



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

“Creature Features”

4:6b-8

Revelation 4:6 Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

Revelation 4:7 The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle.

Revelation 4:8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

I've been reading Don Piper's book, *90 Minutes in Heaven*. In it he describes his beyond-and-back experience after surviving a fatal car crash.

As he attempts to describe the music in Heaven, at one point he writes,

The most amazing [sound] was the angels' wings. I didn't see them, but the sound was a beautiful, holy melody with a cadence that seemed never to stop. The swishing resounded as if it was a form of never-ending praise.

The apostle John **did** see the **four living creatures** leading the never-ending praise in Heaven. He described them for us.

Revelation 4:6 Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures...

In the KJV they are called **beasts**. It's an unfortunate choice of an English word. **Creatures** is not much better. The Greek word is *zōon* and is better translated *living ones*.

They are cherubim. The cherubim are first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 3:24,

Genesis 3:24 So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Prior to his rebellion, Satan was among the cherubim. His fall is described in Ezekiel twenty-eight and in verse fourteen he's called the **anointed cherub**.

The tabernacle and Temple along with their articles contained many representations of cherubim. Most notably there are cherubim on the Mercy Seat that covered the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 25:17-22; 26:1,31; 36:8; 1 Kings 6:23-35; 7:29-36; 8:6-7; 1 Chronicles 28:18; 2 Chronicles 3:7-14; 5:7-8; Hebrews 9:5).

Chapters one and ten of the book of Ezekiel describe **four living creatures** (Ezekiel 1:5) as cherubim (Ezekiel 10). The cherubim in Ezekiel have *four* wings each. What they lack in extra wings they make up for in faces! Each has not one face but four faces - that of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:10; also 10:14).

These cherubim in Ezekiel used two of their wings for flying and the other two for covering their bodies (Ezekiel 1:6,11,23). Under their wings the cherubim appeared to have the form, or likeness, of a man's hand (Ezekiel 1:8; 10:7-8, 21).

Isaiah chapter six introduce other living ones called seraphim. They may be a classification within the cherubim. Whether cherubim and seraphim could be classified as angels or are their own separate species is uncertain. We most commonly think of them as classifications of angels.

They are said to be **full of eyes in front and in back**. We find this a little creepy. Less than or more than two eyes seem abnormal to us. There's a scene in *Monsters Inc.* where the monsters are prepping for their scare activities. One of them pops extra eyes in.

Actually it would be helpful to have 'eyes in the back of your head.' You'd see a lot more! These cherubim see all God's creation. They take it in and respond with never-ending praise. Their heavenly perspective gives them an edge because they 'see' things as moving towards their ultimate fulfillment. They 'see' all things working together for the good.

Revelation 4:7 The first living creature *was* like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle.

These cherubim may have a special relationship to the covenant God made with Noah. We've already seen that there is an emerald rainbow all around the throne. The rainbow always reminds us of God's promises to Noah.

As part of His promises, we read in Genesis 9:9&10,

Genesis 9:9 "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you,

Genesis 9:10 and with every living creature that *is* with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.

God established His covenant with four creatures:

1. **You**, meaning Noah representing the human race.
2. **Birds**.
3. **Cattle**.
4. And **every beast**.

These correspond to the four faces of the cherubim.

Since the early days of church history, Irenaeus and others recognized that the four faces of these cherubim also correspond with the four Gospels:

1. Matthew presents Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
2. Mark presents Him as a servant who then offered Himself as a sacrifice. This is pictured nicely by an ox.
3. Luke presents Jesus in His humanity, tracing His genealogy back to the first man, Adam. Thus the face of a man on the cherubim.
4. John presents Jesus as the Son of God, pictured by the soaring eagle. He is the One who first descended from Heaven only to return to its heights.

These descriptions are insightful for us as followers of Jesus Christ:

1. As ambassadors of the King we possess the Holy Spirit Who gives us a lion-like boldness in our ministering.
2. Our Lord modeled ox-like servanthood and told us to do likewise as we share His yoke.
3. Jesus revealed the glory of God (eagle) in human form. Likewise we are the body of Jesus on the earth and reveal His glory though we are frail earthen vessels.

