

Revelation of Jesus Christ

Study 25

Preview of Heaven

Rev 4:1-11

¹ 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." ² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. 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. ⁸ 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!" ⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ "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."

In our last study we began to hear the worship in heaven, Praises to God from all who were there around the throne. We have in these verses been given a preview of the place we will live forever.

We were given a vision of Him who sits on the Throne. Like a diamond His glory flashes, and like the Sardius His sacrifice is revealed, showing the color of blood that was shed.

Tonight we want to look at the verses that show us what is around the throne, what do we see there? surrounding the throne?

Rainbow

Eph 4:3b-4

and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. ⁴ 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.

Moving away from his description of the throne to describe what was around it. John noted first that **there was a rainbow around it**.

That John describes it as being **like an emerald in appearance** reveals that green was the dominant color.

This again is introduced to show the many-splendored glory of God.

Ezek 1:28

28 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.

The **rainbow** provides a comforting balance to the fiery flashings of judgment earlier seen emanating from God's throne.

According to *Gen 9:13-17*;

13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 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. 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."

A rainbow symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy, and grace.

God's attributes always operate in perfect harmony.

His wrath never operates at the expense of his faithfulness; His judgments never abrogate His promises.

God's power and holiness would cause us to live in abject terror were it not for His faithfulness and mercy.

God said of the faithful remnant of Israel who feared being swept away in His judgment of the nation,

"they will be mine, on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" Mal 3:17

Twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders;

John also saw around the throne **twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones he saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.**

The identity of the **twenty-four elders** has been much debated.

Some see them as the order of angelic beings.

I believe however it seems best to view them as human representatives of the church. There are several lines of evidence pointing to that conclusion.

The reference to the **twenty-four thrones** on which the **twenty-four elders** sat indicates that they reign with Christ. **Nowhere in Scripture do angels sit on thrones, nor are they pictured ruling of reigning.**

The angels role is to serve as *"ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."*

Heb 1;10-14

10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Matt 18:10

10 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

The church, on the other hand, is repeatedly promised a co-regency with Christ;

Rev 2:26-27

26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, 27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'-- as I also have received from My Father;

Jesus Spoke of the same;

Matt 19:28

28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And there are many more references such as (*Rev 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor 6:2-3; 2Tim 2:12*)

The word *presbuteroi* (**elder**) is never used in Scripture to refer to angels, but always to men. It is used to speak of older men in general, and the rulers of both Israel and the church.

There is no indisputable use of *presbuteroi* outside of Revelation to refer to angels, (some believe that "*elders*" in *Isaiah 24:23* refers to angels, but it could as well refer to humans.)

Further, "*elder*" would be inappropriate term to describe angels, who do not age.

While angels do appear in white (*John 20:12; Acts 1:10*) **white garments** more commonly are the dress of believers.

That is particularly true in the immediate context of Revelations.

Christ promised the believers at Sardis that they would "*be clothed in white garments*" *Rev 3:5*

He advised the apostate Laodiceans to "*buy from me, white garments so that you may clothe yourself*" *Rev 3:18*

At the marriage supper of the Lamb, His bride will "*clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean*" *Rev 19:8*

White garments symbolize Christ's righteousness imputed to believers at salvation

Golden Crowns on their heads;

That the elders wore **golden crowns on their heads** provides further evidence that they were human. Crowns are never promised in scripture to angels, nor are angels ever seen wearing them.

Stephanos (crowns) is the victor's crown, worn by those who successfully endured the trial, those who competed and won the victory.

Christ promised such a crown to the loyal believers at Smyrna:

Rev 2:10

10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

"Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things," Paul wrote, "they then do it to receive a perishable wreath [stephanos], but we an imperishable" 1 Cor 9:25

He wrote again of that crown in;

2 Tim 4:8

"8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

James also spoke of this in his writing;

James 1:12

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

And Peter also calling it the unfading crown of glory:

1 Pet 5:4

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Holy angels do not personally struggle with and triumph over sin; thus the overcome's crown, the crown of those who successfully ran the race and finished victorious, would not be appropriate for them.

Assuming, then, that the twenty-four elders are humans, the questions remains as to which humans they represent.

It should be noted that the number twenty-four, as is number seven, used to speak of completion and representation.

There are twenty-four officers of the sanctuary representing the twenty-four courses of the Levitical Priests; There were twenty-four divisions of order for service.

