

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Trip to Heaven, Part 2

Scripture: Revelation 4:4-6

Code: 66-17

Let's go back to Revelation chapter 4 and our study of a visit to the heavenly throne, Revelation chapter 4. The Bible, by the way, refers to heaven about 550 times, both the Hebrew and the Greek words, that being the Old Testament word and the New Testament word, refer to what is lofty, or what is high up. Heaven is simply a name for something very high. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 Paul speaks of three heavens. He says he was caught up into the third heaven.

Simply understood, there is the atmospheric heaven, we live in this atmospheric heaven, sometimes called the troposphere. It is the environment, the atmosphere of air around the earth, the air we breathe. It would include also the heaven of clouds and rain and snow.

Beyond our atmospheric heaven there is what we could generally call the planetary heaven, stars, moon, planets, sun, the heaven of all the celestial bodies where frankly we can't live because we can't breathe. That's the second heaven and it's an infinite amount of space.

And then, thirdly, the heaven where Paul was caught up, the third heaven is the home of God, the divine heaven where God dwells. And while we understand that there is no place that can contain God, Scripture is very, very clear that nothing can contain God...He is too great, He is too glorious, He is too large, He is too infinite. But even though heaven, as it were, cannot contain Him, it is His home. Paul then was saying he was caught up beyond the atmosphere, beyond the planetary space into the very abode of God.

We know it's a long trip to that place if you have to go through the first two heavens to get there. I'm not sure it's quite that simple but if we were to try to understand how far away the third heaven is, we would have to do a little scientific explanation. From the earth's surface and extending upward say seven to ten miles is what is called the troposphere. Extending beyond that is the stratosphere. Extending beyond that approximately fifty miles is the mesosphere. Extending beyond that for 250 miles or more is the ionosphere. And extending beyond that to the outer limits of the planet's atmosphere is what's called the exosphere, that's the planetary heavens.

Beyond that is infinite space and somewhere beyond that is the third heaven. It's a long way. We all understand that. So when Jesus said to the dying thief, "Today will you be with Me in Paradise," He was talking about a very fast trip...very fast, a trip that only God in miraculous and supernatural power could effect.

But beyond the first and the second heaven is the third heaven. To understand the third heaven you can go to the Bible and there are some descriptions. The first description we can only remind ourselves of, we don't take the time to read it again, is in Ezekiel chapter 1. Ezekiel's description of God's throne in heaven is really astonishing. You can't fully understand all that he describes, and I'm sure he didn't either. But under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy, he attempted to describe what he saw when God gave him a look at heaven...blazing light was reflected off of polished jewels, colored wheels of light were mingled with angelic beings. Around the throne of God, around the throne of the eternal and glorious God, shining in full glory, he saw flashing, sparkling, spinning rainbow of brilliance. He referred to the faces of the angelic creatures, the lion, the man, the ox and the eagle. Although it is difficult to understand every specific in his vision, it was a vision of sovereignty and majesty and glory, it was a vision of angels in all their splendor, a vision of the incredible beauty and symmetry and perfection of the heavenly throne. The wheels were moving in concert, the flashing lightning, the sparkling jewels, the brilliant light, the angels all pictured God's glory. And it was something more than any of us, including the one who wrote it, could even comprehend.

Paul when he took his trip, noted earlier, in 2 Corinthians 12:2 wasn't even allowed to talk about what he saw. And when you come to the New Testament, the best illustration, the best description of heaven comes right here in Revelation chapter 4 and also in chapter 5 as John goes up to the third heaven for his visit and is told by God to write down what he saw. And so we get another glimpse. This is the record of what John saw and heard when he was taken to heaven.

Chapter 4 verse 1, we remind you of what it says, "After these things I looked and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I had heard like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me said, 'Come up here and I will show you what must take place after these things.'" Come up here. John, as it were, is caught up into heaven not for coronation, not for glorification, as we noted last time, but for revelation. He is not caught up there to stay, he is caught up there to see something so that he can write it down. What is it? "I will show you...He says...what must take place after these things." What things? The things in chapter 2 and 3, that is the things that happen in the church age, the things that are characteristic in the church. I'm going to show you what's going to happen after these things...after the church, as it were, has run its course this is the end, I'm going to show you the end, the time of coming judgment on the earth at the end of the age. That is what must come to pass after these things.

