

God's Throne

A Glimpse of God's Majesty

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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We often speak about modern Bible students being at a disadvantage when reading the Bible because it contains so many metaphors and other types of illusions to things we have little experience with, we just do not know because we are modern people. And we say this frequently in terms of all the agricultural metaphors that appear in the Bible. How many of you out there are farmers? Okay, maybe you have a garden. Yeah, a few of you have maybe learned a few things about that. How about how many of you are shepherds, tend sheep in any way, goats? Yeah, a few people have had goats, mostly as pets, right? Yeah, they are not goats in the wild or anything like that.

But that is what I am talking about. We are city folks, we are not farmers, we are not ranchers or shepherds or in any way connected to the land or livestock. You know, we get up and go to work in our offices in a city or at a store or something and after a while we think that milk comes from the store, not from cows and we lose that connection to the land. And so these biblical metaphors that we find, which are strewn throughout the Bible and appear in places where you would never think that they would appear, well, they have to be explained to us because we do not understand, whereas the ancients who the writers were trying to teach by these things could instinctively (I do not know if that is quite the word), but they could divine what the message was because they could see right away how what was written applies in the natural world and they could make that leap into understanding a spiritual principle.

And agricultural metaphors are not the only ones we have to deal with in the Bible. We have to be told through commentaries, or dictionaries, or encyclopedias, or notes in the margin, or footnotes, or what have you, about money. We deal with money all the time, but not their money. It was different. We do not know what these little coins were worth. And in the same vein we have to be told about weights and measures because we do not

understand them either. I mean we see the word ephah. What in the world does ephah mean? Well, you know, maybe a quart or so or whatever it is. It is three quarts, is it not? See, I need to go to a dictionary or a commentary to tell me exactly how big that is and some of our Bibles actually have lists of weights and measures in the back so we could have a quick reference to see what it is. And I do not think mine does. Oh well. I will have to wait till I get home to figure out how much it actually is. I have got a Harmony of the Gospels in the back, but I do not think I have a weights and measures. Guess I need a new Bible.

But that is what I am talking about. We have to be told about geographical facts. I do have maps in the back of my Bible, and I refer to them frequently because they help me to figure out certain details and nuances of the things that were happening that the Bible talks about. I mean, you should know that certain things happened in certain places and because of that certain place and the geography of that certain place, it made certain things happen. That is the only way it could be. I go back to the story of Samson taking the gates off the city and then displaying them on the hill in front of Hebron, I believe it was. And if you do not know the geography, you say, "Ok, strong man, he can lift a couple hundred pounds and put it up on the hill." Great! But then you find out that Hebron is like 30 miles away, and then what he does becomes amazing because he did it overnight and carried them the whole way. Now, maybe he was a little tired by the end, but this is the strength that God gave to the man to do His work at that time. It made an awesome witness of the power of God in a man. But you would not know that unless you had the geography explained to you.

How about occupations? We are not potters, we are not smiths, we are not weavers. There are various other occupations in the Bible that we need a little bit of a primer about so that we can understand some of the meanings that God wants us to learn. Same thing with social conditions across a lot of time. What were the social conditions in Joseph's day as compared to Moses' day, as compared to David's day, as compared to Zedekiah's day at the end of the Judaic monarchy and going on then through the intertestamental period, producing things like Pharisees and Sadducees and Essenes and various other people, all working together or not, all being part of the community and certain people were on top and certain people were on the bottom. And those things have to be explained to us.

And we can go on to other things. The prejudices among the various peoples, the pre-scientific ideas that are expressed in the way they speak about things, Even, you know, the sun rises, right? No, the sun really does not rise. That is a pre-scientific idea that we have as part of our idiom. It does not rise. Actually, the earth spins around and it looks like it is rising, but it is actually not rising. Just a little thing.

Various idioms that are used, especially in Hebrew that can really help us. Military actions, this goes along with the geography. Why did they go here rather than there? How were they all structured and organized? That happens almost continuously throughout the Old Testament and then we get to the New Testament there are the military operations of the Romans. They are kind of in the background, but every once in a while they come into the foreground. John the Baptist tells the soldiers, do your orders and do them in a way that is be honorable, and do not oppress the people. You know, those type of things might need to be explained to us because of the powers of the Roman soldier in an oppressed land.

