

A Biblical View OF THE **END TIMES**

THE CHURCH IN HISTORY AND IN HEAVEN, PART 2

Week #25; June 28, 2026, 6PM

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Review:

- This session is the second half of a two-part focus on “**The Church in History and in Heaven.**” Last week, we had Part 1.
- As I’ve shared, my intent in this study series is to move through the panorama of Bible prophecy from start to finish - along a timeline from past to future, and (loosely) that also implies **Genesis** to **Revelation**.
- This is mostly do-able. But periodically - we need to pause, look around, and bring a few other elements up to speed. That’s what we are doing now.
- (And so) last week, we reviewed the seven letters to seven churches that are found in **Revelation chapters 2 and 3**.
- This part of Scripture is not studied or taught well - - but we learned the following:
 - **FIRST**, these were seven letters to seven ACTUAL churches during John’s time. They were in that part of the world known as Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
 - **SECOND**, these seven churches had various specific problems within their fellowships. These letters were intended to (a.) point out these problems, and (b.) provide the remedy for them.
 - **THIRD**, these seven churches – and the problems they each faced – are also intended to serve as examples or guides for ALL churches throughout the 2,000-yr. church age.
 - Each passage to each of these seven churches ends with the phrase “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” It’s plural. The point is we can all learn something from each church.
 - And **FOURTH**, these churches were chosen by the Holy Spirit – and they are placed in the order they are presented – to provide a picture, or an overview.
 - This picture shows the trends, the ebb and flow, and the dynamics of church history as a whole - starting from the Day of Pentecost in **Acts. Ch. 2** and going all the way up to the present.
 - There is nothing random about this list. Each of these seven churches is sovereignly placed – in a specific order within that sequence - to contribute to a prophetic overview of church history. We looked at several examples of this.
 - And that means, the LAST church on that list – the church of Laodicea - which is positioned just before an important picture of the Rapture in **Rev. 4:1**, speaks to the greater church of **our present time**.
 - The church age which started in **Acts Ch. 2** is now almost complete. We are at the very end of its duration today.

- It's been about 2,000 years – which we saw in a previous lesson is a prophetically significant timeframe.
- Because the Laodicean church is a picture of the greater church of **our present time**, we gave a lot of attention last time to better understanding it.
- From the passage of **Rev. 3:14-22**, we lifted out a lot of details about the Laodicean church. We saw every point was full of meaning – for OUR time!
- I don't want to repeat those things here because the lesson notes and video from our last session dives into all that, but here are some broad takeaways:
 - The church of Laodicea is the **ONLY** one of these seven churches in **Revelation chapters 2 and 3** which Jesus provides **no** positive remarks about.
 - In fact, it is a church that Jesus has rejected. It has no redeeming qualities. It is useless. Jesus says He's going to '*spit it out.*'
 - That's because the greater church today – just as it was with the historical Laodicean church - is a delusional church. It holds firm beliefs about itself that are unsupported by reality.
 - Many churches today maintain these false beliefs about themselves with **absolute conviction**, even when they are presented with irrefutable facts to the contrary. It's why Jesus calls this church '*blind.*'
 - The bottom line is the Laodicean church – past AND present – has modeled itself by the standards, ideas, protocols, and attitudes of the world around it. It has chosen to conform to the world rather than to Christ.
 - Therefore, it is unable to perceive its dire condition - and in fact, it does not WANT to.
 - It rejects the help it most needs. It refuses the remedies which would return it to spiritual health.
 - The point is made in this passage that this church needs to repent and go in a completely different direction. That is a message that applies to the church TODAY.
- (And) most alarmingly, Jesus says in **Rev. 3:20** that He's not even IN this church in the first place. He's outside and trying to get in. That's not hard for us to see...
 - **Many churches today** refuse to teach the full counsel of God's Word. They only teach certain parts of it which they prefer, and they ignore (and even mock) other parts.
 - We've learned this is a symptom of a dire spiritual prognosis. The posture of the greater church today shows it is on spiritual life support.
 - That's because, as we learned in the opening 2-3 lessons of this study series, these kinds of postures show a faulty view of God Himself.
 - You cannot separate your chosen views of the Bible from your chosen views of its Divine Author.
 - **Many churches today** SAY, "It's all about Jesus." It makes them feel good about WHAT they're doing and HOW they're doing it – but these statements mean very little. These folks have no problem mishandling God's Word.
 - In fact, **many churches today** refuse to teach from a great deal of Scripture which has MUCH to say about Jesus Christ.

