

# KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

*"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."*

## FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

### Part 71

#### THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES AND THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS (continued)

“And *round about the throne* were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw *four and twenty elders sitting*, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads *crowns* of gold” (Rev. 4:4). “Twenty-four other thrones *surrounded the throne* and seated on these thrones were *twenty-four Elders*, arrayed in white clothing, with Crowns of Gold upon their heads” (Amplified Bible).

The Greek word for elders is *presbuteros*. By the way, the word “presbyterian” comes from that, and I am reminded of the story about the little girl who came home from her Presbyterian Sunday School, and her mother asked her what they had talked about. “We talked about heaven,” the little girl replied. “Well, what did they say about it?” her mother asked. “The teacher said that there were only twenty-four Presbyterians there!” Seriously, elders were representatives. We know that Israel had elders and that elders were ordained in the early churches to rule and to represent the entire church.

The twenty-four Elders in the book of Revelation bear a special signification for they are represented as distinct from both the four Living Creatures “in the midst” of the throne and the great multitude “before” the throne. These Elders occupy a unique position described as “round about” the throne — yet UPON THRONES! In order to fully appreciate the scenery here drawn by the Spirit, we need to go back and examine one particular of the order established by God among the people of Israel after they came up out of the land of Egypt. It is important that we get a clear idea, not only of the structure of the tabernacle of Moses, but also of the arrangement of both the people and the priesthood in relation to it. On page two of this article I give you a diagram of that arrangement.

What do we see then? In the second chapter of Numbers we find the order given for the encampment of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. The camp of Israel as it was established in Sinai formed a hollow square. In the center of the hollow was the tabernacle of Moses. Around the tabernacle Israel was divided into four camps: one camp of three tribes on the east side, another camp of three tribes on the south side, another camp of three tribes on the west side, and the last camp of three tribes on the north side. There was to be one ensign for each camp of three tribes. Judah was to be the head tribe of the first encampment, and they were to camp “on the east side toward the rising of the sun” (Num. 2:3-9). The tribes of Issachar and Zebulun were to camp with Judah around his standard or ensign, which ensign was the *lion*. Therefore, the flag of the tribe of Judah with a lion of gold on a background of scarlet was erected in front of the camp of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

Next in order was the camp of Reuben on the south side along with the tribes of Simeon and Gad. These three tribes were to camp around the ensign of Reuben, which ensign was the *man*. On this flag a man was represented against a background of gold. The third camp was made up of the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin, with Ephraim as the head tribe to camp on the west side of the tabernacle. The ensign of the tribe of Ephraim was the *ox*. The flag of Ephraim had a black ox with a background of gold. The final camp was the camp of Dan together with the tribes of Asher and Naphtali. History shows that the ensign of the tribe of Dan was the *eagle*. This flag had an eagle of gold on a background of blue.



The tabernacle with its courts set “in the midst” of so many thousands of saved and happy Israel, must have been an imposing sight — an all-absorbing scene of wonder to the whole nation, as well as to each one of the mighty host. In this arrangement we see the same typical picture, under different symbols, as that presented to us in chapters four and five of the Revelation. The Most Holy Place was the abode of the God of Israel among His people. When the tabernacle was set up as described in Exodus chapter forty, then the Shekinah, the Cloud of God’s Glorious Presence, covered the whole tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. It is interesting to observe that while the Cloud of God’s Glory rested upon the entire tabernacle complex, the glory of the Lord also “filled the tabernacle,” thus designating the Most Holy Place as the dwelling place or the tabernacle of God.

Later God said to Moses, “Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the Most Holy Place within the veil before the mercy seat...that he die not: for I WILL APPEAR IN THE CLOUD UPON THE MERCY SEAT” (Lev. 16:2). Isaiah testified, “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that DWELLEST BETWEEN THE CHERUBIM, Thou art God” (Isa. 37:16). God was *in* the cloud, He *appeared* in the cloud, He *spoke* out of the cloud, He *led* Israel by the cloud, and in the cloud He *dwelt in the Most Holy Place, over the ark with its mercy-seat or throne of grace*. The tabernacle, and especially the throne upon the Ark, was in very fact **GOD’S THRONE** among Israel from which, by His word and His power, He ruled over them!

