

REVELATION

Every Knee Shall Bow

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. - Rev. 22:7

Revelation 4

Gathered Around The Throne (Part I)

Introduction

- A. Review John's first vision (Rev.1:10-3:22). Tonight we begin the final 1/3 of what Jesus would have John record (Rev.1:19) "the things which shall take place after this."
- B. Chapters 4-5 are a vision of the throne of God in heaven. Chapter 4 focuses on the father and chapter 5 on the Son. Then in chapter 6 with the church securely safe in His arms, judgment falls.

Verse 1

- A. Up to now the focus has been upon the Church Age (ch.2-3); but that focus now turns first to heaven (ch.4-5) and then to the judgment of God for some (ch.6-19). Where is the church during this time? Paul spoke of that mystery in (1Co.15:51-52). One generation of believers will not have to die to become immortal.
- B. Paul amplified this truth of the rapture to the Thessalonians (1Th.4:15-17) where "caught up" is *harpazo*: seized suddenly or violently from the Latin word *raptus*. Before the judgment of God, the saints will be delivered and removed (Rev 3:10) (1Th.5:9, Rom.5:9).
- C. Do not confuse the rapture and Jesus' second coming. The rapture is in the air, out of view, unannounced and unexpected (thief in the night for the lost); the second coming of Jesus will be to the earth, in full view (every eye shall see Him); and known to the day.
- D. As in the days of Noah (Mt.24:36-39) and as in the days of Lot (Lk.17:20-36), it is judgment that falls without warning and so it will again when the church is raptured. It is then that the world will face the awesome wrath of Almighty God. (1Th.5)
- E. After these things: After what things? After this age of the church (ch. 2-3) the trumpet will sound and the Lord Jesus will call us up to be with Him. The word Church is not even found again in this book until the review in chapter 19. See what is left off in (Rev.13:9).
- F. From Rev. 4:1 forward, the Church is found only in heaven with Jesus. See here how the door of heaven is opened and that voice (Rev.1:10) is heard as a trumpet and the invitation is to come up here!

Verse 2

- A. John in the Spirit (Rev.1:10,17:3) is given this second vision of the throne of God in heaven and what a sight it must have been for him...so foreign to his experience so far. Paul saw it and said (2Co.12:4). So did Isaiah (Isa. 6) and Ezekiel (Eze.1,10) which is helpful in studying this portion.
- B. There are five prepositional phrases relating to the throne of God: (2) "on"; (3-4,6) "around"; (5) "from"; (5-6) "before" and "in the midst of..."

Verse 3

- A. Note the word like: indicating a simile not to be taken literally.
- B. Jasper: (Rev.21:11); Sardius: red ruby colored. Of the 12 stones in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:17-21); these would have been the first and the last representing the tribes of Reuben the eldest and Benjamin the youngest. They speak of all-inclusiveness.
- C. Emerald rainbow: The rainbow and the covenant (Gen.9:11-17); here it surrounds the

throne of God who is merciful, even in His wrath to come (Hab.3:2).

Verse 4

- A. 24 elders: Note their apparel; of whom are you reminded immediately? Wearing white robes, crowns of gold on their heads, in God's presence.
- B. Who are these 24? Not the tribulation saints (Rev.7); not the angels who are listed separately from these in (Rev.7:11); not Israel (Rev.12)...these represent the Church who are no longer upon the earth, have been promised deliverance (Rev. 3:10) and are clothed and situated right as God promised the overcomers in the last chapters (2:10 3:21; 3:5).
- C. Why 24: (Rev.21:12,14) 12 tribes and 12 apostles would represent the entire group of saints, Jew and Gentile. The number itself is sometimes used to denote a whole, though included in it would be more than 24...as in (1Chr.24-25) division of the priests and worship leaders.
- D. Additionally, (Dan.12:3) tells us the Old Testament saints will receive their new bodies at the Second Coming of Jesus; yet these already have theirs. And who else can sing the song they will sing (Rev.5:9-10). Neither Isaiah or Ezekiel saw them for they were not yet here. And the crown here is the word for the victor's crown...it is the Church who has been raptured to His throne represented by these 24 elders.

Verse 5-6a

- A. The view of the throne is much like we saw at the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Ex.19:17), and as we read in other places (Ps.18:13, Job 37:2-5, Rev 8:5)...the storm is about to break on an unbelieving world.
- B. The 7 lamps of fire speak of the fullness of the presence of the Holy Spirit as we have already discussed back in (Rev.1:4; 3:1). Note the Father, Son and Holy Spirit here. The 7 lamps are found in type in the tabernacle's holy place, that model of heaven God gave to Moses to build. (Ex.25:8-9, Heb.9:23).
- C. The sea of glass before the throne: Seen also in (Rev.15:2). Moses, Aaron and his sons had a vision of heaven that was very similar (Ex.24:10). Most see this as analogous to the sea of brass found in the laver where the priests needed to wash before approaching God. In heaven this sea is clear for all of our sins have been put away in Jesus' sacrifice.

