Revelation 4:6. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

The “sea of glass like unto crystal” is a reference to something in the Old Testament temple. In that temple, Solomon “made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof” (II Chron. 4:2). That huge vessel, measuring some 15 feet across and 7 feet deep, “was for the priests to wash in” (v. 6).

In the Old Testament, the priests were a representation of all believers, and washing of any kind was a figure of one being cleansed by the blood of Christ. Therefore, the sea of glass before the throne is to remind us that God is our redeemer.

In our King James Bible, the word “beasts” in this passage is an unfortunate translation. It would be better—and perfectly proper and Biblical—to translate the Greek word there as “living creatures”.

All-seeing God. These living creatures have eyes before and behind. Whenever the Bible talks about many eyes, or eyes all around, it almost always refers to God Himself. Revelation 5:6, for instance, states that the Lamb had seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

In Ezekiel 1, God also speaks of four living creatures. Beside each living creature, it says in verse 15, was a wheel. And of those wheels, we read in verses 18-20: “As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.”

That language clearly indicates that the four living creatures are not some unknown heavenly being, but a representation of God Himself. It highlights the fact that our God is an all-seeing God; His sight penetrates the very heart of man. Incidentally, whenever God uses the number four symbolically, it signifies universality. God is everywhere present.

Revelation 4:7. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

This verse presents added evidence that the four living creatures are a representation of God, particularly as He comes in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first living creature was like a lion, and the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David”, who alone, as we will read in Revelation 5:5, is worthy to open the seven seals.
The second living creature was like a calf. In the Old Testament, a calf, as well as a lamb, an oxen or a turtledove, could be offered as a sacrifice. And the Lord Jesus Christ was the once-for-all perfect sacrifice. The figure of the calf, a working animal, stresses the fact that He “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7).

The third living creature had the face of a man. This refers to the Lord’s having condescended to become a man in order to die for our sins. Had He not become flesh and died, He could not be our Savior.

The last living creature was like a flying eagle. In this context, the eagle represents the love of God. A picture of this love is described in Deuteronomy 32:11: “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.”

“Visions of God.” Actually, Ezekiel 1 makes it quite clear that the four living creatures represent God. The opening verse declares that what is to follow in that chapter are “visions of God” that the prophet saw.

Verse 26 then speaks of God sitting on His throne: “Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.”

Finally, the closing verse declares, “As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” (The bow in the clouds underscores that God is the covenant God, that rainbow being a picture of the covenant of grace.)

Sparkling feet. Describing those four living creatures, Ezekiel 1:5-11 states: “Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.”

Notice that their feet “sparkled like the colour of burnished brass”. In Revelation 1:15, we may recall, it says this of Christ: “And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” As we learned then, it’s a reminder that Christ endured hell fires for our sins.
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.

This verse says that each of the four beasts has six wings, whereas Ezekiel 1 describes the four living creatures as having four wings each. Is the Bible contradicting itself? Not at all. Remember, these are simply word pictures of God, not how He actually looks. God, as a person, is not four living creatures. The Bible often uses different word pictures, as well as different names for God, to reveal to us the different characters of the glory of God.

Here in Revelation 4:8, God is tying us back to Isaiah 6, when Isaiah was commissioned by God in a vision to be a prophet. Verse 1 reads, “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.”

See how the language here parallels that of both Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4? They all speak of God sitting on His throne. What did Isaiah see? “Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (vv. 2,3).

Seraphims. Here, God is talking about seraphims. Note that they are very similar to the four living creatures of Revelation 4. They all have six wings each; and they are all praising God. The seraphims say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts”, while the living creatures in Revelation 4 say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty”. The words are slightly different, but the praise is essentially the same.

But what is a seraphim? Some kind of a super angelic being? Most commentators think so. But that cannot be. Isaiah 6:2 says that the seraphims are standing above the throne. Under no circumstance could these seraphims be any kind of being other than God Himself. No one can stand above God.

Notice further what the six wings of these seraphims are used for. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly.

Covered face. Back in Exodus, God had to hide Moses in the cleft of the rock so that when He passed by, Moses saw just the edge of the backside of God’s glory. You see, no one on earth can look full into the face of God and live. Here, Isaiah sees a representation of God in these seraphims. And to keep Isaiah from being consumed by the glory of God, the face of the seraphims is covered by two wings.

