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The Four Living Creatures in the Book of Revelation.

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

The Four Living Creatures in the Book of Revelation.

Topics.

- Four living creatures, a sea of glass like crystal, and the throne of God.
- Four living creatures in Revelation chapter five.
- Four living creatures in Revelation chapter six.
- Four living creatures in Revelation chapter seven.
- Four living creatures in Revelation chapter fifteen.
- The symbolism of the four living creatures and a brief overview.

A PERSONAL NOTE

Though I have always loved reading and studying the Scriptures and have now walked with Christ and in God's grace for around fifty years the following studies should not be taken to be dogmatic, inflexible or the final word on the matter since I am fully aware that my mind is limited by mortality and that greater understanding of God's revelation is continually becoming clearer before our eyes as we move closer to the time of Christ's glorious return in glory.

FOUR LIVING CREATURES, A SEA OF GLASS LIKE CRYSTAL, AND THE THRONE OF GOD.

1

- **Revelation 4:6-8:** before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:6).

Throughout the book of Revelation, we come across four living creatures (beasts in KJV), these verses are the first mention of these creatures and from them we learn the following nine facts about the four living creatures.

1. They are standing on a sea of glass, signifying, peace and calm, transparency and purity.
2. One of the four living creatures are on each side of the throne signifying north south, east and west which often refers to the four corners of the earth, which can signify the entire earth or the entire universe.
3. Each creature appeared full of eyes in front behind and within carrying the idea that they see all things and events (spiritual and secular) happening on earth, or symbolizing the seven spirits of God that are sent out into all the earth (v7).
4. The first creature appears like a lion, the king of wild animals, the lion can also symbolize an exalted royal position of kingly power and fearlessness and courage.
5. The second creature appears like an ox, the king of work animals, the ox can also signify strength and enduring patience under suffering in labour and work (Christian or secular) and unflagging strength and tireless energy in the service of God.

6. The third creature appeared with the face of a man signifying, the king of creation, the face of a man may also signify mankind (i.e., the entire human race) or human pride, greed, power, cruelty and destructiveness, depending on the context.
7. The fourth creature appeared like an eagle in flight, signifying the king of all flying creatures, the eagle can also signify, protection, shelter, freedom and speed of travel (i.e., the Gospel being carried throughout the world).
8. Each of the living creatures appeared with six wings, which can signify freedom and speed of travel, protection, safety and security or armies of nations on the march.
9. Each of the four creatures never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Signifying they are forever in the presence of God and worshipping Him.

FOUR LIVING CREATURES, IN REVELATION CHAPTER FIVE

- Between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." ¹¹Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped. (Rev. 5:6-14).

2

From these verses, we learn that the four living creatures:

1. Are in heaven with the twenty-four elders and the Lamb that was slain, signifying they are in harmony with each other.
2. They humble themselves before the Lamb.
3. They are around the throne, with the twenty-four elders and myriad of angels saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, wealth, honor and glory," signifying the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and the myriad of angels are all in unity, agreement and of the same mind.
4. After Christ took the scroll from God every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea, are heard saying, "Give honor and glory to God and to Christ forever and ever," signifying that all of creation acknowledges Christ being worthy of praise throughout all eternity.
5. The four living creatures said, "Amen," meaning so be it, let it be so, which means they are in full agreement with God's plans and purposes and are ready to carry them out.

FOUR LIVING CREATURES, IN REVELATION CHAPTER SIX

- Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" ²And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer. ³When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" ⁴And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. ⁵When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!" (Rev. 6:1-6).

From these verses, we learn the following three facts:

1. The first of the four living creatures showed John a rider wearing a crown on a white horse, going out to conquer, signifying a powerful king or global world ruler.
2. The second living creature showed John another rider on a bright red horse who was permitted to take peace from the earth so that men went to war with a great sword signifying war (perhaps weapons of mass destruction).
3. The third living creature showed John another rider on a black horse who had a pair of scales in his hand and John heard what seemed to be a voice amongst the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius (signifying great famine).

HURTING THE OIL AND THE WINE

Do not hurt the oil and the wine: (v6) amongst theologians there are many different ideas as to what this command spoken by the voice from amongst the four living creatures means, following are the three most common:

1. Faithful ministers and servants of Christ will not be hurt during any of the calamities and plagues of the seven seals and seven trumpets. The problem with this idea, is that for the faithful on earth during this space of time to not be hurt by any of these calamities they would have to be made immortal, which will only happen at the rapture of the faithful. Added to this even the two witnesses that have great power are eventually killed during this space of time.
2. It is not about physical hurt, harm and death, but about their salvation not being hurt, the difficulty with this idea is that it does not need to be stated, since no one can hurt the salvation of another since it is solely dependent upon their faith and their trust in God's grace. Paul beautifully explained the Christian faith in the following way, "I am certain that neither tribulation, famine, distress, persecution, death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39).
3. Some suppose the verse should read, the rich and wealthy (signified by the oil and the wine) will not be hurt, which is a natural principal during famines, since they have the money to purchase bulk food and store it up. Even today the rich live in excess luxury and indulgent material possessions, while millions live in extreme poverty.

