

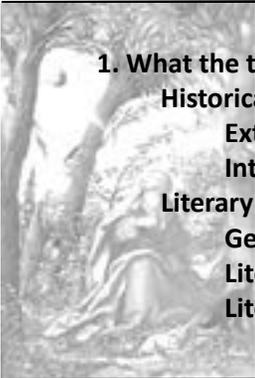


THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 15

Text: Rev. 4:6b-11

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1. What the text meant.
 Historical Aspects:
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2. What the text means.

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A. The Four Living Creatures and worship, vv. 6b-8

B. The Worship of the Twenty-four Elders, vv. 9 - 11

Worshiping at the Throne

Greek NT

6b Καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου τέσσαρα ζῶα γέμοντα ὀφθαλμῶν ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπίσθεν. 7 καὶ τὸ ζῶον τὸ πρῶτον ὅμοιον λέοντι καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ζῶον ὅμοιον μόσχῳ καὶ τὸ τρίτον ζῶον ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ζῶον ὅμοιον ἀετῷ πετομένῳ. 8 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα, ἐν καθ' ἓν αὐτῶν ἔχων ἀνά πτέρυγας ἕξ, κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν, καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες· ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.

9 Καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 10 πεσοῦνται οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθήμενου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ βαλοῦσιν τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου λέγοντες· 11 ἅγιος εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

6b In der Mitte, in einem inneren Kreis um den Thron, waren vier mächtige Gestalten*, die nach allen Seiten voller Augen waren. 7 Die erste sah aus wie ein Löwe, die zweite wie ein Stier, die dritte hatte ein Gesicht wie ein Mensch, und die vierte glich einem fliegenden Adler. 8 Jede der vier Gestalten hatte sechs Flügel, die innen und außen mit Augen bedeckt waren. Tag und Nacht rufen sie unaufhörlich:

»Heilig, heilig, heilig ist der Herr, der Gott, der die ganze Welt regiert, der war und der ist und der kommt!«

9 Immer wieder riefen die vier mächtigen Gestalten Preis, Ehre und Dank aus für den, der auf dem Thron sitzt und in alle Ewigkeit lebt. 10 Und jedes Mal, wenn sie das taten, warfen sie die vierundzwanzig Ältesten nieder vor dem, der auf dem Thron sitzt, und beteten den an, der in alle Ewigkeit lebt. Sie legten ihre Kronen vor dem Thron nieder und sagten:

11 »Würdig bist du, unser Herr und Gott, dass alle dich preisen und ehren und deine Macht anerkennen.

NRSV

6b Around the throne, and 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 a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

“Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

NLT

6b In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS, AND IS, AND IS TO COME.”

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

INTRODUCTION

In this second segment centered on the heavenly throne of God, the focus centers on the worshipful response of the four creatures and the twenty-four elders. As the four new characters are introduced, a description is first given of them. But the emphasis is upon action. The key action is προσκυνήσουσιν, *they bend their knees before*. The worshiping of God before the heavenly throne signals the proper response for those privileged to see His greatness and power. Yet, what is worship?

Most of the English translations wrongly translate λέγοντες in v. 10 as 'singing.' What these 24 elders were doing was not singing in any modern sense of the term. Instead, they were speaking out (λέγοντες, vv. 8, & 10) words of praise specified in verse eleven. Quite interestingly neither ancient Greek, Hebrew, nor Aramaic possessed verbs with the specific meaning of 'singing.' In ancient Greek, the vocabulary referring to music is overwhelmingly centered on playing some kind of wind or stringed instrument in order to create a musical sound.¹

It is a gross misunderstanding when modern perceptions of music are understood from the biblical text. Given the highly rhythmic pronunciation of most ancient languages, ancient Greek in particular, the phonetic line of distinction between normal speaking and the modern idea of 'singing' would have been exceedingly short, if existing at all.² Ancient patterns of speaking

¹The word for 'music,' συμφωνία, shows up but once in the entire NT in Lk. 15:25 in reference to the elder son hearing συμφωνίας along with singing. And at the root meaning of the Greek word is the idea of various instruments playing in 'harmony' with one another, not vocal singing.

The closest to the action of singing is ὑμνέω, which is translated 'sing' in three of the four NT uses by the NRSV: . Yet by the NT era the idea shifted dominantly to 'praise' but not necessarily in a musical expression.

ὑμνέω⁵ means first "to sing a song" of praise, then with acc. of person or thing, e.g., "to praise the gods in choral song," Hom. Hymn. Ap., 158 f.; ποιηταὶ ὑμνήκασι περὶ ..., Thuc., I, 21, 1; Homer (cf. Hom. Hymn. Ap., 156–164 sang the dances of the women of Delos, Thuc., III, 104, 5. But then ὑμνέω means gen. "to extol," "to praise."

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 8:490.]

Only nouns with some sense of the English word 'song' are reflected in the vocabulary of the NT: ᾠδή (song, 9x); ὕμνος (hymn, 2x); ψαλμός (psalm,

²Of course, this in part depends on one's definition of 'music.' The particular understanding of the term is enormously culturally conditioned and differs hugely from culture to culture both con-temporarily around the world and chronologically across history. Only by stretching the definition of the English word 'music' virtually beyond the breaking point, can most of these perspectives fall under the label 'music.'

beyond conversational levels into musical expression fall more into the modern category of 'chanting' than singing.

The medieval Masoretic markings on the Hebrew text of the OT, Psalms in particular, for 'musical expression' are guides for proper 'chanting' of the text in Hebrew.³ Music instruments could not be played while the psalms were being chanted by the Levites in ancient Jewish temple worship, only at the beginning and at the end of worship. What we encounter here in Rev. 4:6b-11 plays off this temple background, which provided the historical model for John to describe worship in Heaven.

As we begin the first of several 'worship' passages in the apocalyptic vision of John, we must first completely clear our thinking of preconceived notions of what worship is. Then there must be an openness to learn from John's vision of worship in Heaven what the heart of the action of true worship of God is. Finally, there must be a prayerful and reflectively thoughtful effort to connect all this up to what we do in Christian worship in our day. There is much for us to learn. And some of it may be very disquieting, when it seriously challenges our contemporary notions of worshiping God. Plus, these pictures give us the only legitimate source of insight into how we will be worshiping God through all eternity. This should be very helpful ad-

³An excellent UTube based re-creation of this is found at internet blog "The Music of the Bible Revealed," musicofthebiblerevealed.wordpress.com under the leadership of Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, a French Baptist musicology professor at Sorbonne University in Paris, France. Amazingly most commentators in Bible commentaries, dictionaries, journal articles display an astounding ignorance of these basic realities in the ancient world. Few writers seem to understand the well made points

"The line that divides poetry (e.g., 1 Cor 13; 15:32; Tit 1:12) from hymnody is finely drawn, and indeed the terms overlap" and

"It is just as difficult and delicate a task to separate out a species of Christian hymn from an early confession of faith (see Creed)."

in **2.2 Discerning Hymns from Other Forms** in "Hymns, Hymn Fragments, Songs, Spiritual Songs," by Ralph P. Martin in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 421.

A more detailed background of the pioneering work of Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, a French Baptist music professor in Paris (1912-2000) is on a NPR presentation available at <http://www.rak-kav.com/biblemusic/>.

One weakness of this presentation is the failure to acknowledge that the 'musical markings' discussed come out of the work of the Masoretes in the early middle ages as a reflection of their projection of the proper sounds going back to the OT era. How accurate this projection is cannot be determined with certainty because the very few OT Hebrew manuscripts -- most notably connected to the Dead Sea Scrolls -- only contain the consonants of the Hebrew texts with no vowel pointing or markings whatsoever.

vance preparation for Heaven.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Both the historical and the literary backgrounds are going to place an important role in making sense of this passage. Thus careful attention will be devoted to this in these subsections.

Historical Aspects:

How does one approach the worship of God? And more precisely from this passage, How should one anticipate worshiping God in eternity? John's dramatic imagery in 4:6b-11 provides the first of several glimpses into worship taking place in Heaven. How to depict this in understandable language to Christian readers at the close of the first century? This was his dilemma. The solution was to turn to what he had experienced as the worship of God out of his Jewish heritage. And this centered on the patterns of worship in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

To be sure, some rare overlaps with worship patterns in the pagan temples in the seven cities of Asia would occur, thus giving additional insights especially to the non-Jewish believers with no prior experience of having worshiped in the temple in Jerusalem. Even for the Jewish believers in these seven churches, their memory of such worship might well be fading, since the temple had been destroyed over thirty years before the writing of this document. For younger Jewish believers these images would conger up pictures they had heard described by their parents from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem for temple worship prior to 70 AD.

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this passage to the middle ages, only one variant reading surfaces that in the opinion of the editors of the UBS 4th rev. ed. Greek New Testament merits listing in the text apparatus of *The Greek New Testament*. Such a listing represents the conclusion of the committee that the variant reading could impact the translation of the passage.

The variation occurs with ἦσαν at the end of verse eleven.⁴ The odd sequence of "existed" and then "were created" is 'corrected' by several copyists in a variety of ways.⁵ But the overwhelming weight of external mss

^{4c} {A} ἦσαν & A 205 209 1006 1611 1841 2053 2351 Byz it^{ar}.
^{gig}.^t vg Apringius ^{mssacc.} to Primasius Beatus // εἰσιν P 1854 2050 2344 cop^{sa} eth Andrew // ἐγένοντο 2329 arm // οὐκ ἦσαν 046 // omit ἦσαν καὶ Varimadum Fulgentius Primasius" [Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

^{5c}The difficulty of the text (where we might have expected the

evidence favors strongly the adopted reading of the text.⁶

Of course, this is not the only place where variations of wording surface in the passage. The *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev ed) Greek New Testament lists some 20 places of known variations in the now existing manuscripts of this passage.⁷ Yet, as careful



sequence ἐκτίσθησαν καὶ ἦσαν) was alleviated in several witnesses either by reading οὐκ ἦσαν or by omitting ἦσαν καὶ." [Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 665.]

^{6c}The word order in the text, ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν (they existed and were created), is difficult since it may seem to imply that all things existed before they were created. The expected word order is ἐκτίσθησαν καὶ ἦσαν. The above difficulty is removed in several witnesses either by reading οὐκ ἦσαν (they were not) or by omitting ἦσαν καὶ. If the two verbs in the text do not refer to one event expressed in two different ways, then perhaps the first verb refers to God's ongoing preservation of the created order and the second verb to the beginning of creation (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 335). The two verbs do not necessarily refer to two separate events. The sense may be 'you willed that they exist, and they were created' (TOB). REB says 'by your will they were created and have their being!'" [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 530.]

Offenbarung 4,7

* εχον & M; Ir (the ptc. ἔχων is replaced by the 3rd Sing verb ἔχον)

| txt A 046. 1006. 2329. 2344. 2351 pc

* τ. πρ. ως -προς 1611*. 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329 M^A syh (The phrase τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου is replaced by a series of variations but w. the same essential meaning)

| τ. πρ. ως ομοιον -πω & (gig t)

| πρ. ἀνθρώπου 1006. 1611c. 1841. 2351 M^K; Ir

| txt A (2344) ar vg sy^{ph}

* 1006. 1841 M^K (ζῶον is omitted)

Offenbarung 4,8

* M (τὰ τέσσαρα is omitted)

| txt & A P 1611. 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329. 2344. 2351 al

* εκαστον & 2329 pc sy (καθ' ἑν is replaced with ἕκαστον)

*¹ 1006. 1841. 2351 M^K t; Prim (αὐτῶν is omitted)

* εχον M (ἔχων is replaced w. a variety of alternative forms)

| εἰχον & pc lat

| εχοντα P 1611. 2050. 2351 pc

| txt A 1006. 1854. 2329 pc

* κ. ἐξωθεν κ. εσ. 046. (2351) pc (καὶ ἔσωθεν is replaced or omitted)

| - 2050

*¹ novies αγ. M^K (ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος is replaced either 9x or 8x repeated)

| octies αγ. &* pc

Offenbarung 4,9

* -σωσιν & 046. 1854. 2351 M^A (δώσουσιν is replace with δώσωσιν or one of the other alternatives)

consideration of these variations reflects, no meaning is impacted or else careless copying is evident resulting in nonsensical expression.

Consequently, we can proceed to exegete the adopted reading of the text in the full confidence that it is the original wording of the original writing.



Model of the Jerusalem temple during the NT period.

Internal History. The apocalyptic visionary nature of the passage limits the internal historical markers of the passage, but the nature of the worshiping pattern does reflect influences from the Jewish temple worship prior to its destruction in 70 AD. Having a clear idea of this historical pattern in the background will help substantially in understanding some of the nuances of this text. This is important because modern Christian worship patterns and structure have virtually nothing in common with how a first century Jew worshiped God in the Jerusalem temple.

