

Revelation, Part 6

As we begin chapter 4 of Revelation, we have a change of subject. We have seen “the things which you have seen, and the things which are”. In chapter 4 through the end of Revelation, we will look at “the things which will take place”. We will initially focus on chapters 4 through 18. That period is commonly called the “Tribulation” and sometimes referred to as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer 30:7), among other names.

What is the Tribulation?

We have been trundling along and assuming everyone who gets this message understands what a major portion of the Book of the Revelation is about, namely the Tribulation. Herein will be a brief description for the purpose of establishing a working base of understanding of the Tribulation. We will look at many details later in this study. Meanwhile, here is the “Cliff Notes” version.

The Tribulation is a period of extreme worldwide events, actually several orders of magnitude of extreme worldwide events, that will take place sometime in the future. It is a period that will try the entire world, leaving no corner untouched. The Tribulation is seven years long as defined in Daniel 9 and supported by other time indicators in Revelation. It is divided into two halves, with the second half called the “Great Tribulation”. The first half begins with a treaty signed by Israel to assure its national security. Conditions will be bad during the first half and will only get a lot worse during the Great Tribulation second half. We are talking “bad” and “worse” on the level of most of the world’s population getting wiped out— THAT bad! The second half begins with an event called the “Abomination of Desolation,” which is the setting up of an “image” of this Satan-indwelt Antichrist in the new temple in Jerusalem and demanding worship as god —or die. The Tribulation concludes with a great war called Armageddon and the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The main theme of the Tribulation is God’s judgment on a Christ-rejecting world. The central focus will be on Israel and the final judgment of Israel, which is why the Tribulation is also called “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” the name “Jacob” referring to Israel. It is a period, therefore, that should be viewed as God returning to dealing with Israel, as we shall see later in this study.

The true Church (upper case “C”) is removed before the Tribulation begins by an event called the Rapture and is not present on Earth during the Tribulation. The word “church,” referring to the Church, that is so prominent in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation does not occur again until Revelation 22:16, except a mention in Revelation 19:7 where It is in view as the wife of the Lamb. There will be people remaining on Earth after the Rapture who are members of some “Christian” denomination but have not actually accepted Christ as their personal savior and are thus not born again. We call them “nominal Christians,” Christians in name only, or the “church” with a lower case “c”. In that sense, there is a “church” that does experience the wrath of God.

There will be people on earth who do respond to Christ *during* the Tribulation, but they are not the Church either. They are seen as saved Gentiles or saved Israelites just like before the Church Age. “Saints” mentioned from this point on in Revelation do not lose their racial identity as is commonly done in referring to saints during the Church Age where they are seen as “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free”.

In the Rapture or resurrection of the Church, all born again believers (the Church) of any denomination are “caught up” to meet Christ in the clouds and there be with Him forever. The Tribulation actually begins some time after that event; it may be days, weeks or even longer, but there seems to be an interlude of some unknown duration between the Rapture and the actual beginning of the Tribulation. Since the true Church is removed it does signal the end of the Church Age. From God’s perspective the Tribulation begins with the opening of the Seven Seals. From Israel’s perspective, it begins with a seven years treaty Israel makes with the antichrist.

There are no prophetic events that must precede the Rapture, thus it is said to be “imminent,” meaning it will come suddenly and without warning. With understanding of what the Tribulation itself will look like, we can, however, see “historical trends” occurring that are *likely* leading to or pointing to some of the events depicted in Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture concerning the Tribulation itself. Christ made it clear that no man knows the day or the hour of His return, only His Father knows. While I have suspicions based what I see in historical trends taking place right now that seem to point to its nearness, I could be wrong.

Daniel 9

I previously mentioned Daniel 9 to support some points I made. We will now look at that passage a bit closer. In this passage Daniel, an Israelite in the Babylonian exile, is given a vision of future events.

Dan 9:24 “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

The first two words of this prophecy, “seventy sevens,” are at the center of controversy surrounding its interpretation. It says there is some specific amount of time left to “his (Daniel’s) people” and his “holy city” before certain other events will happen. “Seventy weeks” is *shib’iyim* {*shib-eem*’} *shabuwa`* {*shaw-boo’-ah*} in the underlying Hebrew text. *Shibiym* is the Hebrew word for seventy, but *shabuwa* can be translated as week or seven. Some translations have this as “seventy sevens” instead of “seventy weeks.” Either translation is legitimate but both leave some doubt as to its meaning. It can safely be assumed it is seventy groups of seven, but are they days, years, or something else?