And so, from here on out to the end of the book of Revelation you have the future. Chapter 4 and 5 actually doesn't get into the future prophecy, it just sets the stage. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the throne room in heaven, the presence of God and the Lamb and set the scene for the judgment which begins to unfold in chapter 6.

Now as we enter the door that is standing open in verse 1, and we come with John through his pen into the throne room of God, the central feature is indeed the throne. And as we read last time through these eleven verses, it becomes apparent to us that the throne is the issue here. The word is used repeatedly in this very brief chapter. And I was pointing out to you last time and I'll continue to do that, some of the features.

First point we made was simply to state the fact of the throne, verse 2, "Immediately I was in the Spirit," that is to say he was in a supernatural ecstatic transcendent state, under the influence of the Holy Spirit so that he was lifted above time and space and he was able to see with spiritual eyes. In that condition, "Behold, a throne was standing in heaven." This is the dominant feature of heaven that John sees. It is the sovereign throne of Almighty God.

We noted secondly that as we focus on the throne, things are going on in connection with the throne. And the second point was "on the throne." Please note at the end of verse 2, "One sitting on the throne." Then verse 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." Now the first half of that verse identifies something of the vision of God. The One sitting on the throne, as we noted, is God. We also told you that the temple is the place in which the throne exists. We said that the throne is not in a palace, remember that? But the throne is in a temple.

It should be noted, chapter 21 verse 11, that it says there just so you don't become confused, it describes God there. It describes His glory. And it says that the city of the new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down out of heaven has the glory of God. And again you see it had brilliance like a costly stone, crystal-clear jasper. Again you see the throne later on in the heavenly city and in the heavenly city God dwells and so you would expect the same glory, the same brilliance.

But go over to verse 22 of chapter 21 and you read there, "I saw no temple in it for the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Now I simply need to pull those all together to say this, throughout the book of Revelation it speaks about the throne and it speaks about the temple. And it links, as I pointed up to you last time, the temple with the throne. But when you get to chapter 21 and you see the final heaven, the final glory of heaven as manifest through the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, it becomes apparent that the temple is in fact the presence of God Himself. So God is His own temple, in which His own throne exists. There is a temple in heaven but it isn't a building then, it is a person. It is the very person of God. He Himself is the temple. You see then the eminences of God. He is the temple. He Himself is the throne, no doubt, as well as the One sitting on it.

And what John is seeing here is not a chair in a building, is my point. He is simply seeing the symbol of the sovereignty of God in the very...in the very temple of God which is, of course, the infinite presence of God Himself. Now you can go back to chapter 4, I just wanted to note that so you didn't

become confused as you read further in the book.

There is a throne. The throne is in the temple, but the temple in reality is God Himself and the Lamb. The third point that we noted for you was around the throne. And the first thing we saw in verse 3 was there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. We now move off of the throne where we saw God sitting to around the throne. And we said that a rainbow is a symbol of mercy and a symbol of grace. But there are more things around the throne and that takes us further on into the text.

I want you to look at verse 4, and now we get into some of the fascinating elements of this scene. Not only was there around the throne a rainbow in verse 3, but verse 4 says, "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones." Now, there isn't just this one throne in which God is placed in His shining brilliant diamond-ruby glory, but there are some other thrones. Now this is very interesting to me because it means that somebody has been coronated here. Somebody has been elevated here. Somebody is sitting alongside Jesus Christ, alongside God, for we remember in chapter 1 that Christ has been exalted. We remember in chapters 2 and 3 that there was a promise given to the church that we would reign with Christ and even that we would sit on His throne as He sits on the Father's throne. So there is...there is the throne of God and Christ, but there are also twenty-four other thrones. This is quite an interesting thing.

We have to ask the question about these twenty-four other thrones. It appears that there is a shared reigning here. In chapter 20 of Revelation we see another revelation to God, or vision, "I saw thrones and they sat upon them and judgment was given to them." So there is a shared rulership in heaven. There is a shared leadership. Sovereignty is somehow spread among some others. Some others have been coronated and elevated.

