

1. **Introduction:** In John's initial vision, the risen glorified Jesus dictated letters to the seven churches - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The letters together with a written version of the other visions John would receive were to be compiled into one document and sent as a letter to all the churches.
 - Then, after the first vision, John received another vision introduced by the phrase *"after this I looked."* Similar phrases will be used several times to indicate a transition to a new vision.
2. **Revelation 4:1-2a:** *After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."* ²*At once I was in the Spirit.*
3. **A Door Standing Open in Heaven:** There are other times heaven was opened. For example, In Acts 10, Peter sees heaven opened and experiences the vision of the clean and unclean animals, showing him that the unclean animals of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 have been made permissible for God's people, signifying the gospel is for both Jew and Gentile.
 - Other examples where heaven was opened are recorded in Luke 3 at the baptism of Jesus and Acts 7 when Stephen was martyred.
 - Jesus speaks to John telling him to *"come up here."* Immediately, John was *"in the Spirit."*
 - In verses 4:1-2a, there are two issues. (1.) What does *"in the Spirit"* mean? (2.) What does *"what must take place after this"* signify?
 - Up to this point the symbols used in Revelation have been relatively straight-forward. From this point onward, the symbols get more difficult and complex.
4. **In the Spirit:** Being "in the Spirit" means a person's thoughts, emotions, and actions are responsive to and constrained by the Holy Spirit. Four times in Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), John said he was *"in the Spirit."* Each time he said it, a new vision began.
 - During the events of the first three chapters, John was "in the Spirit" and physically located on the isle of Patmos. Now he is again "in the Spirit" on Patmos and receives a vision. As the vision begins, John is told to *"come up here"* where Jesus is. Whether or not he was taken up physically we don't know, but his mind was fully engaged and filled by the new vision.
5. **Meaning of "After This":** In the phrase *"what must take place after this,"* to what does *"after this"* refer?
 - Verse 4:1 provides a clue. It begins with *"after this I looked."* What does the phrase *"after this"* refer to in this sentence? It clearly refers to the events of the first vision. It

is reasonable to assume that when the same phrase is used in verse 1b, it will have a similar meaning.

- So, the natural meaning of “after this” in the 4:1b phrase seems to be to refer to something after the events of John’s first visionary experience, after he saw a door standing open in heaven, and after Jesus called him to come up and be shown what must happen after this.
- Immediately, John was “*in the Spirit*” enabling obeying Jesus’ command to “*come up.*”
- John was amazed at what he saw when he arrived.

6. Revelation 4:2b: *And behold a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.*

- The One on the throne is God. The throne signifies that God is the ultimate King, actively ruling over all His creation. What about “seeing” God’s being?
- The Westminster documents tell us God is an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit who is the ultimate in perfection, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. God is invisible, without body. He is a unity without parts or passions who works all things according to the counsel of his own will.
- God’s attributes include omniscience (all-knowing), omnipotence (all-powerful), and omnipresence (always present everywhere).
- Of necessity, the Throne-Room vision with God sitting on the throne is not literal but symbolic.
- Because God is an infinite Spirit, God’s people are forbidden to attempt to make images of Him. No image exists or can be imagined that is sufficient to represent Him. Every attempt to create images of Him can only result in false images. An infinite Spirit cannot be imaged.
- The Hebrew concept of heaven was multi-layered – first, the atmosphere, then the place of the stars, and then the place where God was present (paradise). The OT and most of the NT refer to the “heavens” (plural).
- But Revelation refers to “heaven” as singular not plural. In Revelation heaven signifies the dwelling place of God (the one exception is 12:12 which perhaps based on Isaiah 44:23).

7. Revelation 4:2b-3: *And he who sat there (on the throne) had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.*

- In this depiction of God there is no image recognizable as the Person of God.
- The splendor of the infinite Spirit who is God is beyond human description. Attempts to produce descriptions that convey His majestic reality utilize the most beautiful and

valuable of earthly objects, not to produce a realistic image, but to produce a response of awe.

- The beauty of rainbows is often utilized in descriptions of God. For the Jews, the rainbow was the sign of God's (wonderful, beautiful) covenant mercy.
- Ezekiel compared the surrounding radiance of God's glory to a rainbow.

8. **Ezekiel 1:28**: *"Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD."*

9. **An Interesting OT Parallel to "What Must Take Place After This"**: Essentially this is the same phrase as used in Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream. He insisted that the dream's meaning be revealed to him without him revealing what he saw in the dream.

- His wise men were unable to do so. Daniel became involved. God revealed to him the king's dream and its meaning. Daniel then explained the dream to Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 2:45b, Daniel said, **"A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."**
- Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a prophetic overview of history, predicting the rise and fall of future empires. Many of these predictions have already come true. Others continue to appear.

10. **Revelation 4:4**: *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.*

- The identity of the 24 elders is disputed. Some identify them as angels, some as saints, and others think they symbolize all believers.
- The doubling of 12 could represent the combination of OT and NT people of God, or the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 disciples.
- Another possibility suggested is that they represent the 24 courses of priests as described in 1 Chronicles 24. Whoever the 24 elders are, they have white garments signifying purity and have golden crowns signifying ruling and reigning.
- Yet another possibility is that they are leaders who represent all God's people as did the elders who stood before God's glory at Sinai.
- The 24 elders' primary role around the throne seems to be worship.

11. **Revelation 4:5-6a**: *From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*

- Lightning flashes and thunder are symbolic of God's power and glory. The seven burning torches represent the seven spirits of God signifying the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
- The sea of glass, clear like crystal symbolizes God's holiness and transcendent majesty.
- An image of the sea appears twice more in Revelation. In 15:1-4 what looks like a sea of glass again symbolizes God's holiness and judgment.
- In 21:1, the sea (as a symbol of chaos and evil) completely disappears when God totally judges evil and nothing is left to separate Him from His people.

12. **Revelation 4:6b-7**: *And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.*

- The four living creatures are also exalted angelic beings who form an inner circle around the throne. Though the OT images are transformed somewhat by John, they resemble the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10 as well as the seraphim of Isaiah 6.