have swiftness and perhaps elevated dominion with the eagle. Since eagles have wings and the creatures have wings, that you would have comprehensiveness in the animal creation, both wild and domestic, and in sentient creation with man and the eagle representing the

angelic creation.

In terms of what they represent, lions are noted for their power. Genesis 49, 9 passage where Jacob is talking about his son Judah. Judah is a lion's whelp.

From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The lion of the tribe of Judah. In Numbers 23, verse 24, look, a people rises like a lioness and lifts itself up like a lion.

It shall not lie down until it devours the prey and drinks the blood of the slain. This is conquest and domination. Numbers 24, verse 9, he bows down, he lies down as a lion, as a lion, who shall rouse him? Blessed is he who blesses you and cursed is he who curses you.

A little variation on Genesis 49, 9 is in Numbers 24, 9. In the accouterments of the first temple, Solomon's temple, 1 Kings chapter 7, verse 29, on panels that are between the frames are lions, oxen, and cherubim. Lions, oxen, and cherubim. And on the frames was a pedestal on top.

Below the lions and oxen were wreaths of plated work. So you've got the combination there. And Ezekiel chapter 1, verse 10, of course, we just saw.

It's going to occur again in chapter 10, verse 14. Each had four faces. The face of a cherub, the face of a man, the face of a lion, and the face of an eagle.

And so you have the ox replaced by a cherub in that listing. And then in verse 21 of Ezekiel 10, four faces, four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man under their wings. When you see the ox or the calf, and the Greek word that's translated calf here just means a young bullock, a young cow.

There's no daylight between calf and ox. It's just the difference between the Old Testament and the New, really. So you think of 1 Corinthians 9, 9, it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

Is it oxen God is concerned about? And you can make the same leap here that it's not just talking about the comprehensiveness in creation that all creation worships God. There is a creation element here. God is worshiped as creator, is extolled as creator in chapter 4. But it's not just wild and domesticated animals that he's talking about, nor is it the fourfold gospel idea.

The notion that the four gospels portray four different aspects of Christ is a great one and a good one, but it was not understood or known in John's day because the four gospels had not circulated as a package. And so people didn't know that John presents him as son of God, that Luke presents him as son of man, and Matthew presents him as king, and Mark presents him as suffering servant. That was not known and would not have been clocked by someone to whom Jesus is speaking through John here, or in the vision that John sees, that they wouldn't say, oh, well, that's the four gospels.

So what is going on here? It is the attributes that characterize the presence of God. These cherubim are guardians of God's holiness. They are an honor guard.

God's perfectly capable of defending his own holiness, but they are representative. They communicate. If you're just looking at the brilliant light emanating from the throne, you're not going to get the symbolic value you get from looking at these faces.

So the lion, this from Old Testament symbolism tells us about rulership, about power, about conquest and dominance. Nobody messes with a lion. The lion does what he wants to.

He rises up and goes after his prey. He lays down when he's satisfied. He does his own will.

He's not subjected. It's not like circus lions where they can aim a chair at them and get them to do tricks. In the ancient world, lions do whatever they want.

The ox, this is service, subservience. This is power under control. The lion is power under its own behest and its own control.

The ox, this is the domesticated animal. He is powerful, but he is controlled. He is used for a purpose.

He is also the sacrificial animal. He is the primary sacrificial animal throughout the Old Testament. The bullock, that's the best sacrifice you can offer.

The whole burnt offering, you bring a bullock. Better than a goat, better than a sheep, better than a lamb. When you're looking at certain aspects of sacrifice, each of those sacrificial animals right down to the doves are an aspect.

But this is submission. This is humility. This is power under control.

You get to the face of a man. This is thoughtfulness and responsibility. This is intelligence, and we are accountable for what we know.

The face of a man. What do you know? What do you do about what you know? We can know something is dangerous. We do it anyway.

We can know something is bad for us. We don't refrain. We can know something is bad for others, and we lack restraint.

We lack the yoke. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. Sheep and goats are not yoke animals.

Oxen are yoke animals. Be powerful yet submissive. That's the ox.

The man and then the eagle. Those who wait upon the Lord, what are they going to do? They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not be weary.

This is the man. This is like Asahel who could run for miles. He's like a marathon man.

They will walk and not faint. This is like an ox who can plow all day long, and he never buckles under the load, under the task. Mount up with wings as eagles.

Eagles are used as a symbol of swiftness. They fly quickly. They also have an aerial view.

They see things from a divine perspective, and this is why they often represent angels. You have stars and eagles combined in the same poetic passage, and it speaks, and this is why angels have wings. These are sort of eagle wings, if you will.

They fly swiftly. They are swift to accomplish God's purpose, and they see things from God's perspective. They have the aerial view.

They are not earthbound. All of these things are in the presence of God, represented by these four living creatures. They are part of the heavenly creation.

God's throne is constantly seen with this presence. You see it in Isaiah. You see it in Ezekiel.

You see it in the scene after scene of the revelation, and the four living creatures have six wings in verse eight. We'll close on this thought for the first session. No matter how much time you spend looking at the word of God, if you look long enough, you'll see something you didn't see before.

It is just inexhaustible. How many wings do the four living creatures have? Each. They each have six wings.

This comports with the vision of the seraphim that have six wings in Isaiah, right? So if you've got four living creatures and each has six wings, how many wings is that total? What's four times six? 24. The same as the number of thrones that surround God's throne. There are a total of 24 wings in view.

Now, why does Ezekiel see four faces on each creature? John sees one face on each of four creatures. Here's the quick answer. In Ezekiel, the throne is on the move.

This is the chariot throne, and the perspective is constantly changing. This thing has got wheels and wheels within wheels, and it is moving, and Ezekiel sees it from a number of different perspectives. How much motion is there in Revelation chapter 4 when John looks at the throne? It is static.

It is in the midst of a glassy, sea-like, crystal surface. Nothing is moving. So these creatures could have four faces, but John is only going to see one of the four because they're not moving.

So one can turn his human face, one can turn his ox face, one can turn his eagle face, and one can turn his human face. Each of them can portray one of the faces. They are the same creatures.

This is continuity, but also revelation. It is progress. It tells us something new.

It's not just a rehash of Old Testament vision. And this is the God who is our Heavenly Father, and His will is accomplished swiftly with divine perspective like the eagle. It is intelligent and comprehensible like the face of the man.

It is best served by those who are humble and obedient and follow the guidance that God gives. And there is power, sovereignty, and the opportunity to participate in God's accomplishment of His purpose, to rule with Him. And we're going to see, having looked at the four living creatures, that the 24 elders share in this.

They are ruler-priests. More about that when we come back from the break.