If we interpret this as seventy weeks of days, that is 490 days or a little over 1 1/3 years. Nothing in history happened by way of fulfillment of this prophecy. That interpretation can safely be discarded. Some commentators say this is not meant to be literal but is just a long period of time, but if we interpret the seventy weeks as weeks of literal years or 490 years, we get a series of events that do seem to be fulfillment of the

prophecy. Therefore, most dispensational theologians lean heavily on this “seventy weeks” or “seventh sevens” being 490 literal years.

Verse 24 goes on to say, “Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon your holy city...” Determined is *chathak* {*khaw-thak*}, which means decreed or marked out. This vision and prophecy was given to Daniel, an Israelite, then clearly “his people” would be the Jews, and “his Holy City” can be no other but Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in ruins at the time, but even so it remained a city set apart to God. We conclude that this is a vision concerning Israel and the Jews. It is not related to the Church, which is not mentioned in the prophecy or in view at all. That is an important point to take away from this passage. So much confusion surrounding Scriptural interpretation, especially eschatology, stems from a failure to distinguish between Israel and the Church and between the Law and Grace. This prophecy concerns Israel, “your people” as spoken to Daniel.

Verse 24 goes on to say, “to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”

Six things are mentioned that have to happen before this 490 years are concluded. The first three deal with sin. The expression “to finish” in the Hebrew means to bring to an end. “To finish the transgression” means that Israel’s apostasy and sin and wondering over the face of the earth, as a result of being evicted from the land, will be brought to completion.

“To make an end of sins” can be interpreted to mean to take away sin or to bring sin to final judgment. Another translation could be “to seal up sin” as in shutting up in prison, and some translations say that. Sins are described as sealed because they are altogether removed out of the sight of God.

“To make reconciliation for iniquity” is a rather clear picture of the Cross and Christ reconciling Israel (and the rest of the world) to Himself. Reconcile is the Hebrew *kippur*, and when used in relation to “sin” means to cover or to wipe out, to make as harmless, or to atone. There is an annual Feast Day of the Lord called Yom Kippur, which means “the day of atonement.” On that day, it is understood that the sacrifices made by the Chief Priest atones (or covers and hides from God) Israel’s sins for one

year. The sacrifices must be repeated every year, but this cannot refer to 490 years of Yom Kippurs. Rather it must refer to some “yom kippur” that is more final, and that is the Cross that is in view here.

While the provision for reconciliation is made at the Cross, the application of it is associated with the Second Advent, as far as Israel is concerned. Remember, the Church is not in view here. The eschatological conclusion of Israel’s history will bring an end to their transgressions, bring sin to judgment, and introduce an element of forgiveness for sin. From our side of the Cross, we know this is looking at what transpired at the First Advent and the Cross.

The fourth aspect of the program is to bring everlasting righteousness. There is a sense that this is accomplished by Christ and His first coming in that He provided a righteous ground for God’s justification of the sinner. But the many Messianic passages relevant to Daniel and the Jews view righteousness as being applied to the Earth at what we know as the Second Advent. Understand that they did not see the coming of Messiah as a first and second advent. Their understanding of Messiah pictured only one, the one we call the Second Advent. In other words, Israel was expecting a future Messiah who would come and reign over Israel and the world, and His reign would include incredible physical changes in the conditions found on Earth. Some describe this Kingdom Age as a return to the conditions found in the Garden of Eden. There is an expectation that this will be a period of righteousness on Earth. This is a picture of the righteous character of the Kingdom Age as introduced by the end of the Age of Israel and is a glimpse of the Second Advent and Christ setting up the Kingdom.

The fifth aspect “to seal up the vision and prophecy” probably refers to the termination of the unusual direct revelation by means of visions and oral prophecy. To “seal up” suggests there is no more to be added and what has been predicted will then receive divine conformation and fulfillment. The implication is that there is no more prophecy to be given, and all that is left will be fulfillment at the end of this prophecy period of 490 years.

New Testament Scriptures say prophecy is sealed once the “perfect is come.” That word translated “perfect” is in the neuter gender, meaning it is a thing and not a person, as some have suggested. I believe this “thing” is the completed canon of Scripture, which was completed around AD95

when John penned Revelation. (1 Cor 13:8-10). Though the giving of prophecy was completed 2,000 years ago, there is still much of it to be fulfilled.

The sixth aspect is “to anoint the most Holy.” Various interpretations have been presented as a meaning for this, including the anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit. The more likely interpretation is it refers to the anointing of the Holy of Holies in the Temple in the Kingdom Age. In fact, the NIV translates it that way.

