

02a REV

This is Friday, the 5th of August, 2005. We are engaged in a study of the book of Revelation. Having covered the first three chapters some years ago, and having reviewed them over the last couple of weeks, we are ready tonight to begin our detailed study in chapter 4, verse 1. We'll take a moment at the outset to clear our minds, and prepare our hearts, and go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we are grateful, as always, for the opportunity to spend time in fellowship and in the study of your word. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will open our hearts to the truth. May we find it impressed upon us in such a way that it will influence our thinking, and be the basis for our decisions in the days ahead.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Having addressed this communication through John to the seven churches, and having given a detailed message to each of the seven churches of Asia, in chapter 4 we find a fresh viewpoint.

The book of Revelation can be broadly divided into three parts, the first three chapters being the first part, the second section, chapters 4 through 19, comprising the middle section, and then the final chapters 20 through 22 as the epilogue. So you have a prologue, the main body, and the epilogue, so to speak. But in reality, we're going to see that this chapter, chapter 4, also deals with the church.

We tend to think that the church is the primary focus in chapter 1, chapter 2, and chapter 3, and then as soon as we have come up here in 4.1, then the church sort of disappears from view. But actually, the entire fourth chapter has to do with things pertaining to the church as well. So that's where we begin tonight.

Let's take a look at this chapter. It's fairly short. It's only 11 verses, so let's read it.

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. 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." Well, this is a tremendous picture.

We'll take a look at it in detail. We begin by looking at verse 1. After these things, what are these things? These letters to the seven churches, the things that Jesus speaks specifically to the seven churches which are in Asia, through John, there has been a detailed description of the Lord Jesus in each greeting or salutation section of the letters. This has been followed by an evaluation of the church.

Most of them receive a commendation. All but Laodicea are commended. There is a complaint to five of the seven churches.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are not rebuked. The other five are. And following the complaint or the accusation, there is a correction.

There is an exhortation to improve. Remember where you once were or remember your first love. Be watchful.

Strengthen what remains. Seek fervently after the things that you can buy from the Lord in terms of eye salve and raiment and gold and so on. There is a threatened judgment for failure to respond to correction.

Your lampstand will be removed out of its place. You will be surprised by the return of the Lord. He will come like a thief or you will be spewed out of Christ's mouth, therefore.

And then you have finally the promise to the overcomers which concludes each letter. We reviewed those in some detail and it is now after these things. Well, historically speaking, the time of operation, the time to face the challenge, to receive rebuke, to respond to correction and instruction in righteousness is the historical period of the church.

More specifically, it is defined by the life span of a church age believer and even more specifically, that time within our life span where we are awake and paying attention to the things of God from our salvation to the end of our life. That is these things. After these things, thus implies that we have come, symbolically speaking, to the end of the church age.

And we are now at that point of transition marked by the rapture of the church. And so when we hear that there is a door standing open in heaven and the first voice which I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, come up here, what is the first voice which John heard? When you go back to chapter 1, this is the voice of the Lord Jesus, isn't it? He says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, I was on the island called Patmos, and I heard behind me, chapter 1, verse 10, a loud voice as of a trumpet saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia.

And then it names those seven churches. So the loud voice as of a trumpet is the same voice that we find now in chapter 4. And this is the voice of God. It is possible to believe that the first voice that John heard was the voice of God the Father.

And the second red letter deal there in chapter 1 is Christ speaking. The Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, is the one that is speaking. But John says in verse 12 of chapter 1, I turned to see the voice that spoke with me.

Having turned, I saw this individual standing in the midst of the lampstand. So it seems pretty clear to me that this is the Lord Jesus. But it's odd, isn't it, that in chapter 4, verse 1, he says, 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.

So the trumpet-like voice, and if you have a red letter edition like mine, mine doesn't have these words in red, but maybe they should be. Come up here, I will show you things which must take place immediately after this. Now verse 2 of Revelation chapter 4, immediately I was in the Spirit.

This reminds us of Ezekiel. Remember when Ezekiel gets transported different places by the Spirit of God and snatches him up by the hair of the head and takes him from the river Kabar in Babylon all the way back to Jerusalem, sets him down in the temple precincts and he wanders around and sees things. Well, he's in the Spirit and he is now, as it were, his perceptions and his vision, his view is all in the heavenly realm.

This is what's going to take place for us at the rapture. Whether we are dead or whether we are alive, we'll be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord. And we too are going to begin to see things from a heavenly perspective rather than from the earth.

