

## Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas, Sunday, September 13, 2015.

*"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 before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind." (Revelation 4:2-4, 6)*

We left off last week our discussion about the two witnesses -- observing them in their character and office. We continue that discussion today, and we cannot (I think) do so without gaining some understanding of this passage just quoted. The scene is that introducing what was revealed to our brother John about **"things which must be hereafter"** (Revelation 4:1) and therefore no doubt quite critically relevant to our subject matter; for at least two reasons. First, because it helps to see the stark line of division between the events going before this scene -- which I submit represents our current state of existence -- and those that must follow in a fierce and very short dispensation. Second, because it helps to understand more of the nature of the **"beasts"** of Revelation and of our two witnesses.

In this passage, we have the Greek word *"thron'-os"* utilized nine distinct times. The word is used for both the English words "throne" and "seats". The definition of the word helps to see the full view John was given:

1) a throne seat

1a) a chair of state having a footstool

1b) **assigned** in the NT to kings, hence, kingly power or royalty

1b1) metaph. to God, the governor of the world

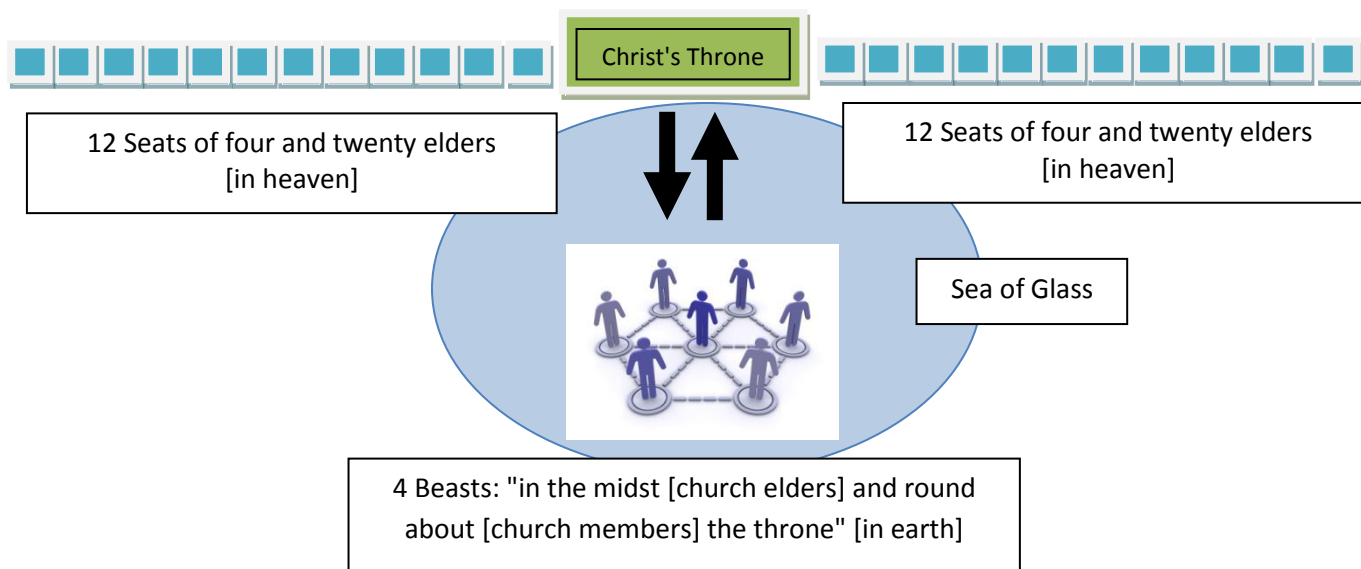
1b2) **to the Messiah**, Christ, the partner and assistant in the divine administration

1b2a) hence divine power belonging to Christ

1b3) **to judges** i.e. tribunal or bench [i.e. the 24 elders about whom it says, **"ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"** (Matthew 19:28)]

1b4) **to elders**

**(emphasis supplied)**. To further help with our understanding, I have prepared a simple illustration below:



There are three distinct "thrones" or "seats" being discussed in this vision. One is the throne of Christ (**verses 2-3**). The second is the seats of the four and twenty elders (**verse 4**). The third is the throne or seat of the church elder in the earth (**verse 6**).

Now a quick detour to consider this *"sea of glass like unto crystal"*. This part of the vision runs parallel to the first introduction of the "four beasts". In similar fashion, the "living creatures" of Ezekiel's vision are presented parallel to "wheels":

***"When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels."*** (Ezekiel 1:21)

The sea of glass and the wheels represent where the "living creature" and the "four beasts" have their operation -- in the providential dealings of God in the earth.

