

# *Holy, Holy, Holy!*

## **Cry Out Those Who Eternally Worship God**

The highest level of praise to which a saint might ascend is that place of worship that God Himself Quickly inhabits. His Word has promised that He inhabits the praise of His saints. "O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3). We were created to love our Heavenly Father and to voice our greatest emotion is to join His cherubims in singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" Just as soon as we reach His celestial throne, the great living creatures will be sounding out Heaven's highest praise. The character of Heaven is not love. That love is Heaven's undying emotion. It is not mercy, although mercy is the reaction of God to His fallen race. The character of God is Holiness, so the song of the angelic throng is "Holy, Holy, Holy!"

*It is impossible* for the Rapture not to occur between the first and fourth verses of Revelation chapter four. Immediately the scene moves from the troubled churches of chapters two and three to a transcending view of Almighty God and His worshipping creation. The Son is there because He is the voice of the grand event. The Holy Spirit is there because He is the Seven Lamps of Fire. The angelic multitude is there to lead in worship by the thrice sounding of the "Holy" chorus. Occupying center stage are twenty-four lesser thrones, the grand seats of triumphant saints. Sixty-five previous books of the Holy Truth could never boast of such a movement.

These saints are seated in regal splendor. This splendor was not earned by human birth or obtained by careless promotions. The position of popes, priests, bishops, or deacons was not even considered in these rewards. These are blood-washed saints that represent an unnumbered multitude that have paid the price of being overcomers. They have forsaken the world to follow the highest calling. They have counted earthly attainment as loss compared to the glory of following their Master. They have reached the star-studded triumph of entering the Heavenly Jerusalem. The moments of man's greatest hope has finally arrived.

The Heavenly Father is welcoming His Son's Bride. They are properly attired in the purity of spotless white robes. Sacred blood spilled on a cruel cross has prepared the wedding garments for this grand event. The cherubims are prepared to worship the thrice revealed and thrice Holy God. "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty which was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). Nothing in the Bible has ever been revealed to match this scene.

The Throne of God is wrapped in a rainbow of brilliant colors. The Father that walked with Noah and Enoch, but made Himself invisible because of human sins, is once again visible to the redeemed multitude. Satan's payday has arrived and the process of reclaiming a lost world has been set in motion. The redeemed of the earth are no longer struggling with the daily temptations and no longer facing the despite of evil enemies. They are elevated, glorified elders ready to join the action of divine judgment. The days of triumph have arrived.

Our Heavenly Father will be personally present and will be seated upon His throne in the Heavenly sphere. Saints of His kingdom have longed to look upon Him and drink in the majesty of His revealed glory. The Psalmist David prayed, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15). It is impossible to walk with God in the graces of Calvary and not long for the day when we shall enter His presence. Christ's redeeming and sanctifying blood will not just cleanse a soul from sin, but will also fill that soul with a righteousness that is fixed on Him and Him alone. If you walk in grace, you will long for the day when you are free from the encumbrance of this flesh.

John the Revelator struggled for words to describe Him on His throne. Without a doubt the Lord Jesus inspired this description, *"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. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunders and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God"* (Revelation 4:3-5).

As the host of cherubims—living creatures—watches the unfolding drama of this reunion of the Father and His separated family, they can contain themselves no longer. They prepare themselves to burst forth into Heavenly praises declaring, *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty"* (Revelation 4:8). The name of their song is clearly, *"Holy, Holy, Holy!"* We do not yet know all the words of this refrain.

As they sing praises to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, it is then stated, *"And . . . those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever"* (Revelation 4:9). Now, the saints either join or follow after these great angelic creatures in praise to God. With united voices, *"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, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created"* (Revelation 4:10-11).

In chapter four the Raptured saints sing of the Father and praise Him with voices that are unlimited by flesh. But, then, in chapter five they sing of their Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The Bible says that we sing a new song to Him, *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth"* (Revelation 5:9-10). Music was created as the language of praise. Every time you sing you praise something or someone. The saints of God — the Rapture-ready believers — must prepare for this triumphant day. We must be freed from the lust of this world and sanctified to praise and worship. We are getting ready to go.

