

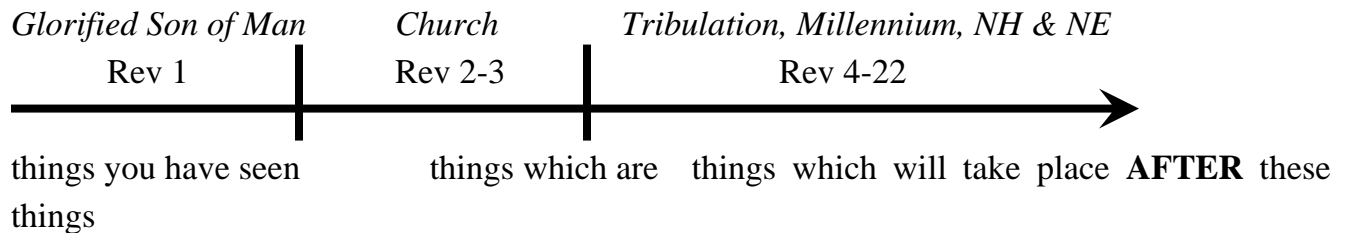
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**A0527 – July 3, 2005 – Revelation 4:1-6 – The Throne Room of God**

We are in the transition between Rev 3 and 4. Last week we took the time to ask and answer some important questions in light of the phrase **after these things** used in Rev 4:1 twice. We concluded that the first of these phrases refers simply to the sequential vision that John is seeing. However, we concluded that the last of these phrases refers to the actual sequence of events that will transpire in God’s prescribed history.

It is important to recognize the sovereignty of God in these events. Under the decree of God all events are included, even the free choices of responsible men. God is in control yet man is held responsible for his choices. Nothing, however, can alter God’s plan. The present history has a definite starting point and a definite ending point. The means to these ends are also included in the decree of God.

Now, returning to the second use of the phrase **after these things** in 4:1. It is obvious that John uses this phrase to connect back to the exact same phrase used in Rev 1:19. Rev 1:19 is a key verse in the Apocalypse because it gives us a 3-Fold Outline of Revelation.



What this demonstrates is that the Church will be completed *before* the Tribulation. This means that we should not expect to find the Church on earth during the Tribulation. And that is precisely what we found. She is mentioned numerous times in chapters 1-3 but then she is not mentioned again until chapter 22. Where then is the church during the

Tribulation? She is found to be in heaven as represented by the 24 elders in chapters 4-19 and as the bride and wife of the Lamb returning to earth in chapters 19 and in the NH and NE in chapter 21.

The reason for her earthly absence during this time of unparalleled destruction is because of the 70 Weeks of Daniel 9. The 70 Weeks are a calendar of 490 years that was decreed for Daniel's people and Daniel's holy city (Dan 9:24). Thus, the events of this period of 490 years only concern Israel and Jerusalem. The Church is never put on calendar time. Instead her destiny at the rapture can take place at-any-time. Therefore, the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel has nothing to do with the Church. The Church itself did not begin until *after* the first 69 weeks at the Triumphal Entry and will end *before* the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week when the Antichrist signs a firm covenant with Israel. We are not on calendar time.



In confirmation of this where do we find Israel during the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel? Israel is on calendar time and therefore she's on earth during the 70<sup>th</sup> Week. One of God's major purposes of the Tribulation is to purge the hardened hearts of Israel to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. When this takes place Jesus the Messiah will return to earth with His bride, the Church, to fulfill Israel's unconditional covenants (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New).

This all fits with the concept that God has two peoples with two distinct programs in His one eternal plan. The facts of history show that God has miraculously protected the identity of the Jewish people even when they had no homeland. This is impossible without God. Every other nation that has ever lost its homeland has lost its identity by intermarrying with other people groups. But twice in history Israel has been without a homeland and through it all she has retained her identity as a distinct people group. Who is in control of history? This is one reason the world hates Israel. They hate her because she won't go away. This is one reason the Palestinians are not interested in a state alongside of Israel (Roadmap) but would rather push Israel right into the Mediterranean Sea. They have never asked for a state and they don't want a state. What they want is

Israel destroyed. The world is going come to the point of saying that “if Israel is not destroyed we cannot have peace. Therefore, the answer to the world’s problems is the total annihilation of the Jews”. Most of the world already thinks that the problem is the Jewish people. Historically, there have been several tactics used to annihilate the Jews but none of them have worked. Interestingly, God has revealed that there is one way to annihilate the Jews. It’s found in Jer 31

**Jeremiah 31:35-36** Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: <sup>36</sup> "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever."

What one would have to do to destroy the nation of Israel is take an arsenal of nuclear weapons and fire them into space *and* be successful at destroying the sun, the moon, and every star in space. If that happens then Israel will cease being a nation. Therefore, you can see that this will never happen. Who is in control of history?