Understanding how temple worship was carried

| δωσι 1006. 1841. (2053) *M*^K

| εδωκαν 2329; Prim

| txt A P 1611. 2050 pc

* του -νου *M* (τῷ θρόνῳ is switched from locative to genitive case spelling)

| txt κ A 1854. 2050 pc

Offenbarung 4,10

* και κ (t) (καί is inserted before πεσοῦνται)

* αμην κ 2329 pc t sy^{ph} (ἀμὴν is inserted after αἰώνων)

* βαλλ- κ* 046. 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329 *M*^A vg^{ms} (βαλοῦσιν is replaced)

| βαλοντες 1611 vg^{ms}

Offenbarung 4,11

* κυριε 1854 *M*^A sy^h (ὁ κύριος και is replaced)

| κυριε ο κυριος και κ

* κ 046*. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2050 al (ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν is omitted)

* ο αγιος 1006. 1841. 2351 *M*^K sy^{h**} (ὁ ἅγιος is inserted after ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν)

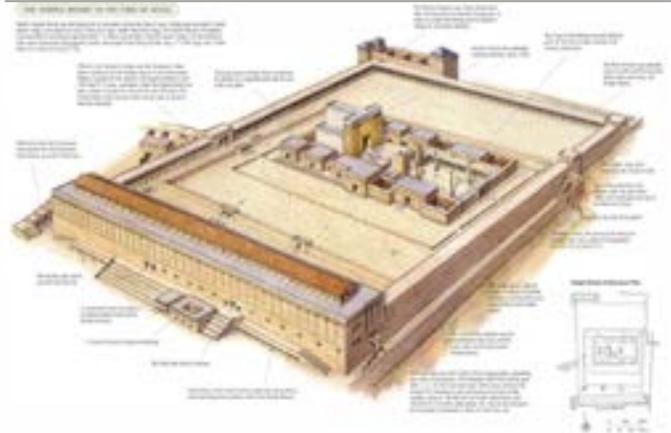
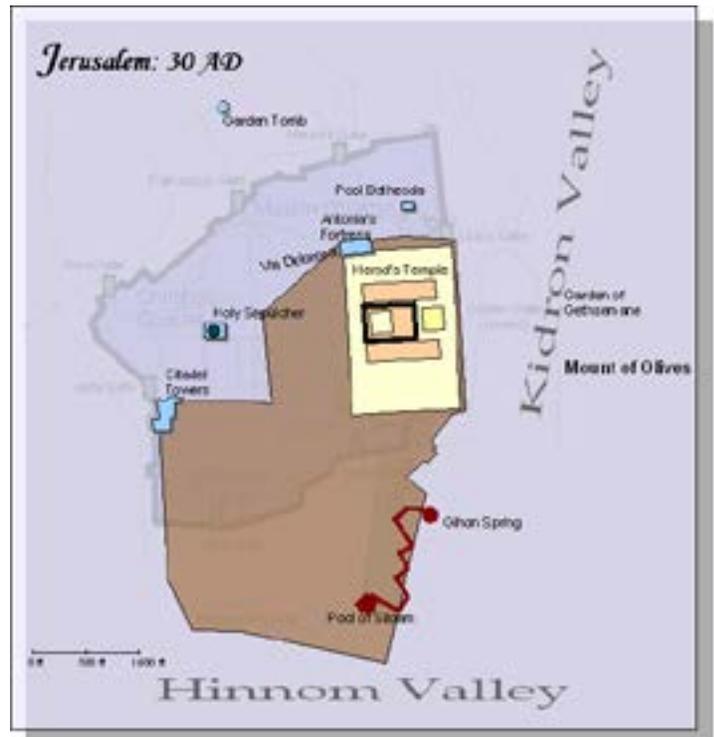
* ουκ 046 pc (οὐκ is inserted before ἦσαν)

* εισιν 1854. 2050 *M*^A sa (ἦσαν is replaced)

| εγενοντο 2329

* A (καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 640–641.]



out necessitates understanding of the design of the temple, for the design of a religious building will shape profoundly the activity that takes place inside it.⁸ The

⁸“Sources Descriptions of Herod’s temple are to be found both in Josephus (BJ v; Ant. xv) and in rabbinic literature (primarily in Mish Tamid and Middoth). Josephus had the advantage of first-hand knowledge of the temple, though it must be remembered that he was writing after its destruction — thus under the obvious limitations of human memory — and with a patent desire to impress. The accounts in rabbinic literature, though written much later, draw on traditions originating with those who had seen the temple. Again, however, their accuracy is limited by what people could remember (note the engaging remark of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob in Mish Middoth ii.5: ‘I forget for what [a certain chamber] was used’) as well as by the rabbis’ familiarity with the OT accounts of sanctuaries, which tended to color their descriptions. Hence though we may draw on these accounts with some confidence for the general features of Herod’s temple, the discrepancies between them and the limitations which accompanied their recording leave us in some doubt as to details.” [Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 4:770.]

outer parameters of the temple area were -- by Josephus' account in *Ant.* xv.11.3 -- about 180 meters or 600 feet on each of the four sides.

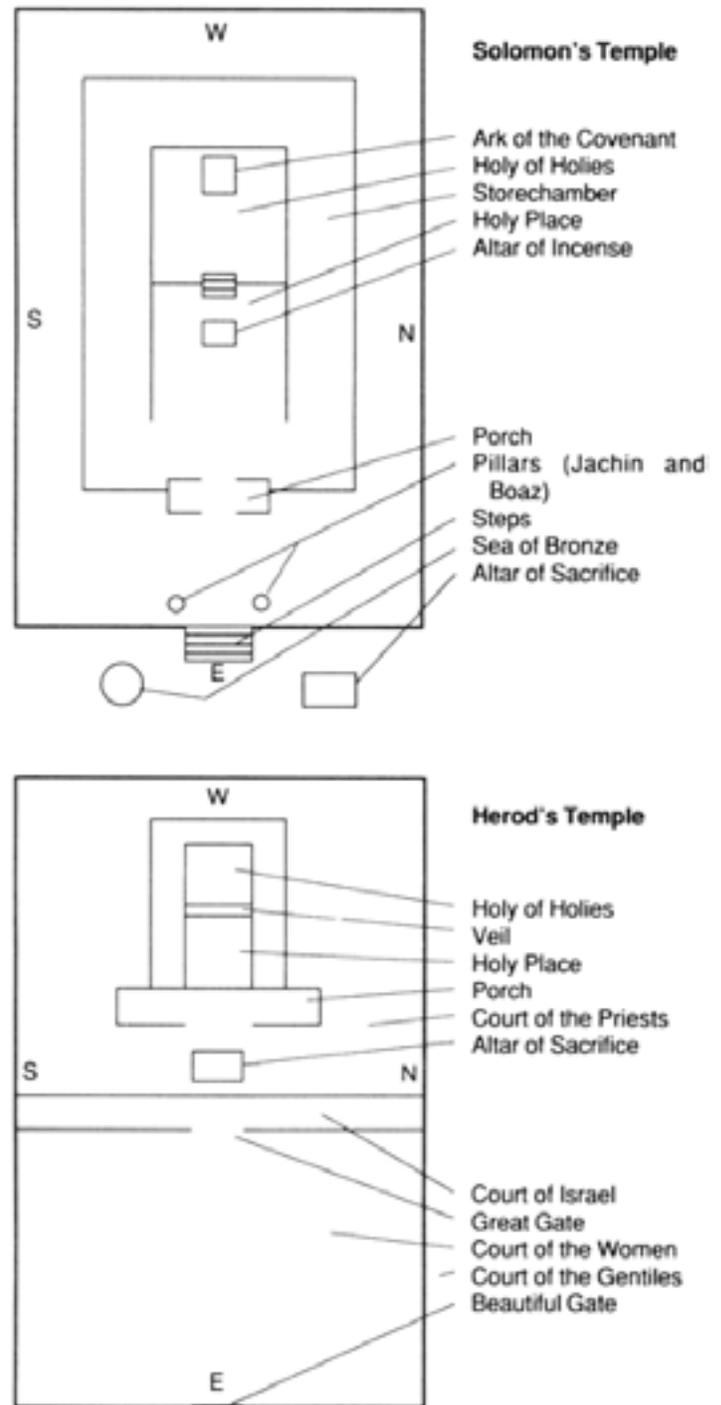
The outer courtyard was the Court of the Gentiles with porticoes on the outer wall some 30 cubits (1 cubit = appx. 18 inches) wide opening to the interior courtyard on the west, north, and east walls. Columns some 25 cubits high supported the porticoes. The Royal Portico was located on the south side with each of the 162 columns eight meters high. Almost everyone including Gentiles were permitted entry into this huge courtyard, except "men or women suffering a 'discharge' (cf. Lev. 15), women during their periods of menstruation, and women who had not yet been purified after childbirth (Mish Kelim i.8)."⁹ In the massive porticoes against the outer wall most of the activities took place such as teaching by the scribes, most of Jesus' teaching and actions etc.

As one moved from the temple complex (usually defined in the NT by the word *ἱερόν*, while the inner sanctuary or the temple building proper inside the temple precinct is *ναός*; this distinction dominates the NT but is not absolutely adhered to), the next court was Court of the Women accessed by a flight of 15 steps accessed through the 'Beautiful Gate.' Female Jewish worshipers could only enter this far into the temple proper. The next inner court, the Court of Israel, accessed through the Great Gate, was limited only to properly circumcised and ritually purified Jewish males. In the interior behind the screen was where the priests carried out the sacrifices that were presented to them by the Jewish men on the outside of the screen.

The very inner courts -- Court of the Priests inside the screened in curtain in the Court of Israel, the Holy Place inside the interior building, and the Holy of Holies -- were reserved exclusively for the priests to carry out their work in performing the prescribed rituals and in sacrificing the various animals presented to them by the Jewish male worshipers. The Holy of Holies was understood to be the actual dwelling place of God on the earth, and thus only the high priest exclusively on the Day of Atonement in early fall was permitted to enter this chamber.

This design highlights the central aspect of Israelite worship during the period of the temple: to present acceptable animal and cereal sacrifices to God for them to be burned in the great altar of sacrifice by the priests. The Levitical chanting of prescribed psalms would be taking place inside the inner courts during much of the activity of sacrificing of the animals, as well as initial processions where the priests and the Levites with both musical instruments and chants would lead a march into the outer court of the temple with the

⁹Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979-1988), 4:772.



Jewish worshipers following behind them after having begun at specified locations inside the city walls of Jerusalem. Only the Levites chanted the psalms and the gathered worshipers would respond with the traditional Hebrew *שְׁלֹחַ*, transliterated as *selāh*, and translated into Greek as *ἀμήν*, i.e., *amen*. During the seven Jewish festivals over the duration of a calendar year, these activities would take place with large numbers of worshipers numbering into the thousands, and especially during the three major festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Day of Atonement. Most of the priestly rituals performed as a part of offering sacrifices included chants of one kind or another, mostly from the prescribed

psalms.

The psalms used for chanting in the temple worship celebrated the greatness and the compassion of God toward His people Israel, in various ways. Consequently the temple during the festival celebrations especially were filled with sounds of praise to God and the smells of enormous quantities of burning animals and blood. During the times of no processional marches coming into the Court of the Gentiles, the sounds of many scribes teaching students would be heard, the cries of those selling sacrificial animals and doing money exchanges into temple currency which alone could be contributed in the offering containers, as well as the conversations of hundreds upon hundreds of people would be heard. The dozens of porticoes in the outer court were filled with people and activities taking place.

Against this backdrop comes John's graphic picture of worship taking place around the throne of Heaven. Thus we can more correctly grasp the details of the image along with the dynamics of activities. For those of us coming out of a free church Protestant background especially, these details and dynamics are utterly foreign to our experiences of worshiping God, particularly in a gathered community of believers.

To be sure, this apocalyptic vision of heavenly worship will still extend the idea of worship far beyond anything ever experienced on earth. Here was John's dilemma in how to meaningful communicate this 'supped up' worship to mortals with limited background experiences that could provide a reference point for meaning. Thus he turned to the hugely liturgical worship experiences in the Jerusalem temple as that reference point, even though only a small minority of his initial readers could identify with it. But the vast majority of them could reference many of the details out of their past experiences of participating in public worship experiences in the pagan temples of the city where they lived. Our modern dilemma is that we have neither the reference point of the Jewish temple worship in Jerusalem, nor a reference point of liturgical worship in the temple of Zeus, Aphrodite etc.¹⁰ Thus grasping correctly what

¹⁰“A Greek temple was the sanctuary of a particular god, rarely would more than one god be worshiped in the same building. Unlike a modern church, a temple was not a place where congregations gathered. Rather, the temple received individuals or small groups for prayer or sacrifice. The temple's priest or priestesses might be minor functionaries under the direction of a high priest who typically came from an aristocratic family associated with that specific sanctuary.

“The worship of the ancient Greek gods involved the use of idols. Statues of the gods made of wood, stone, clay or bronze would be set up in the god's temple for people to worship. There was a huge statue of Zeus in the temple at Olympia. The statue was made of gold and ivory, and was reckoned as one of the Seven Wonders of the world.

“Sacrifice was an important part of Greek religion. Grain,

John is trying to communicate becomes much harder for us. Yet, it is not impossible, even though some of the subtle nuances of the picture will be lost in the process of our grasping the image.

Literary Aspects:

Getting a clear handle on the literary aspects of this passage is critically important. Both the form used to communicate meaning, along with its role in the larger context of chapters four and five as well as the internal arrangement of ideas, stand as the challenge before us.

Genre: Unquestionably vv. 6b-11 stand as a part of the apocalyptic vision of John defined in 4:1-2, in which John is transported in a vision -- not physically -- to Heaven so that



he can be allowed to experience visually and audibly the layout and the dynamics taking place around the throne of God. The ancient Greek labels for a vision -- ὄραμα, ὄρασις, ὄρασις -- are very limited in Revelation which John referencing his vision as a ὄρασις cakes or fruit might be offered, but the most significant sacrifices involved the slaughtering of a domestic animal. The noblest victim was a bull, the commonest was a sheep. Goats, pigs, and chickens were also used.

“Greek sacrifice involved the notion that the god somehow fed up the victim's blood, an essential rite was the splashing of the blood onto the altar (typically located outside the temple). But first the live animal would be led to the altar in a procession featuring the priest and the person who was providing the animal. The worshipers would be dressed in clean finery, their heads decked with garlands of leaves appropriate to the god, for Zeus it would be oak. A flute-player would provide background music.

“Preliminary rituals involved pelting the altar and the live animal with barley grains. Then the priest would cut the animal's throat. The carcass would be skinned and gutted. The inedible organs and bones would be burned at the altar for the god, the smoke ascending to Olympus. Then the edible flesh would be cooked as a meal for the celebrants. Large-scale animal sacrifices, sometimes at public expense, might provide community feasts for holidays.

“Sacrifices, with their associated processions and feasts, defined the religious year. Although the religious calendar differed in its particulars from place to place, the calendar for any city or region told mainly which kinds of offering was to go to which god on which day of the year.

“The Olympic Games, oldest and most important of the ancient greek sports-and-religion festivals, was held in honour of Zeus. One day of the festival was given over entirely to making sacrifices to Zeus, huge numbers of animals were slaughtered in his honour.”

[A Dictionary of the Ancient Greek World, Ed. by David Sacks. Oxford University Press, 1996,]

as a man

153 and
the third living creature was
 like a flying eagle.

4.8 And
154 **the four living creatures. . .**
 each one of them
 having on top six wings
 in a circle and inside
 were full of eyes

155 and
rest they do not have
 day and night
 saying,
 Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty
 who was
 and
 who is
 and
 who is coming.

4.9 And
 whenever the creatures give glory . . . to the One sitting
and	
honor	
and	
thanksgiving	
	/---
	up
	who lives
	forever,

156 4.10 **the 24 elders fall down**
 before the One sitting
 upon the throne

157 and
(the 24 elders) bow down to the Living One
 forever

158 and
(the 24 elders) thrown down their crowns
 before the throne
 saying,

4.11 Worthy are you,
 | our Lord and God,
 to receive glory
 | and
 | honor
 | and
 | power
 because you have created all things
 and
 through Your will
 (all things) exist
 and
 they have been created.

