

THE HEAVENLY CALLING

consider . . . Jesus

Heb. 3:1

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The Time of the End

Part VII

Crowns Cast Before God's Throne

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold...

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne...
(Rev. 4:1-4, 10).

(Editor's Note: This study and the study to follow will deal with material in Revelation chapters four and five respectively [this study with material in ch. 4 and the study to follow with material in ch. 5]. Properly understanding certain things in both of these chapters, *within context* [following that seen in chs. 1-3 but preceding that dealt with in chs. 6ff], is *crucial* to a proper understanding of the Book of Revelation as a whole. *The importance of this cannot be overemphasized.*)

Immediately following events seen in chapters two and three, attention is again called to that previously seen in chapter one — John being removed from Man's Day and placed in the Lord's Day (*cf.* 1:10; 4:1, 2a). 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. And repeating that seen in chapter one at this later time in the book, in chapter four (following events seen in chs. 1b-3), would have to do with Scripture providing additional details relating to *the Church following events surrounding the judgment seat.*

In chapter one, immediately after John was removed from Man's Day and placed in the Lord's Day, along with being moved forward in time, he was shown *the complete Church in Christ's presence, with Christ presented in His future judicial role, not in His present high priestly role.* And, since this is clearly *a judicial scene following the rapture*, that dealt with in these verses can only refer to *one thing.* These verses in chapter one can only refer to:

1) *The complete Church, all Christians throughout the dispensation (shown by the number of the Churches [seven, showing the completeness of that which is in view]), being removed from the earth at the end of the dispensation (shown by John's removal).*

2) *The complete Church appearing in Christ's presence to be judged (shown by Christ appearing as Judge, with the seven candlesticks [the seven Churches] appearing in His presence).*

Then, simply continuing from

chapter one, the central subject of the subsequent two chapters has been established. This central subject, continuing into chapters two and three, clearly has to do with Christians before the judgment seat. But the manner in which the Churches are set forth in these two chapters — beginning with *Ephesus* which left its "first love" (2:4) and ending with *Laodicea* which is described as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (3:17) — it is also evident that a history of the Church throughout the dispensation is shown in these chapters as well.

And, with these things in mind, the Spirit of God leading John to begin chapter four at the same point as seen in chapter one would not only provide a base for additional revelation surrounding Christians following the judgment seat but it would also provide a means for setting forth the same thing clearly taught a number of other places in Scripture — *the removal of the complete Church at the end of the dispensation.*

That is, viewing chapters two and three from *a historical perspective* (depicting a history of the Church throughout the dispensation), chapter four, beginning at the same point as seen in chapter one, shows *the removal of the complete Church at the end of the dispensation.* And this is something which can be seen in a clearer respect in chapter four than it can in chapter one because, from a historical perspective, the complete dispensation is seen immediately preceding, in chapters two and three. Then, the removal of the Church at this point in time would also show the removal of the Church before the beginning of the Tribulation (seen beginning in chapter six). And this, as well, would be in complete accord with that seen elsewhere in Scripture.

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THE HEAVENLY SCENE

Immediately after attention has been called to the same event seen in Rev. 1:10 (in Rev. 4:1, 2a), John, rather than seeing a judicial scene (as in ch. 1), now sees a rainbow encircled throne, with God seated on the throne (vv. 2b, 3). And surrounding this throne, John sees twenty-four other thrones and twenty-four crowned “elders” seated on these thrones (v. 4).

(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 [the Flood], and the same thing is seen in Rev. 4:3 relative to the completion of the judgment of Christians in chs. 1b-3.)

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 (chs. 2, 3, viewed from a historical perspective). As well, events surrounding the judgment seat are also complete (chs. 1b-3, viewed from the manner in which chs. 2, 3 are introduced in ch. 1b). 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 unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.”

And events having to do with bringing to pass that stated in this verse is exactly what can be found in Revelation chapters four and five.

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).

Then the scene returns to the twenty-four elders, who arise from their thrones, fall down before God, worship Him, cast their crowns before His throne, and express adoration to the One worthy “to receive glory and honor and power” (vv. 10, 11).

If an apex is to be found in the Book of Revelation, aside from Christ’s return in chapter nineteen, the action of these twenty-four elders would have to be considered. Their action — relinquishing their crowns to the One Who originally placed them in regal positions — is *significant beyond degree* in relation to the central message of this book.

CROWNS, REGALITY, GOVERNMENT

“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).

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.

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

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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.

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).

(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.*)

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.

A principle of Biblical government necessitates that an incumbent ruler retain his crown until the one replacing him is not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne. *Only then* can an incumbent ruler relinquish his crown.

(For example, note the account of Saul and David, forming a type of Satan and Christ.

Saul, though disqualified, 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].

And it will be exactly the same in the antitype. Satan, though disqualified, will retain his crown and continue to 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].

This same established principle must prevail relative to both the angels refusing to follow Satan in his attempt to exalt his throne and those who did follow him. This entire contingent of angels (both fallen and unfallen) must 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.

These relinquished crowns 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.

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 made known 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.

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).

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, making possible a later full manifestation of regal activity by man at the time of Christ's return.

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).

(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].

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.

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.)

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.

In this respect, these crowns cast before God's throne can only have to do with *the government of the earth*. And, at this point in the book, crowns can be worn by *angels alone*. *The Son* will not yet have taken the kingdom, though the Father will have previously delivered it into His hands (cf. Dan. 7:13, 14; Luke 19:12, 15; Rev. 11:15; 19:11ff).

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.

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).

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.

Christ and His bride, in that com-

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ing 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.

ACTION OF THE ELDERS

Thus, that which is depicted through the action of the twenty-four elders in Rev. 4:10, 11 is, contextually, self-explanatory. This has to do with the government of the earth, it occurs at a time following events surrounding the judgment seat but preceding Christ breaking the seals of the seven-sealed scroll, and it occurs at a time when Satan's reign is about to be brought to a close.

After events in Revelation chapters one through three have come to pass, for the first time in man's history, the person (the bride) who is to rule with the One to replace Satan (Christ) will have been made known and shown forth. And events in the fourth chapter reflect that fact.

Only one thing could possibly be in view at this point in the book, for the bride will not only have been made known but will be in a position for events surrounding the transfer of power to begin. The twenty-four elders casting their crowns before God's throne can only depict the angels who did not go along with Satan in his rebellion relinquishing their crowns, with a view to those comprising the bride wearing these crowns during the Messianic Era.

But the crowns worn by Satan and those angels presently ruling with him are another matter. These crowns will have to be taken from Satan and his angels by force when Christ returns to overthrow Gentile world power at the end of the Tribulation (a power exercised during Man's Day under Satan

and his angels [Dan. 10:13-20]).

(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 by the Greek word which is used for the type crown which they are seen wearing.

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.

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. 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].

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. And the many crowns which Christ will have on His head at the time of His return are undoubtedly 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*, with Satan about to be overthrown.

The crowns on Christ's head at this time 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 will be given to those forming the bride [whom the Father will previously have appointed to various positions of

power and authority with His Son]; and this will occur 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

The identity of the *twenty-four elders* is shown 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 evident 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*.

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 contingent 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).

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*.

But, this structured perfection will one day *again* exist in the earth's government. When Christ and His bride ascend the throne together, 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).

— To be Continued —

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