1 Chron 24:4-5, 7-18

¹ Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ² And Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children; therefore Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests. ³ Then David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to the schedule of their service. ⁴ There were more leaders found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar, and thus they were divided. Among the sons of Eleazar were sixteen heads of their fathers' houses, and eight heads of their fathers' houses among the sons of Ithamar. ⁵ Thus they were divided by lot, one group as another, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials of the house of God, from the sons of Eleazar and from the sons of Ithamar. ⁶ And the scribe, Shemaiah the son of Nethanel, one of the Levites, wrote them down before the king, the leaders, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the priests and Levites, one father's house taken for Eleazar and one for Ithamar. ⁷ Now the first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiiah, ⁸ the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, ⁹ the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, ¹⁰ the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, ¹¹ the ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, ¹² the eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, ¹³ the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, ¹⁴ the fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, ¹⁵ the seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizzetz, ¹⁶ the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel, ¹⁷ the twenty-first to Jachin, the twenty-second to Gamul, ¹⁸ the twenty-third to Delaiah, the twenty-fourth to Maaziah.

As well as twenty-four divisions of singers in the temple;

1 Chron 25

¹ Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: ² Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king. ³ Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the direction of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD. ⁴ Of Heman, the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. ⁵ All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to exalt his horn. For God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. ⁶ All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king. ⁷ So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the LORD, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty-eight. ⁸ And they cast lots for their duty, the small as well as the great, the teacher with the student. ⁹ Now the first lot for Asaph came out for Joseph; the second for Gedaliah, him with his brethren and sons, twelve; ¹⁰ the third for Zaccur, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹¹ the fourth for Jizri, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹² the fifth for Nethaniah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹³ the sixth for Bukkiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁴ the seventh for Jesharelah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁵ the eighth for Jeshaiiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁶ the ninth for Mattaniah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁷ the tenth for Shimei, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁸ the eleventh for Azarel, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ¹⁹ the twelfth for Hashabiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁰ the thirteenth for Shubael, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²¹ the fourteenth for Mattithiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²² the fifteenth for Jeremoth, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²³ the sixteenth for Hananiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁴ the

seventeenth for Joshbekashah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁵ the eighteenth for Hanani, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁶ the nineteenth for Mallothi, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁷ the twentieth for Eliathah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁸ the twenty-first for Hothir, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ²⁹ the twenty-second for Giddalti, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ³⁰ the twenty-third for Mahazioth, his sons and his brethren, twelve; ³¹ the twenty-fourth for Romamti-Ezer, his sons and his brethren, twelve.

So who ever these twenty-four elders are, then, they are likely to represent a larger group.

Some believe the elders represent Israel.

But while individual Jews have been and will continue to be redeemed throughout history at the time of this vision the nation as a whole had not yet been redeemed.

Their national judgment and salvation (*Rom 11:26*) comes during the tribulation (*Chapts 6-19*), largely as a result of the evangelistic efforts of the 144,000 (introduced in chapter 7).

When the twenty-four elders are first introduced those events are yet to take place.

Similarly, the elders cannot be Tribulation saints, since they too had not yet been converted. The elders are already in heaven when the Tribulation saints arrive,

Rev 7:11-14

¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know." 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.

The elders are also seen in heaven when other momentous events of the Tribulation take place, such as

When the Kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of Christ

Rev 11:15-18

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. ¹⁸ The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth."

When the 144,000 gather on Mount Zion;

Rev 14:1-3

¹ Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the

voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. ³ They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

And also when God destroys the Babylonian economic and religious system;

Rev 19:1-4

¹ After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! ² For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." ³ Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" ⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!"

Some would split the twenty-four elders into two groups of twelve, one representing the church and the other Israel.

There is no compelling exegetical reason, however, for so dividing them.

In all their appearances in Revelation they appear as a unified group of twenty-four, never as two groups of twelve.

It is unlikely then, that the twenty-four elders are angels, or that they represent Israel, the tribulation saints, or a combination of Israel and the church.

That leaves one most acceptable possibility.

That they represent the glorified Church, which sings the song of redemption.

Rev 5:8-10

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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 us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

They have their crowns and live in the place prepared for them, where they have gone to be with Jesus

John 14:1-4

¹ "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know."

And thus we see what is around the throne, next we will see what is coming out of the Throne and what is before the Throne, and what is in and around the throne and then the worship toward the Throne.