Of course there is government, there is a lot we need to understand about the various governments throughout the Scriptures. And of course the history, things that took place that are not in the Bible but perhaps have some impact on what is actually happening in the Bible.

So there is a lot of background material, a lot of knowledge that we need to have added to our understanding so that we can understand the Bible as fully as possible. So we have a multi-million dollar industry producing Bible helps of every kind, commentaries and encyclopedias and dictionaries and software and other things to help us to understand God's Word. We need help in comprehending the details so we can extract meaning from Scripture. That is why we have sermonettes and sermons because in order to understand this as fully as possible, we need men to stand up here and explain things to us.

(I mean, James [Stoertz] talking about tearing our garments, a lot of that I did not know. I knew it generally, but he gave us a background to that. So when it appears in Scripture, we have a nice thing to hold on to to say, oh yeah, I understand this, and what he (Caiaphas) was doing was actually

pretty wrong. Why did he do that when he was supposed to keep the garments of the high priest intact? And there was spiritual meaning there too.)

This is why we have to have these extra materials so that we, as modern people, 21st century Americans and Brits and Canadians and all the others who may be hearing this, can understand it, understand a context that we are not used to, we do not know enough about.

Now you notice I mentioned government in that list of things that we need help to understand. Our understanding of ancient government is vague at the very best, it is very vague. We know there were kings and we probably understand that he had certain advisors and he was over the military so he had military officers under him. And there were other administrators that he leaned on. We know that kings built palaces and sat on thrones, they made decrees and judgments, they levied taxes—oh they levied taxes. They like doing that! They waged war, they tried their best to amass as much wealth and power as possible, and from the Bible's point of view, mostly did evil in the sight of the Lord. There were a few exceptions to that, but you go through the kings of Israel and Judah, and you find that God was not pleased with most of them because they went their own way and did not consult Him and did not uphold the covenant.

But I think at that point, in this short list of things that we probably know, we have reached the end of our knowledge on the subject. We do not understand the nuances of the subject of government in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. We probably have more understanding of how it worked under the Romans because it is pretty well documented and, you know, men think about the Roman Empire every day, at least that is the rumor that was going around.

But we really do not understand how things worked. If you remember my sermons on Ecclesiastes, this was actually a big point because I had to show that Solomon was talking about how to defer to a king or what do you do when the king gives you an order that you do not think is right. And so he has to give instruction about those things and unless you are aware that he is talking about that particular context, then you miss the meaning.

So, Americans' knowledge of ancient monarchy is essentially lacking. There is very little there in our common understanding of things because we fought a war not to have to think about it. We had a king over us at one time, about 250 years ago, and we said, "No. You gotta go." And so we have not thought about kings very much since.

Now, our cousins across the pond have a better grasp on it. But even they do not have an absolute monarch. Not like the kings of Israel and Judah were, and all the kings around them were also absolute monarchs. Since the 17th century and the glorious revolution that was in 1688 and the Bill of Rights that came upon the conclusion of that in 1689, Britain has had a constitutional monarch, and that is something wholly different. They get to retain the title of king or queen, but a lot of their power was shifted to parliament. And so Queen Elizabeth II, or now Charles III, they have very little power in the government, and they are a figurehead. They are still considered the head of state, but they do not do a whole lot. Even when a prime minister comes before them and the king or queen's job is to pass yea or nay, it is just kind of a rubber stamp thing. So it has been different in England for a long time. And actually it goes back farther than the 17th century because as early as the Magna Carta in 1215, the monarch's power was being drained away.

So, we ignorant people have to be instructed on the finer parts of monarchy.

Now why is this important? Why is it important that we have some kind of understanding of how a monarchy works, especially a biblical monarchy? Well, it is important because we serve a King. And not only that, He is just not any king. You know, just a minor king in a third rate province. He is the King of kings. And I bring this up partly because this is going to feed in a little bit into my sermon on Trumpets. But it is important to us overall that we understand that we need to comprehend how a king does things, how a king gets things done, what is the width of or the breadth of his powers? What is he supposed to do? How does he go about it?