The greatest worship of human experience is just ahead for the Saints of God. Revelation chapter four opens to the grand hour of *"Hallelujah's," "Amen's,"* and the Heavenly Song, *"Holy, Holy, Holy!"* Will you be ready to ascend and break forth in Heavenly music? There will not be a notice for last minute preparations. The call of God is clear, *"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh"* (Matthew 24:44).

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### ***The Twenty and Four Elders: Who are they?***

*"Surrounding the throne are twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads."* (Rev. 4:4)

The next thing we see "surrounding the throne" are twenty four other thrones, with "elders" in white clothing and with crowns on their heads, sitting on the seats. One of the most controversial questions raised by this vision of the throne of God is the identity of the twenty-four elders. Some Bible scholars, good ones indeed, believe them to be men, whereas the others, equally competent, believe them to be angels. Let us examine both views.

John Darby, one of the first to write on this subject, said, "The number twenty-four represents twice twelve. One might perhaps see here the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles—the saints in the two dispensations." This is better than to make them "represent" the Church; but it leaves them symbolic rather than actual elders. Dr. Ironside explains,

But now the fourth verse brings before us a sight never beheld in heaven on any previous occasion: twenty-four thrones (not merely "seats") surrounding the central throne, and upon them twenty-four elders seated, with victors' crowns (not diadems) upon their heads, and clothed in priestly robes of purest white. Who are these favored ones gathered around the glorious central Being? I do not think we need to be in any doubt as to their identity, if we compare scripture with scripture and distrust our own imagination, which can but lead us astray.

In 1 Chronicles, chapter 24, we read of something very similar; and again I would remind you that many of John's readers were Hebrews, thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament. Can we question for a moment that every Jewish believer would instantly remember the twenty-four elders appointed by King David to represent the entire Levitical priesthood? He divided the priests into twenty-four courses, each course to serve for two weeks at a time in the temple which Solomon was to build. The same arrangement was in force when our Lord's forerunner was announced. Zacharias was "of the course of Abiah," the eighth in order (Luke 1:5).

The priests were many thousands in number; they could not all come together at one time, *but when the twenty-four elders met* in the temple precincts in Jerusalem, *the whole priestly house* was represented. And this is the explanation. I submit, of the symbol here. The elders in heaven represent the whole heavenly priesthood—that is, all the redeemed who have died in the past, or who shall be living at the Lord's return. In vision they were seen—not as a multitudinous host of millions of saved worshipers, but just twenty-four elders, symbolizing the entire company. The church of the present age and Old Testament saints are alike included. All are priests. All worship. There were twelve patriarchs in Israel, and twelve apostles introducing the new dispensation. The two together would give the complete 24.

Then, observe further: these persons are not angels. They are redeemed men who have overcome in the conflict with Satan and the world, for they wear victors' wreaths upon their brows. Angels are never said to be "crowned," nor have they known redemption.

There are two kinds of crowns mentioned in this book: the victor's crown, and the ruler's diadem. The former is the word here used."

Thus two of numerous great men of God *believe that the elders are men.*

When I studied with Dr. David L. Cooper some years ago, he said of these twenty-four elders that nothing in the context would indicate that these elders are used representatively. Never should one resort to a figurative, symbolic, or secondary meaning of any passage of Scripture unless there is a warrant for the same in the context. One will seek in vain for such justification. There is nothing that suggests the idea of representation. The language simply states that there were twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders seated on their thrones, with crowns of gold on their heads.

Another popular suggestion is that these elders are heavenly beings that are of an especially high order, who, under God, are assisting in the administration of the universe. Dr. William R. Newell, who held that view, explains it:

We can only assume, not prove, that the "elders" are not of our race at all. The cherubim are not; nor the seraphim nor the "chief princes" (Daniel 10:13). Because the term "elders" is so often mentioned (over 200 times) in Scripture, both in connection with Israel and the Church,

many are willing to assume that the elders are human beings. But the elders do not testify of their own *salvation* at all: although they celebrate that of *others*, as in Revelation 5:8, 9 (R.V.).