Summary of Rhetorical Structure

Clearly the internal arrangement of ideas flow around the four living creatures (statements 149-155) and the twenty-four elders (statements 156-158). In the first segment (#s 149-155), first the four creatures are described in their appearance, both collectively (#s 149 & 154) and individually (#s 150-153). Then their worship of God concludes the depiction

(#155).

Because a description of the 24 elders has already been introduced earlier, their action of worship is depicted in a threefold manner (#s 156-158). This is synchronized with the worship of the four creatures as the indefinite temporal clause in the sentence prefield of statement 156 signals.

The chanting of the two groups is depicted in the direct discourse expressions in statements 155 and 158. The chant of the four creatures representing heavenly beings centers on who God is. But that of the twenty-four elders centers on God's worthiness because of what He did, i.e., create all things. Thus they compliment one another in emphasis.

Exegesis of the Text: Thus the exegeting of the passage most naturally falls around the two natural divisions of text idea as presented above.

A. The Four Living Creatures and Worship, vv. 6b-8.

6b Καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου τέσσαρα ζῶα γέμοντα ὀφθαλμῶν ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπίσθεν. 7 καὶ τὸ ζῶον τὸ πρῶτον ὅμοιον λέοντι καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ζῶον ὅμοιον μόσχῳ καὶ τὸ τρίτον ζῶον ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ζῶον ὅμοιον ἀετῷ πετομένῳ. 8 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα, ἐν καθ' ἐν αὐτῶν ἔχων ἀνά πτέρυγας ἕξ, κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν, καὶ ἀνάπασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες·

ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,
ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.

6b Around the throne, and 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 a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

“Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.”

In this first segment the focus is upon τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα. First what they looked like and then what they did are the two emphases.

Who are these creatures? Their identity comes out of the LXX rendering of Ezekiel 1:5-25¹² which

¹²**Ezekiel 1:4-14.** 4 καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ πνεῦμα ἐξαῖρον ἤρχετο ἀπὸ βορρᾶ, καὶ νεφέλη μεγάλη ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ φέγγος κύκλῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ πῦρ ἐξαστράπτων, καὶ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς ὄρασις ἠλέκτρον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ φέγγος ἐν αὐτῷ. † 5 καὶ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ὡς ὁμοίωμα **τεσσάρων ζῶων**· καὶ αὕτη ἡ ὄρασις αὐτῶν· ὁμοίωμα ἀνθρώπου ἐπ' αὐτοῖς, † 6 καὶ τέσσαρα πρόσωπα τῷ ἐνί, καὶ τέσσαρες πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνί. † 7 καὶ τὰ σκέλη αὐτῶν ὀρθά, καὶ περωτοὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν, καὶ σπινθῆρες ὡς ἐξαστράπτων χαλκός, καὶ ἐλαφραὶ αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν. † 8 καὶ χεὶρ ἀνθρώπου ὑποκάτωθεν τῶν πτερυγῶν αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰ τέσσαρα μέρη αὐτῶν· καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν τῶν τεσσάρων † 9 οὐκ ἐπεστρέφοντο ἐν τῷ βαδίζειν αὐτά, ἕκαστον κατέναντι τοῦ

translates the Hebrew term for 'living creatures,' חַיִּיִּם *hayyōt*, as ζῶα.¹³ These creatures are the heavenly

προσώπων αὐτῶν ἐπορεύοντο. † 10 καὶ ὁμοίωσις τῶν προσώπων αὐτῶν· πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπου καὶ πρόσωπον λέοντος ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῖς τέσσαρσιν καὶ πρόσωπον μόσχου ἐξ ἀριστερῶν τοῖς τέσσαρσιν καὶ πρόσωπον ἀετοῦ τοῖς τέσσαρσιν. † 11 καὶ αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν ἐκτεταμέναι ἄνωθεν τοῖς τέσσαρσιν, ἐκατέρῳ δύο συνεζυγμέναι πρὸς ἀλλήλας, καὶ δύο ἐπεκάλυπτον ἐπάνω τοῦ σώματος αὐτῶν. † 12 καὶ ἕκαστον κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπορεύετο· οὐδ' ἂν ἦν τὸ πνεῦμα πορευόμενον, ἐπορεύοντο καὶ οὐκ ἐπέστρεφον. † 13 καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ζῶων ὄρασις ὡς ἀνθρώπων πυρὸς καιομένων, ὡς ὄψις λαμπάδων συστρεφομένων ἀνά μέσον τῶν ζῶων καὶ φέγγος τοῦ πυρὸς, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐξεπορεύετο ἄστραπή. †

4 As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. 5 In the middle of it was *something like four living creatures*. This was their appearance: they were of human form. 6 Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. 7 Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. 8 Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: 9 their wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. 10 As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; 11 such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another; while two covered their bodies. 12 Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. 13 In the middle of **the living creatures** there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among **the living creatures**; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire. 14 **The living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.**

¹³The use of ζῶα, 'cherubim,' is the result of the author's dependence on Ezek 1:5-25, where the term חַיִּיִּם *hayyōt*, 'living creatures,' is used, which is translated ζῶα in the LXX (see Oecumenius Comm. in Apoc. ad 4:6-8; Hoskier, Oecumenius, 72). When חַיִּיִּם *hayyā*, 'living creature,' is used in the OT, it refers to 'a dangerous animal, untamed, living free, and usually large' (KB3, 297), and the plural form of the term with this meaning occurs only rarely (see Isa 35:9; Ps 104:25; Dan 8:4). In Ezek 1-3 the term חַיִּיִּם *hayyōt* is a vague, general term for living creatures, defined more fully in terms of their human form (Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1:120). In Ezekiel the living creatures are implicitly understood to bear up the moveable throne of God (see 2 Apoc. Bar. 51:11), though the notion that God rode on the cherubim is made explicit only outside Ezekiel (2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11; see Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron*, 309-51). The divine attribute 'who is enthroned above the cherubim' occurs in hymns (Pss 80:1; 99:1) and prayers (Isa 37:16). In Ezek 10:20, the חַיִּיִּם *hayyōt*, 'living creatures,' are explicitly identified as כְּרוּבִים *kērūbīm*, 'cherubim,' an equation that Zimmerli considers a later editorial development (Ezekiel 1:32-33) and an identification also made in Apoc. Abr. 10:9. In later *hekalot* literature, however, the cherubim are regularly distinguished from the *hayyot* (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§ 100N, 103N, 119N; see Olyan, *Thousand*, 33-34). In *4QShirShabb*, the cherubim but not the *hayyot* are mentioned, perhaps implying their identification and a preference for the term *cherubim*. The phrase 'covered with eyes in front and in back' alludes to Ezek 1:18; 10:12, where it

cherubim which were depicted both in the Israelite tabernacle and then later in the Jerusalem temple.¹⁴ But careful examination of both the biblical and extra-biblical texts will reveal a wide variety of depictions of the living creatures.¹⁵ The depiction by John here shares

said that the wheels (אופנים *ōpannîm*) beside the living creatures were ‘full of eyes round about [MT מלאת עינים סביב *mēlê.îṭ. ēynayim sabîb*; LXX πλήρεις ὀφθαλμῶν κυκλόθεν].’ The Hebrew word for ‘wheels,’ אופנים *ōpannîm*, was used to mean a type of angelic being in later Jewish literature (1 Enoch 71:7; 4QShirShabb lines 4–5; 3 Enoch 1:8; 2:1; 6:2; 7:1; 25:5–7; 33:3; 39:2; 48A:1; b. Hag. 12b; see G. F. Moore, *Judaism* 1:368, 409). The so-called Ladder of Jacob 2:8 speaks of ‘the four-faced cherubim [i.e., the ‘living creatures’ of Ezek 1], beating also the many-eyed seraphim [i.e., the ‘wheels’ of Ezek 1].’

The term ‘eyes’ can be a metaphor for ‘stars’ (Manilius *Astronomica* 1.132–43; Plutarch *Sept. sap. conv.* 161F; *De facie* 928B; Boll, *Offenbarung*, 36). There are several frescoes of Mithras showing him covered with stars (see Vermaseren, *Mithraica* III, plates III, IV, XI, XII). There are pictures of pantheistic, composite divinities on both papyri and amulets, which depict them covered with eyes (Hopfner, *Offenbarungszauber* 2:213, 215; see Eitrem, *Papyri Osloenses*, 41). One such deity is depicted with four wings, one frontal face with eight animal heads of lesser size, and covered with eyes (Keel, *Yahweh-Visionen*, 270, plate 194). In Middle Egyptian hieroglyphics, the ideogram of the eye functions as a generic determinative with the sense ‘eye, see, action of the eye’ (see A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 2nd ed. [London: Oxford UP, 1950] 32, 450–51). Osiris was portrayed by means of an eye and a scepter, and some ancients claimed that the name Osiris meant πολυόφθαλμον, ‘many-eyed’ (Plutarch *De Is. et Os.* 354F–355A; Diodorus Siculus 1.11.2), a symbol for omniscience. Argos was a monster of Greek mythology with the epithet Panoptes (Πανόπτης) because he was usually depicted as having ‘manyeyes’ (Aeschylus *Prom. Vinc.* 569, 978; Apollodorus *Bib* 2.1.3; Pherecydes in scholion to Euripides *Phoen.* 116; Ovid gives the number as one hundred in *Metam.* 1.625–27). [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 297–298.]

¹⁴One should carefully avoid the label ‘angels’ since Rev. 7:11 and 15:7 clearly distinguish between these four creatures and angels in Heaven:

Rev. 7:11a. πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι εἰστήκεισαν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων. *all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures.*

Rev. 15:7a. ἐν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων ἔδωκεν τοῖς ἐπὶ τὰ ἄγγελοις. *one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels.*

¹⁵“CHERUBIM [Heb *kērūbîm* (כְּרוּבִים)]. The terms ‘cherub’ (sing.) and ‘cherubim’ (pl.) occur over 90 times in the Hebrew Bible (and only once in the NT, in Heb 9:5) in reference to fanciful composite beings. Although all of these references are in sacral contexts, there is no uniformity as to the nature of the strange creatures involved except for the fact that they are all winged beings. From a graphic perspective, the biblical description of cherubim can be divided into two major groups: those that were two-dimensional, as they appeared woven into textiles, or in low relief; and those that were free-standing either as modeled, three-dimensional forms or as living, moving creatures.

“The two-dimensional or low-relief images of cherubim were those found in the sacred structure of ancient Israel. In the tabernacle, the inner curtains and the veil that closed off the inner sanctum

some common traits with most of the other depictions, but also contains distinctives not found elsewhere.¹⁶

or holy of holies were adorned with cherubim (Exod 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35). These decorated fabrics, made of a woolen-linen mixture and crafted in special (*ḥšēb*) workmanship, were part of the innermost and holiest part of the tabernacle complex. The Jerusalem temple, which was constructed of walls and not hangings, featured carved cherubim, covered with gold, on the corresponding elements: the sanctuary walls (1 Kgs 6:29; cf. 2 Chr 3:7 and Ezek 41:18–20) and on the doors separating the internal chambers (1 Kgs 7:32, 35; cf. Ezek 41:25). In addition, the temple had cherubim carved into panels that formed the base and part of the top of the stands for the lavers (1 Kgs 7:28, 36).

“Three-dimensional cherubim were also part of the holiest elements of both tabernacle and temple. Two golden cherubim with wings extended were part of the covering of the ark, within the holy of holies of the tabernacle (Exod 25:18–22; 37:7–9). In the Jerusalem temple, two enormous olivewood cherubim, overlaid with gold, virtually filled the innermost chamber (1 Kgs 6:23–28) as a covering for the ark (1 Kgs 8:6–7). In both these instances, the cherubim apparently constituted a resting place, or throne, for God’s invisible presence or glory (e.g., 2 Kgs 19:15 = Isa 32:16; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2). As part of the cultic furniture for God in the divine dwelling place on earth (see Haran 1978: 254–59), these cherubim are to be related to figures attested in several biblical texts which envisage God riding upon living composite beasts (e.g., Ps 18:10 = 2 Sam 22:11) or in which God’s glory rests upon the creatures (Ezekiel 10). Finally, the close connection between God and cherubim is present in their appearance as guardians of the garden of Eden (Gen 3:24).

“The many variations of cherubim represented in the Bible — examples with one or more faces; with human, leonine, bovine, or aquiline faces; with two or four legs — correspond to various forms of composite beasts depicted in ANE art, particularly the art of Assyria (TWAT 4: 330–34). In ancient Israel and its contemporary world, cherubim were characterized by mobility, since they all had wings. By virtue of their combining features of different creatures or having more of such features than real animals or persons, they were unnatural. These characteristics made them apt symbols for divine presence, since deities moved where humans could not and were something other than either animals or humans. The cherubim of the Bible are hardly the round-faced infant cherubim known in Western art.”

[Carol Meyers, “Cherubim,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:899–900.]

¹⁶“*In apocalyptic literature* 200 B.C.–100 A.D.—1. In our text the Cherubim are four in number, it is true, as in Ezekiel, but each Cherub has only one face, and not four faces as in the O.T. prophet. 2. They have each six wings like the Seraphim in Isa. 6, and not four as in Ezek. 1. 3. They stand immediately round God’s throne, Rev. 4:6, 5:8, 19:4, and do not bear it as in Ezekiel. The throne is set (‘ἔκειτο,’ Rev. 4:2) on the firmament of heaven, and does not rest on them. There is no mention of ‘the wheels,’ as in the vision of Ezekiel. 4. They sing God’s praises, Rev. 4:8, like the Seraphim in Isa. 6, and are not silent servants of Deity. 5. They are ‘full of eyes,’ but in Ezekiel they are ‘like lamps,’ 1:13, and it is ‘the fellows of the wheels,’ 1:18, that are full of eyes. Ezek. 10:12, where the Cherubim are said to be full of eyes, is recognized by critics as corrupt. 6. They move freely about, Rev. 15:7, and act as intermediaries between God and other orders of angels. In most of these



The various versions found in Ezekiel seem to have played the dominate role in shaping John's depiction.¹⁷ Additionally, some elements of the depiction of the seraphim found in Isaiah 6 seem to have been used to supplement Ezekiel's versions, e.g., having six wings normal for seraphim rather than two or four as the usu-

respects the conceptions of the N.T. Apocalypse and of Jewish Apocalyptic between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. are at one. As regards I, we have no mention of the number of the Cherubim outside our Apocalypse nor any description of their form in this period. They are regarded simply as one of the highest orders of angels: cf. 1 Enoch 61:10, 71:7. 2. They have each six wings according to Rev. 4:6, 2 Enoch 21:1, as the Seraphim in Isa. 6:3. They stand round the throne of God and not under it, as Gunkel and others have asserted. They do not bear it, but are rather conceived as guardians of it, 1 Enoch 71:7. In 1 Enoch 14:11 they appear to be in the 'roof' of heaven. In 2 Enoch 21:1 they cover the throne like the Seraphim in Isa. 6. In the next place the throne is conceived as resting on the firmament of heaven, even where the wheels of Ezekiel's vision are mentioned in connection with it. Cf. Dan. 7:9, 'The thrones were set. ... His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire.' This meaningless survival appears also in 1 Enoch 14:18, 'I saw ... a lofty throne: its appearance was as crystal, and the wheels thereof as the shining sun, and there was the vision of Cherubin.' In 1 Enoch 14:17, 18, all idea of a moving throne has been wholly lost. But other writers either omitted the mention of 'the wheels' as a meaningless survival, as in T. Levi 5:1, 18:6, where the throne rests on the floor of the Temple in the third heaven, and Rev. 4:2 sqq., or they transformed 'the wheels' (אוֹפַנִּים) into one of the highest orders of angels, i.e. Ophanim, as in 1 Enoch 61:10, 71:7 and later Jewish Midrashim. Underneath the throne was not only the flaming firmament, but also the sources of the fiery streams, which flowed forth from the stationary base of the throne, Dan. 7:10; 1 Enoch 14:19. With this conception we might contrast Rev. 22:1, where it is 'a river of water of life' that proceeds out of the throne." [R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 119–120.]