The unique wording in Revelation four, verse six, *"in the midst of the throne"* indicates that some portion of the "beasts" is in the seat of the throne, while the remainder of the "beasts" are ***"round about the throne"***. The picture is that of the church elder(s) who is/are separate in their role as the ***"angel of the church"*** (e.g., **Revelation 2:1**) sitting on the "seat" or "throne" of the elder, but also very much part of the body of the church membership -- which here are those ***"round about the throne"*** and also articulated as a candlestick (**Revelation 1:13**).

This is why, also, the two witnesses -- elders of that last church -- are said to be both:

***"the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks"*** (Revelation 11:4)

This verse derives its import from the vision of Zechariah -- where we now must visit to further understand the beauty of John's vision.

***"And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof." (Zechariah 4:2-3)***

The book of Zechariah is utterly filled with eschatology, only a fraction of which have I ever felt any assurance that I comprehend ... so it is a joy and refreshment that I can here give some treatment of a small portion. I referenced a later part of this passage last week; but this discussion is focusing in on the significance of this candlestick and the olive trees. In this vision, we see a different candlestick than what is dictated to Moses for the candlestick in the tabernacle or temple.

***"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same. And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side: Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick. And in the candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers." (Exodus 25:31-34)***

It has to be emphasized here, that while this seven-pronged candlestick articulated in Exodus was in fact made ... fashioned ... created, the one in Zechariah's vision has only been seen in a vision, and never fashioned. Indeed it never could be so fashioned ... as it is spirit, not carnal.

The Mosaic candlestick had at least one bowl to hold the beaten-out olive oil for each of the lamps -- with the center post having four bowls for its lamp. Zechariah's candlestick has one bowl; and that bowl receives oil direct from the olive tree and feeds it directly into the lamps.

Light. From a direct, pure, and never-fading source. Not mixed or polluted with any works of man's hands. This is a fitting description of this church that is engaged in the events unfolding -- about which this chapter of Zechariah is concerned. The description of these ***"two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth"*** (Zechariah 4:14) as being both the olive trees [i.e., source of the purified oil, as supernaturally implanted in them by Christ -- ***"the root of David"*** (Revelation 5:5) as the elders of the church] and the candlesticks [recipients of the oil and expressions of light to the earth dwellers] in our Revelation account is again due to their unique position as both elder and member of that last church.

*[As an aside: it is, indeed, this same chapter of Zechariah (and the chapter preceding it) that leads some to declare that Joshua and Zerubbabel are these two witnesses in Revelation 11. I rather believe*

*that Joshua represents the redeemed Jews and Zerubbabel the redeeming Christ -- but that is a discussion for another day.]*

This understanding of the church -- the "living creatures" -- the "four beasts" -- that includes the work of the two witnesses as their elders, is a subject that needs some serious examination. I have been hinting at a view of this matter; but now I quite plainly lay down this proposition about this church that will be in the earth during the dispensation that follows our present dispensation: The whole body of that church reflects the fullness -- the perfection -- the purity of the virgin Bride of Christ.

It should not be under-esteemed that the opening view that John receives of Christ -- by way of introducing not John's call to grace, but what he is to ***"write in a book, and send [ ] unto the seven churches which are in Asia"*** (Revelation 1:11) -- reflects perhaps better than any other writing in all of Holy Writ the state of that church ... it's elders ... these two witnesses:

***"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks [Christ] ... And he had in his right hand seven stars: ... The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels [or elders] of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."*** (Revelation 1:12-13, 16, 20)

Throughout scripture -- as even the superficial and lightest of scholars and expositors easily and readily recognize -- the word "seven" (in Hebrew, "sheba", in Greek "hepta") is a representative number that reflects "fullness" or "completeness" in the system or character under consideration. Here in John's vision, therefore, we have Christ represented in the midst of the perfected (spiritually matured) church and elders.

Furthermore, a full and careful reading of Revelation chapters two and three identifies both what the final church should be doing (positively) and what it should not be doing (negatively). Positive characteristics include:

- Fruitful works, preaching through every door that is opened to them
- Fervent labor for Christ's name's sake -- no lukewarm member included
- Patience in tribulation, without fainting; dying every day in the flesh, yet living in Christ
- Hatred of evil
- Doctrinal purity (declaring heresy and blasphemy wherever it is found); absolutely no hint of human-centered worship (free will, "God loves everybody", etc.)
- Practical purity (refusing any ecclesiastical framework outside of Scripture)
- No fear of man or what men can do to them -- including poverty, prison, tribulation, and death
- Faithful in declaring God's Word -- in no wise ashamed of Christ or His Gospel; full of zeal
- Service to God's people -- strengthening the weak in faith, who are ready to die