- Here are two examples:
 - ✓ **First, there's the Old Testament – that's more than half of the Bible.**
(Cf. **Luke 24:27**) – “*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*” - - (The OT is all about showing the person and work of Jesus Christ. **It needs to be properly and regularly taught.**)
 - ✓ **Second, there's Bible prophecy – that's more than one-quarter of the Bible.**
(Cf. **Revelation 19:10**) – “*The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*” - - (Bible prophecy is all about revealing the person and work of Jesus Christ. **It needs to be properly and regularly taught.**)
- The pattern of **many churches today** is they leapfrog entire portions of Scripture which challenge their preferred views.
- They ridicule parts of Scripture they don't like; they rank Scripture for what they feel is important and what is not; and they refuse to interpret God's Word responsibly.
- In the end, we have a far bigger problem than many people realize. (And) as a result, **'many'** people are being led astray - - even to their eternal demise as **Matt. 7:21-23** makes clear.

NOTE: There is so much more I could say - - and it probably needs to be said MANY more times - - but we must move on....

A. Today, we'll look at the 24 Elders seen in heaven in *Revelation Ch. 4* (READ 4:1-4)

NOTE: These 24 Elders are generally overlooked - and if they ARE studied, they are frequently misunderstood.

NOTE: We'll see they represent the church in heaven, and this fact is connected to everything we have learned so far. (We'll take a careful look at their identity).

1. We notice something right away: these 24 'Elders' come out of nowhere.
 - Relative to other details we see in other throne room scenes elsewhere in Scripture (*i.e. Isaiah 6:1-8, Daniel 7:9-14, Et al*), these 24 Elders suddenly appear here in **Rev. 4:4** as a NEW element.
 - Other throne room scenes in Scripture mention specific angelic creatures and so on (as **Rev. Ch. 4** also does) but not these Elders.
2. That suggests a couple of things:
 - **First**, something unique is going on with the timing of **this** throne room scene that is different from the timing of other throne room scenes.
 - Other throne room scenes in Scripture pertain to OTHER points in the timeline of history. For example, **Isaiah Ch. 6** is associated with the year 740 BC, the '*year King Uzziah died.*'
 - **Second**, that also means these 24 Elders must be associated with events that are specific to THIS context - - and that is correct!

- Paying attention to the context conforms to the proper rules of Biblical interpretation which we learned in our first few lessons in this series.
- 3. The context of **Revelation chapters 2-3** represents a historical AND future element.
 - As I said, these two chapters prophetically represent the entire church age, from start to finish.
- 4. It ends with the Laodicean church which represents the greater church of our time. Again, we learned all these details – and more - in our last lesson.
 - AFTER the Laodicean church, the **immediate** context then moves to **Revelation 4:1** which we learned is a picture or “type” of the Rapture.
 - ‘*After this,*’ (or after the church age) John sees a ‘*door standing open in heaven,*’ and he is told to ‘*come up here.*’
 - He is then told AGAIN that he will see what happens ‘*after this,*’ and that means he will see what happens in heaven AFTER the Rapture.
 - This language recalls what we learned last time: the book of **Revelation** MOSTLY moves through a linear chronology – A before B, then B before C, and so on.
- 5. So, these 24 Elders ‘pop onto the scene’ in heaven’s throne room AFTER the church age is complete, and AFTER the Rapture.
 - They uniquely and suddenly show up here in **this** throne room scene, in **this** specific context, and in **this** order of events.
 - And now, the rest of **Ch. 4** is devoted to the things John sees in heaven which are ‘*after this.*’
 - Keep all this in view. We’re going to circle back on these points in a bit.

B. (I want to go back to this identity issue): “What are the options for the identity of these 24 Elders?”

NOTE: This group of 24 Elders appears multiple times in the book of **Revelation (4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4; Et al)**. I have several things to say:

1. **First**, I personally believe these 24 Elders represent the church in heaven which has **just** been raptured in **4:1**.
2. (And note), this introduction to the 24 Elders in **4:4** is PRIOR to the details of the Tribulation which is presented in later parts of **Revelation**.
 - These things add to the suggestion that these 24 Elders represent the church, since the church was not born until **after** Jesus ascended.
 - That’s why these 24 Elders do not show up in any OT throne room scenes. When John writes about the “*things which are,*” it makes sense that these 24 Elders represent the recently raptured church.
3. While I will show you why I feel these 24 Elders are the raptured church, and why I feel that is the strongest position, it goes without saying that there are various opinions concerning their identity. These include:
 - Angels (there are many problems with this position)
 - OT saints (but they don’t get their glorified bodies till AFTER the Tribulation)
 - Angelic “heavenly representations of all saints,” (obscure and allegorical)

- Patriarchs and apostles - representing the OT and NT saints together,
 - Israel, and / or some sort of representation of the 12 tribes of Israel
4. **Second**, if we can properly understand the identity of these 24 Elders, that should provide some information which would weigh into the timing of the Rapture.
 - In other words, we can ‘reverse engineer’ some of the issues from different vantage points.
 5. **And third**, while the text does not explicitly state the identity of these 24 Elders - in all the places in **Revelation** that they ARE mentioned, we find descriptions of them.
 - Therefore, if we examine the information and the various ways John writes about them, I feel the answer to the question about their identity will become evident.

