

The Time of the End – Part Seven

A Series on the Book of Revelation

Adapted from Arlen Chitwood's book by Jeanne Alley

Revelation 3:19-4:1-11

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

4:1 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." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 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. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. 7 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

1). So far, in chapters one, two and three, we have seen John removed from his present place in time and placed in the future on the Lord's Day. There he was shown the

complete Church in Christ's presence, with Christ presented in His future role as Judge. The scene portrays the time when, immediately after the rapture and resurrection of the Church, everyone is judged and each person receives a just recompense according to their deeds. The overcomers inherit the kingdom; the non-overcomers do not.

a) Immediately following these events, attention is again called to that which was previously seen in chapter one – John hearing a trumpet and being “in Spirit” (compare vv. 1:10 and 4:1, 2a). In both instances it shows John being removed from his present day and placed in the Lord's Day. This is a common way of presenting things in the Word, as Scripture, in its structure, has a way of repeating things at times in order to provide a base for supplying additional details on a subject.

b) So with these things in mind, seeing that the Spirit of God led John to begin chapter four at the same point as seen in chapter one would provide us with a base for additional revelation surrounding *Christians* following the judgment seat.

The Heavenly Scene

2) Even though Revelation 4:1-2 begins by drawing attention to the same event which was just seen in Rev. 1:10, John, rather than seeing a judicial scene (as in ch. 1), now sees a rainbow encircled throne, with God seated on the throne. And surrounding this throne, John sees twenty-four other thrones and twenty-four crowned “elders” seated on these thrones.

a) The significance of attention called to a *rainbow* encircling God's throne at this point in the book can be seen in the first mention of a rainbow in Scripture (Gen. 9:13-17). The rainbow appeared in Genesis following the completion of God's judgment, i.e. the Flood, and the same thing is seen in Rev. 4:3 relative to the completion of the judgment of Christians.

b) At this point in the book, events pertaining to the dispensation in which the Spirit spent 2,000 years searching for a bride for God's Son are complete. As well, events surrounding the judgment seat are also complete. And, because of the reason for the dispensation and the judgment seat, and because of the point toward which all Scripture moves, the logical place where one would expect activity to now be centered at this point in the book would be concerning bringing about the realization of that stated in Heb. 2:5:

“For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.”

c) And that is what we are seeing – the change in the administration of the heavens, which is the focal point to which all of Scripture moves.

d) In the latter part of Rev. 4:2, immediately following the repetition from chapter one concerning the removal of the Church (vv. 1, 2a), John begins to describe various things about God’s throne, which he both sees and hears – “lightnings,” “thunderings,” and “voices” coming out of the throne, and “lamps of fire burning before the throne” (v. 5). And “in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne” John sees four living creatures who “rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”; and these living creatures “give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever” (vv. 6-9).

e) Then the scene returns to the twenty-four elders, who arise from their thrones, fall down before God, worship Him, relinquish their crowns to the One Who originally placed them in regal positions, and express adoration to the One worthy “to receive glory and honor and power” (vv. 4, 10, 11).

f) If an apex is to be found in the Book of Revelation, aside from the actions of the mighty angel in chapter ten and events surrounding Christ’s return in chapter nineteen, the action of these twenty-four elders would have to be considered. The action of these angels in Revelation chapter four is significant beyond degree in relation to the central message of this book.

Crowns, Regality, Government

3). “Crowns” have to do with regality, and the government of the earth is in view throughout the Book of Revelation. At this point in the book, the judgment of Christians, with a view to regality, will have just occurred; and, with a view to this same regality, Christ, following this, is seen as the One about to redeem the forfeited inheritance through taking the seven-sealed scroll from God’s right hand and breaking the seals (chs. 5ff).

a) Angels have ruled over the earth since time immemorial – since that time when God established the government of the earth in the beginning. Angels will still be exercising rulership over the earth at this point in the book, following the judgment of Christians. And angels will continue ruling until Christ and His co-heirs (forming His bride) take the kingdom, following Christ’s return to the earth.

b) Accordingly, neither Christ nor Christians will receive the crowns which they are to wear during the Messianic Era until *after* Christ returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation. The crown which Christ will wear during the Messianic Era is presently being worn by Satan, as he continues to exercise power over the earth. And the crowns

which Christians will wear in that day are presently being worn by two segments of angels – the angels presently ruling with Satan, and the angels who refused to follow Satan when he sought to exalt his throne.

c) When Satan sought to exalt his throne – following his being placed over the earth, with a large contingent of angels ruling the earth with him – only one-third of these ruling angels followed Satan and fell with him, with the other two-thirds refusing to follow him (cf. Isa. 14:12-14; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:3, 4).