Inasmuch as God had "elders" over His people *Israel*, and "elders" were also to be appointed in each *Church* (Titus 1:15); and inasmuch as twenty-four seems God's governmental order, we do not see why it may not be that there are "elders" over God's creation; that they were created so; and they are twenty-four in number ... so these "elders" were created and associated by God with His government. When Christ, with His Bride, the Church, comes to reign in power, in Revelation 19, we hear no more of these twenty-four elders: for God then subjects *all* to the *Man*; Psalm 8 is fulfilled. The elders as all other heavenly beings, have their place, but under Christ and the Church.

The word "elder" means leader. Actually it is a title of rank. It has been pointed out that, militarily speaking, we have a similar expression in English. The commanding officer of any unit is often called "the old man." This has nothing to do with his age or the size unit that he heads, for he may be the commanding general of an entire army. On the other hand, he may be a twenty-four-year-old first lieutenant who is a company commander. Both are more or less affectionately referred to as "the old man." Essentially that is what the word "elder" means: "the old man." This word is used of pastors and church leader to indicate leadership.

Obviously good Bible scholars can be found on both sides of this issue of the identity of the heavenly "elders." Very honestly, I have changed my view since I originally wrote this commentary. Then I leaned toward the "twenty-four elders" being special representative angels who administered the universe of God. Three things worked to change my mind.

1. Further Bible study convinced me that these "elders" had been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (5:9). Angels have not been redeemed, so it could not be angels. *I had been misled by the study note in the Scofield Reference Bible that indicated the word "us" in the KJV was not found in the most ancient manuscripts. Actually, it is indeed found in twenty-three of the twenty-four oldest manuscripts of the book of Revelation!*

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed *us* to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made *us* kings and priests to our God; and *we* shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9,10; [The words "*us*" and "*we*" are my italics])

2. The NIV translators identify the "twenty-four elders" in 5:9: "With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." Nothing could be clearer, these are indeed redeemed men!

3. The following quote comes from my esteemed friend Dr. Henry Morris:

The word "seats" is the Greek *thronos*, the same word as used for "throne." The elders were seen by John seated on thrones exactly as he had seen the divine presence seated on the throne (4:2). The identity of these elders, sometimes mistakenly interpreted as angels, is important.

The elders are undoubtedly redeemed and glorified men, or, representative of such men, in view of the following considerations: (1) although there are principalities and powers in the angelic hierarchy, there can be no "elders," since all angels are of the same age, created probably on the first day of creation; (2) "Elder" is always used elsewhere in the Bible only of men; (3) elders are always chosen representatives and leaders of the people, both in Israel and in the church; (4) there are no elders in the visions of God's throne in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1-10, in consequence of the fact that prior to the cross the spirits of all the redeemed were still

confined to Hades; (5) the elders were wearing white raiment (as promised to overcoming believers in Revelation 3:5) and victors' crowns (Greek *stephanos*, "wreath," as also promised to overcomers in Revelation 2:10 and 3:11); angels, being "ministering spirits" (Hebrews 1:14) are never described in the Bible as wearing crowns of any kind; (6) in Revelation 5:9-10, elders sing a song of praise to the Lamb who had redeemed them by His blood.

But why twenty-four elders? The Israelites used seventy elders (Exodus 24:1), and no indication is given as to the number of elders in the early church. There were twenty-four orders of priests in Israel (I Chronicles 24:7-19), but these were not the elders and, even though believers are to be kings and priests (Revelation 1:6), there seems no reason why the office of the priest should be commingled with that of the elder in heaven. The number twenty-four has often been held to be symbolic of the twelve patriarchs plus the twelve apostles. The latter, however, are specifically assigned to the job of judging the twelve tribes of Israel on twelve thrones in the millennial kingdom (Revelation 19:28), whereas the twenty-four elders are at the throne in heaven. If twelve of these are the twelve apostles, assigned to judging the twelve tribes, then the identity and function of the other twelve are left up in the air. It is barely possible that they are the twelve sons of Jacob."