So, in the Spirit tells us that we are now in the realm of the symbolic. He is going to see things that are representative, not necessarily completely literal. Behold, there is a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

And he who sat there was like a jasper and like a sardius stone in appearance. Now, whose throne is this? Obviously, this is the throne of God. Who is sitting on the throne?

God Himself.

This is God the Father. We know that because Jesus is going to be spoken of as distinct from the personage who sits on the throne. We know from other passages that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

He is seated at the right hand of the Father. So, this is God the Father. When John looks to see who is seated on the throne, what does he see? Just this bright, gem-like, translucent glory.

The sardius and the jasper that are mentioned here, we know from later on in Revelation, are a transparent, translucent type of stone. If you've ever seen a swimming pool at night, and the swimming pool has a light in one end, like a headlight, when you flip that light on, the whole pool lights up. You realize that water has this strange property.

It's the same as the plastic in your dashboard. The lights are at the side, but the whole dashboard is lit because the clear plastic carries the light all the way through. So, what you're seeing isn't always the source of the glory.

It is a manifestation of the light or of the glory. That's what these stones do. When you go to Helzberg or one of these jewelry stores, you notice that they've got these little, tiny, really bright halogen lights.

It makes the gems sparkle a whole lot more than they do if you look at them at home under your normal lamps and light bulbs. You think, boy, this seems a lot more sparkly down at the store or out in the sunlight. So, the translucent nature of what you're looking at determines how much glory you see.

My take on this statement by John is that it is as though there is a kind of screen. There is something that is muting down the light and the glory of the one sitting on the throne. Otherwise, John would more or less be incinerated.

No man can see the Father and live, and yet he can look in the direction of the throne. But this is like a lampshade type of thing. Because God doesn't look like a Sardius stone.

God doesn't look like a jasper. So, I think there is a dimmer here. There is protection for John so that his eyes don't just burn in the socket, even in vision form.

So, having said that, the jasper and the Sardius stone in appearance, and there is a rainbow around the throne in appearance like an emerald. A rainbow around the throne. Now, we've talked before about the great symmetry in God's Word, the great symmetry in God's plan, the great symmetry in human history, and when's the last time the Bible spoke about the rainbow in any great detail? It's back in Genesis, where after the flood, God puts his bow in the sky.

And what does the bow symbolize? What does it mean? It is a graphic, it is a pictorial reminder that God will never again judge the earth, destroy all flesh with a flood. So, you look at the bow in the sky, and it's a reminder that there is a kind of judgment that God will never do again. But it's a reminder of judgment.

So now, when John looks at the throne, this is something Ezekiel never saw, Daniel never saw, Apostle Paul, nobody else has ever mentioned, anybody that's ever seen a theophany or a manifestation of God, Isaiah, nobody says anything about a rainbow around the throne. But now, there is a rainbow around the throne. Moses and the 70 elders going up on Sinai, no mention of a rainbow.

Some of the other elements that we're going to find in this description are there, but no rainbow. So, my question to you is, why the rainbow here, given the clue that the last time the Bible made a point of talking about the rainbow was after the flood? What's the first idea that comes to mind with the rainbow? Judgment. You know what the flag of Japan looks like, right? White field, red dot.

It's the usual, very succinct, very sparse, haiku kind of art that the Japanese are good for. It's what? Yeah, it's not a bullseye. But it's the sun.

It's a picture of the sun. And the Japanese are very concise. You know, it's a very simple thing.

And you remember in World War II what the Japanese battle flag looks like, right? Same flag, same sun in the middle, but now you've got these rays coming forth in every direction. And this is the sun flashing forth, emanating forth, using its energy to burn everything down in its path, so to speak. It's very elegant.

I think you can't beat the Japanese for saying a lot with just a few elements. Well, you get the idea that God's throne always has this glory. But when the rainbow surrounds the throne, it's kind of like those rays coming out of that sun on the Japanese flag.

Yes, there is always glory, but this glory is coming out so much that it's splitting up into the component primary colors. And it's glory plus. It's glory squared.

It's glory and then some. So this isn't necessarily a good thing to see the rainbow around the throne. I saw a picture recently where somebody was up in an airplane and actually got the 360-degree rainbow rather than just a portion, which I think would be pretty neat to see.

And my impression is that's what John saw. When he said the rainbow surrounds the throne, I think it's a 360-degree rainbow. And it also tells you that normally to see a rainbow, you have some kind of a mist.

We were talking about this the other day. You have some water droplets and you get the

whole refraction thing going on. Where is the point source of light? Where are the drops? Where are you? It determines how big and how much in terms of what you see.

Well, this throne, around the throne, is this rainbow in appearance like an emerald. An emerald here, once again, this is a translucent, very bright. We tend to think of emerald being green, but trust me on this, there are emeralds of different colors.