But there is more to it than that. It is not just that we serve a King but we are told that we are heirs with Him, joint heirs with Christ, as Paul said there in Galatians. Revelation 2:26 says we will be given power over the nations and we will rule with a rod of iron. That is something a king does. We have to

learn it. We have to learn to do it right. Revelation 3:21 says we will sit with Christ on His throne as part of our reward. Revelation 5:10 tells us that we have been made kings and priests, or a kingdom of priests, and then the next line says, we will reign on the earth. And Revelation 20:4 and 6 say much the same thing. So we need to understand about kings and what kings do. Not just because we serve a King, but we will one day be kings.

I am not going to try to understand all of kingship in this sermon. As a matter of fact, I am going to concentrate on one particular symbol of kingship and that is his throne. That is the central symbol of a monarch's domain. That is where he rules *from*. Some people would say that that gives him, in human societies, it gives him his power because he sits on that throne. But ultimately we are going to be looking and focusing on God's throne and not just the throne, but His throne room as seen in heaven in Revelation 4. Not only that, but we will continue to look at some of the angelic spirits that we have been going through over the last two sermons and see the ones that are there at His throne in that chapter. And this, I hope, will teach us a great deal about Him, that is, God. Both the Father and the Son and Their power, Their agency, and Their glory as sovereign God over all things.

Now you might think this is rather out there, talking about thrones. And I kind of thought so too. I went into the sermon and researching the sermon thinking there is not a lot there. And then I was schooled by Mr. Concordance. Until we concentrate on it, we are not aware of how many biblical scenes occur in throne rooms. Sometimes they are mentioned, sometimes they are not. But they are all through the Bible. Let me just give you a list. (You will not be tested on this later.)

Joseph appears before Pharaoh when he is removed from prison. Moses speaks to Pharaoh many times at his throne. He has to come before him and tell him what plague is coming next. Ehud presented Israel's tribute to Eglon, King of Moab, and then he killed him. Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Ahab, Hezekiah, and several other kings appear in throne room scenes through I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles. Isaiah and Jeremiah visit Hezekiah's and Zedekiah's thrones, respectively. Ezekiel was a slave, but he saw God's portable throne. It came to him by the river Chebar. Daniel appears before Nebuchadnezzar's throne, Belshazzar's throne, and Darius' throne. And he sees a vision of the Ancient of Days seated on His

throne. Esther came before Ahasuerus' throne. Nehemiah came before Artaxerxes. He was actually Artaxerxes' cupbearer and spent plenty of time with Artaxerxes in his throne room. And perhaps Ezra did too, it does not say it particularly, but it is possible that he was brought before Artaxerxes before he left and got permission to go to Israel. Amos may have preached or may have come before Jeroboam II's throne. That one is not as well documented, but it is possible. Jonah probably preached in the court of the king of Nineveh. The king of Nineveh was one of those that said, "Hey, we gotta do this. Let's fast and repent before God."

Into the New Testament, the magi, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and perhaps even James, the son of Zebedee appeared before the various Herods in the Gospels and Acts. Paul was commissioned to bear Christ's name before kings and did so. And of course, Revelation 4 and 5 describe God's throne room in heaven.

That is a lot of throne room scenes. I have just taken like seven minutes to get through all those. But it is important to understand that we can learn something from these (and I have probably missed a few). But one of the things it does teach us, that is, these kind of stories in that setting of a throne room, that we can come to understand how a king rules in near absolute power. And it is not always a positive thing. A lot of these men who were kings back then misused their power terribly. That is why God says they did evil in the sight of the Lord.

But you go on the other side of the ledger and think about how God appears in the scenes where He is sitting on His throne and dispensing justice or making decrees, we see the positive side of how a king rules. So God gave us so many examples of this for a reason. He wants to impress on us various lessons about the use of power. The necessity of those who are under the king to use supplication and deference. How those under the king should serve the king. How the king not only pronounces judgments, but he also can give blessings and boons to those who are serving him.

We also learn things about law, judgment on the law or using the law. We also learn about a king's wrath, that we do not want to provoke it. And we do

want to provoke it upon our enemies. But they bring it upon themselves if they are in the wrong. And many other things that we can see with the interaction of people with the king.

So we learn lessons about the perfidy, the fickleness, the limitations of human rulers on the one hand versus the sovereign goodness and might and faithfulness of God when He is shown as King.

We are not going to go to any of these narratives where we see things like this, but I wanted to put it out there for you to just kind of stick in the back of your head when you come across some of these scenes in your Bible reading or deeper studying to understand that the setting is very important and they can teach us, these settings in throne rooms, quite a bit.