The “Mercy-Seat” was a slab of solid gold, in fact a lid, with cherubim, one at each end facing each other, all made of one piece. The tables of the law of Yahweh were to be put in the Ark and the Mercy-Seat placed above it. The mercy-seat, or Throne, was to be put upon the Ark of the Covenant within the veil, in the Most Holy Place. That was the only piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place. It was indeed the THRONE ROOM! It was there, upon the mercy-seat, that the glory of the God of Israel dwelt, and from there God communed with His people and set judgment and mercy in the midst. “And thou shalt put the mercy-seat above the Ark...and there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat...” (Ex. 25:21-22). “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel...Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth” (Ps. 80:1).

The covering of the Ark of the Covenant was the place of the judgment-of-mercy for Israel’s sins. It was the Judgment Throne of the Invisible One, Israel’s King. It was the Throne of Mercy! Everything in the law of Moses centered in that Mercy-Throne. All the sacrifices had to do with that Mercy-Throne within the veil. All the shedding of blood of offerings had to do with that one chief sprinkling of blood upon the Mercy-Throne. The Mercy-Throne was, in the arrangement of things, the center of all! The tabernacle was in the center of the camp. The Most Holy Place was in the center of the white linen curtains or outer wall which marked off the tabernacle territory. The Mercy-Throne was in the center of the Most Holy Place. So the Mercy-Throne was in the *center* — or midst — of everything! The Mercy-Throne was what the Most Holy Place was made for! The mercy-seat, as the King James Bible calls it, was not a “seat” as we know a seat; the old English word means the “origin” or “center,” just as when you speak of the “seat of pain” or the “seat of government” as the point of origin of it. The mercy-seat was the place where MERCY ORIGINATED! This is the description of something supreme — M-E-R-C-Y! The writer to the Hebrews calls it “the throne of grace.”

The mercy-seat is an absolute picture of Jesus Christ. There was no wood in it at all. It was made of pure gold. It speaks of God and all that is the nature of God as revealed in Christ. The word for mercy-seat in the Greek language is *hilasterion*. In the New Testament there are only four verses that use this word, as follows: “And over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the *mercy seat*” (Heb. 9:5). “Whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past” (Rom. 3:25). “God...sent His Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins” (I Jn. 4:10). “And He is the *propitiation* for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I Jn. 2:2).

From these four verses you will see that the Greek word *hilasterion* has been translated both as *mercy seat* and *propitiation*. Christ, we are told, is the propitiation for our sins. But the word is MERCY SEAT! It simply means that Jesus Christ BECAME OUR MERCY SEAT, He became the origin or center of God’s mercy and goodness toward us, and it is He from whom that mercy *originates*! So now, blessed be God! we have a faithful and *merciful high priest* who is also the seat, the center, the origin, and the

powerful **throne** of EVERLASTING AND INFINITE MERCY! I do not hesitate to tell you that God is not dismantling His Mercy Throne, He is not evacuating His body off of this planet, He is not taking His Holy Spirit out of the earth, the day of grace is not, as the preachers so ridiculously proclaim, about to end; indeed, it is barely beginning! God is even now forming a body, a son company, kings and priests after the order of Melchizedek, to display and reveal His mercy and power unto creation throughout the age and the ages to come, making all things new. Therefore, though we have but tasted of His mercies, through vast ages yet unborn He will continue to unfold the riches of His grace, manifesting it through His vessels of mercy, until the fullness thereof is revealed, and God becomes, finally, ALL-IN-ALL!

The Most Holy Place is, then, an earthly picture of the throne of God — the realm of God's manifestation in power and dominion. The Most Holy Place prefigured Christ the King together with all those holy sons of God who reign with Him in the authority of the Spirit. It is the glory of KINGSHIP! Armed with the understanding that the tabernacle constituted God's throne among His people, let us remember that there is "before" that throne a "great multitude" of people receiving the blessings and benefits of His kingdom ministered through the typical sacrifices and ministrations of the temple service and the priesthood. As you will note in the diagram, the arrangement of the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the camp of Israel in three distinct divisions (tabernacle, priesthood, camp of Israel), sets forth the three-fold economy of God in His redemptive and restorative processes.