In contrast to the nation of Israel we have the Church, began on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came down from heaven and began His ministry of Spirit baptism which put people in the body of Christ, the Church. This body of believers will be raptured *before* the Tribulation in keeping with the sequence of events in Revelation and in keeping with the truth that the church is not destined for wrath (1 Thess 1:10, 4:13-18; 5:9-10; Rev 3:10) and with the fact that there are no signs preceding the rapture. If just one event *must* happen before the rapture then it is no longer an imminent event. Something may happen before but nothing must happen before. No one knows when it will happen because the church is not on calendar time.

JOHN’S 2<sup>ND</sup> ECSTATIC VISION (4:1-2)

Now, let’s turn to Rev 4, a chapter that should be called “The Throne Room of God”. We are being transported from the earthly vision of Christ walking among the seven churches to a heavenly vision of the “Throne Room of God”. The word "throne" is used 14 times in chapter 4 (Rev 4:2 (2x), 3, 4 (3x), 5 (2x), 6 (3x), 9, 10 (2x)) making it the central theme of chapter 4.

***Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."***

First, John **looked, and behold, a door open in heaven**. John is seeing an **open door in heaven**. The Bible makes mention of 3 heavens. This **door** is located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> **heaven**.

1. The Atmospheric Heaven. This is where the birds fly and the clouds form (Gen 1:8, 20)
2. The Starry Heaven. This is where the planetary and solar bodies reside (Dt 10:22)
3. The Highest Heaven, what the Hebrews new as the *shamayim shamayim* or "highest heaven". This heaven is beyond the Atmospheric and Starry Heavens. The throne room of God is located here. When Christ ascended He went to this 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven. Paul says, I knew a man who was caught up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven. And Satan and the Demons have access to this heaven until the middle of the Tribulation (Dt 10:14; 2 Cor 12:2; Heb 4:14; Rev 12:7-12)

John is being taken through a special **door** located in this 3<sup>rd</sup> **heaven**, the highest **heaven** so that he will have a new vantage point for the vision which follows.

After seeing this **open door** John hears **the first voice which he had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with him**. In other words, this is the same voice John heard in Rev 1:10.

**Revelation 1:10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet,

**Revelation 4:1** and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said,

In chapter 1:10 this voice was the voice of the Son of Man. There is no doubt that this voice is also the voice of the Son of Man. Son of Man is a term that means “the Son related to mankind” and it always has reference to Israel and the Messiah’s earthly reign as in Dan 7. The **voice** of the Son of Man is **like a trumpet** which means it comes with a note of authority. And the authoritative **voice** says “**Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.**” First of all, some have seen in this upward call a figure of the pre-Trib Rapture. There are three reasons for not making this identification. First of all, John is taken in spirit while his body remains on earth (4:2). At the pre-Trib Rapture believers bodies will not remain on earth. Second, Jesus does not descend to meet John in the air but instead calls him directly to heaven. At the pre-Trib Rapture Jesus will descend from heaven to meet believers in the air before taking them back to heaven. Third, John accesses heaven through a door but at the pre-Trib Rapture there is no mention of a door through which believers must pass into heaven. However, even with these differences there are some similarities with the pre-Trib Rapture. Not only is John called to **come up here** in this verse but the Son of Man gives the reason John must **come up** to heaven. The reason is so that the Son of Man **will show** John **what must take place after these things**. The air of certainty is what should grab your attention. What John will see in vision **must take place**. Again, I ask you, “who is in control of history?” The events which begin in Rev 6 **must take place**. This means they are fixed events. And finally they **must take place after these things** which means they **must take place after** the church age has run to completion. The phrase *meta tauta* also carries a sense of immediacy so that **these things** will take place immediately **after** the church has run its course. If there is a gap of time between chapters 3 and 4 it is only to transfer John from his first to his second vision.

***Revelation 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.***

In verse 2 John is **immediately...in the spirit**. This is not the **Holy Spirit** but in his human **spirit**. This is just like John’s first vision in 1:10. What this means is that John’s human **spirit** enters a state of heightened acuity and awareness. His spirit is able to see and hear as if his physical body was in heaven but in all actuality his body remained on the Isle of Patmos. John’s human spirit was instantly transferred from his earthly body to **heaven**. The word **behold** marks the beginning of the second vision. The first thing John sees is **a throne standing in heaven**. As mentioned before the **throne** is the central to the chapter. The word **throne** is used 13 times in this chapter and eleven of these refer to the **throne** of God. This heavenly **throne** is a part of the heavenly temple that is mentioned several times in Revelation. It is also in the presence of the golden altar of incense and

the ark of the covenant (Rev 8:3; 11:19). Therefore, John is inside the heavenly temple within the **throne** room of God. Some have noted that the verb **was standing**, being in the imperfect tense, denotes that this **throne** is being erected and is not the Father's throne but a **throne** of judgment erected specifically for the purpose of releasing the terrible Tribulation judgments. This however is doubtful because the **One sitting on the throne** is not the **Lamb of God** but God the Father. We know this because the **One sitting on the throne** is distinguished from the **Lamb of God** in Rev 5:5 and 7. The reason John does not give us a more distinct description is probably because it is impossible to express in a word the awesomeness of this Person (Alford). The main objective of John is to portray the fullness of the glory of God.