Let us go in the Bible back to one of the great kings of the earth, that is, Solomon, to I Kings 10. We are going to read the first nine verses and we are going to read this because I want to set out a comparison. We are going to see the greatest (perhaps) human king who has ever lived. Now that is arguable if you want, but the way God presents it in His Word here that Solomon, in terms of his power and his riches and his influence, was far beyond David. He went a step further, at least beyond David, in those physical things. And he showed it. So, what we get here in I Kings 10 is a description, partially from the queen of Sheba's perspective, of his throne, his palace, his throne room.

I Kings 10:1 Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions.

Let us think of this as a spitting match between monarchs. She was coming to find out whether he was as great as she had heard. That the rumors were true or not, and she was going to get into a contest with him about who is the better monarch, who had the better stuff. And of course she tested him in terms of his wisdom as well.

I Kings 10:2-9 She came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that

was in her heart. So Solomon answered her all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her. [So he won that pretty handily from the wisdom, understanding that God had given him.] And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his servants, and the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. Then she said to the king: "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw it with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."

We have got to think of this and store this knowledge in for comparison's sake to what we will get to a little bit later.

But what we have here is that Solomon was richer than Croesus. Croesus was supposed to be the richest king in Turkey, in Asia Minor. And his palace and his throne, his throne room, were incomparably more luxurious, according to the queen of Sheba, than any other monarch, perhaps in the history of the world. The splendor of Solomon's throne and his throne room were just beyond compare. Nothing came up to it. And so the queen of Sheba, seeing this, praises him for his palace. You know, this is a great place. I wish I lived here. That sort of thing. But she goes on, she does not stop with just that. She says, "Man, your food is so good. And the way you've organized your court is magnificent. It's so efficient. And the service of the staff and all your officials is just top notch, A-plus. Look at the staff's clothing. That kind of clothing adorns rich men in my kingdom and they are the servants here. They've got all the nice duds. And they serve in that." So they had a really nice livery that they were to wear while they were serving Solomon.

Even the cupbearers gets her mention, about how noble they were. And how they served the king and his every whim. Because normally a cupbearer was one of the most trusted and high ranking servants of the king. And she mentioned that when the king wanted to go up to the Temple for whatever reason, they had this magnificent procession out a private door from his palace up to the Temple. And she said all of this is just magnificent. There is nothing better than I have seen anywhere in the whole world. And as the text says, she was overwhelmed by how glorious and rich and luxurious Solomon's palace was and of course the Temple compared to that very favorably too.

It says that she was breathless. It was like, "I can't believe how awesome this is!" And she felt totally awed and humbled. Remember she had come to compare her kingdom and her wealth and such with Solomon, and by the time she saw his place and all the ways he had done everything in Jerusalem, she was just deflated. She could not compare. Nothing she had was like Solomon's. His glory far outstripped hers. She lost. She lost the competition that she herself had begun.

Let us go to verse 18. Now let us get to what Solomon's throne was like.

I Kings 10:18-20 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round at the back; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests. [These were not living lions. We can think of them probably as carved lions.] Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps. Nothing like this had been made for any other kingdom.

We are supposed to say any other kingdom in the area, maybe in the world.

So this was a top-notch, A-plus, number one throne that was far and away better than any other throne in the world. It was grand and it was imposing. A lot of other kings just had chairs on a raised step, but Solomon had six steps and his throne was on the seventh level, you might say.

Now we have to understand here that this throne, this description of the throne appears in a list of Solomon's wealth. And it contains though, not just an idea of, Wow, Solomon was really rich, but it contains a subtext regarding his power. You can say that underneath all this extolling of his wealth is the idea that "he who has the gold makes the rules." That he, being the richest of all monarchs, was also the most powerful of all monarchs. He had the money to back up his mouth and so he could do whatever he wanted.

And his throne is imposing in the same way. That, because he had built this edifice in his throne room—if we think of like a 7-inch step or something, the bottom of his throne was up about four feet above the rest of the floor, the bottom where everybody else would stand or sit (usually you would stand in the presence of a king rather than sit), but he was up and shown as the eminence. He was the one that everybody had to look up to, and way up to in terms of the standards of the time, if you will. The seat itself was magnificent, made of ivory and overlaid with pure gold. If we would go to II Chronicles 9:18 (we will not), but it says there that the throne also had a golden footrest, probably made of pure gold. Who knows, maybe it was ivory overlaid with pure gold like the rest of the throne was. But everything was just made to impress and to say, this man has power.