The tabernacle is the dwelling place of God — His throne, His sphere of activity, the center of His power, glory, and goodness. The camp of Israel, the great multitude "before" the throne, is the whole world of mankind outside of God, estranged from His life, yet redeemed, blessed, and brought nigh. But there is a third company — the **CAMP OF THE PRIESTS** — situated, as it were, "round about the throne," directly *between* the "throne" and the "great multitude"! The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "The Israelites shall encamp each by his own tribal standard or banner, with the ensign of their fathers' houses, opposite the tent of meeting (tabernacle) and facing it on every side. Then the tent of meeting (tabernacle) shall set out, with the **CAMP OF THE LEVITES IN THE MIDST OF THE CAMPS**" (Num. 2:2,17). The tribe of Levi was not counted among the tribes of Israel, therefore they were not camped with the other tribes, for they were the Lord's priests, ordained to be camped in the center of the encampment near the tabernacle. Divine infinite purpose lies behind this whole arrangement and the moment the wonderful significance of this dawns upon our spiritual understanding, we see that God has placed a **PRIESTHOOD COMPANY** *between Himself and the world of mankind!*

A priest or priesthood infers that there is a reason why such has been raised up by God. It denotes that there has been in the minds of men an estrangement between God and His creatures and the priest ministers to bridge that gulf and bring about peace and at-one-ment. Deep in the heart of every man there is a strong and instinctive demand for a priest, to be a mediator, to lay one hand on man, and the other on God, and standing between both to bring the two together into unification. Webster's dictionary defines priest as: A mediatory agent *between* God and man. In the Old Testament the word priest is translated from the Hebrew word *cohen*, the root meaning of which is "one who stands up and draws nigh for another." The Greek word, in its root, means "to minister." Thus, a priest is one who draws nigh and ministers in *two directions* — drawing nigh to God on behalf of the people and drawing nigh to the people on behalf of God! The priest **stands between**. The ministry of the priest is an intermediate or go-between ministry. He reaches forth with one hand and takes hold of God; he reaches out with the other hand and takes hold of humanity; and brings the two together by the power of his priestly ministration. Can we not see that this is the very reason God placed the priesthood of Israel in an encampment directly *between* the tabernacle throne and the great multitude of the people. That is the picture! Most people miss this great truth, and I don't remember ever seeing a drawing of the tabernacle and the camp of Israel in the wilderness with the tribe of Levi correctly positioned in the open area of the hollow square between the tabernacle and the camps of the tribes. It is abundantly evident that they correspond precisely to the twenty-four Elders that John beheld "round about the throne." Isn't it wonderful!

In the book of Hebrews we read that our great High Priest, even Jesus, is set on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens where He is *minister of the sanctuary*, the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man (Heb. 8:1-2). In ancient times there was in every temple a god, an unseen god, among the pagans an idol god, concealed in the Holy of holies, to whom the temple was devoted. Religion is as old as the human race and religious systems and observances pre-date the oldest empires of antiquity such as the empires of Sumer, Egypt, and Babylon. As these religions spread over the world they developed into an expression in all lands and kingdoms with only a slight change in the names of the gods and slight variations in the rituals. The almost identical knowledge, stories, myths, gods, temples, priesthoods, sacrifices, and belief systems and observances of all kinds had their origins *very early in human history*. The question is, of course, where did all this come from? Was religion merely an “invention” of superstitious savages, or did it originate somehow as an integral part of man’s constitution, revelation, and experience from his very beginning?

The evidence certainly suggests that religion had its origin from the dawn of history. Every religion shared similar characteristics — even among the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Mayan temples of Central America and the Aztec temples of South America were constructed, even to their “holy of holies,” along lines similar to those in Egypt and elsewhere. *The evidence points to the fact that behind them all there was some ancient historical reality*. There are no traces of evolution from simple to sophisticated. All theological systems stemmed from some common but exceedingly ancient source. This raises the question — what was that common but exceedingly ancient source? The evidence unquestionably points to some meaningful design right from the earliest time of man’s appearance upon earth. This type of uniformity suggests a guiding hand at work. Oh, yes! There is the same supernatural *design* throughout practically all the ancient religious systems — God, temple worship, sacrifice, priesthood, after-life, redemption, eternal life, resurrection, judgment, etc. *Design from the beginning!*