Verse 6b-8a

- A. Four living creatures: Are mentioned several times and later in (Rev.6:1-7) they speak to John to come and see the result of the first four seal judgments being opened and the four horses and horsemen sent forth in judgment.
- B. Their unique description is in the form of similes that should not necessarily be taken literally but is consistent with the vision of Ezekiel 1,10 where they are called cherubim and Isa. 6 where they are called seraphim. However, in Ezekiel the cherubim have only 4 wings and in the Isa.6 vision the seraphim have 6 as seen here, so they might be two different classes of angelic beings.
- C. We know these high ranking angels were first seen guarding the entrance into Eden after Adam and Eve had been expelled. They seem involved in all of the administration of God's government, including worship and praise.
- D. What of their faces? Most commentators liken them to the four pictures of Jesus presented and found in the four Gospels and so these reflect who He is even as Moses came with a face that glowed after meeting with God (Ex.34:29).

Verse 8b-11

- A. The worship of our Lord around His throne involves us all.
- B. Next week: Rev.5:1-5 as we continue gathered around His throne

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Revelation 4 "Gathered Around the Throne" (Part 1) March 17, 2021

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Revelation 4 to look at this vision that God had given to His old apostle, John, who is really exiled on an island off the coast of Ephesus until 96 A.D. when Domitian, the emperor, died, and he was replaced by a fellow named Emperor Nerva who let him go back to Ephesus where he finished the rest of his life pastoring the church.

We have studied John's first vision. If you've been with us every week, through the end of chapter 3:22 is the first vision that God has given to John. It was a glorious picture of the risen Lord. It was His Word to the churches in Asia Minor, God's Word to us, the church. In so doing, passing chapter 3, we've covered two-thirds of the book - well, two-thirds of the outline that Jesus gave to John in chapter 1:19.

Tonight we begin the third and the longest portion of this book. It starts with John's second vision. Notice, in verse 1, these words, "After these things I looked," and chapters 4 and 5 are going to take us into heaven. It is the longest that the Bible spends there for us to kind of get a feel for what's going on. It is John's vision of the throne of God. In fact the word "throne" is used fourteen different times just in this one chapter 4 alone. It is all about the worship and the honor given to the One who has given His life for the sins of the world. And then His time has come to bring judgment upon those who refuse to follow Him. But before the judgments begin in chapter 6, we get this beautiful view of the heavenly scene where God's throne is, where Jesus is, where the church will be, where worship will take place. It's one of those goosebump-producing visions. If it'll help you to remember things better, chapter 4 is all about the Father, and chapter 5 is all about the Son. So tonight we're going to just take all of the eleven verses. We'll slow down a bit next week - we're only going to, I think, take five verses. But I want you to focus in. You're going to have to do some thinkin' tonight as we begin this beautiful picture of God's throne in glory.

Verse 1, "After these things," John said, "I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.'" You might come to the conclusion, if you've read or been with us those last

seven weeks, that the inconsistent nature of the church that was reflected in Jesus' letters would have the Lord saying, "Well, maybe I don't want anything to do with the church," because, let's face it, the response hasn't been that good. But that's hardly the case. He is preparing a place for you and me, and every day you live, you get one step closer to that being a reality. It's going to be one generation - and I hope it's us - that can beat death and pass into the glories of God without going through the gates of death, if you will.

Up to now, the focus has been upon the Church Age - Jesus' words to the Church Age - that's when we're alive, that's what we're doing now. For the next two chapters, it'll be the church in heaven, the glory of God and His throne. And then fourteen chapters will follow that will speak of the devastation to come upon the earth when God's wrath is fully exercised and revealed. To those who would question where the church is during this time, here're the answers for you (besides many other places). When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, he said, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep," (die) "but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead" (in Christ) "will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." He uses the word "mystery." The word "mystery" literally means, in the New Testament, something that wasn't fully revealed in the Old Testament. It is alluded to, but it is fully explained here. So there's going to be a group that won't die, to become immortal. When the Lord comes at the rapture, the dead will rise, and they will get their glorified bodies. But you that are alive, or we that are alive, will be changed. "*Allasso*" is the word for transformed.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, and we, I think, went over that on Sunday mornings, he wrote and said (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17), "This we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." That word "caught up" is the word "*harpazo*." It comes from the Latin word "*raptus*," which means to snatch away violently or suddenly. And so why do we need a rapture? Well, the wrath of God is about to be poured out. His patience is exhausted. His time, and their time, has come, and God removes you from His wrath. 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Romans 5:9 both say the same thing - that God has delivered us and saved us from His wrath. He's not appointed

us to wrath. So when His wrath falls in judgment, you're taken out of the way because God has saved you and delivered you. And thank the Lord for that. He promises that, you remember, to the Philadelphian church in chapter 3:10. So praise the Lord that we're going to be delivered from God's judgment. Our blessed hope is the rapture of the church.