i/ Note the way Rev. 12:4a is worded: “And his [the dragon’s, Satan’s] tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven [referring to angels (cf. Job. 38:7; Rev. 1:20)] and did cast them to the earth...” This “third part,” after millenniums of time and separation [separation of one-third from the other two-thirds], is still recognized at this future time as only part of a larger group, only part of all the angels originally ruling with Satan.

d) And though the angels not following Satan didn’t continue ruling with him, they could not immediately relinquish their appointed positions. Rather, they had to retain their positions for a time, remaining crowned.

e) The reason for this would be the principle of Biblical government set forth in the Scriptures that suggests that an incumbent ruler retains his crown until the one replacing him is not only on the scene, but is ready to ascend the throne. Only then can an incumbent ruler relinquish his crown.

i/ An example of this can be found in the account of Saul and David, who form a type of Satan and Christ. Saul, though disqualified from ruling, retained his crown and continued to reign until David was not only present but ready to ascend the throne. Then, Saul’s crown was taken, given to David; and David, along with certain faithful men, ascended the throne and reigned in the stead of Saul and those who had ruled with him [I, II Samuel].

ii/ And we can see the same thing in the antitype. Satan, though disqualified from ruling, still retains his crown and continues to reign. And he will reign until Christ is not only present but ready to ascend the throne. Then, Satan’s crown will be taken, given to Christ; and Christ, along with certain faithful individuals, will ascend the throne and reign in the stead of Satan and those who had ruled with him, both before and after his fall (Rev. 19:11-20:6).

f) This same established principle pertains to both the angels refusing to follow Satan in his attempt to exalt his throne and those who did follow him (remember 1/3 vs 2/3). This entire group of angels (both fallen and unfallen) will retain their crowns until those

who are to replace them - those who are to wear these crowns - are not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne.

g) These relinquished crowns (formerly worn by angels) though will be worn only after Christ returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, overthrows Satan and his angels, and forcibly takes their crowns. Only then will Christ be in possession of all the crowns which He and His bride are destined to wear as they ascend the throne and rule the earth.

h) This entire scenario of events, as it pertains to the government of the earth, is introduced in Revelation chapter four. It is introduced immediately following events surrounding the judgment seat when, for the first time in the history of the earth, those who are to ascend the throne with God's Son will have been called out of the larger body of Christians and revealed. Those shown worthy to take the crowns worn by Satan and his angels up to this point in time will now be on the scene, ready to ascend the throne. And for the first time in the history of the earth, angels can now relinquish their crowns.

i) This is the first order of activity seen in the Book of Revelation occurring immediately following issues and determinations at the judgment seat. And so it should be, for, according to Rom. 8:19-23, the entire creation (as it pertains to the earth, both the material creation and redeemed man) presently groans and travails, awaiting "the manifestation of the sons of God" (a new order of sons — taken from among redeemed man, not angels).

j) Revelation chapter four is the point in the book where this manifestation of a new order of sons has its beginning. It begins here by the relinquishment of crowns (for those comprising this new order of sons will have been revealed), making possible a later full manifestation of regal activity by man at the time of Christ's return.

k) Thus, with the introduction of crowns cast before God's throne in Rev. 4:10, 11, only one group of individuals could possibly be in view (if one remains within context and keeps in mind the earth's government in both history and prophecy). These twenty-four elders can only represent angelic rulers (cf. Heb. 2:5). Angels alone will possess crowns in relation to the government of the earth at this time (as they do during the present time).

i/ It is interesting to note that some Bible students, on the basis of the pronouns used in Rev. 5:9, 10 — "us" and "we" [KJV] — have understood the twenty-four elders to represent redeemed men, not angels. However, the majority of the better Greek manuscripts render the pronouns in v. 10 as "them" and "they" [ref. ASV, NASB, NIV, Wuest, Weymouth], giving rise to the thought that the

pronoun “us” in v. 9 is probably a scribal insertion, being spurious [ref. Alford, Lenski].

ii/ But the matter is really not left to manuscript evidence alone. That the pronouns “them” and “they” are correct is evident from the context. Note that the song in vv. 9, 10 is apparently sung not only by the “twenty-four elders” but also by the “four beasts [‘living creatures’]” as well. Then, other angels join them in vv. 11ff, with all of the angels together voicing additional, related statements.

iii/ Aside from the preceding, it would make absolutely no sense whatsoever to understand these twenty-four elders as referring to a segment of redeemed man. Man couldn’t possibly be crowned at the time of events in Rev. 4, 5, else he would be crowned before Christ is crowned (note that Christ is to wear the crown which Satan presently wears, which Satan will still be wearing at this time). Also, man is to *wear* the crown he receives, *not* relinquish it before God’s throne as seen being done by the twenty-four elders.

l) And at this point in the book, through the action of the twenty-four elders casting their crowns before God’s throne, the way will be opened for God to transfer the sceptre from the hands of angels into the hands of man.