¹⁷"In describing the living beings in vv 6b–8a, John continues to draw from the picture in Ezekiel 1 (vv 5–21), though it probably had become merged in his mind with the portrayal of the 'living beings' in Ezek. 10:12–15, 20–22. This combined picture is somewhat creatively adapted to the portrayal of his own vision." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 328.]



al pattern for a cherub.¹⁸

Down through the centuries most modern western artistic depictions are profoundly false visual depictions following the lead of Roman Catholic tradition that came to consider the cherubim as angels at the second highest rank in their version of a hierarchy of angels. This error was largely introduced by the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, sometime in the fifth Christian century.¹⁹ The above graphic on the left (the right one is of

¹⁸"The six wings of the seraphim from Isaiah 6 have been used to supplement the Ezekiel picture. The living beings are said to have been 'in the midst of the throne,' which probably means that they stood near it.⁶⁵ This is clarified by the following clause, which says that they were 'around (κύκλω) the throne' (hence the viability of translations such as the RSV, which renders ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου as 'on each side of the throne'). This is elucidated further by the fact that later in the book the living beings fall down in worship before the throne (5:8; 19:4). The scene in Isa. 6:2 (LXX) is most influential at this point, since there the 'seraphim stood around (κύκλω) the Lord. Brewer understands ἐν μέσῳ as referring to a position between the throne and some other position (most likely where the elders are) because he sees the arrangement of the throne room as having a striking resemblance to the Greek theater⁶⁶ (but see our comments on the same phrase in 5:6)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 328–329.]

¹⁹"In Catholic theology, following the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, the cherubim are the second highest rank in the angelic

Ezekiel's version) rendering comes about as close as any I could find from the several hundred depictions found on the internet.

Now some consideration of John's description of these creatures. As is reflected in the block diagram above, a depiction of common traits is given in vv. 6b and 8, with an individualized depiction for each one in verse seven.

Their location (v. 6b): ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου. This depiction, taken literally, won't work with having these creatures both in the middle of the throne and encircling it at the same time.²⁰ What do these two locational references mean? If the first phrase is taken to mean 'around the throne' then the second phrase further defines them as 'encircling the throne.' But one can't say dogmatically that this is the intended meaning from John. But it makes better sense than any of the alternatives, and does fall within the range of legitimate grammatical possibility.

Their eyes (vv. 6c, 8c): γέμοντα ὀφθαλμῶν hierarchy, following the Seraphim.[14] In western art, Putti are sometimes mistaken for Cherubim, although they look in no way alike." ["Cherub: Catholicism," wikipedia.org]

²⁰"The phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου, lit. 'in the midst of the throne,' is problematic because it is followed by the phrase καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου, 'and around the throne.' The two phrases are apparently in tension, for it is not at all clear how the four cherubim can be both 'in the midst' and 'around' the throne at the same time. The RSV translates both phrases as 'and round the throne, on each side of the throne,' suggesting that the καὶ linking the two phrases is exegetical, with the second phrase more closely defining the first. The same interpretation is reflected in the REB, 'In the centre, round the throne itself,' and the NIV, 'In the center, around the throne.' The NRSV abandons this view: 'Around the throne, and on each side of the throne.' The phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου is therefore understood by Bousset ([1906] 249) and Charles (1:118–19) as a gloss. According to Ezek 1:26, the four cherubim are situated below the throne, i.e., underneath God (Ezek 10:20). This conception is based on the traditional notion that God was 'enthroned on the cherubim' (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16; Pr Azar 1:32; Ladder of Jacob 2:7) and riding on the cherubim (2 Sam 22:11; 1 Chr 28:18; Ps 18:10; Sir 49:8). Kraft (98) interprets 'throne' here to mean 'heaven' (possible in some contexts; cf. Matt 6:34), but this is impossibly abrupt and conflicts with the obvious meaning of θρόνος in the phrase immediately following. Elsewhere in Revelation, the cherubim are described as 'around the throne,' but never 'in the midst of the throne.' Hall (NTS 36 [1990] 610) argues that the four cherubim are part of the throne, for like the carved legs of a chair they both surround the throne and support it. While this accords with the tradition of the cherubim as constituting God's throne-chariot, such a conception is found nowhere else in Revelation and conflicts with the notion of the four cherubim prostrating themselves before the throne (5:8; 19:4; see Lohmeyer, 48). The best solution is probably to understand the phrase ἐν μέσῳ to mean 'around,' i.e., 'on every side of,' the throne (BAGD, 507), i.e., between the throne and a more remote point (Behm, 32; Brewer, JBL 71 [1952] 227–32), i.e., 'in the immediate vicinity of' (Mounce, 137)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 271–272.]

ἐμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπίσθην, full of eyes in front and behind; κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν, all around and inside filled with eyes. These four creatures had no problem seeing! They had eyes everywhere on their bodies, in their bodies! This depiction rather clearly plays off of Ezekiel 1:18 and 10:12, where the 'wheels' beside each cherub is full of eyes.²¹

1:18. οὐδ' οἱ νῶτοι αὐτῶν, καὶ ὕψος ἦν αὐτοῖς· καὶ εἶδον αὐτά, καὶ οἱ νῶτοι αὐτῶν **πλήρεις ὀφθαλμῶν κυκλόθεν** τοῖς τέσσαρσιν.†

Their rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

10:12. καὶ οἱ νῶτοι αὐτῶν καὶ αἱ χεῖρες αὐτῶν καὶ αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ τροχοὶ **πλήρεις ὀφθαλμῶν κυκλόθεν** τοῖς τέσσαρσιν τροχοῖς αὐτῶν.†

Their entire body, their rims, their spokes, their wings, and the wheels — the wheels of the four of them — were full of eyes all around.

The concept of being full of eyes, relatively common in both Jewish and pagan literature of that time,²²

²¹"The phrase 'covered with eyes in front and in back' alludes to Ezek 1:18; 10:12, where it said that the wheels (אִפְנִים ὀpannim) beside the living creatures were 'full of eyes round about [MT בְּכִי מְלֵאֵי עֵינַיִם מְלֵאֵי עֵינַיִם ἔβְנַיִם ὀpannim sabib; LXX πλήρεις ὀφθαλμῶν κυκλόθεν].' The Hebrew word for 'wheels,' אִפְנִים ὀpannim, was used to mean a type of angelic being in later Jewish literature (1 Enoch 71:7; 4QShirShabb lines 4–5; 3 Enoch 1:8; 2:1; 6:2; 7:1; 25:5–7; 33:3; 39:2; 48A:1; b. Hag. 12b; see G. F. Moore, *Judaism* 1:368, 409). The so-called Ladder of Jacob 2:8 speaks of 'the four-faced cherubim [i.e., the 'living creatures' of Ezek 1], beating also the many-eyed seraphim [i.e., the 'wheels' of Ezek 1]."

"The term 'eyes' can be a metaphor for 'stars' (Manilius *Astronomical* 1.132–43; Plutarch *Sept. sap. conv.* 161F; *De facie* 928B; *Boll, Offenbarung*, 36). There are several frescoes of Mithras showing him covered with stars (see Vermaseren, *Mithraica* III, plates III, IV, XI, XII). There are pictures of pantheistic, composite divinities on both papyri and amulets, which depict them covered with eyes (Hopfner, *Offenbarungszauber* 2:213, 215; see Eitrem, *Papyri Osloenses*, 41). One such deity is depicted with four wings, one frontal face with eight animal heads of lesser size, and covered with eyes (Keel, *Yahweh-Visionen*, 270, plate 194). In Middle Egyptian hieroglyphics, the ideogram of the eye functions as a generic determinative with the sense 'eye, see, action of the eye' (see A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 2nd ed. [London: Oxford UP, 1950] 32, 450–51). Osiris was portrayed by means of an eye and a scepter, and some ancients claimed that the name Osiris meant πολυόφθαλμον, 'many-eyed' (Plutarch *De Is. et Os.* 354F–355A; *Diodorus Siculus* 1.11.2), a symbol for omniscience. Argos was a monster of Greek mythology with the epithet Panoptes (Πανόπτης) because he was usually depicted as having 'many eyes' (Aeschylus *Prom. Vinc.* 569, 978; *Apollodorus* *Bib* 2.1.3; Pherecydes in scholion to Euripides *Phoen.* 116; Ovid gives the number as one hundred in *Metam.* 1.625–27)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 297–298.]

²²"To the familiar cherubim and seraphim, the apocalyptic writers have added the *egregoroi*, who never close their eyes, and the ophanim, who are covered back and front, inside and out, with eyes. Typically, in his description, John has combined several of

underscored exceptional knowledge and understanding.²³ This seems to point to their role as heavenly guardians of the throne of God. Also suggesting this is that they encircle the throne rather than hold it up as in Ezekiel.

Their wings (v. 8b): ἐν καθ' ἐν αὐτῶν ἕξων ἀνὰ πτέρυγας ἕξ, *each one of them possessing above six wings*. What a strange looking creature with three sets of wings! These wings, along with the chant they do, point heavily to a dependence on Isaiah 6 with his description of the seraphim around the throne of God, rather than cherubim.²⁴ What John portrays is a composite picture blending both Isaiah and Ezekiel.²⁵ Unlike Isa-

these elements. See 1 Enoch 39:12; 2 Enoch 19:6.” [Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 16, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 80.]

²³“That they are covered with eyes, in front and in back (cf. v. 8: ‘all around, even under his wings’) speaks of alertness and knowledge. Nothing escapes their notice.” [Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 124.]

²⁴“**cherub** (*chair'uhb*; pl. cherubim *àchair'yōōbim*), a Hebrew term denoting an unnatural, composite being associated with sacral contexts in the Bible. Although cherubim are mentioned 92 times (91 in the OT, and in Heb. 9:5), no single type of creature is referred to in all cases. Rather the term represents a variety of fanciful beings. The only feature found in many of the biblical usages (particularly in connection with the Arks of the tabernacle and of the Solomonic Temple and also with the visions of Ezekiel 1 and 10) and not contradicted by other usages is that the cherubim were winged. Otherwise, specific details are either absent or contradictory. For example, the Ark cherubim apparently have a single face, whereas the Ezekiel Temple cherubim have two faces and the Ezekiel vision cherubim have four. The character of the faces ranges from human through bovine, leonine, and aquiline; and the body is sometimes biped and in other instances quadruped. Such variations confirm the underlying principle that the cherub was a hybrid, and hence unnatural, creature.

“As unnatural beings, cherubim are always connected with the deity. They appear in direct association with a mobile God, as his steed (e.g., 2 Sam. 22:1; Ps. 18:11) or parts of his chariot, or as components of his throne (the Ark passages). They are indirectly associated with God when they are guardian figures (as in Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 28:14, 16) amidst sacred vegetation. As both actual beasts and plastic representations of such beasts, the biblical cherubim share in the contemporary iconographic repertoire of composite beasts well known from ancient Near Eastern art. The biblical cherub is thus totally different from the chubby children often depicted in religious art in the West. See also Ark; Tabernacle; Temple, The.” [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 161.]

²⁵“While the living creatures described in Ezek 1:6 have four wings each, the seraphim in Isa 6:2 are described as having six wings (two for covering their faces; two for covering their genitalia; two for flying). In Apoc. Abr. 18, as in Isa 6:2, the living creatures have six wings. In b. Hag. 13b there is an attempt to harmonize the four wings in Ezekiel with the six wings in Isaiah (see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 56). John's conception of the ζῶα is clearly composite, for while they are described as having four

iah 6:2 where three sets of two wings each have specified functions (two for covering their eyes; two for covering their genitalia; two for flying),²⁶ John simply refers to six wings on each creature.²⁷ Although they are often labeled as ‘angels’ in the interpretive history both in written and ecclesiastical art depictions, nothing in any of wings in Ezek 1:6, they are described as having six wings in Rev 4:8, in dependence on the description of the seraphim in Isa 6:2 (the only OT passage mentioning these six-winged beings). According to the Sopher ha-Razim 7.13–14 (tr. Morgan, 82), the hayyot and the opanim, who bear the throne of God, have six wings each, the same number of wings as the cherubim of Isa 6:2 and Rev 4:8. Philo of Byblos mentions a depiction of Kronos with four eyes in front and four in the rear (two of which were awake, while two slept), a way of depicting an all-seeing god, and six wings, four on his shoulders and two on his head (Attridge-Oden, Philo, 56–59, from Eusebius Praep. evang., 1.10.10.36–37). Though nothing further is said about the function of the wings in Revelation, according to Ezekiel, the wings of the creatures made an extremely loud noise (1:24; 3:12–13; 10:5) and were later understood to be the means whereby they produced their song (b. Hag. 13b). This view is found in Tg. Ezek. 1:24 (Levey, Ezekiel, 22), ‘And I heard the sound of their wings, like the sound of many waters, like a sound from before Shaddai; as they went, the sound of their words were as though they were thanking and blessing their Master, the ever living King of the worlds.’ See also Tg. Ezek. 3:12 (Levey, Ezekiel, 25), “Then the spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great quaking sound, for they were offering praise and saying, ‘Blessed by the glory of the Lord from the place of the abode of His Shekinah.’”