As we've been teaching - and we've kind of hit it a couple of times - you certainly don't want to confuse the rapture with the Second Coming: two extremely different events separated by seven years of time. The rapture of the church is in the air. It is out of sight. It comes upon the lost like a thief in the night. It is unexpected. It is unannounced, if you will. The Second Coming of Jesus will be to the earth. Every eye will see Him. And from the day of the rapture forward, the Bible tells us, in a hundred different places, we can count out the days and know the exact time of the Second Coming; but we just don't know when the rapture will be. That could be at any moment. That's what we should be preparing for and watching for. For us, the coming of Jesus in the rapture should not overtake us like a thief, the Bible says (1 Thessalonians 5:4). We should be ready. I hope you're ready. It could be tonight. How good would that be! Pastor Doug would like it. Go right there. Forget about gettin' better. Just get better all at once.

In Matthew 24:37-39, as Jesus is laying out to the disciples what constitutes the time of the end, the days of His coming for the church, He uses the example there, "As it was in the days of Noah, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark." Right up until the last minute! "And they did not know until the flood came and took them all away." And the Lord said, "So also will the coming of the Son of Man be." It'll catch people off guard. Look, Noah spent 120 years preaching; wasn't like this was a surprise. But no one listened. And then that day, though he had been telling them for that long, it was absolutely a surprise. The rapture will be as unexpected to the world as the Tribulation that they're about to face. It won't be expected at all. So it's not our point tonight, but if the rapture was at the end of the Tribulation, which is what many so-called scholars would want to tell you, then there wouldn't be business as usual; there would be these fourteen chapters of horror, and I think people would get it by then if the Lord hadn't come for His people. Judgment is coming without warning. In Luke 17:27-36, Jesus, in speaking to the same group of folks, made the illustration that it would be like it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. It says that in that day, "They were eating and marrying wives and giving in marriage until

the day that Noah entered into the ark." And then He went on, and He said like it was in the days of Sodom. In that day people were living like everything was fine. And then, as the LORD moved out those who were willing to follow Him - He tried to get Lot's family out, He tried to lead them out. But those that got out, when they got out, judgment fell. "In that day, two will be in bed: one will be taken, the other left. Two will be grinding in the fields: one will be taken, the other left." It'll be a time of tremendous - well, for the world - shock for sure.

So, "After these things." Ending now the Church Age, and coming to the end of the Church Age, we come to these words, "After these things." The Greek phrase is the word "*meta tauta*." It is the same term. In fact, the words "after this" and then "after these things" is a repeat, if you will, of those same terms. And then notice the word "the church." The word for church is "*ekklesia*." We found that word "the church" forever, over and over in chapters 2 and 3. I should tell you it isn't mentioned again, now, because the church has been taken out here in chapter 4, until you get to chapter 22. And then, in verse 16, you'll read about it again where it'll say Jesus said, "I have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches." Kind of like, "When all is said and done, here's what I'm telling you so that you'll know when it comes that it is coming." So the word "church," the "called-out ones," the "*ekklesia*," is not mentioned again here. You won't read anymore, "He who has ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" because the church, now, is gone. There's only a call to have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying in chapter 13:9 and the words "to the churches" are left off because the church is with the Lord in heaven.

So, from the beginning of chapter 4, you will only find the church in heaven with Jesus. We are no longer part of the earthly scene, and certainly the pre-Tribulation rapture, the taking of His saints out before the judgment of God falls, is the only biblical position that you should be taking. Note John says, here in verse 1, "I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven." I was interested to see that St. Peter wasn't standing by it. I've heard a lot of stories. I always thought that he was. It is the only time that we will see this door open in heaven until you get to chapter 19:11, when the door is open for Jesus to come riding through on a white horse to bring judgment along with you, His saints. So, for a moment the door is open - the door into the very presence of Almighty God, to the throne room of God, into heaven itself. Imagine that! John must have been freakin' out. I don't know. I think I would have been. And notice how he gets there. The first voice which he hears is "like a trumpet." Now John had heard

that same trumpet voice in chapter 1:10 where he identified the voice as none other than that of Jesus. So that cross reference that we read tonight where "the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with a trumpet," all of the symbolism is certainly there. And notice the invitation, " 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.' " After what? Well after the Church Age of chapter 2 and chapter 3. I mean, we're waiting to hear the trumpet sound now. We want to hear these words, "Come up here, and let Me show you what's coming next," when we get out of here and the Lord begins to pour out His judgment. So with that, John enters into the heavenly scene. And, like I said, you should pay particular attention because you're going to be here, and you want to act like you've read ahead.