C. Descriptions of the 24 Elders

1. Some Bible scholars (as I stated) see these 24 Elders as angels, but upon closer examination, this cannot be the case.
2. That is because the Bible is consistent. And so - - we need to take in a few details here:
 - In the OT, there were no chairs either in the tabernacle or the temple.
 - That is because the priests were to serve continually. This is a major theological point in the book of **Hebrews**.
 - AFTER Jesus performed His high priestly duties, He “*sat down at the right hand of God*” (**Cf. Heb 1:3; 10:11-12**).
3. In **Revelation**, we do not read of any angels sitting. In fact, we see angels standing (**Cf. Rev. 7:9, 11**).
 - Even one as mighty and majestic as Gabriel declares himself to be “*standing in the presence of God*” (**Cf. Luke 1:19**).
 - Additionally, the angels are specifically mentioned as being distinct from the 24 elders (**Cf. Rev. 5:11; especially 7:11**).

“All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,”

NOTE: For that matter, we also see the tribulation saints (described as a “*great multitude*”), who are martyred in the great tribulation, as “*standing before the throne and the lamb*” (**Cf. Rev 7:9**).

Another group of martyred individuals who we see had victory over the beast are seen to be “*standing beside the sea,*” near the throne (**Cf. Rev 15:2**).

NOTE: What is amazing to see is there is only one group mentioned in **Revelation** (other than God and the Lamb) who are specifically described as sitting.

4. That is the 24 elders who are shown to be sitting on thrones. **Revelation 4:4** says:

*“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and **seated** on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads”*

- This ‘seating privilege’ was promised to the church by Jesus in **Revelation 3:21** which reads, *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*
 - This seating arrangement is a unique privilege as the original seven historical churches could see by reading **Revelation chapters 2-3**. They could then see that this promise of Jesus was fulfilled in **Revelation 4:4**.
 - It would have given them encouragement and hope that they could be part of the group who were **also** promised to be *“....kept from the hour of trial that was coming upon the whole earth” (Cf. Rev 3:10).*
 - Furthermore, this position of being seated is one that is full of honor. To be located so close to the throne of God was massively significant.
 - One would be very hard pressed to find any clear parallels to **any** angelic being or beings that are described this explicitly – as being seated on a throne.
5. Keep in mind too - - after the tribulation is over, there is the resurrection of the OT saints as well as the believers who died during the tribulation (we will be studying the five resurrection events a bit later in this series).
6. (But for now) this post-Tribulation resurrection event is described in **Revelation 20:4-6** and that passage says they also get to sit on thrones during Jesus Christ’s Millennial reign on earth.
- However, an important distinction is made with this latter group: there is no reference of them sitting on thrones in heaven near God’s throne.
 - This specific promise was only made to the church. **Revelation 3:21** says:

“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

- It’s clear from the context that this promise Jesus gave will be fulfilled by the church in **Revelation 4:4** which we read earlier.
 - So - - we have the 24 Elders not only sitting down, but they are seated on thrones, and that distinction demonstrates their rulership alongside the Lord Jesus. It all ties together (**Cf. Rev. 2:26-27; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; Et al).**
7. Another important descriptor to consider here is the number 24 (put your thinking caps on for this one...).
- In the 404 verses of **Revelation**, Bible scholars have noted that there are more than 500 direct references to the OT (see appendix XI in Arnold Fruchtenbaum’s *“The Footsteps of the Messiah,”* page 793).
 - One of the things we see in this is OT patterns are subsequently reinforced in **Revelation**.