Dan 9:25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

At the time of the vision, Jerusalem is in ruins and basically unoccupied. This passage says it is to be rebuilt and gives the starting date. Buried in the prophecy is also the date restoration is completed.

We have what is called in Latin the *terminus a quo*. This is the date in which the seventy sevens begin. Understanding this date is key to finding correct fulfillment of the prophecy. It is identified as the date the commandment goes forth to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem. Seems simple enough—just identify that date and begin counting. Trouble is there were at least four commandments or decrees to rebuild Jerusalem recorded in Scripture, but most expositors agree that it was the second decree of Artaxerxes Longemaneus, king of Persia 465-425BC, that actually resulted in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. He issued his decree in 445BC. While there is some concern about the 445 date’s accuracy, it is generally accepted.

The seventy sevens (490 years) is divided into three segments: seven sevens, 62 sevens, and in verse 27 one seven. The first segment of seven sevens takes us to about 396BC. That is the year generally accepted as the completion of Jerusalem as a rebuilt walled city.

The prophecy goes on to say that from the decree to the Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks and 62 weeks for a total of 69 weeks. Though the word translated “Messiah” could be translated as a noble person or royalty that is anointed, this can really only be interpreted as referring to

Jesus Christ. And just so happens that the seven weeks and 62 weeks takes us up to the time of Christ, perhaps even to the exact date of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, depending on when that actually occurred. We really do not know the precise date of His death, but 30AD is the generally accepted date.

“Troublous times” probably refers to the fact that Israel will be under continuous foreign domination until the end of the age, meaning the Age of the Law also called The Age of Israel.

Dan 9:26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

After the second set of sevens—the 62 sevens—Messiah will be cut off. “Cut off” is *karath* {*kaw-rath*'} and means to cut off, cut down, hue, or to kill. This obviously refers to the death of Messiah on the Cross, and practically all expositors agree that Christ’s death occurred after the 69 sevens.

“But not for himself...” is best literally translated “there is nothing for him.” Though it is true He died for others, nothing that rightly belonged to Him, as Messiah the Prince, was given to Him at that time. He did not come into His full reward nor His full authority.

Who is the “prince that shall come?” This is not the Messiah the Prince but a second prince. We know that Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD70—leveled it and took the Temple down so that not one stone stood upon another. That Roman “prince” was Titus, “The prince that shall come shall destroy the city....” This certainly looks like what happened in AD70 when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. But the wording seems to imply two comings, and this interpretation seems to fit very comfortably with both the known event of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and prophecy of the end times of the Tribulation. The antichrist of the tribulation is pictured in Scripture as leading a “revived” Roman Empire, so, Rome comes in AD70 and again in the Tribulation. We would conclude that this part of verse 26 is referring to the first coming of the Roman prince and his destruction of the city and Temple in AD70 and not the events of the Tribulation, thus all of verse 26 can be considered as fulfilled already.

Dan 9:27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

The “he” here is “the prince that will come” seen in V26. This passage refers to his second coming during the Tribulation. Some interpret “he” to be Christ and the covenant is the “New Covenant” in Jeremiah 31:31 and Hebrews 8:8. This New Covenant will be made between God and Israel during the Kingdom Age that follows the Age of Israel, of which the Tribulation is the last part. But this passage is speaking of events during the Tribulation. The correct interpretation is this is a reference to the antichrist. The antichrist will “confirm the covenant with many for **one week.**” And here is the last week of the seventy, the seventieth week. This is one good reason to interpret the “he” as the antichrist because of this covenant of a specific length of one week.

The antichrist “shall make a strong covenant with many for one week”. This is a clear reference with the treaty or covenant the antichrist will make with unbelieving Israel during the Tribulation. This inference is drawn from the reference to “your people” in verse 24. There will be an alliance between the “prince that will come” (antichrist) and the nation Israel that will be an unholy alliance and ultimately detrimental to the Jews. I believe it will have the nature of a mutual protection pact that will “guarantee” Israel’s survival in a hostile environment that will prevail at the time. I think one reason Israel will do this is to keep her enemies at bay when they rebuild the Temple on Temple Mount, probably requiring the destruction of the Dome of the Rock. I am also thinking that Israel has lost her main benefactor, currently the United States, because of the Rapture and other internal turmoil in America, the seeds of which we may be witnessing today. Therefore, she will need and welcome the peacemaking role of this head of the confederation of 10 European (Roman) nations. In offering this covenant, this ruler will pose as a prince of peace, and Israel will accept his authority. As part of this treaty, I believe the antichrist will station troops in Israel, making his takeover easier when the time comes.