Verse 2, John said, "Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne." Now John is obviously transported in a trance, in a vision, if you will. You see the same thing in chapter 1:10; we'll see it again in chapter 17:3, that the Lord just takes John away in a spiritual sense. And he is given this second vision - one of many - but this one about heaven itself. And notice the word "behold" because I think we've pointed it out to you - you find it a lot in the gospels. But the word "behold" in Greek means, "Hey, check this out, this is very unusual," or, "Look at this very odd situation, it stands out." Whatever you're being asked to look at is something that takes your breath away. This time it is a throne set in heaven. And notice that the first thing that John's eye is attracted to is the throne itself and the Person who is sitting on it. When Paul was taken into the third heaven - remember when we think maybe when he was left for dead outside of Lystra (Acts 14) - he writes about it in 2 Corinthians 12:4, and when he was asked about it, he said, "I think it would be a sin, almost like a crime, if I would try to put into words what I saw there." So he didn't say anything. John is given maybe the unenviable task, according to chapter 1:19, of writing down everything he sees. So he's got a challenge from the Lord to write what he sees. But Paul felt, having seen the same thing, that there was no way that he could write out what he viewed, however long or whatever time he spent there with the Lord. Everything, though, that is connected to heaven's experience - if you've read this for yourself - seems very strange. It's very unpredictable. It's almost like you're out of your own depth. "What am I doin' here?" you know. We relate to Jesus in a body as we study. We even are comfortable with similes that describe Jesus as a lion, and somehow we don't really think He's really a lion. But we understand the comparisons. But here, things are very strange. It almost looks like a foreign country, very far removed from our present experience, certainly.

And he focuses on "One that sat upon the throne." Now, according to chapter 5:7, the One who sat on the throne was the Father. It is the Father in view here in this chapter. Jesus sits at His right hand.

If you are good at prepositional phrases, in verse 2, it is the Father sitting on the throne. In verses 3, 4 and 6, it is a reference to those sitting around the throne. In verse 5, it is that which comes from the throne. In verses 5 and 6, it is that which sits before the throne. And then you have the comment in the midst of the throne. So everything revolves around that place where the Father sits in glory. And, like I said, those prepositional phrases kind of talk you through it. There are only two other portions of Scripture that speak of the vision of the throne of God at all, with more than just one comment verse or something that you wouldn't really learn much from: that is in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 and 10. Actually, there are three chapters; two books, I should say. Both of them would help verify, explain and, I think, make clearer even what we read here. So if you'll write those in your margin, or I'm sure they're in your notes there, that will help you, I think, when you go to study.

We are told in verse 3 by John, as he noticed the Father on the throne, "And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald." Now I just want to point out to you again and again the word "like" is a simile or metaphor term. It means this is what John compared what he saw to. Similes tend to be used in the Bible to explain what you cannot see by comparing it to things that you understand. It's certainly like that in the parables as well. So John was taken by the magnificent, the glorious kinds of colors that he saw when he looked at the throne of God.

And he said he saw, first of all, that the throne was "like a jasper stone." We will read about the jasper stone in Revelation 21:11, and we will read there that it is "clear as crystal." So John saw what looked like a stone, but it had great clarity. The sardius stone is blood red in appearance. So that stuck out to John, too. If you go to the Old Testament - and because everything is written by the Lord, it has to fit together - if you read about the breastplate of the high priest, you know that in the front of his breastplate were twelve stones; they represented the twelve tribes of Israel. They were put there by direction from the LORD. They were made according to what He suggested. He told them that everything around that would really be a reflection of heaven, the worship and all. And so it was

intended to have the priest have on his heart the people of God and then go before the people of God to represent the LORD to the people. It was just that built-in reminder. So, if you go to Exodus 28, the sardius stone was the first one placed in the breastplate. The jasper stone was the last one. And it represented, like I said, the sons of Israel. So the two stones represented were Reuben, who was the firstborn, and Benjamin, who was the last. So, if you will, it's kind of inclusive of all of the people of God, if you will. Reuben means "behold, I have a son." Benjamin means "this is the son of my right hand." Both of them, in a prophetic or in a veiled sense, refer to Jesus - both in His birth and in His place. So John comes, and he sees these two stones. They stand out to him. We can take meanings from them based on what we read in the Old Testament. Can't really assign more to them that what we have in the Bible.

