

Chapter 13

Around the Throne

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat 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. 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. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. (Revelation 3:2-5)

There is no greater place for a human creature to be than before the throne of God. It has become a common almost coined phrase for Christians, describing the state of a deceased loved one, to say that they are before the throne of God. In this world we cannot possibly imagine how glorious it will be to stand in this coveted place.

Revelation 4 begins a description of events taking place before the throne of God. Because of all the controversy it is necessary to talk about the rapture of the Church. Many believe that the first two verses of this chapter mark this monumental event. It is believed to be so because the sky (heaven) has opened up, the sound of a trumpet occurs and John is immediately taken up in vision from the meager and horrible conditions of the Isle of Patmos, and translated in spirit right before the very throne of God.

For many years I too believed this teaching. There are a few resemblances to the time spoken of throughout the New Testament when God will pull his people out of the deplorable conditions and persecutions of this world and translate them directly to Heaven. What bothered me over the years when teaching this doctrine was that nearly all who proclaimed to be experts on the subject also claimed that they were taking the literal approach to the interpretation of John's visions. Afterwards, in order to make their teaching fit, the events were spoken of as symbols of one thing or another. I couldn't help but wonder, "Where's the literal interpretation?" Too much spiritualization is required to support this teaching. This has been discussed in chapter 1 so from this point on I will be taking the assumption that the rapture has not taken place in Revelation chapter 4.

John has been caught up to the most coveted place in existence anywhere and anytime. A meeting in Heaven was taking place that was preparation for what was about to happen next and John had been called up to witness this event. I believe that we are so close to the time when these things will happen that this meeting could be occurring right now. John found himself standing in the throne room of Heaven and One was sitting on the throne.

Here's the scene: Around the throne are twenty-four elders, sitting wearing white robes with golden crowns atop their heads. From the throne issued lighting streaks, thunder, and voices. Seven lamps are burning in front of the throne and the Bible readily identifies these as the seven Spirits of God. The vast floor of the throne room is described as a sea of crystal glass. In the midst and around the throne are four living creatures having multiple eyes in front and back. The first creature is described as resembling a lion, the second a calf; the third has the face

of a man, and the fourth is like a flying eagle. All four of these living creatures have six wings and we are again told that they are full of eyes around them and within them. They do not rest, or sleep but day and night are in their place glorifying God. They say, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come*" (Revelation 4:8). We are then told that whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to the One sitting on the throne in this manner that the twenty-four elders fall down before Him, worship Him who is eternal, throw their crowns before the throne and say, "*You are worthy, O Lord, to receive honor, and glory, and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created*" (Revelation 4:11).

So quickly, in review, chapter four records the vision of John taken into Heaven where he witnesses the systematic praise of the twenty-four elders and four living creatures. We will attempt to identify these characters in the throne room scene without the aid of spiritualization. First, the twenty-four elders are only found in the Book of Revelation so there are no other cross references with which to identify them. I can only offer my best Biblical-educated guess, so don't take this as "gospel." In my opinion the number is twenty-four representing both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles. If this is the case then the elders represent God's people, made up of both His chosen race (Israel) and the Church. It does not mean that the Church has been raptured into Heaven but that those who have died and gone before are there. Again, this is my opinion. Some believe them to be representative of the angelic body in Heaven. Either could be true. The fact is that they are there before the throne of God. Besides in Revelation four and five, they are only mentioned five more times, in Revelation 7:11, 13, 11:16, 14:3 and 19:4. The only place they are not worshipping the One on the throne occurs in 7:13 where they asked John the questions, "What are these arrayed in white robes and where did they come from?" We will discuss the answers to these questions later.

Up until now we have not dealt with the Seven Spirits of God. This phrase appears only four times in the Bible, again, all in the Book of Revelation. Chapter one verse four tells us that these Seven Spirits of God are before the throne. In chapter three verse one the letter to the Church at Sardis is addressed from "He who has the Seven Spirits of God." Then here in chapter four verse five, the Seven Spirits of God are identified as being the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne. Finally, in chapter five the Seven Spirits of God are identified as the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb. Once again, without spiritualizing it is difficult to tell what is meant by this phrase.