Who are they? Some might suggest that they're angels. Well, angels are called thrones in the New Testament, Colossians 1:16. It's a term for some ranks of angels. But no where does it say that angels sit on thrones. No where in the Scripture do we see angels reigning or ruling. In fact, in Hebrews chapter 1 it says they are ministering servants sent out to minister to the saints. We'd be hard pressed, I think, to be dogmatic and say these were angels because these are thrones and furthermore verse 4 says, "I saw twenty-four elders sitting on them." So we wouldn't assume that twenty-four elders were sitting on twenty-four angels. Since angels are never said to reign, are never seen sitting on thrones, we would assume then that whoever the twenty-four elders are they're sitting on these thrones, they have a shared rulership with Christ...probably not angels. It would be best, I think, to see them as human beings.

They're common characters in the play out of this final scenario. The word "elder" is presbuteros, the same word in the New Testament used to refer to the leaders in the church. There is no occasion in Scripture where the term "elder" in the Greek or the Hebrew is specifically and unquestionably related

to angels. There is an obscure text in Isaiah 24:23 that some would like to assign to angels but that cannot be for certain. So the term "elder" is used to speak of men. And the one questionable passage in the multiplicity of uses does not change that...since it can't be proven.

It also says that whoever is on these thrones is sitting, you'll notice there in verse 4. The twenty-four elders are sitting. By the way, if I may note, elder would be an inappropriate word to use for angels since angels don't age. It says they were sitting. Angels are not seen sitting. Angels seem to me to be usually seen hovering, flying, standing, ready for action, waiting, not sitting. As I said, in Hebrews 1:14 they are seen in the form of ministry. In Isaiah 6 they are hovering like celestial helicopters around the throne waiting to be bidden to do their duty. In Matthew 18:10 it says that they are always beholding the face of My Father who is in heaven. They surround the throne looking at the face of God, always looking in His face, waiting for any expression that acts as a dispatch to send them on their duty on behalf of the saints.

Whoever these twenty-four elders are, they have entered into some kind of rest. They have sat down. They have taken a seat. It is the rest of a triumphal rule. They're sitting with God around His throne in triumph.

Now you'll notice something else about them in verse 4, "They're clothed in white garments." Angels do appear as white, you see that in the gospel of John chapter 20 verse 12, you see it in Acts chapter 1 verse 10. You see them in white apparel, evidently indicating their purity, their holiness, their glory. But being clothed in white garments is generally the garment of the saints, the clothing of the saints. If you go back in to chapter 3 verse 5, "He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments." Chapter 3 verse 5...chapter 3 verse 18, "I advise you to buy for me gold refined by fire that you may become rich in white garments that you may clothe yourselves." So in this immediate context we would assign them the white garment to saints in the church. It is the garment of righteousness, as it were, imputed to them by faith. They have become overcomes by faith in Christ and been granted that garment. In fact, in the description of the bridal garment that the bride of Christ wears in Revelation chapter 19, it says that it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, white and clean. And the fine linen or the white linen is the righteous acts of the saints. So we are clothed in righteousness.

So we could assume then that this could be men because they are called elders, men because they are sitting and in some ruling triumphal role, some coronated condition. There's another component here I think that's very helpful in chapter 4 verse 4, it says, "They had golden crowns on their heads." Crowns are never promised to angels anywhere in Scripture, nor do we have occasion in Scripture to ever see an angel wearing one. And particularly this one, this is not diadema, the diadem of the king. This is stephanos, the crown of the one who won the victory, the runner's crown, the warrior's crown, the one who went through struggle, the one who went through trial, the victor's crown, the conqueror's crown, the laurel wreath that was given to one who was competing and won the victory.

Holy angels don't struggle with sin. Holy angels don't struggle with personal trials. They're not trying to win some personal triumph over whatever difficulty faces them, although they are in conflict with the forces of hell and the fallen demons, this is not for them a personal conflict...triumph over sin, trials, struggles, as it is for believers. These are stephanos, always the overcomer's crown, the crown of the one who ran the race and finished victorious.

You will notice in chapter 2 verse 10 the promise of this crown given to believers. "Be faithful unto death and I'll give you the stephanos of life." Crowns are for the overcomers. This is a rather common New Testament truth. In the ninth chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul says, "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things and they do it to receive a perishable crown, or wreath, stephanos, but we an imperishable." So here again believers are in a combat and a conflict and a struggle which yields to them a crown.