Now we do not know what the six steps were made of. It does not say. It could have been stone, it could have been wood, could have been marble, onyx, we do not know. We do know that they knew how to work with all that sort of thing, so it could have been very impressive. And each step going up had a lion on the side, one on each side, so there were 12 lions as you approached the throne. And then there were two right next to his hands, where he rested his arms. Hard to say what the lions represented. Of course, the lion has been often considered a royal symbol, but it was also the symbol of Judah, the lion of Judah. So who knows what it was.

It says the throne itself had a rounded back, but there is a way to read that in the Hebrew that it is referring to the head of a calf. Now, I do not know what to make of that. It could be idolatrous, we think of the Golden Calf, but I believe that the calf was the symbol of Joseph. I think it may be either Joseph or Ephraim, Ephraim the bull, and this could be a nod to Judah with the lions and then Israel with the calf. I do not know. But the faces of lions

and calves, or bulls, also appear at God's throne. And this is very interesting because that is exactly what this throne is.

Let us go to I Chronicles 29.

I Chronicles 29:23 Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him.

So the throne of Israel that Solomon sat upon was actually the Lord's throne, God's throne, and He, that is, God, chose David and Solomon and that line to sit on that throne to occupy it for Him on the earth. So really impressive to think about. A person sitting on this throne would command great respect and honor, and wield tremendous power just by, like I said, virtue of his wealth. But Solomon also had wisdom and he had God's backing for quite a quite a number of years during his reign. And anybody coming before the throne of Solomon, like the queen of Sheba did, would be in awe of the monarch who is looking down on them and having the power of life and death over them. And that is exactly, precisely what a throne is designed to do. A throne is designed to project power—especially human thrones, but also God's—as well as glory, the glory of the kingdom, the glory of the king himself, and also to inspire fear.

Let us go through a few psalms which mention God and His throne. Let us start in Psalm 45. We will just pick out verses 6 and 7.

Psalm 45:6-7 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed You [speaking of the Son] with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

And so he is saying that God loves the throne of righteousness and He is going to give it to the righteous Son because He knows that the Son will use it properly in righteousness.

Let us move on to chapter 76, and we will read verses 1 through 3 and then 7 through 9.

Psalm 76:1-2 In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion. There He broke the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword of battle [speaking about His power over the enemy, His enemies].

Psalm 76:7-9 You, Yourself, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry? You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still, when God arose to judgment, to deliver all of the oppressed of the earth.

Let us move and read Psalm 93. We will just read this whole psalm. It is not long.

Psalm 93:1-5 The Lord reigns, He is clothed in majesty; the Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so it cannot be moved. Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea. Your testimonies are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever.

So we can see that Solomon's throne was supposed to parallel this: the glory, majesty, power, sovereignty, just awesomeness of God's throne in a physical earthly setting in Jerusalem.

But you know what? Solomon's throne room was just a cardboard mockup compared to the glory of God in His throne and throne room in heaven. And we are going to get a glimpse of that right now. Let us go to Revelation 4. We will be spending pretty much the rest of the sermon here in Revelation 4. We may go somewhere and come back, so a bookmark might do well here. We are going to read the whole chapter here so we can get the whole setting. The context actually moves into Revelation 5, but we will not be going in there very much.

If you want to know the story that is happening here and the prophetic and future relevance of it, please see David's article on this, "Worthy to Take the Scroll." It describes what is going on in terms of the book of Revelation.

Revelation 4:1-11 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. Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. 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. 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.

Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

This is a scene far grander, far *other* than what we see in Solomon's throne in Jerusalem. This is just amazing. It is fantastic. It is hard to comprehend what is going on here. And all of these creatures and angels that are there around

the throne, and we even get a glimpse of the Father here. It is vague, but we see Him there. It is just supposed to be amazing!