Though these views may have some valid points, I feel that the most likely meaning of the command, "Do not hurt the oil and the wine," is that it refers to the rapture of the church for the following reasons. The four living creatures are about to release the four horses and many other

calamities and plagues of the seals and trumpets. Later, one of them gives to the seven angels seven bowls of God's wrath (Rev. 15:7). This is most likely in answer to the prayers of the faithful who cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10) and for the Lord Jesus Christ to return and bring justice, joy and peace to earth. With, this in mind the command, "Do not hurt the oil and the wine," appears to aptly fit rapture of the church that is to take place prior to the wrath of God being poured out spoken of in chapter sixteen. This does not mean that the rapture takes place here, but that John is seeing ahead to that glorious time when the church (made up of Jews and Gentiles) is raptured. This is an encouragement to those who are alive during the time of the seven seals and trumpets. It is vision that reaches past this space of time to the rapture that takes place at the sound of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15), after which God's wrath is poured out (Rev. 15:7). It is most likely given here to encourage the faithful that no matter how bad the crisis or chaos is during the time of the seals and trumpets their eternal inheritance will not be hurt or harmed in any way, but is secured in heaven awaiting their arrival.

FOUR LIVING CREATURES, IN REVELATION CHAPTER SEVEN

- All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. (Rev. 7:11).

From these verses, we learn that angels surround the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders standing around the throne of God. It seems that nearest to the throne were the twenty-four elders, then the four living creatures and then the myriad of angels on the outside surrounding them. Since the twenty-four elders symbolise the church made up of Jews and Gentiles it is very fitting that they are pictured as being the nearest to the throne. It is also fitting that the angels are on the outside surrounding them all, since they are all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:14).

4

In Revelation chapter fifteen we read:

- One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, (Rev. 15:7).

From this verse, we learn that one of the four living creatures gave one of the seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God to each of the seven angels, showing that it was the four living creatures who had within their possession all seven-golden bowls full of God's wrath and that it was within their power to give them to the seven angels or not give them.

FOUR LIVING CREATURES, IN REVELATION CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Following is the final verse we read of the four living creatures:

- The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" (Rev. 19:4).

From this verse and (v1-2), we learn that the four living creatures with the twenty-four elders and a great multitude in heaven worship God together, crying out, "Salvation and glory and power belong to God, for His judgments are true and just.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

Amongst theologians it has been suggested that the four living creatures (beasts in KJV) signify the following four things:

1. The power of God over the entire universe and the earth.
2. All creation praising God, because the lion is the king of animals, the ox the king of working animals, the face of a man can symbolise all mankind and the eagle is the king of birds.
3. Four cherubim (the plural of cherub) these beings are visionary figures. There maybe angels called cherubs, but based upon the many verses that speak of cherubs it appears that the word cherub is a title that is applied to God's mighty power and to God's omnipresence (symbolised by Him riding on a cherub and flying swiftly on the wings of the wind). However, the following verses show that the LORD referred to the King of Tyre as a cherub:
 - The signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, ¹⁴You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. ¹⁵You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. (Ezek. 28:14-15).

Ezekiel also says, that the king of Tyre in the abundance of his trade and wealth, became full of violence and pride saying, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods" (v2-5), so the LORD cast him as a profane thing from the mountain of God (signifying Jerusalem), and cast him, the guardian cherub to the ground. (Ezek. 28:16-17), because Tyre treated all Israel's neighbours with contempt. After this Ezekiel continues his prophecy saying, "Israel will no longer suffer hurt, for the LORD will gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered and manifest His holiness in them in the sight of the nations. Then they will dwell securely in their own land, and build houses and plant vineyards and know that He is the LORD their God. (Ezekiel 28:24-26).

The king of Tyre is a good example of the rise of the final world ruler who Paul titled, "the man of lawlessness," (man of sin in KJV) (2 Thess. 2:3) who in the latter days will have great power and authority over the nations and abundant wealth through global trade and commerce (especially over the seas) as the king of Tyre had, but despite all his authority, power, pomp and wealth, he will dramatically fall from his glory and suffer the same fate as the king of Tyre. The following verses show that Cherubim also symbolise keepers of the way and represent protectors of mercy and truth and the way to God:

- He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24).