In 2 Timothy chapter 4 you are familiar with verse 8, I know. Paul says in the future there is laid up for me the stephanos of righteousness. Again, another victor's crown. In James chapter 1 and verse 12 we will again receive the crown of life. And in 1 Peter chapter 5 and I think it's verse 4 the same again, the unfading crown of glory, always the victor's crown always promised to the believer.

So as I look at Revelation chapter 4, just kind of taking you through that information, it would seem best to me to assume that what you have here is redeemed humanity. Angels could not properly be called elders since they don't age. Angels as far as we can tell in Scripture don't sit. Although they do appear in white, so do the saints. Angels are never given crowns, nor are they promised crowns, but believers are.

Now the question comes, if this is some kind of redeemed and coronated humanity, who is it? Who are these twenty-four elders and what do they represent? Well let me give you a little bit of further insight to help you with that. There were twenty-four elders appointed by David to represent the Levitical priesthood, that's in 1 Chronicles 24, interestingly enough. There were twenty-four elders appointed by David and they were to represent the twenty-four courses of priests.

Furthermore, according to the next chapter, 1 Chronicles chapter 25, there were twenty-four divisions of singers in the temple. Twenty-four patriarchs listed, twenty-four elders representing the priesthood, twenty-four singers representing the divisions of musicians in the temple. Twenty-four then is a...an interesting number that seems to speak of completion. It seems to speak about a representative group. All of the priests were represented in the twenty-four. All of the Messianic genealogy was represented in the twenty-four. All of the musicians were represented in the twenty-four. We could conclude then that twenty-four can be a representative number. So whoever these twenty-four are, they represent a larger group.

All right, then, who do they represent? Now somebody will immediately suggest they represent Israel. They represent Old Testament saints. We have a problem with that. Israel has not by the time of this vision, Israel has not yet been...what?...saved. The Tribulation hasn't begun. A hundred and forty-four thousand haven't been sealed. The witness hasn't been given. Israel has not looked on Him whom they have pierced. Israel as a nation has not been converted yet. Oh yes, there are individual Jews who have been converted and come to Christ all through history, but the salvation of Israel has not yet occurred. They haven't been redeemed. Because they haven't been redeemed they haven't been glorified and coronated and set to reign. Israel's salvation has not yet occurred. There is yet to be a divine judgment on Israel, yet to be the sealing of the 144 thousand Jews, that is yet to come. In fact, it's over in chapter 7, it hasn't happened yet.

So, follow my thought, this cannot represent then a coronated and completed Israel. This cannot be the redeemed crowned clothed reigning Israel represented by these twenty-four elders. It can't be because it hasn't happened yet. The multitude saved out of the time of Tribulation are not included with the twenty-four elders.

Some people say, "Well maybe it's the Tribulation saints." They haven't been converted yet either...not yet. The elders are distinct from those people who are saved who come out of the Tribulation time. The people who are redeemed and saved and come out of the Tribulation, they will sing songs of praise along with the twenty-four elders. It can't be...it can't be a coronated representative of Israel, it can't be a coronated and throned representative of the Tribulation saints because they haven't been converted yet either.

Some say, "Well, twelve of them represent the church and twelve of them represent the Old Testament saints." On what basis do we split the twenty-four? What exegetical basis is there in the text to make twenty-four two twelves? It never says twelve and twelve...so why split the group? If God intended us to have two groups of twelve I think He would have inspired John to put down two groups of twelve. And so, I don't think there's really any compelling reason to say...well, twelve represent Old Testament saints and twelve represent New Testament saints. If they are a representative group, then certainly that is possible, but there's no compelling reason to split into two groups the twenty-four. And you still have the problem of how can you represent a coronated Old Testament Israel, as it were, when they haven't yet been converted as a nation? That has to happen during the Tribulation. Then we read in Daniel 12, at the end of the time of Tribulation, Daniel 12:1 to 3, "Then they will be lifted up and brought into glory." And that doesn't happen till the end of the Tribulation which in this context hasn't yet even begun.