And then he also noticed this rainbow, but this time it was around the throne, and it seemed to have an emerald, a green, kind of hue. You remember from Genesis 9 that the rainbow was a visible sign of God's covenant with the people that He would never again destroy the earth in a flood. So here it encircles. It says the words "around the throne," and perhaps it speaks of that completed covenant. God has been faithful. He said He wouldn't, and He didn't. This next judgment will come by fire according to 2 Peter 3. Usually a rainbow shows up after a storm, but this one is found in the presence of God before judgment is falling. So God's mercy, even when He's in His wrath.....what is that Scripture in Habakkuk that says, "in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2). And I suspect that God was merciful to man. He didn't destroy again. Beautiful picture.

Well then we read, in verse 4, these words, "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads." Who does that sound like to you? Folks wearing white robes with crowns on their heads in God's presence. Right. It is no doubt the church. In both Jewish and Christian history, elders were the ones who had the spiritual responsibility for the congregation or for the people. In the Old Testament, some elders functioned as priests; others brought worship to the people and led them before the LORD; others came to teach the Word of God to them. And they were all referred to as elders, if you will. In the New Testament, all believers are called priests to the Lord, kingdoms of priests, while there are elders or pastors or shepherds over the flock to feed and to lead, to care for.

In Revelation 7 - and we won't get there, obviously, tonight - one of the elders will speak to John about the Tribulation saints, those that are dying upon the earth for their faith, refusing to take the mark of the beast and having to give their life to walk with Jesus. In Revelation 7:13, one of the elders says to John, " 'Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?' And John says, 'Sir, you know.' " Humble John, man. He's not makin' any guesses anymore. "So he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' " So these elders cannot represent the Tribulation saints, and you should know that, in Bible prophecy, the church is unique. They are treated differently than any other portion of those believers. They are categorized, in the Bible, Old Testament saints, the church, Tribulation saints, and God treats them and deals with them differently. But you're the ones that are promised to be able to rule and reign with Christ. So, these are not angels because they'll be listed in chapter 7:11, where the angels stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. So they're listed independently. So you can't make these twenty-four elders the angels, if you will, and you certainly can't make them the Tribulation saints. Neither can you say, "Well, they represent Israel" because Israel, in the Tribulation time, is represented by 144,000 - 12,000 from each tribe bearing witness to the things of God. Also, there'll be two other representatives who will, for a good portion of the 3½ years, be a witness to the nation that God will use in a mighty way. During this time, national Israel will be persecuted by Satan, as many of the Old Testament prophets have portrayed. So, when you try to eliminate who this is not, certainly the only group that it can represent is the church. They are no longer found on the earth. It has been Jesus' promise to deliver us, verse 10 of chapter 3; to clothe us in white, that we can sit with Him on His throne; and we can rule and reign with Him when He returns.

The question then becomes - well, why twenty-four? What does twenty-four mean? And I can give you a couple thoughts. Some say, Bible scholars (and I'm not one), that the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles upon whom the church was established as their testimony adds up to this number twenty-four so that it represents the entire church - Gentiles, Jews, everyone who, during the Church Age, gave their life to Christ; combining the Old and the New Covenant. That could certainly be the case. There is a verse in chapter 21 of Revelation which reads this, "Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them," (this is the New Jerusalem) "which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on

the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (verses 12-14). So that's usually the proof text that they use to say it's representative of the number twenty-four of all that Old and New Testament saints, if you will - those who believed in Christ. And that's.....I'm all right with that. That's all the verses that we have. Does the number twenty-four represent completeness everywhere else in the Bible? And, again, I said to you when we started the book of Revelation, I'm not much for guessing, and I don't like theorizing. If I don't know, I'll be happy to tell you. So I'm just telling you this is the support that we have for what twenty-four means. You can do with it what you want. I just know there'll be twenty-four elders, and I'm sure that they're representing the church. But beyond that.....we do read in 1 Chronicles 24.....that must be a sign.....(Pastor Jack laughs).....it isn't. It's like Bible roulette, I think. There's a listing of the division of the priests who came from the line of Aaron. His son, Eleazar, had sixteen heads of priestly families. His other son, Ithamar, had eight. There was a total of twenty-four. If you read through 1 Chronicles 24, you'll get the names of the twenty-four subdivisions and how they would serve at the Temple in their order to fully represent the entire priesthood, serving the LORD. So that's one place that the number is used. In chapter 25 of 1 Chronicles - Pastor Gerard could tell you - there are all of the musicians that are listed there to serve the LORD in like passion, and there were way too many skilled musicians to serve the LORD all at one time. In fact we're told that there were 288 of them. And so to solve the equation, they broke the groups into twenty-four divisions of singers and musicians and all, and they added it to the twenty-four divisions of priests. So everybody got their own worship team and went out to serve the LORD; every group had its own band, so to speak. So, a group of twenty-four priests, a group of twenty-four musicians and singers, yet they're just referred to everywhere else as the twenty-four, and it means to say here's everyone that's serving. So I'm not uncomfortable using the word "twenty-four" to represent the whole church family: those who were Jewish and came to Christ, those who were Gentile and came to Christ - Jew and Gentile together.