The Bible affirms that the worship of God originated with an ***original truth*** revealed to man by His Creator. Adam and Eve stepped forth from the garden with this original truth implanted firmly in their hearts. They knew of the tree of life, which was Christ as life. “*In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him *was life*; and the *life* was the *light (illumination, inspiration, revelation)* of men” (Jn. 1:1,4). They experienced the presence of God and the glory of God, for the Lord God Himself walked with them in the Garden in the *cool* (Hebrew: *spirit*) of the day. They knew what it was to *walk in the Spirit!* They conversed with God and understood His will, His word, and His ways. The only government they knew was the life, spirit, and word of God! But then they came to know the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which indicates a living after human reasoning and law, instead of life. They knew about sin and death, for they both sinned and died. They understood *conscience*, for after partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they perceived that they were naked and were ashamed, hiding from God because of their shame. They tried the impotent route of *religion by works*, symbolized by them sewing their own flimsy aprons of fig leaves in a futile effort to cover their shame. They received the divine revelation of redemption by sacrifice, for God Himself slew a lamb (the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world!) and with it covered their nakedness. To be naked means to have your *flesh exposed*, that is your own carnal mind, will, and nature revealed for what it is, and this was covered by the life of the Lamb! They thus received the revelation of being clothed in the righteousness of Christ! They had the promise of a redeemer, and a restoration to life and glory. They were instructed that this redeemer would be known as “the seed of the woman” a *manchild*, Christ, Head and body, and that He would bruise the serpent’s head. They had been introduced to the “god of *this world*,” the serpent, who cunningly allured them into the living out of the natural intellect, reason, human conscience, and man’s own perverted sense of man-made law, instead of out of the living Spirit of *Christ as Life*. Let us now acquaint ourselves with the following important fact: All the so-called *wisdom* of this *present world*, yes, all the vaunted wisdom of the worlds of science, philosophy, education, politics, government, psychology, astrology, economics, religion, and a thousand more things that shape our world systems are one and all ***brought forth out of the illumination of the serpent-mind***. For this reason we are admonished, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is *not of the Father, but is of the world*. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that *doeth the will of God abideth for ever*” (I Jn. 2:15-17). In that long ago beginning our first parents were given the promise of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration of all things to God! They saw afar off their regained dominion by the

wisdom, spirit, and power of God. Their first offspring knew about *worship*, sacrifice, offering, redemption, and living in the presence of God, and by the revelation of God, for Cain and Able brought their sacrifices out of a knowledge of the plan and purpose of God. But what happened was that as man moved farther and farther from Eden and the presence, life, and glory of God, that **original truth** was passed through the polluted corridors of time and human nature, becoming distorted, contorted, embellished, misconstrued, disfigured, and mutilated. This is what the scriptures call *apostasy*!

We see examples of what apostasy does to an original truth in our own age, the church age. Jesus and His apostles came and brought an original truth — redemption and transformation of mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of His kingdom in and by the Spirit. Now consider what happened to that original truth as it was filtered through time and human imagination! Look at the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and other ancient disciplines with their cathedrals, priests, vestments, traditions, holy water, candles, incense, altars, statues, icons, shrines, holy relics, ceremonies, confessionals, rituals, masses, rules, celibacy, monastic orders, and on and on. Do any of these even faintly *resemble* the original truth and the power and glory and experience of the early church? Not at all! The church world today is but a grotesque caricature of the gospel of Jesus! Yet — the *essence* of that original truth is still present on some level *in all of them*! They all acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God who came and died for the salvation of mankind! And all their carnal-minded procedures seek in some way to illustrate that truth.

What I am saying is that the similarities in all ancient religions *reveal an original truth* from which they stemmed — God, worship, temples, priesthoods, altars, sacrifices, forgiveness, prayers, salvation, resurrection, eternal life, judgment, future life, paradise — all of this and more, though convoluted, twisted, distorted, misfigured, embellished, and even demonized — still reflected something of that original truth! What becomes evident is that the Sumerians did one thing with that original truth, the Babylonians did another, the Egyptians another, and so on through all the pagan systems. All had temples, priests, altars, incense, sacrifices, gods, saviours, worship, prayers, etc. In the most powerful and enduring myths that man inherited from his beginning, the human race had retained a confused and perverted memory of *the original truth*.

Some years ago Lorain and I were privileged to take a tour of Egypt. At the many temples of Egypt I stood in several “Holy of holies” including the one in the temple of Luxor. There is no denying that Moses’ tabernacle in the wilderness was fashioned somewhat after the model of the temples in Egypt. The Egyptian temples each had their “Holy of holies” in which the only item present was the idol god. Superficial thinking might reason and conclude that since Moses was from Egypt, and learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, he simply modeled his tabernacle after the order of the Egyptian temples. *But such reasoning misses the point altogether!* All the ancient temples reflected the *original truth* of God tabernacling among men. Therefore, that Moses’ tabernacle would be similar should be self-evident! It would have been a blunder and an absurdity of momentous proportions if his tabernacle would have been completely different. Here is what happened. Religion, from the time Adam and Eve left the garden, had been on a steady decline, apostatizing into wretched forms and gross misrepresentations of the original truth. False and hideous portrayals of God sat in their temples — grotesque idols of imaginary beings and animal gods. In the land of Egypt this pagan stupidity had sunk as low as man’s serpent-inspired imagination could carry it.