- Fervent charity
- Perpetual repentance and mourning for their sins -- full knowledge of their dreadful condition
- Continual, fearful watchfulness

Negative characteristics indicated, which place the candlestick into jeopardy, include:

- Proud continuance in spiritual or carnal sins -- idolatry, adultery, fornication
- Indifference in duties to God or to fellow members -- no zeal
- Impervious to chastening -- no broken heart or spirit
- Self-righteous imagination that they can save themselves with works or will
- Lack of charity toward the brethren
- Ecclesiastical perversion -- like the Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopal, etc. -- ecumenicalism.
- Fainting -- capitulating -- in the face of trials
- Doctrinal error -- not discerning the body of Christ
- Not watching for the coming of Christ -- so will be taken as a thief.

Now, these considerations can be easily categorized with only two -- doctrinal and practical perfection (positively) or error (negatively) -- but are captured in different conditions discussed related to each of those historical churches. Though the writings were to specific churches, to address what was wrong in those churches, the import of the writings are not chiefly to be understood to apply to ***"Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."*** (Revelation 1:11). Chiefly, they are to be applied to understanding the things that must be addressed for that final church to be prepared for that dispensation John was introduced to when he was told:

***"Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."*** (Revelation 4:1)

"Hereafter" meaning those things that will begin to take place after the church has reached her perfection -- having carefully and soberly sought out those things they must do to be doctrinally and practically pure.

Two additional metaphors -- laced through the whole Bible, and also specifically found in this Apocalypse -- are necessary to take a view of to solidify this point: Pregnancy and betrothal. Both of these are quite perfectly designed to help us understand the distinction between the church age generally -- and those beloved saints who walked through those centuries patiently enduring that evil appointed them in their lives -- and this church that is to be prepared to face the raging world in the Day of the Lord.

***“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.” (Revelation 12:1-2)***

and

***“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7)***

As several of our sweet sisters, daughters, mothers have here recently experienced – or about to experience – there is quite a difference between being pregnant and **“travailing in birth”**. A Rubicon is crossed ... a point of no return. All things look, feel, and are quite different in that hour. Similarly, a betrothed – not to be confused with the rampant perversion of this concept in today’s society – is quite a different woman than the bride who has **“made herself ready”** for the marriage. There is a finality in preparation of heart, mind, spirit ... a focus like no time before ... when the issue is imminent! This is the church that has the charge of things during this critical period of three and half years before the return of Christ.

Now I could set forth in quotation the whole of the poem that King Solomon wrote to the Queen of Sheba, and I believe you would thereby find only more -- and more complete -- understanding of the Apocalypse. Since Solomon represents Christ and Sheba (i.e., "seven", reflecting fullness or completeness) represents the last Church, it is quite relevant. However, it is enough for me to focus on a passage that will help us on our particular examination of the two witnesses.

***“A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: ¶ A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.” (Song 4:12-15)***

This image of the purified and perfected church -- a lush, fruitful garden that is closed off from all but those to whom entrance is granted -- is an allusion to that place from which our first parents were driven; the Garden of Eden. A spiritual representation of a physical state from which the human race was removed -- but to which it has been promised that a remnant of them will return.

***“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7)***

Remember, if you will, this language when our father Adam and mother Eve were sent forth from the Garden:

***“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the***

***LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*** (Genesis 3:22-24)

From before the Creation, there was a work set in motion. The fall of Adam was a necessary part of that work ... and so also was (and is) the return to this perfected state by an elect remnant, as we see in the closing book and chapter of this blessed Scripture:

***"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."*** (Revelation 22:1-2)

Now, there is much more that can be -- and I say should be -- said about the amazingly beautiful symmetry to this phenomenon of the garden. To turn aside to that here would be to swallow my point in this sermon. My focus is on a remarkable portion of this symmetrical imagery. The prophecy of Daniel ties the work of these two witnesses directly into the imperative of God's elect being -- exclusively -- given access to the beauties of this garden ... however that is finally to look:

***"Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river."*** (Daniel 12:5)

Please remember, my beloved friends: Just because our slow-witted minds and brief life experiences frequently oblige us to stupidly myopic views of our King -- in fact, all of the movements of all of the creatures in all ages are sent to their work in accordance with God's design. So, it should not be at all dismissed by or even remarkable to you sitting here today, that the river Daniel sees in his vision is providentially determined.

***"And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel;"*** (Daniel 10:4)

Hiddekel is the river that we're told runs out of the east of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:14) ... and as it exits the Garden, to flow down into the Assyrian plains, what do we find?