In the New Testament, all but a couple of times the Greek word "Pneuma" is interpreted as "spirit." The other two times the word "Phantasma" is used referring to ghosts. This word "pneuma" most often refers to "The Spirit of God" or "The spirit of man." But it is also used as the "spirit" of something else, for instance, truth, slumber, word, meekness, faith, wisdom, grace, glory, error and antichrist. It is also used in saying "the spirit that now works through the children of disobedience" and "a quiet spirit." In all these cases the same word is used. So it not only refers to the Spirit of God and the human spirit but also the attitude or character of something else. Once again I'm giving you my opinion. I believe that the seven spirits of God refer to the seven dispensations, or the "ages" in which God dealt with man beginning with the time of innocence when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, right up until the time of eternal bliss when everything has been said and done and we are ever with the Lord. It isn't

seven spirits like the human spirit or the Spirit of God but seven airs, or attitudes – ways God felt when dealing with us. These were teaching times, all different, and all leading up to the fact that we must have Christ as our Savior. These times reflect both how God dealt with man and how man failed God. They were different ways wherein the Holy Spirit worked to show us that our morality, government, law, and conscience cannot be relied on to bring us back to God.

Then we have the four living creatures. These creatures are also described in Ezekiel 1:4-10 and Ezekiel 10:1-20. There they are identified as Cherubim. These angelic beings are first seen in the Book of Genesis. The Bible tells us that they were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned. Their purpose was to guard the entrance so that none could enter. From this we may reason that they are special angels used for various tasks by the Great Jehovah.

We are never told what happened to Eden. Some have assumed that it was translated to Heaven because later in the Book of Revelation we see the tree of life growing there. But we can only make assumptions because it is a tidbit of information God chose to keep from us. It would make sense though because if these Cherubim were assigned guardianship of the Garden of Eden and the garden had been translated into Heaven, then there would no longer be a need for them to guard it. This is all opinion again because we have no scripture to back it up.

Perhaps there are more than four cherubim. Again, we are not told. Whatever the truth may be the fact is that four of them are before God's throne ever praising Him by saying, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*" (Revelation 4:8).

The One sitting on the throne is compared to two precious stones; first the jasper which is an opaque type of quartz that can be red, yellow or brown in color, the second a sardius which is chalcedony quartz that is a translucent or milky transparent stone ranging in color from a deep orange to a brownish red. This is how His appearance is described so I'm thinking that it means that His skin had a transparent to translucent character similar to these stones. John also said that there was a rainbow around the throne that resembled the same shade of green as an emerald. Again, we are not going to try to spiritualize these things by saying they mean this or that. Let's just try to get the picture in our mind as John described it.

Once more in summary we have One sitting on the throne whose skin is transparent or translucent, shaded in the colors mentioned above. A greenish rainbow sits around the throne. The four Cherubim continually worship Him with the words, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.*" When they do the twenty-four elders fall down before Him in worship, 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.*" What a picture! What a time of praise and worship! What glory is there!

Chapter five describes a very important occurrence that begins the events of the rest of the Book of revelation. It is the passing of the seven-sealed scroll. In order to understand the significance of the passing of this scroll we need to understand the laws of redemption God gave to Moses for the governing of Israel. This law was a type of the very act of the redemption ceremony as found in Revelation 5.

In Leviticus 25 we read about the provision of redemption God gave to Moses. It was established so that no family in Israel would ever lose their inheritance forever. If they got into a tough spot and had to sell their land, provision was made so that a near relative could purchase it back, or redeem it, or if not, certainly when the Year of Jubilee came (every fifty years) the possession would be returned to the original owner. This was a type of what God intended to do through Jesus Christ in buying back what the devil tricked man into selling. Basically, whatever the creditor had paid for the land could be returned and the land would once again be part of the family's inheritance.

Over the centuries, even though the practice was unchanged, the proof of the redemption took on several forms depending upon the customs of the times. When Boaz redeemed the land of Naomi and Ruth (in Ruth 4) after he had paid the money, it was made legal by the witness of other property owners in town and sealed by giving his shoe to the creditor. By the days of Jeremiah a type of paper contract had been put into place. We read in Jeremiah 32 that after he had paid the money for the redemption of land, contracts were signed, first an open contract that described the details of the transaction and secondly a copy was sealed.

Later, in Jewish history, this practice was modified so that the contract was written on both sides then sealed. By this method one could read the details of the contract that was sealed on the inside because they were also plainly written on the outside.