Oh that the darkening veils of ignorance might be torn from our minds that we might see that just at that point in history GOD GLORIOUSLY INTERVENED! The great difference between Moses’ tabernacle and the Egyptian temples was just this — the Holy of holies of Moses’ tabernacle, for the first time since its type in Eden and its archetype in the heavenlies of God’s Spirit, now held **THE LIVING PRESENCE, GLORY, AND POWER OF THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD** — *not an idol*! The bottom had been reached, religion had sunk as low as it could go, the point of return had arrived, and the ascendancy of the original truth back to its purity, fulfillment, and *consummation* had begun! The Exodus and Moses’ tabernacle was the *turning point* for God’s purpose among men in the history of the human race! That, precious friend of mine, is *historical fact*. God manifested Himself as a living reality in the midst of His called and chosen people there in the wilderness and eventually in the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. And now — isn’t it interesting that temple worship survived *only until Jesus came*!

The ascendancy of the original truth came about this way. God manifested His presence and power in the midst of His people in Moses' tabernacle. He established His throne there in the midst of Israel. Later His presence, power, and rule in the midst of His people was *intensified* when Israel possessed their land, through the prophets, judges, kings, and the temple of Solomon. Then the presence, power, and rule of God was *intensified again even more* as out of that nation God came in Jesus Christ and tabernacled among men! The ascendancy of the original truth reached a higher level yet when on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was outpoured from on high and God came and dwelt and walked and talked *in men*. Is it not significant that within that very *same generation* when the *true tabernacle*, the body of Christ, was raised up in the earth, the Jewish temple was violently and completely destroyed, *never to rise again!* And within a few generations all the temples of the ancient gods would stand empty and silent. The turning point came with the tabernacle of Moses! There is no idol god in the temple of Luxor today — only because Moses came on the scene by the intervention of God to change the course of human history, beginning the ascendancy of the original truth revealed in Eden, and the eventual consummation of God's purpose in man. **THIS IS THE TRUE MEANING OF HISTORY.**

All God's holy prophets since the world began *prophesied* that the *coming One*, the redeemer of the world, would banish all the gods of the nations, that He was the hope of all creation, that all nations would come and worship before Him, that all things and all men would be reconciled unto Him, and that all principalities and powers would be made subject to Him. Oh, yes! And history clearly records that in relation to all the mystery religions and the ancient gods of all the great empires of antiquity, **THESE PROPHECIES WERE EXPLICITLY FULFILLED IN JESUS CHRIST!** Of all the religions of earth *only Jesus triumphed* over the ancient gods! There are no temples or altars to Zeus today, nor to Athena, nor to Baal, nor to Diana, nor to any other of the ancient gods and goddesses. And He triumphed not only because those gods, by man's imagination and manipulation, had become false gods, perverted representations of the *original truth*, but truly because **HE BECAME AT LAST THE VERY EMBODIMENT AND FULFILLMENT OF THAT ORIGINAL TRUTH SO FAINTLY SHADOWED IN THEM!** Jesus appeared right on schedule, by divine destiny, and accomplished all that the prophets had foretold and that the myths of all religions pointed to! Thus He is the fulfillment not only of all the types and shadows of the Old Testament, but even of the figures still set forth in all the pagan religions of antiquity! Oh, the wonder of it!

### **THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD**

Let us return now to the encampment of Israel in the wilderness. In every temple there was a priest, the priest of that temple, who was to receive the petitions and the sacrifices of the worshipper and to get the answer back from God. So it was with Aaron in the Old Testament. It was said of him and of the priesthood of Israel, "They shall stand in my presence to minister," and "they shall go out and bless in my name." This great truth reveals why God placed the camp of the priests directly *between* Himself and the people of Israel. It should be clear to any thinking mind that the priesthood camped "round about" the tabernacle-throne corresponds precisely to the twenty-four Elders seated "round about" the throne in Revelation chapter four!

I would remind the reader of the account in I Chronicles chapter twenty-four of how, under king David, the Levitical priesthood was divided into **TWENTY-FOUR COURSES** under the headship of **TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS!** The twenty-four courses or orders of the priesthood were chosen by families — according to the twenty-four grandsons of Aaron the high priest. Each course was named for one of these twenty-four grandsons and the male descendants of each grandson constituted one of the twenty-four courses throughout their generations. We are inclined to lightly pass over many profound statements of holy scripture. The priesthood was divided into twenty-four orders for this stated purpose: "This was their order for coming on duty to serve in the house of the Lord, according to the procedure ordered for them by their grandfather Aaron, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded him" (I Chron. 24:19, Amplified).

