**Session 4**

***Workbook,* Week 3**

**Revelation 4**

**30 Sep – 1 Oct 2024**

**Earthly Reality and Heavenly Reality –** We have seen that seven letters were sent to seven literal churches in Asia Minor during the first century A.D. The reason that *seven* churches were included was to indicate that these churches also *symbolically represent the entire church of all ages.* But it is not enough that these seven churches see themselves as they are seen by God. It is also necessary for them to see what is true about God. If you recall from the creation account in Genesis 1, the author begins with a heavenly view looking down at what is being created. Then in chapter 2 there is another vantage point, providing another account of the creation of man, but from an earthly standpoint. Now in the last book of the Bible, those two vantage points are reversed. Revelation begins with the earthly reality of churches who were enduring these attacks, and Christ is in their midst. But now we will zoom out to see the heavenly reality of this very same thing. What is going on in Heaven at this very moment is meant to be an encouragement to the seven churches on the earth below.

**Tabernacle Imagery –** It should not be a surprise that Tabernacle imagery figures heavily into this scene. Another heavy emphasis is given to the concept of *thrones*. We marked 17 occurrences of this word in the homework this week, and we will see that the word occurs a total of 45 times in Revelation. (To put this into perspective, the word in used in the entire New Testament only 61 times—so over two-thirds of them are in Revelation!) So this book is very concerned with pointing our gaze toward the Throne Room and helping us to understand it in Tabernacle language. Why? Because the Tabernacle has always been the place where Heaven and earth overlap, where God comes to dwell among His people. This heavenly scene is not detached from earthly reality at all: it is our *perception* of it that draws a line between the two. So God is telling the first century church—and us—“This is your reality, and this is what you need to get you through.”

**The Visions –** Think how the book of Revelation flows: it begins with seven individual letters to seven separate churches, but the rest of the book is filled with visions that are meant for all of them and for the church of all time. Notice that the visions are shared with both the faithful churches and the unfaithful ones, so apparently the visions are meant to both encourage and exhort.

**“After This…” –** The first time this phrase occurs, it means “after John received the seven letters to be sent to the churches.” The second time, it means "after these things”, i.e. as human history unfolds and builds toward the final judgment. It is a statement for the entire rest of the book of Revelation.

**The Tabernacle and the Throne Room –** The first item in the heavenly scene we can connect with something in the Tabernacle is the throne of God; it is identified with the ark of the covenant, which was considered to be God’s throne. In the ancient Near East, thrones were flanked by living creatures, such as lions. The Holy of Holies was meant to be an earthly representation of the heavenly throne room. Next we see mention of “jasper and carnelian stone”, which are the first and last stones mounted on the ephod that was worn by the high priest in Old Testament times. So jasper and carnelian remind us of the “Alpha and Omega”, and also of the children of God held near by the one seated on the throne. The next item mentioned is a “rainbow”, a reminder from the days of Noah that God is faithful to preserve His people even when the flood of His wrath is being poured out on the earth: God WILL preserve the righteous.

**Twenty-Four Elders –** The number 24 is significant in that it is two times twelve, the number that represents the people of God. When we hear about two sets of twelve people of God, who do we think of? We have the twelve sons of Israel (Jewish) and the twelve apostles (church). So the 24 elders represent the entire church, both Jew and Gentile. The elders are pictured as seated on thrones, which is significant because that means that what God had intended to take place in the Garden of Eden is finally happening: man had been created in order to rule and subdue. They were to take the region assigned to them (Garden of Eden) and push it to the ends of the earth, so that eventually they would rule the entire earth. But instead, they rebelled against God’s rule; instead of ruling over the creation, they tried to rule and subdue *each other.* This is why there are so many “one another’s” in the New Testament, telling us how we *should* treat each other. But here in the throne room of God, we see the elders, the people of God, ruling as they were meant to do.

Can you think of an article in the Tabernacle that included “12” in its design? The table of showbread was to have twelve loaves of bread on it at all times, symbolizing God’s provision for the twelve tribes of Israel.