#### THE ONE ON THE THRONE (4:3)

*Revelation 4:3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.*

Two ancient stones are used to describe the Father's **appearance**. Identification of these stones is limited because of our ignorance of ancient geology vocabulary. It seems that the ancient **jasper stone** is best described by its use in Rev 21:11 where it represents a watery crystalline brightness. This is not the modern opaque jasper but a crystal clear stone, perhaps a diamond. The second ancient stone is the **sardius**. This was a fiery red stone. What do these two **stones** symbolize? They symbolize two attributes of God. The **jasper** symbolizes God's holiness and the **sardius** symbolizes God's justice. It is a mixture of white light with fire, a dramatic picture "of His anger because of His holy nature reacting in response to the prevailing sinfulness of mankind, resulting in the judgment He is about to send upon the earth" (Smith). God's holy nature has been continually violated by sinful humanity. His fiery judgments are about to rain down. Third, we see **a rainbow around the throne**. This calls to mind the **rainbow** that is a sign of the Noahic Covenant where God promised that He would never again destroy all flesh as He had done in the Noahic Flood. Although the judgments will be extremely severe some will survive. Incidentally, if the 70<sup>th</sup> Week was not limited to seven years all flesh would have been destroyed (Matt 24:22). The **rainbow** here is an *iris* which is a circular **rainbow**. When we see a **rainbow** from ground level they appear to have a beginning and an end and therefore look like a **bow** pointing upward but many an airplane pilot have seen **rainbows** from the vantage point of the sky and attest to the circular nature of many **rainbows**. This is a circular **rainbow**, having neither beginning nor end but wrapping **around the throne** of God. This **rainbow** does not have seven

colors (ROYGBIV) but is **emerald** in appearance. The **emerald** color symbolizes the grace and mercy of God. He ever remembers the covenant He made with Noah and all flesh so that He will pour out His mercy by not destroying all mankind with the severe judgments.

#### THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS AROUND THE THRONE (4:4)

*Revelation 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.*

**Around the throne were 24 thrones; and upon the thrones John saw 24 elders.** The identification of these **24 elders** has been debated, particularly in the last 100 years. The word for **elders** is *presbuteros*. This word was originally used of an older man. It came to be an office in Judaism and later in Christianity. The two chief interpretations of the **24 elders** are that they are angels or men. It is my contention that they are redeemed men who represent the church. There are numerous reasons for this, I will give you four.

1. The majority of manuscripts indicate that they sing of their redemption in Rev 5:9-10 (KJV; NKJV; Maj Text; Robinson-Pierpont 1995). Angels are never said to be redeemed so they could not be singing of their redemption.
2. They are clothed in “white garments”. In the letter to Sardis, overcomers were promised white garments (Rev 3:5).
3. They are wearing golden crowns. These crowns are *stephanos* crowns which symbolize victory. Angels are never said to wear victory crowns but believers have been victorious over the satanic world system and as a result receive victory crowns. Additionally, in the letter to Smyrna, overcomers were promised a “crown” (Rev 2:10).
4. Angels are never referred to as “elders”.<sup>i</sup>

There are other reasons but these should suffice to identify these **24 elders** as redeemed men. Their absence from any other portion of the word of God and the Church’s absence from earth signify that they are representatives of the Church who has been taken to heaven and from among them **24** representatives have been placed on **24 thrones**. The **white garments** do not represent imputed righteousness but the “righteous acts of the” church saints. The **golden crowns** are the rewards earned for living by the Spirit on earth. The fact that they are already **clothed in white garments and** are wearing **golden crowns** demonstrates that the judgment seat of Christ has already taken place (cf 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 3:6-15). The fact that these **24 elders** fall down and “cast their crowns”

before the throne (Rev 4:10) signifies that they recognize that God was the cause of their righteous acts (1 Cor 3:6) while in the body.

JUDGMENT COMES FORTH FROM THE THRONE (4:5-6a)

*Revelation 4:5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;*

**Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.** The fact that these come **out from the throne** is a reverent way of saying they have are coming from the One sitting on the **throne**. The **lightning and thunder** reminds us of the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai (Exod 19:16).