The priesthood numbered, in the time of David, some 18,000 who lived in the countryside of Galilee and Judea. Of course, all those priests could not go into the temple at one time, so they were divided into courses and assigned to work shifts, each "course" of priests and Levites came on duty for a week, from one Sabbath to another. When a "course" was on duty, all its members were bound to appear in the temple, and the service of the week was subdivided among the various families which constituted a "course." This order

continued until Jesus came. We read about Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, in these words, “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, *of the course of Abia*: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth” (Lk. 1:5). The point I wish to emphasize here is this: It took *all twenty-four courses* to **MAKE UP THE ENTIRE PRIESTHOOD OF GOD!** As the Father unfolds these truths to the inner man, we become convinced that as the four Living Creatures “in the midst of the throne” reveal the glory of KINGSHIP, so the twenty-four Elders “round about the throne” reveal the glory of PRIESTHOOD. **KINGS AND PRIESTS! A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS! PRIESTS THAT SIT UPON THRONES! REIGNING PRIESTS!**

This is the great truth revealed in the four Living Creatures and the twenty-four Elders. John the Revelator summed up in three short verses the wonderful truth of which I now write: “And when He had taken the book, the *four Living Creatures* and the *four and twenty Elders* fell down before the Lamb, every one of them having harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints. And *they* (the four Living Creatures and the twenty-four Elders) sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed **us** to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast **made us** unto our God **kings and priests**: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:8-9). That is the mystery!

The twenty-four Elders represent the whole priesthood of God, of which Jesus is the Head, our great High Priest. The priesthood of God ministers from the Holiest of all, from the Mercy-Throne in the heart of the Father. It is written of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Forasmuch then as the children (of God) are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a **MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST** in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:14-18). When the Word of God consented to be made flesh, to strip Himself of the glory He had before the world was, and become a man, a human being, to live among the vileness of the sinful, rebellious, and dying, to be touched by the same infirmities, weaknesses, and feelings that touch us, to suffer being tempted in all points like as we are, to be rejected and suffer the agony of false accusation and the humiliation of ridicule, the pain of the stripes received from the Roman lashes, and the trauma of the cross itself — why did He submit to all this? The stock answer is that He had to become a man and suffer and die in order to purchase our redemption. That is true! That is certainly part of the reason He became a man, *but only part of it*; there is much more to the reason He became a man, *much more!*

In the passage quoted above we see that Jesus became a man and suffered all that mankind suffers, not merely to die on the cross for our sins, for He could have died without all the lifetime of suffering, pain, temptation, sorrow, weakness, rejection, and infirmity. He suffered so that after having redeemed us to God He might become a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, a faithful High Priest and a **MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST**. Ah, Jesus could be the eternal *King* without having been so completely compassed about with infirmity. But He could never be a *Merciful High Priest* without it! He might have been perfect in character and desirous to help us; but, if He had never tasted death, how could He allay our fears as we walk through the dreadful quagmire of this *death realm*? If He had never been sorely tempted, if He had never encountered the allurements of the flesh and the almost irresistible drawing power of sin and the world, how could He succor those who are tempted? If He had never wept, how could He soothe and dry our tears? If He had never suffered, hungered, wearied on the hill of difficulty, or threaded His way through the swamplands of grief, how could He be a *merciful* and faithful High Priest, full of understanding, compassion, and kindness?

My purpose in writing of these mysteries is that all who read might see that the nature of the firstborn Son of God, the High Priest of our Profession, must be the nature of every member of the *house of sons* who are also the *body of the High Priest* — the *Priests and the Priesthood* of the most high God! This company of priests, reigning priests, are the twenty-four Elders “round about” the throne! “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou hast made us unto our God **kings and priests**: and we shall reign on the earth.” “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and...they shall be *priests of God and of Christ*, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4,6).



The wonderful book of Hebrews is literally packed full of mysteries, types, shadows, and allegories, all pointing to the ministry of the *sons of God* who are God's *Royal (Kingly) Priesthood*. These are only unfolded by the Spirit as we are able to bear it. Hebrews chapter five sets forth the qualifications of that typical High Priest under the law, and therefore the qualifications that Christ Jesus, the anti-typical High Priest of the new order of the Kingdom, must possess. All the members of the Royal Priesthood, the Kings and Priests of the Kingdom who are, with Him, "partakers of the heavenly calling," must also have the same qualifications, for they are the *body of the High Priest*.