With this in mind we go back to the scene in Heaven. The One sitting on the throne held a seven-sealed scroll written on the inside and on the back. It is clearly the articles of redemption, not only for mankind but for the entire world. It contained the conditions for reversing man's sell-out to the devil and the price that had to be paid in order to make redemption.

As outlined in the laws of redemption under the Mosaic covenant, the first condition was that the redeemer must be a near relative. God became man in Jesus Christ and so established the blood relationship as a near relative to man. Secondly, He had to pay the price. The price for redemption was the sacrifice of a sinless human being. Before Christ none could be found. Jesus not only fulfilled the requirement as a near relative by becoming a man, but also lived a sinless life. He did not inherit man's sin because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He was born without sin. But He had to continue this sinless state, and He did. He became the first man to ever qualify as the Redeemer of the world. That's why the devil tried so hard to tempt Him after He had fasted. He not only offered Jesus food and assurance of His role, but also control of all the kingdoms of the earth. The first two temptations were only lead-ins to his real purpose. If he could get Jesus to see that he would give Him control of what he had purchased from Adam without having to die on the cross, then he would have also been successful in tempting our Lord to sin. It didn't work.

This is also why Jesus labored so much in prayer in Gethsemane just before His crucifixion – to the point that His sweat became like great drops of blood. As God, He knew what He was preparing to suffer. If there was a way, "let this cup pass from Me," He said. But there was no other way, and our Lord fulfilled the contract. He died on Calvary as a man but

arose the third day as the Son of God. He paid the price as the only One who could ever redeem us.

All that remains is for Him to take possession of the contract and read it. That is what is getting ready to happen in Revelation 5. First we hear a strong angel crying out in a loud voice, “*Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals?*” (Revelation 5:2). Time was allowed. Not one angel, not one elder, or John himself could step forward and answer that call. It was extremely important that someone be able to receive the scroll. On it rested the right of existence of the entire world, mankind, and all of God’s creation that had been a part of the curse the Mighty Jehovah had been forced to issue when Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, thus giving the rights to God’s creation to the devil.

When no one immediately stepped forward John began to weep. He somehow realized the great importance of this moment. With no one stepping forward it meant that all were doomed to everlasting destruction. Not only was no one found worthy to open the scroll but not one was even able to look at it – to read what was written on the outside.

It was then that one of the elders spoke to John and said, “*Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals*” (Revelation 5:5). What a moment! What a victory! What a time of hope! It was the answer to the groans and travails of all of creation as spoken of in Romans 8:22.

John looked because he wanted to see the hope this elder had told him about. Fully expecting to see a powerful, lion-like figure, in the middle of this glorious, holy scene in Heaven, the magnificent throne, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures, stood a lamb that looked as if it had been slain – Not a powerful lion but a lamb and one that had been wounded to death. Folks, this can be none other than Jesus Christ, the one John the Baptist had described – “*The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). He is further described as having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God. If I am right about these Seven Spirits being the seven dispensations, then what this passage is telling us is that He holds the leadership of all time. A horn is clearly identified throughout the Bible as signifying a king, a leader, or one of power. The seven horns represent the leadership of all ages. The seven eyes linked with the seven horns can only mean that He sees all the problems of each of those dispensations and He is the answer to them all. These seven spirits are sent out into all the world. Our Lion-Lamb is the fulfillment and the solution to each age and to all of creation! How exciting to know that finally, the fulfillment of our redemption is about to take place!

We read, “*Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.*” (Revelation 5:7). He is worthy and He has taken possession of what He has paid for. There is no struggle from Him who sits on the throne (God Himself) because our redeemer has paid the price and He is worthy.

The most magnificent worship service ever to be erupted in that great throne room of Heaven. After taking possession of the scroll the twenty-four elders fall down in worship of Him. Each is described as having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, and we are told that they are the prayers of the saints. Their cries for redemption have been answered! A new song

is sung around the throne: *“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”* (Revelation 5:9-10). Next came the voice of many angels, the number is countless because John says, ten thousand times ten thousand plus thousands of thousands. With a loud voice they say, *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!”* (Revelation 5:12). Next John tells us that every creature, in Heaven, on the Earth, under the Earth and in the sea, said, *“Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”* (Revelation 5:13). Finally the four living creatures say, *“Amen!”* – This is the final word and the so be it of all! At that, the twenty-four elders again fall down and worship Him who lives forever and ever.