



After Jesus addresses the seven churches, we are now taken to the end-time scenario unfolding before John: "After these things 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.' 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" (Rev. 4:1-3).

It's vital to note that in the original written document of Revelation, there are no chapters, so right after the seven churches are addressed, John is taken in a vision to view the third heaven. As G. E. Ladd brings out, "After the first vision of the exalted Christ caring and protecting his churches, the revelation of 'what must take place after this,' i.e., the coming of God's Kingdom, begins" (p. 70).

This is another indicator that there is *a continuity* of events between the last church, Laodicea, where Jesus says He is at the door, and the subsequent scene of the times of the end.

John describes being "in the Spirit" or having a vision given by God. He sees the very throne room of God and the time is right at the beginning of the last days. The term "throne" is used more than forty times in Revelation and symbolizes authority. The Being on the throne is "the Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 4:8), or God the Father. Yet, all he can see of Him is His glory in its brightness, sparkling like beautiful jewels. He mentions the gem of jasper, which in Rev. 21:11 is described as, "clear as crystal" or that of a sparkling diamond, and the sardius jewel is a fiery red stone, such as the ruby. These were also the first and last gems in the high priest's breastplate and each was inscribed with a tribe of Israel (Ex. 28:17-21). The people of God, as spiritual Israel, always are prominent in Revelation. The throne with God's glory had over it a rainbow, dominated by a green glow. (The Gk. term for rainbow can mean a partial arc or a circle, but an arc is more likely here.)

The color green in the Bible represents life, health, and refreshment, symbolic of God's mercy. David said, "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever"

(Ps. 52:8). Also, God told Noah after the Flood about the rainbow being an everlasting covenant, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember *the everlasting covenant* between God and every living creature" (Gen. 9:12-16).

Thus Paul could say, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain *mercy* and find *grace* to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Some commentators bring out that the three colors mentioned around God's throne—the transparent crystal symbolizes God's purity; deep red represents God's sure justice, and green signifies God's mercy.

John continues to describe the scene around God's throne: "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. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 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!' Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 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” (Rev. 4:5-11).

So around God’s throne are twenty-four thrones occupied by 24 elders dressed in white and wearing golden crowns. These are angelic beings which have an honored position around God.

Ladd adds, “There is no difficulty in understanding the twenty-four elders as a body of angels who help execute the divine rule in the universe. White clothing is the garb of angels (Mt. 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). Paul refers to certain ranks of angels as thrones, principalities, and rulers (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:16). In the Old Testament, God is sometimes pictured surrounded by a council of heavenly beings (Ps. 89:7; Is. 24:23)...Their song praises God both for creation (Rev. 4:11) and for the redemption of humans (Rev. 5:9)” (p. 75).

Remember, God the Father is the educator in chief and primary delegator in the heaven and earth since He doesn’t do everything Himself, but wants others to learn how He and His Son carry things out.

Next, John sees around the throne “seven lamps...which are the seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5). Their functions are further described in Rev. 5:6 as being “sent out into all the earth.” They are angels that inform God of vital occurrences on the earth as Zec. 4:10 tells us, “For these seven...are the eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.”

In front of the throne, John saw, according to the Gk. text, what looked like “a sea of glass, like crystal” (Rev. 4:6). Throughout the Bible, this is a consistent description of the platform in front of God’s throne.

Ezekiel saw this in his vision God’s chariot throne, “The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads...And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it...Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (Ez. 1:22-28).

Moses also described this platform in front of God’s throne, “Then Moses went up, also Aaron,

Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity” (Ex. 24:9-10). It indicates separateness and absolute holiness of God. As Paul brings out about Him, “dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power” (1 Tim. 6:16).

God’s throne is also flanked by another type of angelic beings, called seraphim by Isaiah, which have six wings, faces, hands, feet, and multiple eyes. These four living creatures have faces that depict a man, a lion, a calf and an eagle.

Isaiah describes the scene, “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up...Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’” (Is. 6:1-3).

Ladd points out, “That they worship God not only as the Eternally Existing One, who was and is, but also as the coming One suggest the longing of creation for deliverance from the bondage to decay to share the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 21:1)” (p. 78). So the “coming One” can also refer to God the Father when He comes and brings the New Jerusalem to the renewed earth.

Now, while the seraphim praise God the Father for His essential nature as the Eternal One, the 24 elders praise Him for His works of Creation. Both elements are good to remember as we worship God.

Notice this scene is dynamic, for God the Father holds a pivotal scroll, “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it” (R. 5:1-4).

John was distraught because he thought this vital scroll revealing God’s plans in the future would not be opened. Yet an angelic elder intervenes, “But one of the elders said to me, ‘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.' And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood *a Lamb* as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders *fell down before the Lamb*, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed [them] to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made [them] kings and priests to our God; And [they] shall reign on the earth'" (Rev. 5:5-10).

In the King James and New King James versions, we have a faulty translation in Rev. 5:10, where it says, "He has redeemed *us*" when it should say, "He has redeemed *them*." Most modern translations have corrected this text. As Robert Mounce mentions, "The idea that the elders were the ones purchased by Christ's blood stems from *inferior variants* that make the text read, 'Thou was slain, and has redeemed *us* to God.' The most accurate texts omit the first italicized pronoun and read, 'them' and 'they' for the other two pronouns" (p. 136).

Next, Mounce adds another important point, "Those who are purchased are from every tribe, language, people and nation...In contrast with the exclusivism of Judaism that prided itself on having been chosen out from among the nations, the Church was genuinely [universal], recognizing no national, political, cultural, or racial boundaries" (p. 136).

Now, the only one worthy of unsealing the scroll is Jesus Christ, who is symbolized as the Lion, coming from the tribe of Judah and having the scepter of rulership (Gen. 49:9-10) and being the prophesied descendant of David and the Messiah (Is. 11:1-5).

He is worthy of worship because of His sacrifice, redeeming mankind through His shed blood. He is therefore transformed into another symbol, that of a slain Lamb, recalling the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12 and Jesus as the Lamb of God in John 1:29. The seven horns are symbols of the fullness of power

(Dt. 33:17; Ps. 18:2; Mt. 28:18). Moreover, the elders and the living creatures have harps or lyres, the common string instrument used to worship and sing hymns to God (Ps. 33:2; 98:5; 147:7). They also have golden bowls of incense, representing the prayers of the saints (Ps. 142:1; Lk. 1:10).

Now, it is important to place these descriptions in the context of the first century Roman Empire and what the Christians had to face in what was probably Domitian's mad rule (A.D. 81-96). Even the Roman Senate considered him over the top and removed him from imperial honors after his death.

As Mounce brings out, "'You are worthy' greeted the entrance of the emperor in the triumphant procession, and 'our Lord and God' was introduced into the cult of emperor worship by Domitian. For the Christian, only the One who sits on the heavenly throne is worthy; the claims of all others are blasphemous" (p. 127). This is good to keep in mind.

Also, notice that these redeemed people have been made "kings and priests to our God; and shall...reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). This clearly indicates they did not go up to heaven, but will be resurrected to reign with Christ on the earth for a thousand years as also mentioned in Rev. 20:4-6.

Furthermore, John describes more angels joining the heavenly chorus, "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand [100 million, the Gk. *myriad* means ten thousand], and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!' And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to *Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb*, forever and ever!' Then the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever" (Rev. 5:11-14). Note here there is *no* third Person in the Godhead.

Finally, it is interesting to note that this throne scene in heaven is said to have been the inspiration for George Handel's *Messiah*, one of the greatest musical compositions ever written, three hours long, which ends with Handel quoting Rev. 5:12-13!