The **flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder** are visible and audible reminders that the **throne** is primarily a **throne** of wrath. These are not pleasant sights and sounds but terrible demonstrations of that which must take place on earth.

Secondly, John sees **seven lamps of fire burning before the throne**. Earlier, in chapter 1 we saw seven lampstands (*luchnias*) but these are seven **lamps** (*lampades*). The seven lampstands were used indoors and provided soft light but these are **seven torches of fire**. These **torches** were used outdoors and could withstand heavy gusts of wind. These emit a blazing flame of light not a soft, calm one. **Fire** symbolizes judgment in Revelation and these **torches** are no exception. God is prepared to judge the world. What do the **seven torches** represent? We do not have to guess. The text tells us they represent **the seven Spirits of God**. We learned in Rev 1:4 that the **seven Spirits of God** is a title of the Holy Spirit. The background of this imagery comes from Zech 4. **Fire** consumes and here the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a consuming **fire**. He goes forth to consume wickedness on the earth.

*Revelation 4:6 and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the midst and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.*

Notice John's description of that which is **before the throne**. He says **there was something like a sea of glass**. John had never seen anything like this on earth. It was hard to describe but it was something like a **sea** made out of **glass**. It was fluid but perfectly clear and perhaps impenetrable. It is also described as **like crystal**. This is one



of many descriptions that use the comparative adjective **like** (*homois*). When you see this word it means “similar to” but not “exactly”. Whatever this is **before the throne** it is **something like a sea** made of **glasslike crystal**. The word **crystal** comes from the word for “frost or ice” and refers to something crystal clear. Manufactured ice in the ancient world was not clear but opaque. Therefore, this is signifying extreme purity and high value. Therefore, this pictures the splendor and majesty of God on His throne” and sets “Him apart from all His creation, a separation” that stems “from His purity and absolute holiness”.<sup>ii</sup>

#### THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (4:6b)

*And in the midst and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.* The phrase **in the center...of the throne** signifies not that they were sitting in the center of the throne but **in the midst of the throne**. These creatures were in the immediate vicinity of the **throne** and they were **around the throne**. Not all placed on one side but one on each of the four sides of the **throne**. These **creatures** are closest to the **throne** sitting immediately **around** it and they offer worship to the One sitting on the throne. Although they are not described as moving here their description in Ezekiel 1:12 suggests that they are moving rapidly in a circular movement around the throne.

The **four living creatures**. Who or what are these **creatures**. They are **four** in number. They are **living** (*zoon*), a word that is often used of domestic or wild animals. But here they are not animals but angelic beings. They are very similar to the **four living creatures** described in Ezekiel 1:4-14, 9:3; 10:2ff, 20ff and they show some resemblance to the seraphim of Isa 6 with their many **eyes**. I have always found it interesting that angels are often described as animal parts. In some way this suggests that animals are made in the image of angels as man is made in the image of God. There is one God and one kind of man made in God’s image but there are many angels and many kinds of animals made in the image of these angels. The interesting thing about some angels is that they are a compilation of different parts of different angels. They are like a composite of several animals in one. Animals normally have some superior ability but the combination of different animal parts in one being gives angels superior abilities in many areas. The expression **full of eyes** signals supernatural intelligence and alertness. Nothing escapes their realm of judicial authority.

Today we have learned that John is entering his 2<sup>nd</sup> ecstatic vision. For this vision John’s human spirit is transported through a door into the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven. He is transported to this new location to see what must take place after the Church has been raptured. The first

thing John sees is the Father's throne. The Father is portrayed as holy and just and therefore He must judge the earth. Yet at the same time there is the circular rainbow around the throne that reminds us of the Noahic Covenant where God promised He would not destroy all flesh. Around the throne there are also 24 elders who are representatives of the Church which has already been to the judgment seat of Christ and rewarded. Out from the throne come terrible noises and sights signaling that this throne is a throne of wrath. Before the throne the Spirit of God is portrayed as a consuming fire, marked and ready to destroy wickedness. Finally, we see something like a sea of glass which signals God's purity and separation from the world. In the midst of the throne are 4 living creatures who are angels that move about in a circular motion around the throne. We will learn more about these creatures and their worship next week.

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<sup>i</sup> Objection to this argument (R. Thomas) is that the LXX version of Isa 24:23 uses *presbuteros* of angels. But these *presbuteros* are not angels but resurrected saints who will be present in the New Jerusalem, for in that day there will be no need of sun or moon to give light but the Lord God will illumine them (24:21 – Tribulation; 24:22 – Millennium; 24:23 – New Jerusalem).

<sup>ii</sup> Robert Thomas, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 353.

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