- And one of those patterns concerns the number 24. It is a relatively unique number that occurs in **1 Chronicles chapters 24-25**.
 - Here, David and Zadok divided the priesthood and worship leaders into 24 different orders (**Cf. Luke 1:5, 8, 9 as one example: Zechariah of the order of Abijah**).
 - This shows us a pattern: the number 24 is meant to represent the whole group. When the 24 chief priests of the 24 different orders stood before David, they represented the entire priesthood. The same would be true for the worship leaders.
 - In the case of the 24 Elders sitting on thrones, they would likely represent the entire church in fulfillment of Jesus's promise in **Revelation 3:21**.
 - Additionally - they are seated in heaven, and they are exempt from the period of the Day of the Lord, beginning in **Rev. 6:1** just as Jesus promised in **Rev. 3:10**.
 - Another concept of the number 24 in **1 Chronicles** relates to the functions of priesthood and worship. This seems to align well with the roles of the 24 Elders in the book of **Revelation**.
 - For example, they offer up incense which is the prayers of the saints (**Cf. Rev 5:9**). The offering of incense is reminiscent of the priestly duties as found in **Leviticus**.
 - Further, numerous times they are highlighted as participating and initiating worship in the presence of the throne and the angelic host.
 - These connections between priesthood in **Rev. 1:5-6**, and worship in **Rev 5:9; 4:11**, and the number 24 in **1 Chronicles chapters 24 and 25** is probably more than coincidence.
8. The 24 Elders are also described in **Rev. 4:4** as having crowns of gold, and this is an important and revealing detail insofar as their identity is concerned.
- The first point needs to be made that angelic beings do not have crowns. They are not portrayed in Scripture – or in any throne room scenes specifically – as being crown-wearers.
 - Furthermore, in the Greek, these are ‘*stephanos*’ crowns which are often used in the context of overcoming or gaining victory over adversity; similar to an athlete (**Cf. 1 Cor 9:25**). We learned this in our lesson on ‘rewards.’
 - Both **Revelation 2:10** and **3:11** speaks of those kinds of crowns which are given, as seen in Jesus's promise to the church for being overcomers.
 - The other type of crown in the Greek is a ‘*diadem*’ crown typically used as a reference to those who recognized for their power, royalty, and authority.
 - Jesus wears this ‘*diadem*’ crown in **Revelation 19:12**. The dragon and the beast have this same kind of crown as they seek to imitate the inherent royalty of Jesus (**Cf. Rev. 12:3; 13:1**).
 - But back to that ‘rewards’ thing for a moment. We learned in that previous lesson that after the rapture, believers will stand before Jesus at the bema seat judgment to receive their rewards for their Christian service.

- So, it is not surprising that these 24 Elders would be seen as having these ‘*stephanos*’ crowns showing they have already received their rewards from Jesus Himself.
 - All this strongly suggests these crown-wearing, overcoming 24 Elders represent the greater church which is in heaven immediately AFTER the conclusion of the church age - - and BEFORE the start of the Tribulation timeframe.
9. (Let’s stay with the ‘apparel’ angle a bit more). I want to look at their ‘white garments.’
- In Jesus’s letter to the seven churches, He speaks positively about His promise to those in the church who overcome.
 - He says they will receive “white garments” (**Cf. Rev. 3:4, 5, 18**).
 - The 24 elders are said to be clothed in “white garments” which clearly is using the same language as Jesus’s promise to the churches (**Cf. Rev. 4:4**).
 - Furthermore, we – the church - return with Jesus Christ at His physical Second Coming. And in **Rev. 19:14**, it describes us as follows: *“The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.”*
 - The ‘white garments’ is an apparel distinction that is mentioned regarding true HUMAN believers in the book of **Revelation** - - not angels.
10. Here are a couple more bullet points about why these 24 Elders most likely represent the church in heaven.
- An obvious point is the fact they are called ‘Elders’ in the first place.
 - ✓ From all the way back in OT times, ‘Elders’ were human leaders beginning from the book of **Exodus** and going up through the Gospels.
 - ✓ Additionally, this term ‘Elders’ was used as an official designation within the church structure multiple times (**Cf. Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1, Et. al**).
 - ✓ Lastly on this matter, nowhere in the Bible are angels referred to as ‘Elders.’
 - Then there are the speech patterns or communication emphases of these 24 Elders. They are reminiscent of true believers who recognize and speak of the significance of their salvation.
 - ✓ They see the Lamb **being slain** which **redeemed people from every tribe** to be a **kingdom of priests who will reign** (**Cf. Rev. 5:8-10, 12**),
 - ✓ They have detailed knowledge of those coming out of the tribulation, and **who have been made white by the redemptive blood of the Lamb** (**Cf. Rev. 7:14**), and so on....

SO, WHAT'S OUR CONCLUSION? The evidence seems strongest that the 24 Elders represent the raptured church. The sum of the points – when responsibly interpreted by the proper rules of doing that – make a better case for this identity than any other option.

Furthermore, the timeline of **Revelation** also makes it clear that the church arrives in heaven BEFORE the Tribulation starts. This view is consistent with multiple other passages which make the same case.

NEXT WEEK: We'll move past this pivotal timeframe we've been looking at (our death / the Rapture / our arrival in heaven, etc.) and all the issues surrounding that. We'll start looking at all the things that happen after that point. We will be taking a deep look at all the issues around the antichrist.



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The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

Solid Bread Community, PO Box 431, Windsor, CO 80550

Website: www.solidbreadcommunity.com

Email: connect@solidbreadcommunity.com Please follow Solid Bread Community on Facebook and subscribe to our YouTube channel.