Here God placed cherubim at the east side of Eden to prevent humans from re-entering the garden and gaining access to the tree of life. In this context, they are a symbol of protection, firstly for the tree of life (i.e., protecting the tree of life from the sin and destruction of man, and secondly for mankind (i.e., protecting us from living forever in sin and all its miseries).

- The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. (Exod. 25:20).

Here the Cherub or Cherubim sit over the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place in God's temple with their wings spread out over the mercy seat (the law of God is under the Mercy Seat). In this context, the cherubim symbolise God's covering and shelter and protection over the law and over His mercy.

- Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. (Psalm 80:1).
- He (the LORD) rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind. (Psalm 18:10).

- The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! ²The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. (Ps. 99:1-2)

In these verses the Cherubim symbolise God's chariot, His guidance, His glory shining forth, His coming quickly, His being enthroned above all creation and exalted above all people. This means that Cherub and Cherubim can be a symbol of any of the following three things:

- a) God's presence, His glory and His protection.
- b) To something that is far above the ordinary in beauty, and has great authority, outstanding power and influence that inspire wonder and awe.
- c) A king, man or nation with great wealth, power, splendour and glory.

There is no doubt that the traits and qualities listed in (a) and (b) fit the character and peculiarities of the four living creatures.

SIX WINGS

Each of them with six wings: (v8) the wings of the cherubim overshadow the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place of the temple and God is pictured as flying through the heavens on a cherub with a chariot on the wings of the wind (Psalm 18:10) (2 Samuel 22:11) (Psalm 104:3), which means that wings can be a symbol of:

- Deliverance from trouble or a place of refuge, protection, shelter, joy, healing, help, strength, energy.
- The vehicle that brings people or a nation to God Himself.
- Something that takes wealth and riches away; carries wickedness; puffs a person up in pride; binds people or nations in their sin; brings God's judgment on an individual or nation or to something that carries an army and its warriors into battle. When they are referred to as whirring wings, they picture a cruel, fierce and terrifying army or an enemy of Israel, while spreading wings in the context of battle refers to an army that has surrounded or trapped their enemy.
- Babylon, Egypt, Greece and the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle are all pictured with wings that carry them to their destination and in this context, can be viewed as vehicle (natural or spiritual) that carries something good or bad to its final purpose, goal or objective. The context the word wings is used in determines whether the wings are carrying a good or bad cargo.

OVERVIEW OF THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

One of the four living creatures gave seven-golden bowls (golden vials in KJV) to the seven angels (Rev. 15:7). These golden bowls were normally used for sweet smelling incense, but in the hands of this living creature are now filled with the wrath of God, which is about to be poured out upon the man of lawlessness (man of sin in KJV) (2 Thess. 2:1-4) (an antichrist) (1 John 2:22) and his hostile antichristian empire in answer to the heartfelt prayer and cry of the faithful, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10).

The fact it was one of the four living creatures that gives the seven vials of wrath to the angels (Rev. 15:7) shows that the four living creatures cannot be human ministers of the church on earth (as some suppose). In John's visions of future things to come the four living creatures are seen

in heaven from the time John was called up to heaven (Rev. 4:1-11) to the time the Bride appears ready for the Lamb. (Rev. 19:4-7). During all this time the church is still on earth which means that the four living creatures most likely symbolise:

- Four figures that have great authority, outstanding power and influence and stand in the presence of the LORD forever, ready to carry out His will, plans and purposes.
- God's mighty power and omnipresence over the entire universe and the earth and His will and judgment being worked out on the nations and all creation.

Their six wings (Rev. 4:8) most likely symbolise strength of something (natural or spiritual) that carries a thing (good or bad) to its destination. There is a living creature on the north, east, south and west side of God's throne which signifies that their power, influence and calamities will affect the entire earth and not just part of it in the latter days. Being awe-inspiring creatures of splendour and wonder in vision form that worship God and the Lord Jesus Christ they inspire and encourage the church by showing that all things are in God's control and no matter what terrors, dread and calamities come upon earth the redeemed will be resurrected to heaven and stand before God's throne and worship the Lamb with the angels surrounding them, prior to God's wrath being poured out. The King James Bible uses the word "beasts," while many modern Bibles use the word, "living creatures."

Since the creatures have characteristics and appearances that beasts cannot have such as being full of eyes in front and behind and having the face of a man (Rev.4:6-8), the better translation is, "a living thing or living creature," especially since they are to be taken as symbols that represent various things and not literal animals. Whatever these four living creatures are that represent creation, it is interesting to notice that one of them gave the seven vials/bowls to the seven angels to pour out God's divine justice upon His enemies, and that it is through creation that the wrath of God comes upon the anti-Christian beast world. It could be said that God has given to all things an eternally righteous law that is averse to evil, and cannot be broken without consequences, which means that His wrath is the operation of His righteous law against sin.

FOOTNOTE

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.