Verse 27 cont. ...and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of

abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Note that the vision is still concerned with events during this seventieth week. Also note that Israel has a functioning Temple and is performing the Levitical sacrifices as before AD70. Today Israel is indeed preparing to resume the Levitical offerings. The priestly vestments have been produced. Vessels of worship have been researched and made. With the help of an American cattle breeder, they are breeding for a perfect red heifer that is a necessary sacrifice to dedicate the Temple. Ultra-religious Jews are preparing right now to rebuild the Temple.

“In the midst of the week” is half way through the seven years. Three and a half years into the seven years the treaty will be broken and the antichrist will force the cessation of sacrifice at the Temple with the erection of an “image” of himself in the Holy of Holies and will require worship of himself as god.

Mat. 24:15-16 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

This “abomination of desolation” is a buzz term among the Jews even today and refers to idol worship. An “image” of the Antichrist is set up in the Temple and worship of him is demanded—or die. This is the sign to Israel—FLEE! This is the event that signals the beginning of the second half of the tribulation, the Great Tribulation. Things were bad before—now they get really nasty!

Dan 9:27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

This ruler will end sacrifice and offering. This expression refers to the entire Levitical system, which suggests that Israel will have restored that system in the first half of the 70th “seven.” After this ruler gains worldwide political power, he will assume power in the religious realm as well and will cause the world to worship him (2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:8). To receive such worship, he will terminate all organized religions. Posing as the world’s rightful king

and god and as Israel's prince of peace, he will then turn against Israel and become her destroyer and defiler. Israel will "desolate" or be desolated, laid waste, destroyed until "the decreed end," the end of the Age of Israel and more specifically, the end of the Tribulation.

Daniel was shown the last days of his people, the Israelites. The Church is not part of his people. This prophecy was specifically for Israel and did not include the Church. Where does the Church fit in? Israel was offered the promised Kingdom. Both John the Baptist and Jesus said the Kingdom was near. But Israel rejected Messiah/King and thus the Kingdom offer was withdrawn. Instead, God gave Messiah to the Gentiles and cut off Israel in judgment, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 with the Jews being expelled from the land just as God had promised in Deuteronomy 28. The Age of Israel was interrupted at Pentecost in AD30 with the creation of the Church (Age), leaving "one week" of Daniel's prophecy left to run. The Church Age was inserted between the 69th week and the 70th week.

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Paul doesn't hold his tongue. He and Barnabus "waxed bold," that is they gave these Jews both barrels. "You have judged yourselves"—YOU made the decision—and by your decision you are not worthy of salvation. "Lo" - *idou* {*id-oo*'} means behold, or see for yourselves, that we are turning our attention to the Gentiles. Messiah and salvation were offered to the Jew first as the chosen people, but they rejected both. God's plan will proceed with or without them, and Messiah was given to those they despised the most—the lowly "dogs"—the uncircumcised, the Goyim. Christ said He came first to the lost sheep of Israel, but once He was rejected by His own people, God was free of His obligation to restrict the message to Israel. Aside from the fact that Israel rejected Messiah, the provisions of salvation and the spiritual aspects of the rejected Kingdom of God were given to the Gentiles for another reason.

Ro 11:11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

God intends that Israel should be provoked to jealousy to bring them to ultimate repentance and salvation. The fact that this would happen was kept from Israel. The existence of the Church Age was kept hidden from them as a *musterion*—mystery.

1 Cor 2:7-8 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: 8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (Also Eph 3:9; Col 1:26; Rom 16:25)

The “princes of this world” is Israel. The truth of their future rejection of their Messiah was kept from them. Had they known they might not have rejected Messiah, violating their free will. It was God’s will that Christ go to the Cross to deal with sin. That is the only means by which we sinners could ever be reconciled to Him. The details of Israel’s failure and complicity in the crucifixion, and God’s plan for the insertion of the Church Age, was kept from them as a mystery. Jesus did not begin revealing the existence of the Church Age until the very end of His ministry when he began speaking in parables.

This does not mean Jews cannot be saved during the Church Age. Many are and we have congregations of Messianic Jews who believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But as a nation, they were temporarily blinded (John 12:37-43). God is far from finished with Israel. They (and an unbelieving world) will face the final judgment of the Tribulation during Daniel’s Seventieth Week. Christ will return in Glory to deliver the remnant of believers who survive the Tribulation and finally deliver to *believing* Israel the promised Kingdom.

Back to Revelation.

Rev 4:1 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.