There is something else about the description of the cherubim. We've seen this exact formation before in our Bible. In the Book of Numbers God told the nation of Israel how they were to set up camp around the Tabernacle in the wilderness and set up their flag. Each of the four sides were to be encamped by three tribes. The tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were to camp on the east and were collectively called the camp of Judah. What was the symbol on the flag of Judah? A lion.

The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were to camp on the west side and were collectively called the camp of Ephraim. What was the symbol on the flag of Ephraim? An ox.

The tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to camp on the south side and were collectively called the camp of Reuben. What was the symbol on the flag of Reuben? A man.

The tribes of Dan, Naphtali, and Asher were to camp on the north side and were collectively called the camp of Dan. What was the symbol on the flag of Dan? An eagle.

Israel camped about the Tabernacle as an earthly representation of the cherubim surrounding God's throne in Heaven. God was enthroned on earth as He was in Heaven. His people were to live in such a way as to bring Him never-ending praise.

The numbers given in Numbers are interesting. The eastern camp of Judah numbered 186,400; the western camp of Ephraim numbered 108,100; the northern and southern camps (Dan and Reuben) were nearly equal, 157,600 and 151,400 respectively. Some see in this a symbol. If the encampments were orderly seen from directly above, in an aerial view, they would look like a Cross.

Revelation 4:8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

These are real beings and this is their appearance. Again **beasts** is the worst translation possible. It's the same word translated **creatures** earlier. The function of their **six wings** is not given; but it is given for the seraphim in Isaiah's vision:

Isaiah 6:2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Whether the same can be applied to the cherubim I cannot say. But it is interesting to note.

I assume that a being that has been gifted with six wings is using them to fly with great speed and agility. It seems almost a waste of wings to cover your face and feet with them. But it was God who gave them so to God be the glory.

Christians can get frustrated thinking that their gift or gifts are not being recognized or utilized properly. Your 'wings' aren't always to be used for flying! Let God raise you up. Don't despise days of small things. You need to learn how to fly.

Full of eyes within. *More eyes!* I've seen artist's representations. They look hideous!

The cherubim will look beautiful to us when we get to Heaven. It serves to remind us that we see through a glass darkly. Our appreciation for beauty is damaged. It is narrow, prejudiced, maybe in some cases even bigoted.

And they rest not day and night. No cherubim burn-out! They never need retreats or encouragement.

That's not to say we don't. But it does encourage me that the closer I am to God and the more I 'see' of Him the more energized I will be.

Another interesting thing: The cherubim have no rest but they have no unrest among them! If we are experiencing unrest perhaps we're not working hard enough.

Saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. Many times phrases are repeated three times in Scripture purely for literary emphasis. For example: In Jeremiah 7:4 the Jews are represented by the prophet as saying, **the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these.**

Scholars see something more than emphasis. They see a reference to God existing as One in three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The repetition is not enough to justify such a conclusion. But here is something that is!

We've briefly mentioned that Isaiah saw a vision of God on the throne surrounded by seraphim. In the Gospel of John Isaiah's vision of the glory of God is applied to Jesus Christ when John says,

John 12:41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

John 12:42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;

John 12:43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

John 12:44 Then Jesus cried out and said, "**He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.**

John 12:45 **And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.**

Add to this the fact that the Scripture elsewhere teaches that God is One existing in three Persons and it seems perfectly certain that the **Holy, Holy, Holy** of the cherubim is for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Lord God Almighty. The word is from the Greek *pantokrator*, meaning *the one who has His hand on everything*. God is hands-on in His approach to you. You might even say (with reverence) that He is a control freak! I'm glad He is because left to myself I would totally ruin my life and everyone else's.

Which was, and is, and is to come. We see this describing God in at least two ways:

1. First it describes Him as best language can as being eternal, always existing in the past, present, and future.
2. Second, from His throne in Heaven the Almighty God created in the past, is redeeming the fallen creation in the present, and will complete the work of redemption in the future.

This song of Revelation four will continue in verse eleven. It teaches that God is the God of creation. The song teaches that everything that exists in heaven and earth exists because of the decision of God.

I'd add to that the notion that it all exists for you. Creation is the backdrop for God to have fellowship with you. He is mindful of you and will complete what He has begun in you.