And this isn't so much talking about color as it is translucence and sparkling glory. Around the throne, we're 24 elders. Now, if there is any doubt in anybody's mind, Revelation 4.1 does represent the rapture of the church.

And I will point out as we go along the reasons we know that this is true. There is no question and there is no doubt that when he says, come up here and I will show you things which must take place after these things, that these things are the letters to the seven churches. And we've already seen that each letter comprehends a possible or potential state of things in every different time.

Anytime you've got church, you could potentially have one or more of the seven letters pertaining and applying. In our life, as individual believers, one or more of those letters can pertain to us. Maybe we've lost our first love.

Maybe we've done a few things well, but God has something against us. Maybe we've been in a period of suffering and we're not in line for any sort of rebuke. But it's a pretty comprehensive package.

It would be hard to find a person or a church or a time in history in the church age where you do not have pertinent facts and pertinent promises given. And he says, after these things. Let me show you what's going to happen after these things.

And these things is manifestly the seven letters. That's what these things are. So if he says, I will show you what's going to happen after these things, it's after the church age.

So the question is, well, okay, so yes, the church has left, but maybe everybody has left. Who all is in heaven at this point? And that's what we're about to figure out, because now we're going to see who is standing around, sitting around, who is saying things, who is singing things, who is doing what in and around the throne that John sees here. So, around the throne were 24 thrones, and on the thrones I saw 24 elders sitting, clothed in white robes, and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

Now, this tells us a lot. First of all, the 24 elders are human beings. Now, they may be symbolic human beings, representing a greater group, but they are human beings.

How do I know this? They are called Presbyteroi. Presbyteroi translated elders, you know, sort of get Presbyterian, Presbyter, John, all that. Presbyteroi means elders.

If you're an angel, you don't get elder. Angels are timeless. There's no such thing as elder angels and younger angels.

Evidently, they are all the same age. God must have spoken them all into existence at once, as far as we know. But the term elder, or presbyteros, is never applied to angels anywhere in the Bible.

66 books, not once. It is always used of human beings. Always.

So, these 24 elders, we would expect, would not be an exception. They are, in some way, shape, or form, human. They are either literal humans, or they represent humans.

That remains to be determined at this point. So, around the throne, 24 thrones, on the thrones, 24 elders, clothed in white robes, and they had crowns of gold on their heads. So, we know three additional facts.

There are 24 of these individuals. They sit on thrones. They wear crowns.

And they have white robes. That's four things, isn't it? These three things I will point out, yea, four I will extract from the passage. So, we'll leave aside 24 for the moment, and talk about robes, crowns, and thrones.

What have we just seen in the promises to the overcomers, as far as promises? As far as details of those promises. Some of those overcomers are promised that they will sit with Christ on His throne. That they will rule with Him.

This would be the symbolic value of a throne. Do we know anything about crowns in the New Testament? By the way, are Old Testament Jews, Old Testament saints, Israelites, have they ever promised crowns? Do you have any Old Testament promise of a crown? The answer is no. But, you have a lot of discussion of crowns, and we've gone through this in other contexts.

I know there is laid out for me, Paul says, A crown, you are our glory and our crown. The crown of life is promised to those who love His appearing, and so on. So, crown represents a reward.

I think the morning star that we saw could be classified as a crown in the sense of a reward or an honor. These are not crowns like the crown jewels of England. These are crowns that are like the laurel wreath that represent the victor's crown.

This is a recognition of accomplishment, and so on. So, they have crowns of gold on their heads. They are also clothed in white robes.

Time and again we are told what white robes represent. What are they? Righteous deeds of the saints. So, all of this is consistent with our theory that these individuals are or represent believers, specifically church age believers.

One of the promises to the overcomers, you will walk with me in white, white robes. The suggestion here is that these are church age overcomers, 24 in number, wearing crowns, wearing white robes, sitting on thrones. Now, an additional conclusion we can draw, assuming for the moment that we are correct and these are church age believers, is that the judgment seat of Christ, at this point, has already taken place.

Why? They've got their robes. They've got their crowns. They've got their thrones.

So, the mistaken idea that the judgment of church age believers is going to go on for seven years, all during the 70th week of Daniel, would fail on this verse alone. These people have already got those things. And, as we're about to see, nothing has happened in the tribulation as of yet.

No trumpets, no seals, no trumpets, and no bolts. So, I think the judgment seat of Christ is something that will take place outside of time, as we know it, and will be complete just virtually immediately as the rapture takes place. Come up here, I will show you what's about to happen.