In Revelation 1:19 we saw John being told, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” John’s vision of the glorified Christ was the things he has seen. The letters to the seven churches are the things which are, and now we will see the things which will take place. The remaining portion of Revelation is clearly future. Beginning with chapter 4, we will see a series of unfolding events through the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. They will come with increasing intensity of devastation ultimately pointing to the Second Advent of Christ in chapter 19, then the millennium kingdom in chapter 20, and chapters 21-22 will be focused on the New Heaven and New Earth. Revelation’s main purpose is to draw all attention to the Second Advent of Christ and alert the people of the world of this important event and the need to be prepared for God’s coming judgment. The events of the rest of Revelation will be largely chronological.

Rev 4:1 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.”

After what things? After the events described in chapters 2 and 3. “After this (these things)” is made up of two Greek words *meta touto*. *Meta* is a primary preposition that can be translated with, among or after. It has the connotation of associating one thing with another. *Touto* is a demonstrative pronoun, after *this (these things)*. These same two words appear near the end of the verse when the loud voice says, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place *after this*.” After what? “After this” at the beginning of the verse and at again the end likely refers to the same thing, and that would be the events described in chapters 2 and 3, a reference to the events associated with the seven

churches. And since we believe the seven churches are a prophetic look at church history yet future to John's time, then we conclude "after this" refers to after the Church Age. I do not see any other reasonable interpretation.

The word translated "door" in verse 1 is one that usually refers to a house door that opens to the street or to the outside. It is sometimes translated as a gate. This outer entrance (door) was open, and "the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me...." The implication is that the voice is very loud. Sound familiar? The same terms show up in the main Rapture passage in Scripture.

1 Thes 4:11 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the **Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout**, with the voice of an archangel, **and with the trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

John hears a loud voice like a trumpet speak to him and commanding him to "Come up here". That is exactly the way the Church will be called out during the Rapture. There will be some kind of command that believers will hear accompanied by a trumpet blast, and they will be brought to heaven.

Rev 4:2 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.

John stated that immediately he was in the spirit (or “in [my] spirit”), meaning that experientially he was taken up to heaven, though his body was actually still on the island of Patmos. There he saw a great throne with One sitting on it who had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. This jasper is a clear stone in contrast to the opaque jasper stones known today; it may have resembled a diamond. The carnelian, also known as ruby, and sardius, were a ruby-red color. The jasper and the carnelian were the *first and last* of the twelve gemstones worn on the high priest’s breast. The throne’s overall appearance was one of great beauty and color, enhanced by a rainbow, resembling an emerald, which encircled the throne. This appears to be the throne of our Lord.

Rev 3:4 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.

The question is just who are these twenty-four white robed and crowned “elders”? There are several interpretations.

- Some regard them as representing the saints of all ages
- Some see them as angels
- Some see them as representing the Church and Israel - twelve of each
- Some see them as representing the Church only

My money is on the last one. The word “elders” is the Greek *presbyteros* which is a word associated with the Church. They are dressed in white linen and wearing gold crowns, suggesting they have been judged (evaluated at the Bema) and rewarded with crowns. There are two kinds of crowns: The first is a *diadem* a crown of a ruler, but that is not the word used here. The second is *stefanos* the crown of a victor or overcomer. It is traditionally a laurel wreath and, in this case, they are gold. That is the “crown” used here.

Referring back to the way John was called to this vision and how it resembled the way believers will be called out in the Rapture, and if we consider Revelation as chronological, the only group that could possibly be in heaven at this time, as well as evaluated and rewarded, is the Raptured Church.

You will notice the 24 elders are seated on thrones. To sit on a throne is a seat of power and authority. In the Bible one of the things we are told is

that we will reign with Christ. Ephesians even mentions that we are seated with him in heavenly places. The elders were clothed in white symbolic of the righteousness of Christ. No other group of humans has experienced judgment at this point, so these must represent the Church in heaven. More specifically the overcoming, victorious, and raptured Church.

Why twenty-four? The priests in Israel, were divided into twenty-four sections to determine the order in which they would minister before the Lord. Each of the twenty-four orders were represented by one priest. When these twenty-four priests met they were representative of the whole nation Israel. In 1 Chronicles 25 the musicians were divided into twenty-four sections, and they were responsible for worship in the house of the Lord. Revelation 1:6 says we (the Church) are “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”. The Scriptures don’t give us a definitive answer for the reason behind the number. All we can say for certain is they are not angels, as some argue, but are believers, and the only evaluated and crowned believers who could possibly be present in Heaven at this point are resurrected (raptured) Church Age believers. “After these things,” the Church Age, the next prophetic event is the Rapture of the Church.

And that, my beloved, leads us to the subject of the Rapture or resurrection of the Church, sometimes called the “translation of the Church”. But that will have to happen next session.