So I don't think it can represent the completed nation of Jews. I don't think it's best to associate it with angels. I don't think it fits the Tribulation saints because they're not converted till later, as you will note in chapter 7 verses 9 and 10. That leaves us with only one other group. And while obviously you

cannot be hard and fast and dogmatic about it, it seems to me best to see this as twenty-four elders representing a coronated exalted Raptured church. That is what makes the most sense to me. Certainly if you go to the New Testament and you read the word "elder" it fits the church, doesn't it? It is the common New Testament word for the representatives of the church, for those who are the leaders in the church. And when we see twenty-four elders we could easily understand that they represent the whole church.

According to 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 8 it says, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing." Paul says there's a day coming when believers are going to be coronated, when believers are going to be enthroned, when believers are going to be crowned. And I believe that that glorious day is the Rapture.

Now what are we going to conclude then? Follow the thought. If you have a coronated, crowned, exalted, glorified church in heaven, you've had to have a Rapture. This then becomes one of the important texts to look at when trying to understand a pre-tribulational Rapture. Furthermore, I want you to understand the song the elders sing. Go to chapter 5 verse 8, "When He had taken the book," that is the Lamb, "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, 'Worthy art Thou to take the Book and to break its seals, for Thou wast slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God and they will reign upon the earth.'"

Here you have the elders and they are joined by the four living creatures, we'll talk about them in a moment who are angels, and they're singing a song of redemption. And so I think it's consistent that we represent the church. They have found their place in the Father's house. They are the overcomers who have received their crowns. They are the ones who were promised that they would reign with Christ and they are now sitting on thrones. They are living in the place prepared for them in John 14, Jesus said, "I will come and take you to be where I am." And where He is is in the Father's house and that's where He will take us. They have gone to be with Jesus. They have been coronated. They are sitting on their thrones. They are wearing the crowns, as it were, and all of this is symbolic of their glorification. I think there's every reason to see in this a raptured, glorified church.

Now follow this. These twenty-four elders, which seem to be the representatives of the church, watch the mighty accession of those who are coming out of the Tribulation with washed robes. Look at chapter 7 verse 11. "And all the angels standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' And one of the elders answered saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they? And from where have they come?'"

One of the elders said, "We've got some new folks here. Who are these people?" "And I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'Yes.'" It was a rhetorical question. "These are the ones who come out of the Great Tribulation and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Isn't that interesting? You have the church in heaven welcoming the Tribulation saints. Again that speaks of a pre-tribulational Rapture. They are there in heaven already watching the accession of the Tribulation saints coming up out of the Tribulation.

They are also in heaven when the seventh angel sounds. Go over to chapter 11 verse 15, "The seventh angel sounded," and now you're really getting near the end. Verse 15, "There arose loud voices in heaven saying, 'The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever.'" Now Christ is going to take the world over. This is the end. This is the last moment, the seventh trumpet immediately followed by seven bowls of wrath in a brief period of time. And the world becomes Christ's. Then verse 16, "And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God saying, 'We give thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who was because Thou hast taken Thy great power and has begun to reign.'" There are the twenty-four elders. They're in heaven when the Tribulation saints are converted and come into glory. They're in heaven when the seventh angel sounds and the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Christ.

Go to chapter 14. In chapter 14 verse 1, "I looked, and behold the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion and with Him 144 thousand." You remember, that's twelve thousand out of every Jewish tribe. The Jews don't know what tribe they are but God does. And they'll be His witnesses during the Tribulation. "And there are 144 thousand of them, they have His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the voice of many waters, like the sound of loud thunder and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps and they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders and no one could learn the song except the 144 thousand who had been purchased from the earth."

Now here again you have the elders and where are the elders? They are in heaven when the 144 thousand are on earth gathered together at Mount Zion. They watch the mighty accession then of the Tribulation saints who are coming to Christ and coming to heaven. They are in heaven when the seventh angel sounds. They are in heaven when the 144 thousand are gathered.

Go to chapter 19. In chapter 19, "After these things I heard as it were," this is right at the time of the destruction of the whole world system when God destroys the whole system called Babylon. "A loud voice of a great multitude in heaven and they're saying, 'Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God because His judgments are true and righteous. He has judged the great harlot...that's Babylon, the false religious system...who was corrupting the earth with their immorality. He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her.' And a second time they said 'Hallelujah,' her

smoke rises up forever and ever and the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen, hallelujah." They're there again. There you see the twenty-four elders sitting enthroned in heaven from which they watch the overthrow of the Babylonian system.