Here are these people who have already been found worthy and have been seated on their thrones, given their crowns, handed their white robes, and so on. So, the remaining detail to deal with is the number 24. There are those who say, well, this sort of represents 12 plus 12.

12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles. It's all of the redeemed of the Old Testament and the New Testament age. I say, wrong.

No. Can't be. For a couple of reasons.

First of all, again, nothing about thrones, nothing about crowns, nothing about white robes is ever promised to Israel. Secondly, Israel has seven more years yet to run in their dispensation, in their age. They are not ready to go under the rod and be evaluated and be judged and be given their assignments.

So, if these are all church age believers or represent church age believers, why are there 24? Well, one of the things we know about the people of God in the Old Testament is that they, as a people, represent individuals in this age. The nation of Israel comes out of Egypt. The nation of Israel is redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb, goes through the baptism of the Red Sea, comes out on the other side, is sustained.

We draw individual lessons, for you and me, from what happens with the nation. In the nation, you have different roles. You have some who are rulers.

You have King David. You have the monarchy. You have the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha and Samuel and Ezekiel and Isaiah and all the rest of them, the major and minor prophets.

You also have a priestly ministry carried out by the tribe of Levi, and within the tribe of Levi, specifically the sons of Aaron, and within that group, specifically the two sons of Aaron, that survived to provide the priestly line. So you have all Israel, and within that, you have prophets, priests, and kings. We, in the church, have the opportunity to partake individually of all of those functions.

The Lord Jesus is prophet, priest, and king. He is the head of all things to the church. He is our source for righteousness and wisdom and peace and sanctification, and we are in Him.

So we share in His priesthood. We share in His prophetic ministry. That's why we all are taught by God's Holy Spirit.

And we all have, potentially at least, the opportunity to share in that ruling and reigning function that will take place in the Millennial Kingdom, not to mention prevailing in this life. So, say all of that to say this. Twenty-four thrones, twenty-four elders with twenty-four crowns, each sitting there in his white robe.

Why twenty-four? In the days of David, when the monarchy and the earthly rulership came into full bloom in Israel, what did David do with the sons of Aaron? What did he do with the priests? How did he organize them? He divided them up into courses so that they could serve in an orderly fashion and rotate through the duties involved in the temple, which would be completed under Solomon. Previous to that, they didn't really need this level of organization, but as the temple comes into being, they do. How many courses are there in the priestly organization? Twenty-four.

You can look at it specifically with Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and it was his turn because his course was on duty, so to speak. So, the twenty-four here speaks of priesthood. Priesthood.

What do priests do? They preside over worship. They stand, representatively speaking, as intermediaries between God and man. Jesus Christ himself is our high priest.

We are kings and priests in and with him. So, this sort of makes sense that, as representing church-age believers here, there are these twenty-four elders. There are twenty-four of them, twenty-four priestly courses.

They have thrones, they have crowns, they have the white robes, and they are around the throne. John stands outside. Here is this ring of king-priests, if you will, and then God himself is seated on the throne in the middle.

So, from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. What does this suggest? Lightning and thunder in the ancient world were the most powerful manifestations of natural force that people typically saw. You could perhaps throw in the occasional volcano or something, but in terms of routine observation, thunder and

lightning were known to be vastly superior in power to anything man could create or control.

We covered this when we looked at the vision of Ezekiel. When the whirlwind and the storm comes and there is thunder and lightning, it is associated with the presence of God in judgment. In Ezekiel, God comes in judgment.

Here, God is viewed in terms of judgment. The rainbow has already sort of suggested that. Now we have thunder and lightning and voices.

So there are things being said. Phonaē in Greek can be voice or sound. I think here this is really sounds.

There are sounds that John can't even describe. There is thunder and lightning. If you are an ancient man, how would you describe the sound of a jet engine? How would you describe the sound of a rocket at Cape Kennedy or Cape Canaveral, or whatever they call it now, taking off? It is just beyond thunders, beyond anything that you could describe in ancient terms.

It just says there were these sounds. I can't even tell you what they were like. This is ominous.

This is foreboding. This isn't the gentle Jesus sitting in the midst of a field of daisies with a child on his knee. This is God the Father seated on his throne, surrounded by a rainbow with lightning and thunder and sounds.

Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. Now we are going to see more than one reference here, just as you do back in Isaiah, to the seven spirits or the sevenfold spirit of God. Seven is the number of perfection.

It is the number of completeness. It means this is absolute. Why are there seven instead of just one? Or why isn't it a single candelabra with seven branches or something? They seem to be seven separate spirits.

This speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit. You don't find God the Father ever pictured as divided or distributed or multiplied. He is always the one God.

The Lord our God is Echad, is one. It's the Shema over in Deuteronomy 6. Remember? The Lord our God is one Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ is not divided.

Remember when Paul is upbraiding the Corinthians and he says, I hear that there are schisms and divisions among you. Is Christ divided? He's not. There's one Christ.

And you can't divide Him into humanity and deity. He's a single person. He is the God-man, God and man, indivisibly, single consciousness, single person, forevermore.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is the member of the Trinity that is spoken of as being distributed. You see this on the day of Pentecost in Acts, where the Spirit descends like multiple tongues of fire, multiple flames of fire. And this is a good thing because, of course, God is one and is not a pantheon or something.

People who misunderstand the Trinity like to say, well, He's just a small pantheon of multiple gods. He is a unified, single God. And in particular, the Father and the Son are viewed as single entities.

But the Spirit, this emphasizes the individual ministry, the individual presence of the Holy Spirit. And that's important because if you emphasize the unity of the Spirit and He is indwelling you and He's indwelling me, this would imply that there is a connection between you and me that we could sort of talk over this radio, or I could get into your head, you could get into my head, because the same Spirit unites us in sort of a strange and unnatural way. God the Holy Spirit is pictured as several, as separate, because He links us to God more than to each other.

We are in Christ and that makes us brethren. That is the basis of our unity. Not the old devotional song, you know, we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. But the Spirit operates individually. And His individual ministry to you may be different than His individual ministry to me.

His gift to you is probably different than His gift to me. The way that He brings up and applies and impresses the Word of God to you may be different than the way He brings up and reminds and applies the Word of God to me. It is an individual, custom-tailored ministry of God's Holy Spirit.

So, sevenfold means it's perfect and complete, but yet it is divided up because this is where God gets right down one-to-one with us. It is through the Spirit. So, the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are the seven Spirits of God.

This is a sevenfold witness, a sevenfold ministry. We are going to see what the Spirit does as we go forward. 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. Now, verse 6 says in front of the throne there was a sea of glass. I find this interesting.

We've seen the sea of glass before. We saw it on Mount Sinai with Moses and the elders, right? Ezekiel sees this transparent sea and you have it here as well. What does it say? You know this already even though we haven't gotten anywhere near there.

At the end of Revelation, what does it say about the new heavens and the new earth?

There's no sun. What else? There is no sea. But here there is a sea.

What does the sea universally represent in Scripture? The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked. It is the abode of Leviathan.

It is the place of uncontrollable chaotic forces of darkness. You go a few feet below the surface and it gets black and dark. It's a place of mystery, a place of confusion.

Jonah goes down to the gates of Sheol at the bottom of the sea and there's seaweed wrapped around his head. It's a bad place to be. Usually in Scripture you find the frothing waves of the sea.

You have the sea of Galilee whipped into a frenzy and Jesus stilling the waters. Peace be still. And immediately this sea that scared even veteran sailors who had spent their life on that body of water, who thought they were going to die, immediately it is calm like glass.

So when you think about all those things and then you look at this picture, the throne of God is in the midst of a sea, but the sea, how troubled is it? Untroubled. Impossible to trouble. It is a glassy sea.

Yes, there is evil present in the universe, but it is causing not even a ripple anywhere near the throne of God. It is a picture of God's absolute control over His universe. The sea is present, but the sea is not a problem.

The sea is present, but people walk on it, stand on it. You get the idea that the four living creatures, the 24 elders on their thrones, and all the other traffic that goes back and forth is walking on this sea and having no problem. So the throne is surrounded by this sea of glass like crystal.

God's sovereign domination and control over all things, including evil. What could be a dark and churning force is like a sea of glass. It is transparent.

There is nothing that He doesn't see. There is nothing that He doesn't know about. There is nothing that He does not control.

In the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. First living creature, then you have the lion, the calf, the man, and the eagle face. From our study in Ezekiel, we know what these are.

What are they? These are the cherubim. The four cherubim that surround the throne of God, whether He is traveling or whether He is stationary in heaven. You find these guardians of His holiness.

We know from Ezekiel's description that they have four faces. Same four faces that you

see here. Only here, each one seems to be presenting a different face.

You get the idea that they all face outward. If you look at them in that presentation from the right angle, you can see each of the four faces, one presented by each creature. They have the same six wings that we've seen elsewhere.

Why are they presented in this symbolic vision? What do the four faces remind us of? We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to resume our station, gazing at the throne of God, and see what we can learn from the remaining section of Revelation chapter 4. Let's pause here and take our break.