There are many representations of four-winged gods and genii from the ancient Near East, particularly on cylinder seals (Keel, *Yahweh-Visionen*, 194–216), some of which have from two to four human faces (Keel, 216–43). A six-winged deity with a winged cap is depicted on a late sixth-century B.C. chalcidony scarab from Cyprus pictured and discussed in J. Boardman, *Archaic Greek Gems* (London, 1968), no. 40, plate 3 with discussion on p. 32; see J. Boardman, *Greek Gems and Finger Rings* (New York: Abrams, –) 143 and no. 286. An engraved jasper amulet depicts a deity with three pairs of wings (i.e., six wings) and holding an ankh symbol in each hand, like Egyptian gods (Delatte-Derchain, *Les intailles magiques*, no. 39).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 301.]

²⁶**Isa. 6:2-3.** 2 καὶ σεραφὶν εἰστήκεισαν κύκλῳ αὐτοῦ, ἕξ πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνὶ καὶ ἕξ πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνὶ, καὶ ταῖς μὲν δυσὶν κατεκάλυπτον τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ ταῖς δυσὶν κατεκάλυπτον τοὺς πόδας καὶ ταῖς δυσὶν ἐπέταντο. † 3 καὶ ἐέκραγον ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον καὶ ἔλεγον Ἄγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος σαβαωθ, πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.†

2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings; with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

²⁷One should always remember the often wildly differing images of both the cherubim and seraphim in the Bible. And this doesn't begin to compare to the unbelievably diverse perspectives found in both Jewish and Christian interpretive history. Some depiction of this is found in “Cherubim & Seraphim of Scripture,” sacred-texts.com, although the presentation here is limited.



Ezekiel's picture on the left & John's picture on the right

either the OT or NT texts suggests this as behind their depiction in the Bible. This conclusion stands more as a by-product of later non-biblical attempts to develop hierarchies of angels out of the scattered references to heavenly beings found in scripture.

Their individual identity (v. 7): καὶ τὸ ζῶον τὸ πρῶτον ὅμοιον λέοντι καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ζῶον ὅμοιον μόσχῳ καὶ τὸ τρίτον ζῶον ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ζῶον ὅμοιον ἀετῷ πετομένῳ, **the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.** Here four separate creatures each one with a single face are depicted in contrast to Ezekiel 10:12-15, 20-22 where each of the four creatures possessed four faces.²⁸ Each creature possessed a human form (1:5) with four faces (1:6). The faces (1:10) are those of a human being (front side), a lion (right side), an ox (left side); and an eagle (back side).²⁹

²⁸“In Ezek 1:5–14 (a problematic text subject to much redaction; see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1:81–106), four such creatures are described, each shaped like a human being and each with four wings (each of the seraphim in Isa 6:2 has six wings), but each of the four has a different face (a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle), and each face looked in a different direction. In 4Q385-389, a rewritten form of portions of Ezekiel, each creature has four faces, though the order of the faces differs from that of Ezekiel: lion, eagle, calf, man (4Q385-386= 4QPseudo-Ezekiela frag. 4, lines 8–9).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 298.]

²⁹“In two passages in Ezekiel, the author describes the חַיִּיִּם *hayyôt*, ‘cherubim’ or ‘living creatures,’ which are associated with the throne of God in the prophet’s vision. In Ezek 1:5–14 (a problematic text subject to much redaction; see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1:81–106), four such creatures are described, each shaped like a human being and each with four wings (each of the seraphim in Isa 6:2 has six wings), but each of the four has a different face (a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle), and each face looked in a different direction.

“In 4Q385-389, a rewritten form of portions of Ezekiel, each creature has four faces, though the order of the faces differs from that of Ezekiel: lion, eagle, calf, man (4Q385-386= 4QPseudo-Ezekiela frag. 4, lines 8–9). In Rev 4:7, on the other hand, there are four cherubim, one resembling a lion, the second an ox, the third a man, and the fourth an eagle. Nothing is said that restricts these likenesses to the face of the creature only. In Ezek 10:14 (omitted in the LXX, suggesting that it was a late gloss; v 14 occurs only in Origen’s Hexapla, see Ziegler, *Ezechiel*, 126), the faces of the cherubim are again described: the first has the face of a cherub (replacing that of the ox in Ezek 1:10), the second that of a man,

On the other hand, John describes four creatures each with a single face in the sequence of a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. Across the ancient Jewish literature a wide variety of sequential listing of the faces of the four creatures can be found and the significance of the sequence seems to be distinct to each writer who usually doesn’t reveal any reason for his sequence.³⁰

the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle (note the difference in order from Ezek 1). In b. Hag. 13b the order is man, ox, lion, eagle, while in Apoc. Abr. 18 the order is lion, man, ox, eagle. H. Zimmern argued that the four faces of the living creatures in Ezekiel resembled the principal constellations in the four quarters of the zodiac, perhaps corresponding to the four seasons of the year: man = fall, lion = winter, ox = spring, eagle = summer (KAT3, 631ff.). In Ezek 1:5–14 it is implied, though never explicitly stated, that the four creatures bear the throne of God (see 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11; T. Adam 4:8; 3 Enoch 33:3; Appendix to 3 Enoch 24:15 [Charlesworth, OTP 1:309]; *Sepher ha-Razim* 7.1–2 [tr. Morgan, 81]). In the Tg. Ezek. 1:6, it is said that each of the faces had four faces, sixteen to each creature, with sixty-four faces in all (Levey, Tg. Ezek., 20). This kind of elaboration is also found in 3 Enoch 21:1–3 (tr. Alexander in Charlesworth, OTP 1:277):

“There are four creatures [חַיִּיִּם *hayyôt*] facing the four winds. Each single creature would fill the whole world. Each of them has four faces and every single face looks like the sunrise. Each creature has four wings and every single wing would cover the world. Each one of them has faces within faces and wings within wings. The size of a face is 248 faces, and the size of a wing is 365 wings.

“The clause in v 7c, ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου, ‘has the face of a human,’ disturbs the careful symmetry and stereotypical phraseology of the descriptions of the first, second, and fourth creatures. Instead, we would have expected the phrase to read ὅμοιον προσώπῳ ἀνθρώπου, ‘like a human face.’ Since ἔχων is a solecism (it is masculine in gender, though it modifies the neuter noun ζῶον) and, further, is used as a finite verb (a characteristic usage; see 1:16; 4:7, 8; 6:2, 5; 9:17, 19; 10:2; 11:2; 19:12; 21:12), it appears that John is consciously altering a source. One possible motivation for the alteration is the similarity between the reconstructed phrase and the phrase ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, ‘like a son of man,’ in 1:13; 14:14, which is also a solecism and therefore stems from John. Cf. the parallel phrase καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ὡς πρόσωπα ἀνθρώπων, ‘and their faces are like human faces’ (Rev 9:7). In connection with v 7d, it is worth noting that the phrase in 4:7, ἀετῷ πετομένῳ, ‘flying eagle,’ has a verbal parallel in 8:13, ἀετοῦ πετομένου, ‘flying eagle.’”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 298–299.]

³⁰In the early interpretive history of Rev. 4:7 stands the depiction of a magical square for healing, although no real basis for its legitimacy exists:

A magic square for healing that was popular in the ancient world was based on Rev 4:7; see LXX Ezek 1:10 (M. Marcovich, *Studies in Graeco-Roman Religions and Gnosticism* [Leiden: Brill, 1988] 38–39):

	Rev 4:7	P. Mag. Copt. Lond.
	(Ezek 1:10)	Ms. Or. 1013 A
		(=V.24–25 Kropp)
A Λ Φ Α	Μόσχος	the face of bull
Λ Ε Ω Ν	Λέων	the face of Lion

The significance of these four creatures has been understood over time in a most bizarre range of meanings. The church father Irenaeus in the second century was the first to see them as symbols of the four gospels with the lion as John, the ox as Luke, the human face as Matthew, and the flying eagle as Mark.³¹ Some have attempted unsuccessfully to link the four creatures to the four signs of the zodiac.³² A very common view --

Φ Ω Ν Η	Αετός	the face of Eagle
Α Ν Η Ρ	Ἀνθρώπος	the face of Man

The magic square is made up of the names of the four cherubs that surround the heavenly throne, with which they are identified by the author of Kropp V.24. Ἄλφα refers to Hebrew aleph = "ox," and Λέων and Ἀνθρώπος obviously refer to the "lion" and the "man." Φωνή refers to the "eagle," according to Marcovich, because in Revelation the eagle plays a special role as the voice of God (Rev 8:13).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 299.]

³¹Irenaeus identifies the four Evangelists with the four living creatures of Rev 4:6–7 (Adv. Haer. 3.11.8), though he does not explicitly identify Revelation as the source: lion (John), ox (Luke), human face (Matthew), flying eagle (Mark). This order for the Gospels is extremely unusual but is also found in Victorinus Comm. in Apoc. 4.34 (Haussleiter, Victorinus, 48–51), which suggests that the order of the symbols and the Evangelists has nothing to do with the order of a collection of the Gospels (the various orders of the four Gospels are listed and discussed in Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1987] 296–97). The normal order of the gospels elsewhere in Irenaeus is Matthew, John, Luke, Mark. Though it has often been called the "Western" order of the gospels, this designation is problematic since evidence is found for this order in the East as well as the West. The present canonical order of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) is associated with Eusebius and Jerome and is not earlier than the late fourth century A.D.. Skeat has argued convincingly that Irenaeus (who writes ca. A.D. 185) drew on an earlier source that suggests the existence of a codex with all four gospels ca. A.D. 170 (T. C. Skeat, "Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon," *NovT* 34 [1992] 194–99); this agrees with Zahn's judgment that this tradition originated with an exegete or homilist of the second century A.D. not known by name ("Die Tiersymbole," 2:265). Jerome's recension of Victorinus Comm. in Apoc. 4.4 (Haussleiter, Victorinus, 51) has a different order: lion (Mark), man (Matthew), ox (Luke), and eagle (John); inexplicably, F. C. Grant has read Irenaeus as if this order were present there (*The Gospels: Their Origin and Growth* [New York: Harper & Row, 1957] 5, 65–66) and makes it one of several arguments for the priority of Mark. On this problem, see T. Zahn, "Die Tiersymbole," 2:257–75; H. Leclercq, "Évangélistes (Symboles des)," *DACL* 5/1 (1922) 845–52; J. Michl, *Engelvorstellungen* 1:88–103." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 300.]

³²The appearance of the living beings — one each like a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle — has been identified with the symbols in the four quarters of the zodiac (the Ox, Lion, Scorpio — sometimes symbolized as a man, and Aquarius), which because of their middle positions represented the four quarters of the heavens and therefore the four directions of the winds and the four seasons.⁶⁹ If this is so, then the cherubim represent creation in general. However, the problem with this view is that an eagle is never part of the zodiacal scheme.⁷⁰ [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testa-

and more likely -- is that these four creatures symbolize both all of animate life, and also the Creator of that life in a double symbolical assertion.³³ This has in its favor a similar understanding of Ezekiel's four creatures in the Jewish interpretive history. Are they angels? Nothing in the text points to anything beyond them being a part of a Heavenly entourage, and also symbols derived from combining the imagery of both Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Also perhaps in the distant background -- especially for Ezekiel and Isaiah, and maybe for John as well -- was the fourfold division of the camp of Israel around each side of the tabernacle in their wilderness journey. At least in Jewish interpretive tradition stood four standards representing each set of three tribes: a lion, a stag (originally an ox), a man, and a serpent (later changed to an eagle).³⁴ If this plays some role in

ment Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 329.]

³³Whether or not a zodiacal background is in mind, it is likely that the four figures are designed to be representative of the whole created order of animate life, a view also held by other commentators.⁷¹ The same conception of the four cherubim of Ezekiel 1 was espoused by later rabbinic tradition (e.g., *Midr. Rab. Cant.* 3.10.4; cf. also *Midr. Rab. Exod.* 23.13; *Midr. Pss.* 103.16; Tanna debe Eliyyahu 161; b. *Hagigah* 13b). This representative role of the four cherubim in Rev. 4:6–8 will have significance in the following verses.

"In addition to representing creation, the cherubim also represent the Creator. Such double symbolism should not be unexpected in apocalyptic visions. The multitude of eyes in the living beings signifies divine omniscience and that they are God's agents; *Targ. Ezek.* 1:14 asserts that "the living creatures are sent forth to do the will of their Master." In the light of Rev. 5:6, 8ff. the living beings must also be seen as servants of the Lamb. They are mentioned in ch. 4 not only because they form part of the eternal royal entourage around the heavenly throne, but also because they inaugurate the judgments on humankind and continue to mediate those judgments until the final consummation (cf. 6:1–8; 15:7).⁷² Their knowing eyes search the earth, and they execute punishments only on those who truly deserve them. For the discerning reader these 'living beings' are an encouragement to keep persevering under persecution, knowing that God is acutely aware of their plight and is already in the process of taking action in their favor and against their persecutors (as chs. 6ff. reveal)."

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 329–330.]

³⁴The tribes of Israel were divided into four groups in the wilderness, and each group was located at one of the four directions of the compass, with the sanctuary in the middle of the camp. According to *Targ. Pal. Num.* 2 each group had a standard with the colors of the stones representing their tribes on the priest's breastplate and with an insignia on it: a lion, a stag (originally an ox), a man, and a serpent (which later tradition changed to an eagle). Later Jewish tradition affirmed that this configuration was intended to reflect the arrangement of the four guardian angels around the divine throne.⁷⁸ If this material has a link with earlier tradition, it could suggest fur-

John's depiction, then the picture is more of idealized humanity worshipping around the throne of God, than of animate life before the heavenly throne. The latter stresses God as Creator of all life, while the former sees God as the God of His covenant people in Heaven.

What do they do? In verse eight, their activity in Heaven is depicted as chanting around the throne of God: καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες·

ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ,
ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος.

Day and night without ceasing they sing,

“Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.”

The narrative introduction to the chant of these four creatures underscores an unending expression of worshipful adoration of God: καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες. What stands as unique to John's depiction is the unending expression of adoration to God. R.H. Charles' mistaken citing (ICC) of a parallel Jewish tradition has been established an incorrect.³⁵ In contrast to the Jewish tradition of angels chanting according to the set times for the Levitical choir chants of the Psalms in the temple, John's creatures offer their praise up to God without interruption.³⁶

ther that the living creatures in Rev. 4:8ff. represent humanity, especially the worship of the ideal community of God.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 331.]