So what...if we can conclude anything here is clearest to me is that you have twenty-four elders representing the church...the church then having been caught up to heaven is there while the Tribulation goes on from which the church watches Tribulation saints coming to glory, watches and hears the seventh angel sound, watches while the 144 thousand are sealed and watches while God overthrows the Babylonian system that dominates the time of the Tribulation.

So, we are not...we are not able to be absolutely dogmatic because the text does not tell us specifically who the twenty-four elders are but I have reason to think that this is as good an understanding as we can have. The twenty-four elders then probably aren't angels. They probably aren't the nation Israel. They probably are not the multitude on the earth during the time of the Tribulation, but most likely would represent the church. They are the new priesthood, as it were, they are the new kings and priests as we are called in Revelation chapter 1. We as the church are represented in the twenty-four elders, having been caught up into glory.

Now let's go back to our text. We saw the throne. We saw who was sitting on the throne. We saw what was around the throne, a rainbow and twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders. Let me take you to a fourth point...from the throne, from the throne. Verse 5, "And from the throne," you see you can outline this whole chapter with prepositions. "From the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder."

That's just a little part of that verse. But it's very important. "From the throne" is a reverent way of referring to God. He is the throne. He is the temple. He is on the throne. From God proceed flashes of lightning, sounds and peals of thunder. What's the point here? The point is God is in a judgment mood, that is the point. God is in a judgment mood. Coming out of Him is fury. In chapter 8 verse 5 it talks about the angel who took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, threw it to the earth and followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and earthquake. Now what you see in 8:5 is on the earth what John saw in heaven. It comes out of God and all the way down to earth.

Chapter 11 verse 19, "The temple of God which is in heaven was opened and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and earthquake and a great hailstorm." There's a similar vision as John again sees heaven and sees the same lightning and the same flashing, thundering. Chapter 16 verse 18, "The seventh angel sounds, pours out his bowl," this is the end of the judgment, the final climax. What is it? "Flashes of lightning, sounds and peals of thunder." The very same terminology.

So what you're seeing in heaven is just a preview of the explosion of thunder and lightning that's going to tear up the whole world. And it isn't the thunder and lightning men are used to, it's the thunder and lightning of the fury of God, not the fury of nature. We shouldn't be surprised at this, you can go all the way back in to the book of Exodus and you see God manifesting Himself in the same way. I think it's chapter 19 where God was revealing Himself...yes, verse 16, "Thunder, lightning flashes, thick cloud, loud trumpet sound, everybody trembled." And so here does John see coming from the throne evidences of the judgment fury of God. This is prophetic then of the fire storm of righteous fury about to come from the holy throne on a sinful world. You are now beginning to see God move into action. And when chapter 6 opens up, that fury begins to unfold on the earth.

So what do you have? The throne, on the throne, around the throne, from the throne...fifthly, before the throne...before the throne. Another preposition opens to us another dimension. In verse 5 in the middle, "There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven spirits of God."

Now we come before the throne. And we see something else. Verse 6 says, "And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal." Two things then are before the throne. First, seven lamps of fire burning before the throne. This is not a lampstand. Remember back in chapter 1 we saw lampstands and the Lord was fixing the lampstand and it represented the church. This is not a lampstand used indoors, this is a torch used outdoors. John sees seven torches of fire. They're burning around God's throne.

You say, "What is this?" He tells you, it's the seven spirits of God. You say, "Wait a minute, I thought there was one Holy Spirit." You're right but the...the idea of the language is the seven-fold spirit. These are not lamps that give off a soft gentle light to the indoors, these are fierce blazing torches. And what you see in the Holy Spirit here is fury also. These torches were used for war. Go back and read Judges 7, read Nahum chapter 2, torches associated with war. God is ready to make war and the Holy Spirit is His war torch.

The seven spirits of God have also been mentioned back in chapter 1 verse 4. We went in to detail when we studied it there. And I told you they're basically two passages that help you with that. One is in Isaiah 11:2 because in Isaiah 11:2 you have a very kind of clear outline of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in seven dimensions. Let me just remind you of it. Isaiah 11:2, "And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him." And then it says this, "The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." There you have seven titles for the Holy Spirit. He's the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of strength, the Spirit of knowledge and the Spirit of fear or reverence.