"For every High Priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: *who can have compassion* on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that *he himself is compassed about with infirmity*" (Heb. 5:1-2). Here we have defined the intrinsic nature of the priestly office! First, he must be "taken from among men," that is, he must partake of both the nature and circumstances of those on whose behalf he acts. Second, he acts not as a private individual, but as a public official: "is ordained for men." Third, he came not empty-handed before God, but furnished with "gifts and sacrifices for sins (errors, missing the mark)." Finally, he himself must not be exempt from infirmity, so that he might the more readily succor the distressed and distraught.

All this is important for it points to Jesus' qualifications to be our great High Priest, the Head of the priesthood company. A High Priest must know and experientially understand the problems and limitations of those he represents. "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; **for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.**" On three different occasions Matthew tells us that our Lord was "moved with compassion" on the multitudes. Frankly, when you read the Gospels you read of Jesus doing miracles, healings, mighty signs and wonders; but Jesus never went around looking for a miracle to perform! HE WENT ABOUT DOING THE FATHER'S WILL. The Father brought Him to a place where His heart could be moved with compassion. It was not a gift of compassion that that came to Him by a spiritual experience; it was the compassion wrought out in His life by His many sorrows, sufferings, and testings. He had suffered loss, He had suffered pain, He had suffered reproach. Coming to a town He sees a funeral procession and as a Son, having suffered the loss of Joseph and friends and family members, and shared in the sorrow of His mother at the loss, thereby developing the nature of a priest, He is filled with compassion when he sees the widow and her dead son. There was no Social Security in those days, and the boy was the only person to look after the widow, so He stops the procession, raises the boy, hands him over to the mother, and goes about the Father's business. I find that the basis of Jesus' sonship ministry was *not power* — IT WAS COMPASSION!

When He saw the multitude He was moved with compassion. They were hungry, and He had known knowing hunger, so He said, "Let us feed them." When He met the leper He was moved with compassion, for He had experienced pain and shame, and He laid His hands upon him and healed him. He could have spoken a word to heal him, but the man needed the touch of somebody's hand on him, he had been separated from people so long, he needed more than to be healed from his leprosy, he needed the sense of the hand of God upon him. When Jesus looked upon the careworn faces of the toiling, tax-ridden multitudes — taxed by cruel priests; taxed by Herod; taxed by Pilate; taxed by their own sins and sorrows; wearily burdened, wounded at heart, and heavy laden — He was not looking for a chance to show off His power — He was moved with compassion.

"Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; **FOR THAT HE HIMSELF ALSO IS COMPASSED ABOUT WITH INFIRMITY.**" Ah, the condition which develops compassion in us, is that *we ourselves* get compassed — surrounded, hedged in — by the problems, the difficulties, the needs that are going to be represented in the people to whom we minister. So many of us are intolerant in certain areas of our lives because we have not gone through the pressure, we have not been drawn by that insidious temptation, we have not been compassed by that particular infirmity, weakness, sorrow, or need. Priesthood demands suffering, trial, testing, tribulation, and pressure. *Sonship* demands relationship with God. He sends the spirit of the Son into our hearts and we cry, "Abba, Father!" Now God intends that all of us who have been called should be sons of God, and that all of us should be a Kingdom of Priests, a Royal Priesthood unto God. But you may be a *son* and still not be a *priest*!

John the Revelator said, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them...and they shall be **priests** of God and of Christ, and shall **reign** with Him a thousand years.” Here you see that it is not the sons who are reigning — it is the **PRIESTS**! What about the sons? “He that overcometh shall **inherit all things**; and I will be his God, and **he shall be my son.**” The sons inherit, for they are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Who, then, is destined to reign? **THE SONS WHO ARE PRIESTS**! Christ was a Son before He was a Priest. He was not a Priest during His years in the flesh, although He was qualifying to be one, but He was a Son. Christ in His ministry from the heavens today is not merely the Son of God. As a Son He is “heir of all things.” But to become the great High Priest and provide the priestly ministry on our behalf the Son had, as a Son, to go through the experience that was necessary to perfect Him for the understanding heart of the Priesthood. “We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; **BUT WAS IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED LIKE AS WE ARE...**” (Heb. 4:15). “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being *made perfect (for the Priesthood)*, He *became...AN HIGH PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK*” (Heb. 5:8-10). Ah, Jesus could have been a **son** without being so totally compassed with infirmity, **BUT HE COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN A PRIEST WITHOUT IT!**