Additionally, we can get some help in the next chapter, especially in chapter 5, when you look at the singing of the song and you ask yourself who can sing this song. And you determine immediately that "the Lord has saved us by His blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." In other words, the church and the gospel reaches everywhere - across every denominational, ethnic and racial

line. So that would support the idea of the twenty-four being the Jews and the Gentiles all coming to Christ. In Daniel 12 - I know I'm throwing a lot of verses at you and hope you're writing them down or at least following along in your notes; that's why we gave them to you - it talks about the Old Testament saints receiving their new bodies. When does the church get it? At the rapture. Right? The dead in Christ shall rise, and then we'll be changed. The Old Testament saints get their body at the end of the Tribulation. So there'll be some saints in heaven without glorified bodies, but they'll be Old Testament saints. The church is unique. So here these twenty-four, notice, are already clothed. That may help you as well. Their bodily resurrection is past, the Church Age is unique, and, like I said, we get our bodies at the rapture. One other thing - try to confuse you even more - neither Isaiah nor Ezekiel, in their vision for heaven, sees these twenty-four elders at all. They see everything else, but they leave these twenty-four off which reason would say, since Jesus did not yet die and had not yet risen, and the Old Testament believers were not gathered in heaven in Abraham's bosom awaiting the Lord to come and open the gates, that there was not entrance into heaven, that the church hasn't been born, that makes sense then, that we don't see them in the vision by these Old Testament prophets. That and the fact that they have white robes - white as snow - and they have crowns of gold. These twenty-four representing the church have crowns of gold. There're basically two words for "crowns" in Greek. Actually there're a bunch of them but two that are most often used. The one is called "*diadem*." A "*diadem*" is a crown of governments. If I'm in charge, I'm the leader, I have a crown that says I'm the king or the queen or whoever it might be. And then there's the crown called "*stephanos*," and "*stephanos*" was really just a leaf, a garland, a wreath given to athletes in the Olympic Games to say, "Hey, you won the race." It's a crown of victory. So interesting things that we see at the very beginning here. Sitting on the throne, clothed in white, wearing crowns of victory - promised by the Lord, by the way, to the church in chapter 3:21, chapter 3:5, chapter 2:10. Go back and read these letters to the churches. They were promised this crown, this "*stephanos*," if they would be faithful to the end. Paul will tell the Corinthians that the church will judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2). So it is our conclusion, certainly, that these twenty-four elders represent the church, and I'm comfortable with the meaning of the word "twenty-four" based on what we can find in the Scriptures. I don't think you have to believe that to go to heaven. But from the day of Pentecost until the day of the rapture, Jews and Gentiles came to Christ, individually.

All right. Verse 5, "And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices." That doesn't sound exciting, does it? All of that displays what? God's power, God's presence, God's.....I think He's warming up for judgment. You see the very same thing, if you've read through the Old Testament, at Mount Sinai when the LORD meets with His people in the wilderness to show them who He is, to give them the directions on how to build a place of worship, and He gives them the Law, and He sets up the priesthood. You will read there in no uncertain terms, on the third day in the morning, as the people got up, six weeks out of Egypt, traveling to Mount Sinai, they woke up to thunder and lightning and thick clouds and trumpets very loud, and the whole place trembled, and it was filled with smoke, and it quaked greatly, and there was a long blast, and it got louder and louder, and then the LORD said, "Tell the people to stay back. I'm the LORD." And that would have done it for me. And I think that's the same God that we see here, sitting upon the throne, the One that they met with there in the wilderness in the book of Exodus, chapter 19. So, fitting that the storm clouds are about to go forward into an unbelieving world, and the throne of God, now, His cup has overflowed. Now judgment is coming. And so I think there's a warmup here, if you will.