***"and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims."*** (Genesis 3:24)

These cherubims are what Daniel saw -- one of whom engages with Christ to learn how long of a period would their final work be:

***"And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that***

***liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished."* (Daniel 12:6-7)**

Since I'm focusing here on the work of these two witnesses, I will not continue in Daniel's prophesy -- although it is clearly a source of additional light on the Apocalyptic events. The period is the same ... the work is the same ... the servants of God envisioned are the same. And it's very exciting to read, but time will not allow it today.

The next thing I want to squarely address about these two witnesses is the reason why we cannot conclude that they are representative of the whole church ... though they are no doubt members (elders) of that church. A short analytical path will lead you to this evident conclusion. The elliptical reciting of the season, nature, and work of these two witnesses comes to a close with the following language:

***"The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly."* (Revelation 11:14)**

It is, therefore, necessary to conclude that the two witnesses end their work, are slain, have life return into them again, and rise into the heaven in the sight of their enemies -- all under the seventh seal, sixth trumpet. The very next verse begins the events under the seventh trumpet:

***"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."* (Revelation 11:15)**

Now, you will notice that there is no mention -- here in this Revelation 11 account -- of the "rapture", the rising of the dead in Christ and the translation of the remaining Christian saints in the earth. To get this picture, you have to refer to the writings of Paul in his letters to the churches at Corinth and Thessalonica.

***"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)**

and

***"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)**



This being the case, it is quite impossible to conclude that the two witnesses are the church body -- as they two were slain and risen again **before** the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. However, we know -- from many proofs heretofore articulated -- that the two witnesses are associated with the churches, as integral to the vision of the "living creatures" and the "four beasts".

A closer examination of the language in Paul's writings -- and in John's visions under the sixth trumpet -- help us to see what is happening here. Paul twice refers to those Christians who are to be translated at the coming of Christ with the phrase "***we which are alive and remain***". Of course, if they are alive at this moment in providence they necessarily "remain" in the strictest sense -- so was this a mere redundancy that Paul was using? I think not. Look at what John writes about events immediately following upon the resurrection and rise of the two witnesses:

***"And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven." (Revelation 11:13)***

This group -- though many expositors suggest (without clear proofs) that it refers to those of the damned in earth who were not killed in the earthquake -- is defined with the same exact word that Paul used in referring to those who will be translated. The word is the plural version of the Greek word "*leipo*", which is a root word defined as "*to leave behind, forsake, to be left behind*".

Both Paul and John are describing the same events ... using the same word ... describing a most disquieting and yet exhilarating scene. The elders of the church have been slain. Their bodies advertised for all the earth to celebrate over. The members of that church are in a state of distress and discomfiture -- with the very certain knowledge that the time is at hand and that the issue was prophesied by God's holy messengers time and again. They know what is happening -- because part of their spiritual maturity is full faith that what has been promised will most certainly come to pass.

Now the two are quickened -- sending shockwaves through the freshly-alarmed enemies. Their bodies raise up into heaven in the presence and sight of the impotent mob. There is no turning this clock back. The issue is imminent -- and every soul in observance knows it! The earth quakes, intensifying the panic and chaos and that city "***which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified***" (Revelation 11:8) -- Jerusalem -- sees a tenth part fall. Seven thousand die. The rage and fear overtake the mob. They know that there is a little body of believers right nearby. There will -- if God would allow it -- be more dead of God's patient, faithful servants.

The remnant -- amazed at the sight, and yet joyful at the imminent issue -- find themselves for a brief period affrighted.

***"The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." (Micah 6:9)***

God has appointed this matter -- from the foundation of the world -- and only His servants are given to see His name ... so they give **"glory to the God of heaven"** and patiently wait for His deliverance. There goes forth, then, the voice of the archangel. The final trump of God sounds, and those faithful remnant are **"caught up unto God, and to his throne."** (Revelation 12:5)

There is a great deal more to be learned about these two witnesses, and I again encourage all of my friends here to search out a more complete understanding of them and their work. However, it must be said that since we have real and reliable proofs in our time that the indicators provided in this book -- when these events will begin to come to pass -- are all around us, we must put some urgency to knowing. Knowing what is to come. Knowing how we need to grow to that spiritual maturity that distinguishes this blessed church of the Apocalypse.

From many rounds of exploring the discussions about the gifts of grace ... the fruits of the Spirit ... the evidences that Christ dwells in us and God is with us, I feel strongly that we have doctrinal purity in this body. But we have much work to do in the way of practical purity. Particularly in how we spend our talents and how we deal with each other. Please be clear about this one thing: only the perfected body will be granted that dispensation.

These are exiting times, my friends. There can be no higher work for our time and energies than to preach this truth and to show fervent love for the brethren. Many recent sermons from this body's elders have been right on target for this work ... and I trust many more will follow. I love you all, and I am most humbled to be given this work to feed you. Amen.