³⁵E. Peterson (*Von den Engeln*, 385–86 n. 8) maintains that the notion of ceaseless praise is not found in early Judaism and argues against the various examples cited by Charles (1:125–26), contending that many of them are from Christianized texts. Peterson is quite correct, for while many of the texts cited by Charles refer to the heavenly praise accorded God by angelic beings (1 Enoch 40:4–7; 61:9–13; 69:25; 71:11; 2 Enoch 17:9; 19:6; 20:4), none clearly emphasizes ceaseless praise. 1 Enoch 39:12 is a passage in which ‘those who do not slumber’ recite the Qēduššah (though here the fact that praise is offered by the עִירִים *irīm* or ἐγρήγοροι, ‘the wakeful ones’ or ‘watchers,’ implies nothing about the unceasing nature of their praise; see the helpful note in Black, 1 Enoch, 106–7). Among early Jewish texts there appears to be a single exception, T. Levi 3:8: ‘there praises to God are offered eternally [ἐν ᾧ ὅμοι ἀεὶ τῷ θεῷ προσφέρονται].’ A second text occurs in 2 Enoch 17:1 (Rec. J and A), which speaks of ‘unceasing voices’; yet it is extremely late (medieval) and heavily Christianized. According to Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 32:26, the angels offer praise to God in accordance with the Jewish ritual plan of hours. See also Mart. Perpetua 12.2 (Krüger-Ruhbach, Märtyrerakten, 40): *et audiuimus uocem unitam dicentem*, ‘Ἄγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος, sine cessatione, ‘and we heard voices chanting in unison, ‘Holy, holy, holy,’ without ceasing’.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 302.]

³⁶“The terms ‘day and night’ form a hendiadys meaning a twenty-four-hour day, which by extension means ‘without ceasing’

In the **Historical Setting** section, we covered the precise meaning of λέγοντες, not as ‘singing’ in the common modern sense but as reflecting the ancient Hebrew chanting of the psalms by the Levites in the Jerusalem temple.³⁷ To legitimately use the English verb ‘sing’ for λέγοντες, it must be defined in terms not commonly understood in popular use of the verb today.

The content of the chant is derived primarily from Isaiah 6:3 and supplemented from Exod 3:14 and Deut. 32:39:

Isa. 6:3. καὶ ἐκέκραγον ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον καὶ ἔλεγον Ἄγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος σαβαωθ, πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

And one called to another and said: “**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;** the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Exod. 3:14. καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν· καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραηλ Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

God said to Moses, “**I Am Who I Am.**” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’”

Deut. 32:39. ἴδετε ἴδετε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν ἐμοῦ· ἐγὼ ἀποκτενῶ καὶ ζῆν ποιήσω, πατάξω κἀγὼ ἰάσομαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὃς ἐξελεῖται ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν μου.†

See now that **I, even I, am he;** there is no god be-

or ‘without interruption’ (Josh 24:8; Neh 4:9; Pss 1:2; 32:4; 88:1; Isa 62:6; Jer 9:1; 16:13; Luke 18:7; 1 Clem 20:2; 24:4; Jos. J. W. 6.301). It is, of course, obvious that this description is not given from the perspective of what John sees in the heavenly court but is based rather on his knowledge of the character of the heavenly liturgy and may be based on a traditional interpretation of Isa 6:3 (Jörens, *Evangelium*, 25). This is clear in the redundant phrase διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας, ‘continually, night and day’ (Mark 5:5; cf. Jos., Ant. 13.217), similar to the phrase here ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς, ‘they have no rest day and night.’ The hendiadys ‘day and night’ occurs several times elsewhere in Revelation (7:15; 12:10; 14:11; 20:10) and frequently in the OT and early Jewish and early Christian literature (Gen 8:22; Lev 8:35; 1 Sam 25:16; 28:20; 1 Kgs 8:59; 1 Chr 9:33; 2 Chr 6:20; 42:3; 55:10; Isa 28:19; Lam 2:18; Acts 9:24; 1 Clem 24:4; Jos. J. W. 3.174; 5.31; 6.274; Ant. 5.60; 6.223). The reverse hendiadys ‘night and day,’ identical in meaning, also occurs frequently (Deut 28:66; 1 Sam 9:24; 1 Kgs 8:29; Esth 4:16; Isa 27:3; Jer 14:17; Mark 5:5; Luke 2:37; Acts 20:31; 26:7; 1 Thess 2:9; 3:10; 2 Thess 3:8; 1 Tim 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3; Ign. Rom. 5:2; Barn. 19:37; Jos., Ant. 2.274; 7.367; 16.260; Ag.Ap. 1.164, 199). There are a number of Jewish and Christian texts in which the hendiadys ‘day and night’ is used hyperbolically for lengthy or continuous prayer or divine service (Neh 1:6; Ps 88:1; Luke 18:7; 1 Thess 3:10; 1 Tim 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3; Jos., Ant. 7.367).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 302.]

³⁷“λέγοντες ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ‘chanting, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 302.]

sides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand.

The threefold repetition of “holy” is called in the Hebrew the *Qēduššah*, and in Latin the *sanctus* or *tersanctus*. In Isa. 6:3 it is chanted by the seraphim and likely reflected a part of a hymn used in the temple liturgy.³⁸ This is the only expression of the *Qēduššah* in the OT,

³⁸“The *Qēduššah* first appears in Isa 6:3, where it is chanted by the seraphim in the context of Isaiah’s inaugural vision, and may have been part of a hymn regularly chanted in the temple liturgy or at least a cultic liturgical formula (Engnell, *Call of Isaiah*, 35–36), in which the threefold repetition functions to emphasize the transcendence of God (Spinks, *Sanctus*, 18):

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.

The context in Isa 6 is Isaiah’s vision of the divine council, i.e., a heavenly throne-room scene in which God presides over a council of angelic beings (1 Kgs 22:19–23; Jer 23:18; Job 1–2; 15:8; Pss 82:1, 6; 89:7), a conception found in Mesopotamian and Canaanite mythology (see Robinson, *JTS* 45 [1944] 151–57; Cross, *JNES* 12 [1953] 274–77; Mullen, *Divine Council*; Seitz, *JBL* 109 [1990] 229–47). In Qumran this notion was developed to the extent that the community regarded itself as standing in the midst of God and his angels (1QS 11:7–9; 1QH 3:19–22; 11:13–14; 1QM 12:1–5; see Mach, *Engelglaubens*, 209–16). The *Qēduššah* does not occur in the rest of the OT, though the term ‘holy’ occurs three times in Ps 99, in a way that suggests dependence on Isa 6 (see Scoralick, *Trishagion*). The *Qēduššah* became part of both Jewish liturgy (Heinemann, *Prayer*, 230–33) and Christian liturgy (Spinks, *Sanctus*), and after the fourth century A.D., it was found in virtually all versions of the eucharistic prayer in Christianity.

“In the traditional liturgy of the synagogue, with three services daily together with an additional service on Sabbaths and festivals, the combination of Isa 6:3 and Ezek 3:12 (‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place’) occurs in three different places, the *Qēduššah dē Amida*, the *Qēduššah dē Yozer*, and the *Qēduššah dē Sidra* (P. Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book* [New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1977] 74, 84, 131). Though the earliest explicit mention of the *Qēduššah* occurs in t. Ber. 1.9 (late Tannaitic period), the core of which consists of Isa 6:3 together with Ezek 3:12, it is likely that it had already been incorporated into synagogue liturgy by the Mishnaic period (Heinemann, *Prayer*, 24, 230–32). While forms of the *Qēduššah* occur in early Jewish apocalyptic literature as well as in the later *hekalot* literature, the relationship between those occurrences and synagogue liturgy is problematic. Scholem (*Major Trends*, 40–79), Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic*, 183–84 and passim), and Morray-Jones (*HTR* 86 [1993] 177–217) argue that the latter developed out of the former. Allusions to Isa 6:3 and Ezek 3:12 are also found in *Apost. Const.* 7.35.3, in a section that very probably represents a Christian redaction of Hellenistic Jewish synagogal prayers (Fiensy, *Prayers*, 134, 178, 199 [reconstructed Jewish text]; tr. Fiensy, 69):

And the holy Seraphim together with the six-winged Cherubim singing the victory ode to you cry out with never-ceasing voices, “Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory.” And the other multitudes of the orders: angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, powers, cry out and say, “Blessed is the glory of the Lord from his place.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 303.]

and John’s use in Rev. 4:8 represents the single use of it in the NT. But beginning with 1 Clem. 34:6, written close to the time of Revelation at the end of the first century, onward it plays an important role in the developing liturgy of early Christian worship, as well as Jewish.³⁹ One other point in the interpretive history is

³⁹“The first occurrence of the *Qēduššah* in early Christian literature is Rev 4:8, and one of the major issues from the standpoint of the history of liturgy is whether it was adapted from Jewish worship as many scholars have contended (Mowry, *JBL* 71 [1952] 84; Cabaniss, *Int* 7 [1953] 76–87; Rowland, *JSS* 10 [1980] 145; Prigent, 87–89). It is also quoted in 1 Clem 34:6 (nearly contemporaneous with Revelation), in which Isa 6:3 is conflated with Dan 7:10 (the latter passage is alluded to in Rev 5:11): “For the Scripture says, ‘Ten thousand times ten thousand stood by him, and a thousand thousands ministered to him, and they cried, ‘Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, the entire creation is filled with his glory.’” Here it is noteworthy that the phrase κύριος σαβαώθ found in LXX Isa 6:3 is used (see Comment on 4:8e), but Clement substitutes κτίσις for γῆ. Van Unnik has argued that 1 Clem 34:6 was drawn not from Jewish or Christian liturgy but from a written source, indicated by the explicit use of the quotation formula ‘for the Scripture says’ (VC 5 [1951] 225), though the combination of Dan 7:10 with Isa 6:3 suggests dependence on a *florilegium*. Tertullian appears to be the first Christian author who provides evidence for the use of the trisagion in Christian liturgy (*De oratione* 3):

He [God the Father] to whom that surrounding circle of angels cease not to say, “Holy, holy, holy.” In like wise, therefore, we too, candidates for angelhood, if we succeed in deserving it, begin even here on earth to learn by heart that strain hereafter to be raised unto God, and the function of future glory.

“An allusion to Isa 6:3 is found also in *Apost. Const.* 8.12.27, the latter of which (like 1 Clem 34:6) alludes to Dan 7:10 (tr. Darnell in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:694):

the cherubim and the six-winged seraphim, with two covering up their feet, and with two their heads, and with two flying; and saying together with thousands on thousands of archangels, and ten thousand times ten thousand angels, incessantly [ἀκαταπαύστως] and loudly crying out—and all the people together, let them say—“Holy, holy, holy is Lord Sabaoth, the heaven and earth are full of his glory!”

“Here the last phrase, ‘heaven and earth are full of his glory,’ reflects a slight expansion of the phrase ‘the whole earth is full of his glory’ in Isa 6:3. This expansion became the canonical form of the trisagion in the eucharistic liturgies of Chrysostom, James, Mark, Adai and Mari, and Serapion (Werner, *HUCA* 19 [1945–46] 298; Spinks, *Sanctus*, 116–21), though the phrase ‘heaven and earth’ was also used in early Judaism (Flusser, “Sanktus,” 131–47; see 1QH 16:3; Tg. Isa. 6:3). The *Qēduššah* is also part of the heavenly liturgy according to *Mart. Perpetua* 12, where a vision is recounted that was purportedly experienced by Saturus and Perpetua, in which they found themselves in heaven before God (tr. Musurillo, *Acts*): “We also entered and we heard the sound of voices in unison chanting endlessly [sine cessatione], ‘Holy, holy holy!’ In the same place we seemed to see an aged man with white hair and a youthful face, though we did not see his feet.”

The *Qēduššah* also occurs in early Jewish literature. Isa 6:3 is quoted, for example, in 1 Enoch 39:12–13 (tr. Knibb, *Enoch*):

Those who do not sleep bless you, and they stand before your glory and bless and praise and exalt, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Spirits; he fills the earth with spirits.” And there my eyes saw all

how this chant has been turned into a ‘magical’ phrase down through the centuries of understanding.⁴⁰

those who do not sleep standing before him and blessing and saying: “Blessed are you, and blessed is the name of the Lord for ever and ever!”

“Here it is evident that the author understands δόξα or כבוד *kābōd*, ‘glory,’ as ‘spirits’; i.e., ‘Lord of Hosts’ is understood as identical with the equally biblical phrase ‘God of spirits’ (Num 16:22; 27:16; see Flusser, “Sanktus,” 138–39). The *Qēduššah* also occurs in the longer recension of 2 Enoch [J] 21:1 (tr. Andersen in Charlesworth, OTP 1:134), as a song of praise sung by cherubim and seraphim before God and clearly alluding to that version of Isa 6:3 in which the phrase ‘heaven and earth’ replaces ‘the whole earth’:

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Lord Sabaoth,
Heaven and earth are full of his glory.

“The *Qēduššah* is also frequently included in the prayers of *hekalot* literature, such as the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, §§ 549.9 [MS M22 only]; 550.4b; 555[3x]; 556; 592.10; 595.4), and in *Hekalot Rabbati* and parallels (see Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§ 94, 95, 97, 99, 101, 102, 104, 105, 126, 146). Sometimes the *Qēduššah* is quoted not as part of the heavenly liturgy but rather as a text from Isa 6:3 with the introductory formula קִדְּבָרְךָ וְנִצְאָמְרָךְ *kaddābār šenne. ʿmar*, ‘as it is said’ (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§ 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 164, 165, 166, 168, 169, 273, 274, 306[2x], 322, 334). The liturgical use of the *Qēduššah* may perhaps be presupposed by the introductory formula לפניך יהוה אלהינו *šeyyisrā. ʿl. ʾōmēr lēpānāyw*, ‘when Israel spoke before him’ (Schäfer, *Synopse*, § 161; cf. § 179). Paral. Jer. 9:3–6 contains a short and distinctive prayer of Jeremiah, which begins with ‘Holy, holy, holy’ and concludes by addressing God as ‘Almighty Lord of all creation, unbegotten and incomprehensible [κύριε παντοκράτωρ πάσης κτίσεως, ὁ ἀγέννητος καὶ ἀπερινόητος].’ The *Qēduššah* is also found in 3 Enoch, in a form reflecting the combination of Isa 6:3 with Ezek 3:12, the form that characterizes the *Qēduššah* in modern synagogue prayers but is not attested prior to the second century A.D.. In 3 Enoch 1:12, Enoch sings praises to God in heaven, and angelic beings respond with “ ‘Holy, holy, holy’ [Isa 6:3], and ‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord in his dwelling place’ [Ezek 3:12]” (see also 3 Enoch 20:2; 40:2; Appendix to 3 Enoch 22B:7). The *Qēduššah* also occurs in the *Sepher ha-Razim* 7.16–17 (tr. Morgan, 83), an early Jewish magical text influenced by *hekalot* literature (Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 233), in the first line of an angelic hymn sung in the seventh firmament: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts,/The whole world is full of his glory.’”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 303–305.]