And the covering of the feet? In the Bible, feet that are uncovered, like bodies that are naked, are a figure of spiritual nakedness, or sinfulness. By the same token, the fact that the seraphims’ feet are covered by two wings indicates that there is no naked spot on God; He is absolutely sinless.

Omnipresent. With two of the wings he did fly. This means God is everywhere present. Remember Isaiah 6:5? When the prophet saw the seraphims, he cried out, “Woe is me! for I
am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Notice Isaiah identifies the seraphims as the King, the Lord of hosts. And we read in the next two verses: “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”

That altar, as well as the seraphims, represents the Lord Jesus Christ. All this is a picture of God providing for our salvation Himself. He died for us and He brings the gospel to us. Even as God brought that coal from the altar and touched the lips of Isaiah to make him clean, God the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to our heart to make us holy.

**Identical truth.** Whereas the seraphims in Isaiah 6 had two wings to cover the face and two wings to cover the feet, Ezekiel 1:11, speaking of the living creatures, says, “And their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.”

Again, though the language is different, the principle remains the same; God’s body is covered. We cannot come into the holy presence of the holy God without being consumed. The picture presented by Isaiah 6—that God Himself brings us salvation—is also seen in Ezekiel 1. We read in verse 24 of Ezekiel 1, “And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.”

You see, whenever we share the Word of God, it is God speaking through us. The voice of God is like the noise of great waters and that of an host (both meaning a large number of people). It is God’s plan to speak through all believers. As we send forth the gospel, He does the saving.

**Self-adoration.** The four living creatures are saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”. Is God praising God Himself? Yes, indeed. First of all, Jesus is the Word and so is the Bible. As we read the Bible, the Psalms, for instance, we read songs of praise over and over again. In fact, the foremost theme of the Word of God is the glory of God.

That God glorifies God Himself is also dramatically shown in John 17. In verse 4, Jesus prays, “I have glorified thee on the earth...” Note that Jesus Christ, who is God, has glorified God the Father. Then He continues in verse 5, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” Here, He asks God the Father to glorify Him, God the Son.

**Worthy is He.** We are unaccustomed to this kind of self-praising. That’s because we humans cannot glorify ourselves; there is nothing that we can boast about in ourselves. But God is perfect in all of His attributes. He is worthy of praise. When Christ said that He has glorified the Father and asked the Father to glorify Him, He was not engaging in an act of idle boasting. It is the kind of perfect glorification that properly goes on within the Godhead.
So, here in Revelation 4, as well as Ezekiel 1, God is giving us word pictures to show the magnificent glory of God. Without rest, therefore, these four living creatures say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” The last phrase again emphasizes that Christ is from everlasting to everlasting.

Revelation 4:9. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever...

Just as God glorifies God, God also gives thanks to God. If I were to go around giving thanks to myself for who I am or what I have done, I would be a first-class egomaniac. It would be dreadfully sinful. But for God to give thanks to God Himself is a different matter. Under God’s divine plan, the Lord Jesus Christ had to empty Himself of His glory to become flesh and, bearing our sins, to endure the awful wrath of God as our substitute. In total obedience and righteousness, Christ did precisely that. By doing so, the Lord Jesus Christ has glorified God the Father. Now, as the everlasting Lamb of God sitting on the throne, He is being thanked by God for His perfect obedience and righteousness. It is the answer to Christ’s prayer in John 17 that the Father would glorify Him with the glory He had before the world was.

Revelation 4:10. The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying...

As you’ll recall, the four and twenty elders represent all believers, Old Testament and New Testament believers together. We fall down and worship the eternal God. And we cast our crowns before the throne. These are the crown of eternal life, the crown of kingship as we reign with Christ, and whatever other crowns God graciously gives us. We lay them down at the feet of Jesus because we really do not deserve them. We have received them as a gift only because Christ was victorious over death and because He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It says here that the four and twenty elders worship Him that liveth for ever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne. Our casting of the crowns before the throne of Christ is a continuous event. We don’t literally cast the crowns down over and over again, of course. It is a figure to show that we live out our lives ever recognizing that whatever righteousness we have has been imputed to us from Christ.