To bring this subject to a conclusion—with all due respect to my friends and many I admire who hold the view that I once did, that the "twenty-four elders" are some kind of five-star generals of the angelic hosts who are always before the throne of God—I no longer believe that is accurate. Instead, as John Darby, a careful student of Bible prophecy who lived a century and a half ago, taught—these are men who represent Israel and the church, representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles to represent the Church. This view of a future event in heaven is a beautiful picture of the many things we share with the redeemed members of the nation of Israel.

This view also highlights the difference between Israel and the Church (1 Cor. 10:32). After the Church is raptured to be with Christ in His Father's house, Israel will go through the Tribulation here on earth. We will join them and the Tribulation saints after their resurrection, and we will all share the blessings of the Millennium and eternity together. Our Lord evidently has a slightly different relationship planned for Israel than He does for His Church, even in the Millennium. But we all will share its blessings and that of the eternal heaven as individuals, who can all sing the song of the redeemed because we have personally received Him who is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."<sup>1</sup>

### ***Where is the Church During The Tribulation?***

1. The first three Chapters of Revelation mentions the "Church" 22 (+/-) times on earth.
2. Chapter 2-3 of Rev. is Christ encouraging the 7 Churches to repent!... before it's too late.
3. The final mention of the Church in Heaven is Rev 22:17— (she is the Bride of Christ).
4. The Church is the "Bride of Christ". Not because we are the better; but because we are those who chose to be washed in the precious Blood of Christ (both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant saints), and live for Him exclusively for the rest of our lives on earth—simply because of Who He Is in us—and who we are in Him! Though we daily yearn to be with Him forever, we also realize that many still have not repented of their sins. We must attend the Father's business till Christ returns—but then—we will spend the 7 years of Tribulation in Heaven preparing for the "*Marriage Supper of The Lamb*" which takes place near the end of Tribulation.

### ***The Bride of Christ throughout the Tribulation period:***

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation Unveiled, By Tim LaHaye; Zondervan Publ. House, Grand Rapids; ©copyright 1999; Pgs 116-120.

1. **Revelation 4: 4-7** – see vs 1, after Christ says, "Come up hither."
2. **Revelation 4: 8-11** – 24 seats for the elder around the throne
3. **Revelation 5: 8-14** – mightily in worship of the Lord Jesus
4. **Revelation 7: 11-13** – again mightily in worship of the Lord Jesus
5. **Revelation 11: 16-18** – Praying for judgment on earth. Ch. 12 God pouring out His wrath
6. **Revelation 19:4-8** – Proclamation calling the Bride to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!
7. **Revelation 22:17** – *And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come" ....* (The Bride, The Church).

### ***How do we know the elders are the Church?***

1. They responded to the voice, "Come up hither" (Rev. 4:1). This is the same voice that also called the "two resurrected witnesses" to heaven at Mid-Tribulation (See Rev. 11:11-14)
2. They are seated on 24 thrones (12 tribes of Messianic Israel; 12 for Apostles)
3. They are dressed in white linen garments.
4. They wear incorruptible crowns on their heads, and cast them before the Lord.
5. They were, in every case, near the throne of their Saviour, Jesus Christ, in worship.
6. They awaited the time when Jesus would call the saints to the "Marriage Supper" of the Lamb.
7. They sang a new song; one no other could sing, saying, "*Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God Kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*" (Revelation 5: 8-10) These saints claimed their inheritance! **Note:** The highlighted words "us" and "we"; Apostle John was speaking here concerning himself and every blood-washed born again believer, ever! (Rev. 7:11-14).
8. **Rev 7: 11-13:** Verse 13 refers the reader back to verses 9 and 10, which is the Tribulation saints (those saved by decision inside the tribulation period).
9. A Proclamation: It's time for the "Marriage Supper Of The Lamb"! (Revelation 19: 4-8)
10. And finally, the Church, *as the Bride of Christ*. (Revelation 22:17):

*And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly" Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20, 21).<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Nelson's NKJV Study Bible; Thomas Nelson Publishers; Chapter 5-22 (References only, as given in text above on the "Elders" of the Church of Jesus Christ).