

Revelation Symbols

By Paul R. Blake

I received the following question: "We are studying Revelation and a question was brought up about the twenty-four thrones and the various animals mentioned in chapter four. Could you shed some light on this chapter?"

I believe the twenty-four thrones represent the totality of the house of God, both old and new. Twelve is a holy number, significant in both Old and New Testament times. There were twelve patriarchs whose descendants became Israel. The twelve apostles were the evangelists who carried out Christ's work of building the church in the present dispensation. Combining the two would create a symbol that represents the first among all of the redeemed of all time.

The four beasts or beings of power are full of eyes before and behind. Eyes represent several things in Bible symbolism. It could mean all seeing. It could mean visionary in the sense of being able to prophesy the future or perfectly discern the past. Eyes also represent intelligence. In this context, I believe that the eyes represent great vision, i.e. the ability to see and know the past, present, and future to the fullest extent.

The wings give the beings the ability to go anywhere their possessors are sent. Three pairs of wings show the power to traverse the three divisions of the earth (according to the ancients) above, on, and under the earth in all directions.

Each being of power is characterized by a representative animal. Each animal symbolizes a specific characteristic that is epitomized by those who serve God in heaven. For example, the lion represents strength (Gen. 49:9). The ox shows endurance under burden. The man represents sentience, reason, wisdom (which separates him from the animals). The eagle has penetrating vision and swift execution of judgment.

Put it all together and you get the following: Those who serve God before His throne are strong, enduring, wise, swift, penetrating of vision, and capable of going wherever God wants them to go.

Revelation is a difficult book. But when read from the perspective of the triumph of the church over the enemies of our Lord, and having all confidence in the glory and power of God, we can have confidence in understanding and profiting from its message.

Two Tales of a City

The book of Jonah has the makings of a great movie. It contains a runaway prophet, a terrible storm at sea, a prophet swallowed by a great fish, God sparing the prophet's life, and the repentance of a great pagan city.

But Jonah's sequel—the book of Nahum—might not be so popular. Nahum prophesied in Nineveh just as Jonah had, but about 100 years later. This time, the Ninevites had no interest in repentance. Because of this, Nahum condemns Nineveh and proclaims judgment on the people.

To unrepentant Nineveh, the prophet preached: "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked" (Nah. 1:3). But Nahum also had a message of mercy. To comfort the people of Judah, he proclaimed: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him" (v.7).

Jonah and Nahum teach us that with every new generation comes the necessity of an individual response to God. No one's spiritual life can be handed off to another; we must each choose to serve the Lord from our own heart. God's message is as fresh today as it was hundreds of years ago: judgment for the unrepentant but mercy for the repentant. How will you respond? God is abundant in mercy, and His Judgment is certain. (ODB)

Faith and Fire

When Polycarp (AD 69-155), who was bishop of the church at Smyrna, was asked by Roman authorities to curse Christ if he wanted to be released, he said, "Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The Roman officer threatened, "If you do not change your mind, I will have you consumed with fire." Polycarp remained undaunted. Because he would not curse Christ, he was burned at the stake.

Centuries earlier, when three young men named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego faced a similar threat, they answered, "O Nebuchadnezzar... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:16-18). Similar experiences; two different outcomes. Polycarp was burned alive, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego left the furnace unharmed.

Two different results but the same display of faith. These men showed us that faith in God is not simply faith in what God can do; it is the belief that God is God whether He delivers us or not. He has the final say. And it's our decision to choose to follow Him through it all. Life is hard, but God is good -- all the time. (ODB)

Brevity

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address contains fewer than 300 words. This means, among other things, that words don't have to be many to be memorable. Likewise, with Psalm 117 -- Brevity is its hallmark. The psalmist said all he had to say in 30 words (actually just 17 words in the Hebrew text).

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!"

That's the good news. Contained in this praise psalm is a message to all nations of the world that God's "merciful kindness," His covenant love, is "great toward us." Think about what God's love means. God loved us before we were born; He will love us after we die. Not one thing can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39). His heart is an inexhaustible and irrepressible fountain of love. (ODB)

A Moments Wisdom

--"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Jesus Christ)

--"Fairy tales do not tell children that dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed." (G. K. Chesterton)

--"When we were children, we used to think that when we grew up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable." (Madeleine L'Engle)

--"If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders." (Abigail Van Buren)