m) These crowns are relinquished to God (cast before God’s throne) – with a view to man ruling in the kingdom – so that God can appoint those who had previously been shown qualified through decisions and determinations at the judgment seat [chs. 1b-3] to positions of power and authority with His Son; and those whom the Father appoints will wear these crowns in His Son’s kingdom.

n) These crowns are cast before God’s throne (cf. 4:1-4; 5:1-7) because the Father alone is the One Who places and/or removes rulers in His kingdom (Dan. 4:17-37; 5:18-21). He alone is the One Who placed those represented by the twenty-four elders in the positions which they occupied; and He alone is the One Who will remove those represented by these elders from the positions in which He originally placed them and assign other individuals to positions in the kingdom, in their stead (Matt. 20:20-23).

o) The transfer of the government of the earth, from the hands of angels into the hands of man, in reality, is what the first nineteen chapters of the Book of Revelation are about; and, as well, this is what the whole of Scripture preceding these nineteen chapters is also about. In this respect, these twenty-four elders casting their crowns before God’s throne forms a key event which one must grasp if he would properly understand the Book of Revelation and Scripture as a whole.

p) Christ and His wife, in that coming day, will rule the earth in the stead of Satan and his angels. And, in the process of ruling in this manner, they will wear all the crowns worn by Satan and his angels prior to his fall – both angels who did not follow Satan and those who did follow him.

The Crowns

4). The fact that angels represented by the twenty-four elders are *not presently ruling with Satan* can be shown not only by their present position – in God’s presence, in heaven – but also by the Greek word which is used for the type crown which they are seen wearing.

a) There are two words in the Greek text for “crown” – *stephanos*, and *diadema*. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, with regality in view, one major distinction stands out concerning how these two words are used. *Diadema* refers to the type crown worn by a monarch, one presently exercising regal power. *Stephanos*, on the other hand, is used in an opposite sense. It is used to show someone crowned but not presently exercising regal power.

b) For example, the crown seen on Christ’s head in Rev. 14:14, preceding His reign, is referred to by the word *stephanos* in the Greek text. A crown on Christ’s head at this time could only anticipate His impending reign. (A similar thought can be seen by the crown resting on Antichrist’s head at the beginning of the Tribulation in Rev. 6:2, referred to through the use of the word *stephanos*.) Then, when Christ returns to the earth to take the kingdom, He will have many crowns upon His head; and the Greek text uses *diadema* rather than *stephanos* to refer to these crowns, for Christ will be returning as “King of kings, and Lord of lords” [Rev. 19:12, 16].

c) The twenty-four elders in chapter four cast crowns referred to as *stephanos* before the throne, indicating that, though crowned, these elders were not exercising regal power at this time [though the fact that they were seated on thrones and crowned portends regal power at some point in time [in past time, as shown by their present positions and subsequent actions]. And the many crowns which Christ will have on His head at the time of His return are perhaps these same crowns [Rev. 19:12]. But, anticipating that day when Christ reigns, the Book of Revelation uses the word *diadema* to refer to these crowns, for Christ will be exercising regal power at this time, with Satan about to be overthrown.

d) The crowns [diadems] on Christ’s head in Rev. 19:12 though will not be worn by Christ when He rules the earth, for He is to wear the crown presently worn by Satan [the incumbent ruler] in that day. Rather, these crowns are reserved for those forming the bride [whom the Father will previously have appointed to various positions of

power and authority with His Son]; and the Son will give these crowns to His co-heirs following that time when the remainder of the crowns having to do with the earth's government are forcibly taken from Satan and his angels.

Twenty-Four, Thirty-Six

5). The identity of the twenty-four elders can be known not only by their actions and the place in which this occurs in the book but also by their number. Comparing Revelation chapters four and twelve (4:4, 10, 11; 12:3, 4), it appears probable that the original government of the earth – originally established by God prior to Satan's fall – was representatively shown by three sets of twelve, thirty-six crowned rulers. "Three" is the number of Divine perfection, and "twelve" is the number of governmental perfection.

a) Those angels who did not follow Satan in his attempt to exalt his throne would be represented by the twenty-four elders – two sets of twelve, showing two-thirds of the original group of angels ruling with Satan. And the angels who *did* go along with Satan, presently ruling with him, would be represented by a third set of twelve, showing the other one-third of the original contingent of angels ruling with Satan (Rev. 12:3, 4).

b) In this respect, these three representative sets of twelve would show Divine perfection in the earth's government. And also in this respect, this same perfection in the structure of the earth's government has not existed since Satan's attempt to exalt his throne.

c) But, this structured perfection will one day again exist in the earth's government. When Christ and His wife ascend the throne, crowns worn by those represented by all three sets of twelve will be brought together again. Then, Divine perfection will once again exist in the government of the one province in God's universe where imperfection has existed for millenniums (cf. Col. 1:16-20).