We have to put ourselves in John's position here, and think about being there and seeing this, and how would you describe it? Because it is so alien to what your normal life is like. Poor John, he was on an island, you know, deprived of a lot of things, and then he is brought from that lowly position of being in exile into this—the very throne room of God! Could you imagine his reaction? It is hard to do. Like I said, this is so *other*, it is hard, it is alien to us being so human and physical and to see all of this suddenly revealed, all this splendor and majesty and glory. It would be hard to comprehend. It would be hard to convey to somebody else. I have read this like 5 million times and I still have a hard time articulating what this was all about because it is so beyond what we are used to.

So the whole chapter, whole two chapters going into chapter 5, are constructed to impress on John, and now on us reading it, just how powerful and holy and glorious and worthy of worship God the Father is. He is called in verse 8, "Lord God Almighty." How strong He is! He is called "holy, holy, holy." That is the superlative of holiness, the Holiest of all. And in verse 11, He is called the Creator of all things. And we are told that He is not only the One who created us, but He is the One who now sustains us. What power is there! And we cannot imagine it.

And then chapter 5, which we will not go into, carries this further. Concentrating though, not on the Father, that was chapter 4, it goes on and concentrates on the Son in chapter 5. He is the Lamb of God, and He is in the same way worthy of honor and glory and praise. Because He was victorious in His divine mission as our perfect Atonement. And having done that, died and resurrected and ascended to heaven, He showed Himself, He proved Himself, if you will, worthy of opening the scrolls. And the opening of the scrolls is essentially saying that He was worthy to complete the plan of God, get things rolling to become King over all the earth and all of that that came after it. He was worthy then to fulfill the rest of His mission—the plan of God—and bring it to fruition.

So what is happening here after the letters to the seven churches, which are not very complimentary of the people of God in many respects, God says,

"Okay, John. We're going to let you see the Gods you serve, the God you serve, the Father and the Son." It is kind of a juxtaposition where we come out looking really bad. But we are supposed to. We are supposed to look at this and say, "Wow. That's my goal. And how far I have to go before being like the Father and the Son, being worthy of power and worship and praise." And then saying, "He chose me. I can't believe it. He chose *me* to receive honor and glory and power, and eternal life. All I have to do is follow and obey and submit, and I can have this forever and ever. I can sit on that throne forever!"

It is amazing how this is constructed. These first five chapters follow a pattern. Chapter 1 obviously introduces the book, but what is it that we see after John is introduced? We see the glory of the Son. We see the Son in His post-resurrection state and He is over the churches of God. He walks among them, He rules them. And we are supposed to say, "Wow, what a wonderful leader."

And then He hits us across the head. He says, "Okay, churches. You guys are great, but you've got some problems. This, this, this, this, and this. This is what you need to work on. And if you do that and overcome, then I will grant you to sit on My throne with Me. You will have eternal life, you'll have white robes, you'll have the white stone, you'll have this and that and the other thing as a reward. But let me show you something. Let me show you the reward in its fullness. Here's a picture of God's throne. God Himself sitting on the throne and all of this wonder and glory and just magnificence and the power that's there. Do you want some of this? Do you want a part of this?"

And you get into chapter 5 then and you start seeing that Jesus Christ is worthy to open the seals of the scroll. And you are saying, "Okay, I get it now. This One—Christ, backed by the Father—is the One we need to follow because He has all the power. He has all the power of the universe, and He is the One that's going to be opening these seals, one after the other after the other, to reach a goal, wherein, when it's reached we participate fully as sons and daughters of God."

So what am I saying here? He is setting up these first five chapters to say, "Look, you've been chosen on the winning team. Stay there, be faithful. And

if you are faithful, this is what you get at the end." So once we get to chapter 6 and these seals and things start being opened, we remain on the winning side and are not dissuaded to go to the losing side. God is using perfect psychology here, reading the book of Revelation from front to back, to convince us, to *convict* us that we need to follow Jesus Christ no matter how tough it gets, no matter how bad the deceptions, no matter how painful it may be, we follow the One on the throne—the Father and the Son.

The vehicle, though, that God decided to use to impress this revelation upon us, this disclosing of what is going to happen, His awesome glory, His honor, and might, is to give us a peek at His throne room. That is what He decided to use as a symbol of our faithfulness to Him and our completion of our part in His plan, to keep us on His side, as it were. To make it worthwhile and to see what is in store for us.