The elders are also shown to be wearing white robes, priestly garments, which reveals a fulfillment of Exodus 19:6 (“…you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests…”)

**Seven Spirits of God? –** John saw seven torches burning in front of the throne of God, which represented “the seven spirits of God”. The seven torches should have reminded us of the golden lampstand in the Tabernacle, with its seven branches. But seven *spirits*? Isn’t there just one Holy Spirit? Isaiah 11:2 sheds some light on this statement:  *“And the 1Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him* (the promised Messiah), *the Spirit of 2wisdom and 3understanding, the Spirit of  4counsel and 5might, the Spirit of 6knowledge and the 7fear of the Lord.”* The Holy Spirit demonstrates each of these seven qualities perfectly and simultaneously. So when we read “the seven spirits of God” in Revelation, we can understand that the phrase means “the seven-*fold* Spirit of God”.

**A Sea of Glass –** At first this seems puzzling: what is a sea of glass doing in this heavenly scene? But when we consider a tie-in with the Tabernacle, we should be looking for something there that held a lot of water, i.e. the bronze basin. In fact, when a bronze basin was constructed for use in Solomon’s temple, it was so huge it was called “the bronze *Sea*”! (1 Kings 7:23-26)

**Four Living Creatures –** These four “living creatures” are cherubim, pictures of which were woven into the Tabernacle curtains. Two cherubim were also cast from gold and placed in the Holy of Holies, above the ark of the covenant. Cherubim seem to function as guards. They guarded the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve lost the right to enter it. They also appeared to both Ezekiel and Isaiah at crucial moments in their lives. When we consider them, we don’t want to focus so much on what they literally looked like, but what the *significance* of their description is. For instance, in both Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1 they are described as being covered with eyes, both in front and in back…so they could look in any and every direction at once. There are four of these creatures in both accounts: this is a number tied to the idea of *completion*. God had completed His work on the earth itself on day 4 of the creation week, so when you have *four* creatures covered with eyes, you have a picture of a *complete witness*: they see everything in God’s creation (think of the four compass directions, the four corners of the earth, the four winds, etc.) The number six will also come into play frequently. It is tied to Day 6 of the creation week, when man was created. So it will play heavily into the contrast between the things of earth (#6) and the things of heaven (#7). And the number six even has a connection with the cherubim: they each have six wings, which symbolizes the fact that they too are *created* beings, just as man is. They use two of their wings to shield their faces from the blinding light of God’s glory; they use two to fly; and they use two to cover their feet…which is another indication of their creatureliness: feet are what tie us to the dirt. And speaking of their faces, we get a hint of their significance by considering what happened in Genesis. Jesus told His followers that “as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” (See Matthew 24:36-39.) So Jesus connected the account of Noah to what John is seeing in Revelation about Jesus’ second coming. If we look back to Genesis 9:8-13, we find that God made His covenant, not just with Noah and his descendants, but with every living creature. So we see that God’s covenant was with the people on the ark (“the face of a man”), the birds of the air (“the face of an eagle”), the livestock (“the face of an ox”), and all wildlife (“the face of a lion”). **The four living creatures in Revelation symbolize for us all that is preserved through the flood of God’s wrath.**

**Holy, Holy, Holy –** John tells us that the four living creatures are continually proclaiming God’s holiness with the phrase, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty…” The three-fold “holy” is an oblique reference to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. We miss it in the wording of the English translation, but in Hebrew, the Israelites referred to the outer room of the Tabernacle as “the holy” and the innermost room as “the holy-holy”. So when the four living creatures say “holy” *three* times, they are describing the throne room of God as the ultimate holy place, “the holiest of holies” if you will.

**The Creator-Owner –** Every time the creatures repeat their refrain, the twenty-four elders fall down in worship, telling God that He is worthy to receive glory and honor “because You have created all things.” The One who created all things *owns* all things, and He can do with His creation as He pleases. It exists by His will and for His glory. **He is worthy of worship…and He is entitled to judge.**