

A compass is an instrument designed to keep you from getting lost. The pointer always shows you which direction is north. If you're walking through the woods and become overwhelmed with the density of the undergrowth and the similarity of the trees, a quick look at the compass can keep you from going in circles.

In the study of the book of Revelation, 1:19 is like a compass. It provides us with the big idea of the book: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." Thus:

*What you have seen* = The Vision of chapter one

*What is now* = The letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three

*What will take place later* = Everything from chapter four on

In this study we'll move into the third section, the material that deals with future events. It begins with an amazing description of a heavenly vision given to John in chapter four...

Note: This is a good point to mention an important theological term, *perspicuity*. The perspicuity of the Scriptures refers to the doctrine of the *clarity of the Scriptures*. It is not denying that some parts of the Bible say things that may be difficult to understand when isolated from the rest of the Bible. Nonetheless, the message of the Bible as a whole is clear, and when examined in light of the whole, the message of the parts is clear.

In other words, God didn't give us the Bible to confuse us. It's not in code. God the Holy Spirit gave us a book that He intended for us to read and benefit from (it is "profitable" says 2 Tim. 3:16). When we find parts that are difficult to understand, we need to compare those texts with clearer texts to come to an understanding of meaning. The Bible interprets the Bible.

That's important to know and to do as we enter into this next section of Revelation.

## I. Here's the context of the vision (1).

### **A. John saw a door (1a).**

1. When? "After this"

After what? After Jesus finished giving the seven church letters to John. After John finished his dictation/writing, *then* he saw a door.

2. What kind of door? "Open"

Q: What's the significance of an open door here? See 3:20

3. Where was it? "In heaven"

Q: What's the significance of heaven? Who's there? God, namely, Jesus Christ, the author of the seven letters and the subject of this book.

### **B. John heard a voice (1b).**

1. What kind of voice? "Like a trumpet"

Note: Again notice the use of the terms "like" and "as" and "appearance of" in this vision. This is apocalyptic literature. John is using human vocabulary to describe the supernatural. If we tried to draw what he saw based on the images he selected, the picture would look bizarre. A "literal" interpretation must always take into consideration the type of literature the Spirit of God chose to utilize in communicating truth.

2. What was the message?

a. "Come up here."

Q: Up where?

b. "I will show you what must take place after this."

Q: After what?

Note: Some interpreters find the rapture of the church in this verse (*NIV Study Bible*, p. 1930).

## II. Here's the content of the vision (2-11).

Notice a series of images that John saw...

### **A. John saw a throne (2a).**

Q: What does a throne represent? Who sits on a throne? A ruler.

1. How? He was "in the Spirit"

Q: What does that mean? The same phrase appears in 1:10. It seems to indicate he was made attune to things not apprehended by the five, natural senses. The Holy Spirit enabled him to see and hear supernatural sights and sounds ("a state of heightened spiritual awareness," *NIVsb*). See also 17:3; 21:10

Caution: Is this phrase appropriate to use to describe the experience of believers today? It is often used in an unbiblical sense, like, "Wow, the preacher was really in the Spirit today!" We are commanded to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:25) and "pray in the Spirit" (Eph 6:18). But remember John was an apostle. What he experienced was not intended to be the norm for Christian experience.

2. Where was it? "in heaven"

### **B. John saw someone sitting *on the throne* (2b-3a).**

1. Who? We're not told here yet. In 5:6-7 the Person on the throne is distinct from "the Lamb" who came and took the scroll from "Him who sat on the throne."

2. What did He look like? He "had the appearance of jasper and carnelian."

Q: What does that mean? God is described in terms of the "reflected brilliance of precious stones (*NIVsb*). How would you describe how a precious jewel looks? Words fail--and that's the point. If you look at a diamond, you'll see spectacular color as the light refracts through it. Look at the same rock from a slightly different angle, and you see something entirely different.

### **C. John saw a rainbow *encircle the throne* (3b).**

Q: What's true of a rainbow? D.A. Carson observes that a rainbow is fuzzy, slightly out of focus, hazy. The closer you get to the presence of God, the more difficult it becomes to describe what you see. Why? Because God cannot be depicted adequately by human words.

### **D. John saw twenty-four other thrones/elders *surrounding the throne* (4).**

Q: What does the term "elder" signify?

Q: What are we told about these beings?

1. The elders were seated.
2. The elders were dressed in white.
3. The elders wore crowns.

Q: What does a crown indicate? It's what a king wears. The symbolism indicates these beings help rule.

Q: Who are they? Some feel they represent believers (12 Israelite tribes, plus 12 apostles). Others feel they are angelic beings. Who they are does not seem to be as important as what they do (which we'll see momentarily in verses 10-11).

### **E. John saw lightning and heard thunder *come from the throne* (5a).**

Q: Where else do we see this kind of storm-terminology? At Sinai (Ex. 19).

### **F. John saw seven lamps *before the throne* (5b).**

1. They were blazing.
2. They are the seven spirits of God.

Note: Seven represents "fullness" and "completeness."

### **G. John saw what looked like a sea of glass *before the throne* (6).**

Observation by Carson: To us, glass is clear. Not in the ancient world. It was fuzzy--you couldn't see through it very well. The image here suggests mystery and distance and says, "The closer you get to the throne, the more indescribable it becomes."

#### **H. John saw four living creatures in the center, *around the throne* (6b-8).**

They seem to be special, angelic beings...

1. They were covered with eyes (6b, 8).

Q: What does that indicate? We see with our eyes. Lots of eyes indicate that nothing is missed. Nothing escapes their attention. Notice this detail is mentioned twice.

2. Each was "like" something (7)...

- The first was like a lion. (signifies might--the "king of the jungle")
- The second was like an ox. (signifies power)
- The third had a face like a man. (signifies wisdom)
- The fourth was like a flying eagle. (signifies majesty)

3. Each had six wings (8a).

4. They never stop saying "Holy, holy, holy... (8b)"

Q: Who does that sound like? Where else do we meet six-winged creatures in the Bible?  
Isaiah 6

#### **I. John saw a chain-reaction of worship (9-11).**

Notice the awe-inspiring action/reaction that never stops in heaven...

1. When the four living creatures worship the One on the throne... (9)

2. The twenty-four elders worship the One on the throne as well (10-11).

Here's what they do...

- They fall down before Him.
- They lay their crowns before the throne.
- They say, "You are worthy..."
- They express why: "You created all things."

Note: God deserves honor for two basic reasons spelled out in Scripture. One is highlighted in Rev 4, the other in Rev 5. He deserves honor, first, because He created us; and second because He redeemed us.

Discuss: What do we learn about worship from this scene?

#### Observations:

1. *The focus of the vision is on the One who is on the throne.*
2. *The significance of everything else in the vision is determined by its relation to the One on the throne.*
3. *The vision is going to reveal future events (1, "what must take place after this").*
4. *The future is in the hands of the One on the throne (5:1).*

#### For Discussion:

1. Is this vision in Rev 4 describing the way it is in heaven *now*, or is it describing a future scene?
2. Who are the 24 elders and 4 living creatures?