Unlike the description of Solomon's throne, there is actually not very much about God's throne here. Although the throne is mentioned about 40 times in Revelation, and it always has some form of a meaning in terms of sovereignty—that God is sovereign, God is Lord, God rules—and we need to have that in mind, and He repeats it throughout the book of Revelation. So we keep getting these little inputs of, stay on the right side, God is on His throne, God is in power, God cannot lose this fight. Just stay firm, endure, hold fast—because of the throne and because *who* sits on the throne.

Now, the vision focuses on the Father's glorious presence and the high ranking angelic beings serving and praising and worshipping Him incessantly. In the spirit world, gold, ivory, carved stones, or whatever, do not mean a whole lot so we do not get very much of that kind of description. We are told that things are *like* jasper, *like* sardius. They have gold crowns, so there is some physicality to some of these things. But more important than these things that we think are so precious, God concentrates on the glorious and powerful spirit servants who prostrate themselves before God. That is much more awesome! That these creatures that He has made to be so glorious are bowing to Him and throwing their crowns before Him say a whole lot more than just the fact that His throne was made of ivory and overlaid gold. So that is why the concentration is on the beings that are there.

And this activity is all happening against the backdrop of stars and galaxies, and it happens on a magnificent crystalline sea, a lake, a vast body of water. It is a huge transparent surface, that when you look in it, it appears like the stillest, clearest body of water. One that is so pure you can see all the way down to the bottom, if it were here on earth. It gives you a feeling of heightened otherness and fabulous superiority, that is, God's fabulous superiority and preeminence that He lives in an environment like this that is so awesome. It is so awesome that it is entirely beyond human imagination. We have to make material comparisons to figure it out. It is *like* this. It appears *like* this, it seems *like* this. But it is more than this.

What about an emerald green rainbow arcing over the throne? This is the word iris in Greek, like an iris of our eye or an iris of a camera. It can mean halo, and I think this is probably where the medieval painters just started putting halos above angels and saints and Christ. Iris just means a circular or semi-circular band of light. It could be a ring or a bow. We do not know. But it arches around the throne. Some people have thought that that rainbow, reminiscent of Genesis 9 and the rainbow that God put up for man's benefit after the Flood, that they may be related here, a sign of God's covenant. The one after the Flood was a sign of God's covenant that He would not do this terrible worldwide flood again, so it was a covenant of grace and mercy, and maybe we are seeing that again here.

And then we go on to the Father. "He who sat there was like a jasper and sardius stone in appearance." He is not described very clearly. He is described appearing like two types of quartz. Jasper is a translucent stone, perhaps of indeterminate color. If you go to chapter 21, verse 11 it is more like a diamond. And sardius or carnelian is a translucent red. It is hard to know what the ancient stones looked like, they would put a name to something but we would never get a description, so we do not know what the ancients actually called various mineral things like that. But it looks like that what we have here is white and red. The idea is that these stones emitted light in these colors, a blending of a red and a white color that was so bright and magnificent that you could see no features under it. And then add the green and you think you were in Italy or Spain or Mexico but it is just supposed to be colorful and awesome and bright, so much that you cannot make out the person who is under it.

So what we are seeing here is the majesty of God described. It is dazzling and it is beautiful and it is unapproachable. And this is what Paul said in I Timothy 6:16, where he says that God dwells in unapproachable light.

And then God's throne is surrounded by 24 thrones on which sat 24 elders, and these are clothed in white robes and wearing golden crowns. And ask 20 commentators what these 24 elders are and you will probably get about 20 different answers because the description is very enigmatic about what they are. I will give you a bunch of scriptures here where they are mentioned in the book of Revelation. Revelation 4:9-11, where we are; Revelation 5:8-14; Revelation 7:9-17; Revelation 11:15-18; and Revelation 19:1-4 all are references to the 24 elders. In these, the elders are always associated with the four living creatures and they always seem to be engaging in acts of worship and praise to God and to the Lamb. My conclusion is that they are a class of angelic beings, and probably the best name that we can give to them outside the book of Revelation is what Paul distinguishes as thrones. That is in Colossians 1:16. He gives classes of angelic spirits and one of the classes is thrones. Of course, they are sitting on thrones and they wear crowns, so it probably fits.