We read, at the end of verse 5, "Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." The Holy Spirit was mentioned in John's introduction in chapter 1:4, was seen at work in the churches: "if you hear what the Spirit is saying to the church, listen." We've seen that the number seven is the number of completeness. We went over that in great detail in chapter 3. The Father on the throne, the Son at His right hand, and the Holy Spirit there to do His work - the tri-unity of God. The word "trinity" is not in the Bible, but it does speak of God, the triune God. In both Exodus 25 and Hebrews 9, we read about the tabernacle and everything in it, and we are told more than once that the tabernacle was an exact replica in miniature of what heaven would be like. And so you go there to try to understand what you're reading here and in other places, and we read about a seven-pronged candlestick that the priest would rely upon. It was the only light in the holy place, that place outside the Holy of Holies where the priest would come to do his work. And it was a reference and obviously a dependence upon the light that the Holy Spirit would come to give to the work of the priest. You can read in Isaiah 11 about the seven Spirits of God, but it described, really, the Holy Spirit's character as being God-like and being God Himself. And so no doubt this is a reference to the power of the Holy Spirit in all of His fullness.

In verse 6 we read, "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal." Notice the word "like" again. "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back." Before the throne like glass. You will read in chapter 15:2 this same reference to God's throne. This time, though, in chapter 15 it is "mingled with fire." The Tribulation saints will stand on it (in chapter 15) with harps in their hands, worshipping the King. In Exodus 24:10, Moses and Aaron and his sons had a vision of heaven that was very similar but not as defined. So this sea of glass is, by position, analogous, I think, to the sea of brass that you find at the tabernacle, later at the Temple. The brass or bronze lavers in the Old Testament were places that the priests would have to go wash before they came into the presence of God - wash their sin, wash their failures, admit that they weren't ready to stand before God. Cleansing was always necessary. But here in heaven, notice the basin is clear. All sin has been removed. Access to God has been afforded those who believed in Him. Jesus has made it clear. And so John sees the glass all right, but he says "like crystal." There're no impurities in it whatsoever.

So then we read, in verse 6 in the middle, about these four living creatures who had eyes in the front and in the back. Verse 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. 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!' " These four living creatures are mentioned several times in the book of Revelation. We'll see them again in chapter 5 three different times; later in chapter 6 it'll be they who invite John to come and see as the first four seals of the scroll (that we're going to read about next week) will be taken in Jesus' hands and removed - the scroll of judgment and this title deed, if you will, that the Lord... it all belongs to Him; He's purchased it with His own blood. So when these four seals are removed, it is these four living creatures that say to John, "Come and see," and another vision is given to him as the four horsemen of the apocalypse go forward to begin to bring the judgment against man.

Notice the description of these things is pretty unique. They are full of eyes - in the front, in the back, and within. The word "like" again is a simile, so one of them looked like a lion, one looked like a calf, one had the face of a man, the other had a flying eagle. Six wings they had; more eyes - he would say it again - within. They don't rest, they don't sleep, they're awake night and day. And their job, their

ministry, is singing about the holiness, the uniqueness, the exclusivity of God. The word "holy" means to be set apart. There's no one like God. And that's kind of their ministry, and you'll hear its sounds day and night. Because of the word "like" in comparative language, you don't want to take this literally. And I guess just reading the description, I guess we're glad we don't have to. The descriptions of these four living creatures are very similar in the book of Ezekiel, in chapter 1 and in chapter 10, who sit around the throne of God. But in Ezekiel, they're called cherubim, and the only difference is they have four wings, not six. But other than that, they seem to have the same look. In Isaiah 6 - Isaiah's vision of heaven - they're called seraphim (at least in Hebrew), and they have six wings. And so it does appear that these are two classes of angels, high-ranking, exalted angels that sit around the throne. In Isaiah, these seraphim are stationary; they don't move. In Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, they seem to move around like a chariot; just kind of hover around the throne, and they're not in one place. I think surround sound. Worship. From all of these verses that we can combine together, it does seem that these high-ranking offices are held by angels, and they all have to do with worship.

The first time, by the way, we meet a cherubim is in the book of Genesis. You might remember when the LORD told Adam and Eve and He put them out of the garden because of their sin, that He placed an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance to the garden lest man in his sin would eat of the tree of life and have to live eternally in sin (Genesis 3). So God protected the tree of life from man in his sin partaking of them. And we read of these cherubim who stood there to protect, if you will, the tree. No doubt these many eyes would talk about insight or awareness. The fact that they never sleep and they just proclaim God's goodness and mercy is interesting to me. It's going to be quite a place, heaven, I think. I don't think you can ever say enough how good your God is.