⁴⁰“The *Qēduššah* is also used in magical texts either produced by Jews or Christians or influenced by Jewish or Christian *nomina sacra*. In an apotropaic copper amulet from Smyrna of uncertain date, the obverse contains the inscription ‘Seal of the living God, guard him who wears this. Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of thy glory’ (Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* 2:231; vol. 3, fig. 1054). Note that the phrase ‘the whole earth’ of Isa 6:3 is often rendered ‘heaven and earth’ in Christian versions of the *Qēduššah*, though the same change is sometimes found in Hellenistic Jewish sources (E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1935] 307, 324). Similarly, in a lengthy Coptic exorcism, which appears to be a Jewish magical text lightly Christianized, the Christian form of the *Qēduššah* appears in Greek: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sa-

The reference to God κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *Lord God The Almighty*, reflects John’s preference for this title over the κύριος σαβαώθ (יהוה צבאות *YHWH šēbā. ʾôt*) found in the LXX translation of Isa. 6:3, as reflected in Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; and 21:22.⁴¹ The

baoth/Heaven and earth are [fu]ll of thy glory’ (Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:178; a verbally similar text in Greek is also found in a Coptic curse text in Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:235). *Ladder of Jacob* 2:6–22 has what resembles a magical hymn in which the *Qēduššah* in 2:18–19 is followed by seven divine names followed by a string of transliterated Hebrew words resembling *voces magicae* (tr. H. G. Lunt in Charlesworth, OTP 2:408):

Holy, Holy, Holy, Yao, Yaova, Yaoil, Yao,
Kados, Chavod, Savaoth,
Omllech il avir amismi varich,
eternal king, mighty, powerful, most great,
patient, blessed one!

“Some amulets begin with the *Qēduššah*; see M. Naldini, “Due papiri cristiani della collezione fiorentina,” *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 33 (1961) 216–18 (see van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 754); M. Naldini, “Testimonianze cristiane negli amuleti greco-egizi,” *Augustinianum* 21 (1981) 179–88.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 305–306.]

⁴¹“The divine epithet κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ‘Lord God Almighty,’ has been substituted for the phrase κύριος σαβαώθ (יהוה צבאות *YHWH šēbā. ʾôt*) found in LXX Isa 6:3, probably because it is a divine title preferred by the author. It occurs five times in Revelation (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22); all but the last occurrence is found in a context of praise or prayer. According to Delling (*NovT* 3 [1959] 127–34), this title was taken over from Hellenistic Judaism. In *Mart. Pol.* 14, the aged Polycarp begins his prayer the same way: ‘O Lord, God almighty [κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ].’ A similar but shorter address in prayer to God in the vocative is κύριε παντοκράτωρ (T. Abr. 15:12; Paral. Jer. 1:5; 9:6); see also Paral. Jer. 1:6; 9:6. The same title is of course also used in nonprayer contexts, as in 3 Apoc. Bar. 1:3, where an angel appears to Baruch and says, ‘thus says the Lord God Almighty.’ It is clear that in Rev 4:8, as in Isa 6:3, the function of the *Qēduššah* is to provide a solemn introduction for uttering the divine name. According to the Tg. Deut. 32:3, it is impossible for one of the angels of the heights to invoke the name of God without having said ‘holy, holy, holy’ three times (M. L. Klein, *Fragment-Targums* 1:113,225; 2:85, 182). In the LXX the Hebrew phrase יהוה צבאות *YHWH šēbā. ʾôt* is often translated as κύριος σαβαώθ (fifty-four times in Isaiah; three times elsewhere), transliterating rather than translating צבאות *šēbā. ʾôt*. κύριος appears to be a distinctive Christian translation of יהוה *YHWH* not found in Jewish MSS of the Greek OT, but rather represented by the tetragrammaton written in archaic letters or the transliterated Greek form *Ίάω* (Jellicoe, *Septuagint*, 271–72; Skehan, DJD 9:167–86, on pap4QLXXLeviticus^b, which has *Ίάω* in frag. 20.4, but never κύριος). But σαβαώθ is also translated παντοκράτωρ, ‘almighty,’ elsewhere in the LXX no less than a hundred times, though never in Isaiah. The phrase κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ occurs seven times in the LXX as a translation of יהוה צבאות *YHWH šēbā. ʾôt* (Hos 12:6; Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:8 [MT has only יהוה *YHWH*, while a few MSS add צבאות *šēbā. ʾôt*], 14, 15, 16; 9:5; Nah 3:5 [MT has only יהוה *YHWH šēbā. ʾôt*]). In Orat. Man. frag. 22.11 (A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta*, 115), Manasseh addresses a prayer to God: ‘Lord Almighty, God of our fathers [κύριε παντοκράτωρ, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν].’ The title

sense of the original Hebrew text of Isaiah remains unchanged with this different terminology. One should also note that in the Jewish tradition the saying of ‘holy’ three times was the necessary expression before saying this very sacred name of God. John is clearly playing off this heritage.

The supplementary section, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, *who was and is and is coming*, clearly comes from the “I am” texts in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Deut. 32:39. This Greek phrase is encompassed in the single Hebrew word אֲנִי. Additionally there is some likelihood that the threefold ‘holy’ at the beginning is synchronized with this threefold affirmation of being at the end.⁴²

Thus the Jewish *Qēduššah* used by John here as the unceasing chant of the four creatures dramatically underscores the utterly holy nature of God, and also pictures to human worshipers the proper tones of reverence in coming before God to seek His presence and blessing.

B. The worship of the Twenty-Four Elders, vv. 9-11.

9 Καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 10 πεσοῦνται οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ βαλοῦσιν τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου λέγοντες·

11 ἅγιος εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν,
λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν,

‘Lord of hosts’ (יהוה צבאות) *YHWH šēbā-ōt* occurs on three Aramaic ostraca (Porten, Elephantine, 109).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 306.]

⁴²“The *Qēduššah* in v 8d is linked with a threefold exposition of the divine name, a phenomenon that occurs elsewhere in early Jewish texts. An example is the expanded version of the *Qēduššah* found in Tg. Isa. 6:3 (tr. Chilton, Isaiah Targum):

Holy in the heavens of the height, his sanctuary, holy upon the earth, the work of his might, holy in eternity is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with the brilliance of his glory.

“In this targumic interpretation, each ‘holy’ is given a specific meaning, and in this sense may be analogous to Rev 4:8e, where the threefold repetition of ‘holy’ is connected, perhaps by design, to three characteristics of God. Another possible example is found in the hekalot literature (Schäfer, Synopse, § 126, p. 62):

והארץ אומרת יהוה מלך יהוה מלך (יהוה) ימלוך לעולם ועד.

wēhā-āreš ·ōmeret YHWH melek YHWH mālak

(*YHWH*) *yimlo(w)k lē-ōlām wā-ed*

And the earth says, “The Lord was king, the Lord is king, the Lord will be king for ever and ever.”

“This acclamation is preceded by the *Qēduššah* by several lines and bears a certain similarity to the divine title ‘who was, is, and is to come’.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 306–307.]

ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα

καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God,

to receive glory and honor and power,

for you created all things,

and by your will they existed and were created.”

But not only were the four creatures offering up adoration of God, additionally the twenty-four elders were doing the same. Because John has already presented a description of these individuals (cf. v. 4), he only focuses here on their activities. In essence their actions of worship mimic those of the four creatures around the Heavenly throne. And they are carefully synchronized with that of the four creatures.

What triggers the response of the elders is the worship of the four living creatures: Καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever*, The indefinite temporal dependent conjunction ὅταν coupled with the future tense verb δώσουσιν, rather than the normal subjunctive verb form and especially a present tense form, speaks in this context of a specific event that is different from the unceasing chanting of the above *Qēduššah* in v. 8.⁴³ No reproduction of their praise is given, only an allusion to it, that comes indirectly as the indirect object of the verb. The tone of the depiction of God as the recipient of the adoration itself has tones of a standard

⁴³“The temporal adverb ὅταν, ‘when, whenever,’ does not suggest repeated action here but refers to a unique event as it does in 8:1; 10:7; 11:7; 12:4; 17:10; 20:7 (Lohmeyer, 49; Mussies, Morphology, 345). When the cherubim give glory and honor and thanksgiving to God, then the twenty-four elders will worship God, cast their wreaths before the throne, and sing the ἅγιος song (v 10). This occurs just once in this text unit, namely in 5:13–14, when all creation ascribes blessing and honor and glory and might to God; it is precisely then that the elders fall down to worship God (Mussies, Morphology, 345). The problem here is that, since the action of giving glory and honor and praise to God cannot refer to the chanting of the trisagion, the ascription of glory and honor and praise to God is mentioned, but the hymn itself is omitted. This is the only place in Revelation where a hymn is summarized but not reproduced except in *oratio obliqua*, or ‘indirect discourse’ (cf. 14:3–4, where the new song sung in heaven is mentioned though not included in the narrative).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 307.]

doxology.⁴⁴ Perhaps this is the reason the content of the praise is not stated in direct discourse as in the *Qēduššah* above nor the hymnic praise below in v. 11.

One should also note the synonymous nature of δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν, *glory and honor*, then linked up to εὐχαριστίαν, *thanksgiving*. Everything in worship centers on the being and actions of God. The individual worshiper is never an object of the praise offered up. For John's non-Jewish first century readers the benefactor tones of ascribing glory and honor to someone of generosity would have communicated quite easily and clearly.⁴⁵ The grace of God in providing salvation to fallen humanity clearly merits ascription of glory and honor to Him.

The depiction of God as τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *to the One sitting upon His throne who lives forever and ever*, provides great insight into the nature of the worship of these elders. God is so holy that they dare not mention Him by name. He is the One in control of the universe and lives eternally without beginning or ending.

Upon the signal of the worship of the four living creatures, the twenty four elders respond in appropriate worship that includes three major actions accompanied by a chant.

First, they fall down before the throne: πεσοῦνται οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου. Falling down is the first action of the two-fold expression and is followed by καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. The verb προσκυνήσουσιν literally means to bend the knee in showing reverence toward another. Out of the Jewish heritage comes only some isolated texts depicting such action in worship.⁴⁶ But with this initial pairing of the two

⁴⁴“This hymnic summary exhibits the features of a doxology: (1) the divinity to whom some attribute is ascribed, usually in the dative case (τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ), (2) specific attributes listed, of which δόξα, ‘glory,’ is the most common, usually in the nominative (δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν), and (3) a formula describing the unending extent of time during which the one praised will possess these attributes (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων). Only the concluding ‘amen’ is lacking.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 307.]

⁴⁵“The ascription of ‘glory and honor’ to God can be construed as based on the widespread use of benefactor language in the Greco-Roman world (Danker, *Benefactor*, 470; J. H. Elliott, “Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society,” *Forum* 3/4 [1987] 399–48).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 308.]

⁴⁶“There are a few texts that depict heavenly beings bowing down before God (Brettler, *King*, 104); one such text is 4QDeuta 32:43, ‘Rejoice, O heavens with him; bow down before him,’ and another is Ps 29:1–2, ‘Ascribe to the Lord, O divine beings . . . bow down to the Lord, majestic in holiness.’ No analogous court ceremonial for Israelite kings is known from the extant sources.” [Da-

verbs, πίπτειν, *to fall down*, and προσκυνεῖν, *to bend the knees in reverence*, a succession of their interlocked usage surfaces in Revelation: 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:10; 22:8. In Heaven, it seems, God is worshiped only on one's knees!

Note the parallelism between both the two verbs and the referential ‘objects’ of the verbs. One falls down ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου, *before the One sitting upon His throne*. And one bends the knee in reverence τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *to the One living forever and ever*. Thus the elements of the previous depiction of God in v. 9, τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, are repeated in synonymous parallel expression in v. 10.⁴⁷

The third action of the elders is that καὶ βαλοῦσιν τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, *and they cast their crowns before the throne*.⁴⁸ Such a rather com-

vid E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 308.]

⁴⁷“Vv 10a and 10b constitute a couplet consisting of two cola in synonymous parallelism (cf. the very similar couplet in 19:4, which exhibits progressive or climactic parallelism). The verb προσκυνεῖν, ‘to worship,’ occurs nineteen times in Revelation with an object either in the dative or the accusative. Kilpatrick (“Style,” 154–55) argued that since Atticistic grammarians condemned the dative construction and recommended the accusative construction, we should expect scribes to have changed the dative objects into accusative objects. On the divine epithet ‘the one who lives for ever and ever,’ see Comment on 4:9. Philo (Leg. 116) describes prostration (προσκυνήσις) before the emperor as a barbarian practice (cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 1361a.36).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 308.]

⁴⁸“καὶ βαλοῦσιν τοῦ στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου λέγοντες, ‘and they cast their wreaths before the throne, chanting.’ This action signifies both subordination and homage and has parallels in historical accounts of conquered rulers presenting their crowns to the conqueror (Tacitus *Annals* 15.29) and in rulers who take crowns from conquered kings (2 Sam 1:10; 12:30; 1 Chr 20:2; cf. Ezek 21:26) or rulers who voluntarily put aside their crowns (Plutarch *Defrat. amore* 488D). The Magi reportedly fell down and worshiped the infant Jesus and then presented him with rich gifts (Matt 2:11). Tertullian reports that followers of Mithras, after receiving a crown and putting it on their heads, take it off and proclaim that Mithras is their crown (*De corona* 15). Gold crowns were frequently presented to Roman emperors for a variety of reasons; this practice was inherited from Hellenistic kingship tradition (see Excursus 2A: Ancient Wreath and Crown Imagery). The Roman emperor was presented with gold crowns by the senate and delegates from provincial cities on such varied occasions as accessions, consulships, victories, and anniversaries (S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 58; F. Millar, *Emperor*, 140–43). Arrian (*Anabasis Alexandri* 7.23.2) reports that on one occasion embassies (πρεσβεῖαι) arrived from Greece; the envoys (πρέσβεις), who were themselves wearing wreaths, came forward and presented golden wreaths (στεφάνοι χρυσοί) to as Alexander if honoring a god. Herodian (8.7.2), describing an episode during the reign of the emperor Maximus (early third century A.D.), says that Italian cities sent delegations (πρεσβείας) of their prominent citizens dressed in

mon action in the first century world of John clearly signaled submission and acknowledgment of the authority of the One sitting on the throne. The στεφάνους, crowns, normally designated a wreath worn around the head as a symbol of power and authority.⁴⁹ But it could, especially with certain adjectives, e.g., στεφάνοι χρύσοι (golden wreaths), signal a metal shaped crown in the form of a olive branch wreath. These 24 elders as leaders acknowledge the complete authority of God by this action of worship.