They wear white, which is always a symbol of righteousness and holiness, and their crowns are of gold. This is the Stefanos crown of victory. It also can mean royal dignity as well. Twelve is the number of government organization, divine government organization. This is 2 times 12, so they obviously play a part in God's government. And assuming these are angels and not glorified humans as most Protestant commentators believe, they could be something like a heavenly counterpart to the Levitical 24 courses of priests or the representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 apostles. I do not know. Those things are seen together in Revelation 21 in the New Jerusalem where the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles are the gates and the foundations of the New Jerusalem.

My idea is, and I do not know if this is right, there is not enough detail to know, but I think they are a heavenly council that God consults. They have wisdom and certain amount of oversight of what is going on on the earth. I do not know.

Let us go on to the seven Spirits of God. They are next. You will find them in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; and 5:6, as well as here. That is at the end of chapter 4, verse 5. Most Protestant commentators believe that this is the Holy Spirit. Some say it is a sevenfold spirit, referring to the Holy Spirit's activity among the seven churches. They, of course, think that the Holy Spirit is a member of a trinity, and they base this on chapter 1, verse 4, which they consider a Trinitarian greeting. That does not seem very sound to me. My view is that they are, since they are associated with the seven churches, a special angelic group that inspects and watches over God's church. They are linked to the seven eyes that you will find in chapter 5, verse 6 and in Zechariah 4:10. But again, there is not enough data on the seven spirits to be conclusive about things. But I would think that they are kind of counterparts to the messengers to the seven churches, angelic counterparts.

And finally, we have the four living creatures. I will give you verses for these as well. Not only here and in chapter 4, verses 6 through 9; but also chapter 5, verses 6 and 8; and also verse 14, chapter 6, pretty much the whole chapter because the four living creatures are the ones that announce the seals; chapter 7, verse 11; chapter 14, verse 3; chapter 15, verse 7; and chapter 19, verse 4.

So these are four creatures—angels—around God's throne and seemingly part of it. When you go back to Ezekiel 1, it almost seems like that *they are the throne* and they go up and down and the wheels within wheels and they move it wherever they go. It is, I think, the human perspective of the spiritual world that gets us in trouble here. It is hard to say. But it seems they are actually not part of the throne, they bear it, and they can do other things as well. They seem to be guardians of the throne. I do not know if you remember in another sermon I said the cherubim were put around the Garden of Eden and they had the sword that went every way so that the humanity, the sons of Adam, could not come back into the Garden and take of the Tree of Life. So they have some guardianship as part of their responsibilities.

The reason why I use the word cherubim is because even though it is not mentioned in Revelation 4, I do not even know if it is mentioned at all in Revelation, but Ezekiel calls the four living creatures cherubim in Ezekiel 10, which is the second description of God's portable throne. So they are certainly the same beings as the ones in Ezekiel 1 and 10.

They have faces like a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle, and these faces probably represent godly qualities like royal power or nobility, strength, spirituality, or wisdom. And also the eagle with the wings talks about swiftness. They are swift to serve, they are swift to act at God's command. They are said here to have six wings, whereas Ezekiel only counted four. We do not know why there is that discrepancy, why maybe they had some hidden that Ezekiel did not see when he saw them. If you would jot down Isaiah 6:2, you will find that when Isaiah saw them they had six wings. And he called them seraphim, winged ones. And the six wings probably symbolize something like they have unlimited mobility to fulfill God's commands. If God wants them to do something, they can zip there and do it, wherever it is.

They are also covered with eyes, which we do not understand. Probably again, a symbol, maybe of vigilance since they are guardians. Also of knowledge; knowledge comes primarily through the eyes for most.

But what they are doing here in Revelation 4 is they are constantly announcing and praising God. They are the ones that say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" They are constantly extolling God as the great sovereign of all. And so they constantly speak about His holiness, His might, and His sovereignty and His eternal being.

Now this vision that we have seen in chapter 4 is intended to inspire our awe, our praise, and worship of God. It is designed for us to conclude that He is incomparable. There is nothing, no one like Him. There is no one who has His power, His glory, His judgment, His wisdom. He is far above everything. And the mightiest angels that He made fall down before Him and sing His praises. This is what we are supposed to understand, supposed to stick up here in our memories so that it is always part of us, so that we can always have that attitude of humility and of great anticipation of being like Him.

Let us finish in Psalm 150, the final psalm of the Psalms. This is what the people who put this book together, the Psalms, wanted to end on, the same note.

Psalm 150:1-6 Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with high sounding cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!