What do the faces mean? I can only think aloud with you when God doesn't clearly say. We're left a little bit to wonder, and, again, I'll give you the best guesstimates of Bible scholars, and I'll let you do with it what you want. I'm not going to say this is unilaterally what I believe the case is as the rapture, for example. In Ezekiel's account, chapter 10, these four faces that you read about here, he sees as well. Many commentators believe that they are portraits of Jesus as seen in the four gospels, that represent the Lord in the gospels. Matthew portrays Jesus to the Jews; the letter is to the Jews. There are more Old Testament quotes in the book of Matthew than the other three gospels combined. So to Matthew, Jesus is the

Lion of the tribe of Judah. He takes the Old Testament and presents the New Testament reality to it, if you will. Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant, the calf, if you will. Luke portrays Jesus as the Son of Man. He goes out of his way to tell you Jesus is tired, and He's thirsty, He needs some rest, traveled for a long way. He speaks about the human nature, the human side, if you will, of Christ, and His experiences. So the Son of Man. And then John describes Jesus as the Son of God. He looks at the divine side, the eagle, if you will, that speaks in the Bible often of divinity.

Other people see these four pictures as the encampments of Israel around the tabernacle. I know those are quite distinct. The tents were arranged by the LORD in order. But interestingly enough, the first three tribes on one side were called Judah the lion. The next three were named for Ephraim, the ox. The other side, three of them, Reuben is the name for man. And the last three were named the tribe of Dan, which is represented by the eagle. So both of those certainly fit biblically. Listen to what I'm going to say now: your guess is as good as mine. I don't have enough biblical information to tell you one's right and the other's not. I like both of them. I want to just go to heaven and understand what the Lord wants me to know about Him. I know that it is important. If it was more important for the Lord for me to know all of this now, I probably could find some more verses. They're not here.

So I do know that Satan was the chief cherub that covered, according to Isaiah. In other words, of all of these living creatures, there was one - Satan - who led in worship, who was the one that the LORD gave the position closest to the throne. He was the fellow that could have been and was not. He decided he'd rather try to be like God. And you can read about him there in Ezekiel 28. In the tabernacle's Holy of Holies, there was a mercy seat, a lid on top of a box that held the Ark of the Covenant in which was the Law. On top of this lid, the mercy seat, there were two cherubim with wings made of pure gold that covered their bodies, really, and kind of covered the box itself. When, on the Day of Atonement, the blood was brought into the Holy of Holies to be poured out before the LORD for the sins of the people, that blood was poured on that lid in between these two cherubim overlooking that place of sacrifice, covering a box that had in it the Law that the people broke, which required, then, salvation for them. And the LORD brought it in the form of His broken body. So you can read about that lid and those cherubim in Exodus 25. But here, in heaven, the cherubim, the seraphim, if you will, watch and worship Almighty God, and we will see them in heaven one day and learn clearly

what they are all about. But we know this is heaven because we see these weird looking, higher, angelic beings, and we aren't given much information about them other than they might very much.....again, before the throne of God represents the nation that He chose and the church that He saved. And that's the best I can do for you. I really don't know what else to tell you.

We are told, in verse 8, like I said, that these four living creatures focus their attention on the holiness and on the power and on the eternal nature of God. That repetition of "holy" emphasizes how separate from all God is. He is Almighty. He was. He is. He is eternal. He is to come. By the way, those same words were applied to Jesus in chapter 1:8. So to the Father and to the Son, one God.

Verse 9 tells us, "Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever," whenever they started tuning up, "the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.'" So, as the four begin to sing, the twenty-four begin to fall on their faces. The church goes down. Be ready now. When you hear the tunin' up, you go down, okay? Don't stand up. Don't look silly. Don't embarrass us. And they take their crowns off. Isn't it great? I have victory, but the victory is because of You. You know? You're going to cast your crowns before the Lord and just acknowledge that all that you are and all that you have has come from His grace. And you're going to join in the worship as well. And notice that this song, although we'll get to a larger one next week or maybe two weeks from now, recognizes that He's the Lord as Creator, that His will is behind everything that takes place, and that He is a Redeemer of everyone who will look to Him. "By Your will they exist. You created them all. And for Your will they are created." Apparently there are no evolutionists in heaven. They couldn't sing that verse. So, if you're an evolutionist, practice. I love the picture of the church, right? No longer on the earth, no longer goin' through it. "Come up here, and I'm going to show you what's goin' on after this." And here we go.....through an open door, kneeling and falling on our faces which reinforces the position of our hearts. Casting our crowns before the Lord. God, You've given us victory. It's Your victory that gives us life. You are worthy to receive glory. You're the only One. And as the angel said, "You alone are Almighty God," we just join in, and yes, You are, indeed.

Next week, five verses. If you just read through to verse 5, we're going to stop next week with a weeping over the fact that no one is there to open the scroll. But, like I said, learn about heaven, listen for the trumpet. What're you gonna hear? "Come up here! I'm gonna show you what comes next." You ready? Man, I hope the Lord comes tonight.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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