These actions are accompanied by their chanting a hymnic praise to God, λέγοντες. The uniform threefold future tense verbs -- πεσοῦνται, προσκυνήσουσιν, and βαλοῦσιν -- speak of a punctiliar moment of worship while the present tense participle βαλοῦσιν defines a process action taking place simultaneously with the verb actions.

The hymnic praise to God in verse eleven stands as the direct object of the participle λέγοντες.⁵⁰ Note a similar pattern in the hymn to the Lamb in 5:9. The form of this hymn has antecedents in numerous ancient sources.⁵¹ This hymn also stands as an appropriate and wearing laurel wreaths and bearing statues of the gods and golden wreaths to pay homage to Maximus.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 308–309.]

⁴⁹“a wreath made of foliage or designed to resemble foliage and worn by one of high status or held in high regard, wreath, crown.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 943.]

⁵⁰“ἄξιός εἰ ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, ‘Worthy are you, our Lord and God.’ This colon introduces a four-line hymn to God, with the final two cola, introduced by ὅτι, in synonymous parallelism (Charles, 1:133; Mowry, JBL 71 [1952] 77; Lohse, 37; Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus, 50; Jöms, Evangelium, 74; Roloff [ET] 68):

ἄξιός εἰ ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν,
λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν,
ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα
καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 309.]

⁵¹“This short hymn is couched in the du-Stil, ‘thou style,’ a style that has antecedents in Hebrew (1 Chr 29:10; IQS 11:15), as well as in Greco-Jewish and early Christian literature (LXX Dan 3:26; Did. 8:2; 9:3–4; 10:2, 4, 5). The term ἄξιός is used as an epithet appropriate for benefactors in the Greco-Roman world (Luke 7:4; F. F. H. von Gaertringen, *Inschriften von Priene* [Berlin: Reimer, 1906] 6, lines 26–27; 114, lines 33–34), either in the third person (Rev 5:12, ἄξιόν ἐστιν, ‘he is worthy’; Luke 7:4, ἄξιός ἐστιν, ‘he is worthy’) or in the second person (ἄξιός εἰ, ‘you are worthy,’ Rev 4:11; 5:9; see the letter from a soldier to his father in which he says ἄξιός [εἶ], ‘you are worthy,’ in Llewelyn, *New Docs*

ate response to that of the four living creatures. Their focus was on God’s holiness and eternal existence as the all powerful One. The praise of the elders centers on God as Creator and Sustainer of all things.

God is here addressed directly as ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, our Lord and God. From the background materials, considerable likelihood is that this represents an antithesis to the pagan ascribing of the same titles to the Roman emperors. For example Suetonius, the Roman historian in his *Domitianus* 13.2, speaks of emperor Domitian’s formal title being *dominus et deus noster*, our Lord and God.⁵² Domitian was the emperor at the time of the writing of Revelation. To John’s initial readers living under the tyranny of this egocentric ruler comes the reminder from Heaven that the God of this universe alone is to be addressed in this manner. Also is the background here stands Daniel three where Daniel’s three friends were demanded to fall down and worship the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar. By refusing

6:156–57). The attribute of ἄξιός, used of God (and Christ), has few parallels outside Revelation and apparently none that occur earlier (Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus, 50–51; see the excursus on ἄξιός in Jöms, *Evangelium*, 56–73). See Jos., Ant. 8.53, τὸν μὲν θεὸν εὐλογεῖν ἄξιον, ‘it is appropriate to praise God.’ The hymn does have some of the formal features of an acclamation (Peterson, *Eἰς Θεοῦ*, 176–80; Lohmeyer, 50). The term ἄξιός is used at the beginning of two more hymns, both directed to the Lamb (5:9, 12), where worthiness is based on his death (see Comments there).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 309–310.]

⁵²“13 [*Legamen ad paginam Latinam*] 1 When he became emperor, he did not hesitate to boast in the senate that he had conferred their power on both his father and his brother, and that they had but returned him his own; nor on taking back his wife after their divorce, that he had “recalled her to his divine couch.”⁵¹ He delighted to hear the people in the amphitheatre shout on his feast day:⁵² “Good Fortune attend our^o Lord⁵³ and Mistress.” Even more, in the Capitoline competition,⁵⁴ when all the people begged him with great unanimity to restore Palfurius Sura, who had been banished some time before from the senate, and on that occasion received the prize for oratory, he deigned no reply, but merely had a crier bid them be silent. 2 With no less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators, ‘*Our Master and our God* bids that this be done.’ And so the custom arose of henceforth addressing him in no other way even in writing or in conversation.⁶ He suffered no statues to be set up in his honour in the Capitol, except of gold and silver and of a fixed weight. He erected so many and such huge vaulted passage-ways and arches in the various regions of the city, adorned with chariots and triumphal emblems, that on one of them someone wrote in Greek: ‘It is enough.’⁵⁵ 3 He held the consulship seventeen times, more often than any of his predecessors. Of these the seven middle ones were in successive years, but all of them he filled in name only, continuing none beyond the first of May and few after the Ides of January. Having assumed the surname Germanicus after his two triumphs, he renamed the months of September and October from his own names, calling them ‘Germanicus’ and ‘Domitianus,’ because in the former he had come to the throne and was born in the latter.” [“The Life of Domitian,” *penelope.uchicago.edu*. Cf. 13.2]

the three friends were thrown into the blazing furnace of fire.

The hymn affirms the worthiness of this God λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, *to receive glory and honor and power*.⁵³ The praise of the elders echoes that of the doxology of the living creatures -- ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν (4.9) --- except for the final attribution of τὴν δύναμιν instead of εὐχαριστίαν. This praise closes follows that in the 11:17, ὅτι εἴληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἔβασιλευσας, *because you have received great power and have begun ruling*.

What does ἄξιός εἰ...λαβεῖν, *you are worthy to receive*, mean? Do the elders give glory, honor, and power to God who is ὁ παντοκράτωρ, *all powerful*?⁵⁴ Hardly! God already possesses these qualities and more. The point of their acclamation about the worthiness of God is that God is worthy to receive acknowledgment of His existing possession of these qualities. God possesses already glory, honor, and power. He -- unlike human rulers -- is worthy to receive from others acknowledgment of His possession of these traits. In the background of this hymnic praise stands the benefactor language of the ancient Greco-Roman world where such affirms of generous patrons was common.⁵⁵ This stands at the heart of the elders worship: to acknowledge the greatness of God on His throne.

The second segment of this praise affirms the reason for God's worthiness: ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν, *because you have created all things, and through your will all things exist and have been created*. God stands as Creator and Sustainer of all things. Thus acknowledgment of His glory, honor, and power is fully appropriate from those representing His people on earth.

To be certain, some commentators are puzzled by the sustaining - creating sequence in the phrase διὰ τὸ

⁵³Note that the Lamb ἄξιόν ἐστιν...λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὴν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν, *is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and thanksgiving* (5:12).

⁵⁴Remember that δίδωμι, *I give*, and λαμβάνω, *I receive*, are complementary verbs to each other. The interaction between two individuals is the same but is defined from the 'subject' or 'object' -- giver / receiver -- perspectives.

⁵⁵"Like ἄξιός, 'worthy,' in v 11a, these predications are all appropriate for one of high status. In *De cor.* 108, Demosthenes claims ἄξιός εἰμι' ἐπαίνου τυχεῖν, 'I am worthy to get credit,' because through his public service δόξα καὶ τιμαὶ καὶ δυνάμεις, 'reknown, distinction, and strength,' accrued to Athens. The phrase τιμῆς ἄξιός, 'worthy of honor,' closely parallel to the phrase ἄξιός λαβεῖν τὴν τιμὴν, 'worthy to receive honor,' here in 4:11, is found in benefactor contexts; see 1 Tim 6:1 and the phrase ἀξιά τιμαί, 'worthy honors,' in Inscription 86 in Roueché, Aphrodisias, 137." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 312.]

θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.⁵⁶ This puzzlement, however, extends back to the hand copying of this text with a variety of alternative readings surfacing in several of the lesser important ancient manuscripts. The exact reason for this sequence escapes certain identification, although in Jewish polemical writings defending Judaism this 'reversed' sequence of listing is frequently found. One possibility could very well emerge out of the full clause expression, that contains a created -- sustains -- created sequence, as a literary device stressing God as creator but with the central focus on God as sustainer of what He has created. The shift from the active voice ἔκτισας, you created, to the passive voice ἐκτίσθησαν, they have been created, signals the shift from active creator to creation as existing in the will of God -- διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου -- long before being created. Thus what God did in creating and sustaining it was carefully planned out in advance of the creative action.

⁵⁶"ὅτι σὺ ἐκτίσας τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν, " 'Because you created everything/And by your will they existed, yes were created.' " One of the major difficulties of this clause, reflected in the variety of textual variants extant, is the apparently illogical order of the verbs ἦσαν, 'they were,' i.e., 'they existed,' and ἐκτίσθησαν, 'they were created' (see Notes on 4:11); i.e., the 'existence' of everything seems to precede creation. This can perhaps be explained as an instance of hysteron-proteron, i.e., the inversion of events, which sometimes occurs in Revelation (see Comments on 3:17; 5:2, 5; 6:4; 10:4, 9; 19:13; Beckwith, 504). While an emphasis on God as creator is not a central way of characterizing God in Revelation, the theme, important in Hellenistic Jewish apologetic literature, appears in a variety of ways. The verb κτίζειν, 'create,' is used only here and in Rev 10:6, where (in the context of an oath), in contrast to the more generic expression 'everything,' God is referred to elaborately as 'the one who created the heaven and what is in them, the earth and what is on it, and the sea and what is in it.' The verb ποιεῖν is also used in a similar context in Rev 14:7, where an angel orders all people to worship 'the One who made [τῷ ποιήσαντι] the heaven and the earth and the sea and the springs.' Christ is referred to as ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως, 'the beginning of creation,' in Rev 3:14 (κτίσις), and the term κτίσμα, 'creature,' implying the creative activity of God, is used in 5:13; 8:13. Finally, the renewal of creation is announced by God in 21:5, 'Behold I make all things new.'

"The generic way of referring to what God created as 'everything' is typically expressed with participles or finite verbs based on κτίζειν and ποιεῖν together with τὰ πάντα in the accusative in Judaism (Wis 9:1; Sir 18:1; Gk. 1 Enoch 9:5; Jos. As. 12:1; Sib. Or. 3.20), in early Christianity (Acts 7:50; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Did. 10:3; Hermas Man. 1.1; Sim. 5.5.2; Justin Dial. 55.2), and occasionally in Greco-Roman literature, where the verb ποιεῖν is regularly used, with the exception of the magical papyri (Epictetus 4.7.6 [ὁ θεὸς πάντα πεποίηκεν τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, 'God made everything in the cosmos']; Aelius Aristides Or 43.7 [Ζεὺς τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν, 'Zeus made everything']; PGM IV. 1709-10 [τὸν πάντα κτίσαντα θεὸν μέγαν, 'by the great god who created everything']; XIII.62-63, 571 [τὸν πάντα κτίσαντα, '(by) the one who created everything']; see IV. 3077). Ignatius refers obliquely to God as ὁ θελήσας τὰ πάντα, 'the one who willed all things' (Eph. inscr.; Rom. inscr.)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 312-313.] Page 22

This procedure of God of planning and doing constitutes a major aspect of His worthiness to be acknowledged by His creation.

Now this is some kind of worship of God by these two groups gathered around the throne of God in Heaven. Worship in heaven is thus active rather than passive. There will be moments of silence and listening to either God or the Lamb speak in the subsequent scenes in chapters five through twenty two. But in the worship depictions in these chapters the model established here in chapter four for active worship by those in heaven will stand as foundational for subsequent expressions.⁵⁷

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What will we experience as worship of God in heaven? The depiction in 4:6b-11 introduces us to the concept of Heavenly worship. The role models are the four creatures and the twenty-four elders. The background framework defining worship in heaven is worship in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem as long as it existed.

Central to worship of God on His throne will be both actions and words spoken in acknowledgment of His ultimate authority and power as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The actions center on dropping down on our knees or in complete prostration before God's thrones (v. 10). For the elders as symbolic leaders of God's people on earth it includes total surrender of any 'authority' (crowns) they might have over to God (v. 10).

The words of worship come in the form of liturgical chanting of expressions of acknowledgment of God's honor, glory, and power. For the living creatures this is an unceasing chant before the heavenly throne affirming God's holiness (v. 8), that is occasionally interrupted by acknowledgment of glory, honor, and thanksgiving to Him (v. 9). This in turn triggers the similar acknowledgments of the twenty-four elders (v. 11).

John's vision of Heavenly worship here in this initial foundation presentation comes directly out of his Jewish heritage of defining the worship of God within the boundaries of Jewish worship in the temple. Central to temple worship was the offering of sacrifices to God; hence the emphasis on the Lamb as an object of adoration in Revelation five. But such offering of sacrifice was based on a clear understanding of who God is and what He has done. Thus it is that beginning focus on the very nature and being of God who merits acknowledgment of His being that forms the opening scene of worship here in Revelation four.

⁵⁷See 4:10; 5:14, 34; 7:11; 9:20; 11:1, 16; 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; 15:4; 16:2; 19:4, 10, 20; 20:4; 22:8, 9 for the full range of worship expressions signaled by the use of *προσκυνέω* in Revelation.

What is the lesson to be learned from this? First and foremost is that our worship must center on acknowledging God's greatness. Not what He has done for me the worshiper! And certainly not on anything I have done that permits me to worship this God! God, because He is God, merits our unconditional acknowledgment and affirmation as the Creator God to whom we owe our very existence. His glory, honor, and power we must acknowledge and submit to totally.

In chapter five this foundational picture will be expanded to include the Lamb of God as meriting the same and even more acknowledgements (cf. 5:8-10).

Another aspect of this depiction of heavenly worship as a model for our worship underscores that our acknowledgment of God's glorious being must be both action and word. The elders prostrated themselves in total surrender before God's throne. They chanted words of verbal acknowledgment of God's greatness. If all we do in our worship on earth is to sing words of some hymn and perhaps even without mentally affirming the content of acknowledgment to submission to God, WE DO NOT WORSHIP GOD! If we sing and don't express in concrete actions of obedience our submission to God's greatness, WE DO NOT WORSHIP GOD!