There you have then the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The seven-fold torches represent the seven-fold Spirit, the fullness of the Spirit. Also, I mentioned to you that He could be alluding to Zechariah chapter 4 because in Zechariah's prophecy in chapter 4 he also alludes to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. And he pictures the Holy Spirit as a seven-fold lampstand. That's where the Jews get their menorah, you know that seven-candle...seven-candle candlestick. Zechariah talks about in verse 6, "Not by might and nor by power but by My Spirit," says the Lord. So the seven-fold torch vision is the seven-fold Spirit.

By the way, the seven-fold Spirit of Isaiah...wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, reverence, deity. The seven-fold Spirit of Zechariah is power. The seven-fold Spirit of Revelation 1, grace and peace. But the seven-fold Spirit here, fiery judgment. Could this be the fulfillment of the words of John the Baptist? Matthew 3 said Jesus was coming and when He comes He'll baptize you with fire, with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This of which John spoke was a judgment prophecy. The fiery fury of the Holy Spirit is associated with the flashing light and the thunderous peals of the throne of God.

The Holy Spirit know to us as the Comforter becomes the consumer. And He will consume you if you do not know Christ.

Then also verse 6, "Before the throne..." the language here is...is a little bit elusive. "Before the throne, as it were, like...well, it was and it wasn't...a sea of glass like crystal." Now you hear a lot of people talk about a sea here. This is not a sea, this is a sea of glass. Sea is metaphorical. What John saw at the base of the throne was crystal glass. It's very important to note that. Revelation 21 says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth," verse 1, "and the first heaven and the first earth passed away and there was no longer any sea."

So Revelation 21 says there's no sea in heaven. What John saw here was not a sea, there's a river, not a sea. What he saw here was crystal glass like a sea. On the throne sits God. His refracting presence coming through, as it were, diamonds and rubies and an emerald rainbow. And then at the very base of the throne is crystal glass, refracting through every imaginable prism that it could possibly contain, the light of God's glory and bouncing it throughout the infinite universe. A huge crystal base stretching out before it, glistening. This is the pavement of crystal on which the throne of God sits.

Back in Exodus 24:10 Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy of the elders of Israel and they saw the God of Israel. Listen to this, "And under his feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky itself." They're describing the same thing. A pavement crystal clear and yet sapphire. Yes, because what comes from God is blazing light and fiery red...the color of sapphire. Ezekiel chapter 1, Ezekiel describes the floor. He says, "There's a floor under God's throne," he says, "It's the color of awesome dazzling crystal stretched across the sky," Ezekiel

1:22. It's absolutely consistent.

So there is this magnificent crystal base. Heaven is not a world of shadows. Heaven is not a world of mists. It is a world of splendiferous light, refracting through jewels and crystal beyond anything we could ever describe or even imagine. There is God in all His glory ready to pour out His fury. God's splendorous and glorious beautiful, majestic, sovereign powerful and holy and filled with wrath.

So, we look on the throne, around the throne, from the throne and before the throne. And we'll stop there. There are two more points, in and around the throne and toward the throne, but that's for next time.

Father, we are awed by the vision, thrilled at Your glory. We have so much anticipation for the day when we enter heaven and we see this magnificence. But, God, we know as well that this is a scene of fury, judgment, wrath and our hearts grieve for those whose sins have separated them from you. We thank You, Father, for the hope we have to be in that heaven that John shows us. But we also know that there are many, a world of people who will never know the glories of heaven, only the horrors of hell. And we can only pray for their salvation and call on them to embrace Christ.

Thank You, Father, for giving us such a vivid glimpse of Your sovereignty as we see the power begin to unfold in future judgment. Thank You for the warning of this book. Thank You that it sets down for all to see who will look...exactly where history goes and what happens to those who know not Christ. Thank You, Father, for the grace of such a revelation.

We thank You for the hope of the redeemed church, to be caught up to meet You in the clouds and be taken to the place You've prepared for us, there to enjoy the time of our coronation, our reigning with You as kings and priests, as Peter said, there to enjoy the time of rewards, the marriage supper of the Lamb while the judgment breaks loose in this world. Thank You, Father, for our hope. And yet as we rejoice in our hope we sorrow with those who have no hope. And may our hearts open to them to see them move from hopelessness to hope, even as the testimonies we heard tonight. We thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).