There have been those precious folk who have said to me, “Brother Eby, I don’t understand. Since I came into this kingdom message things have gotten worse — all hell has broken loose.” That is just what you need — **IF YOU WOULD BE A PRIEST!** Have you not known some beautiful saints to whom you naturally betake yourself in time of trial and sorrow? They always seem to speak the right word, to give the very counsel you are longing for; you do not realize, however, the cost they have had to pay ere they became so skillful in binding up gaping wounds and drying tears. But if you were to investigate their past you would find that they have suffered more than most. They have watched the slow untwisting of some silver cord on which the lamp of life hung. They have seen the golden bowl of joy dashed at their feet, and its contents spilt. They have stood by ebbing tides, and drooping flowers, and darkened skies; but all this has been necessary to make them comforters and healers, **the priests of men.** The reason our blessed Lord is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities* is that He *knoweth our frame*. He remembereth that we are dust. He knows this not by revelation or by divine omniscience, but He Himself was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Aren’t you glad!

Merciful priests! The priestly heart is above all things a caring, sympathetic, compassionate, merciful heart in which the love of Christ constrains us to express His goodness unto men. The Bible-waving preacher on the street corner, screaming at the passersby that they must repent or burn in hell, knows nothing at all about being a priest of God. If a vicious serial killer is caught and put to death, or some homosexual activist is murdered or dies of aids, there is that deceitful self-righteous spirit within us which silently judges, saying, “Good...there is one less murderer and one less pervert in the world.” As righteously moral as that appears, I tell you earnestly that it is not the Spirit of God, and it is not the judgment of a Priest of God! **A priestly heart!** Oh, Spirit of God, write upon my heart with indelible letters the merciful heart of my High Priest!

It is my deep conviction that it is more important to express the tender, forgiving, compassionate nature of Christ in meeting a person’s need, than in witnessing to people about the “plan of salvation.” Christians have become so conditioned to the idea that they aren’t “doing anything for God” unless they go out and witness, skillfully using the sword of the word of God. But, my precious brother, my dear sister, when you are unconditionally loving and merciful and encourage and speak life to people in their desperate need, you **become a living word** to them that says, “I care and God cares for you!” Jesus said that He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Priests are not *condemners*; priests are *saviours*! Jesus speaks His word through us in actions, we become a word that is alive to men, not a dead doctrinal word, or religious word, but a Living Word. This is a life to be lived, as Jesus did, and it is more important than quoting scripture, witnessing, teaching or preaching. Instead of witnessing, we **BECOME THE WITNESS** of what our Father is *really like*.

Those who are called to the high calling of sonship to God are the kings and priests who shall reign on the earth and restore all things back into God again. There is both a Godward and a manward work in redemption, reconciliation, and restoration. As I mentioned earlier, there was this Godward and manward ministry expressed through the priesthood of Aaron in the tabernacle in the wilderness. It is written of him and the priests of Israel, “They shall stand in my presence to minister,” and “they shall go out and bless in

my name.” And so our great High Priest, Jesus, stands in the heavens of God’s Spirit as the “minister of the sanctuary,” as the priest of the tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, and not man, and He ministers in this dual way. He both carries us to the Father and brings the Father into us. In and by His blood He Himself brings us nigh to God. But He does more! Without interruption there flows back from the Father to the Son, in whom He delights, a stream of blessing to impart to His people on earth. And in Him, the entire priesthood, the body of the High Priest, so ministers both unto God and unto men. Anything short of this is *not priesthood!*

The High Priest was thus the mediator between God and the people. He carried into the presence of God the sins and needs of the people, and carried the people in him. The people drew nigh to God in the person of the High Priest, identified in him as he entered into the Holiest of all by the blood. He obtained from God the power to declare remission of sin and the right of blessing the people. Then when the High Priest came out of the Most Holy Place, God drew nigh unto the people in the person of the High Priest. Oh, we see it so clearly in these instructive words, “And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and BLESSED THE PEOPLE: and THE GLORY OF THE LORD APPEARED UNTO ALL THE PEOPLE” (Lev. 9:23). The service of the priesthood is thus clear, FIRST TO MINISTER TO THE LORD, then to stand between the Creator and His creation, to minister the life of Christ to those who sit in darkness, in the region of the shadow of death, until all are fully reconciled to God again, and behold the glory of the Lord! The body of Christ, like its glorious Head, is a **kingdom of priests**, a people for a purpose.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the important truth that *all priesthood* has a double outreach — ministry to both God and man. Notice how Jesus often spent the whole night in prayer communing with the Father; then He came down from the mountain, from the high place in the Spirit, to touch and bless and deliver the multitudes of the helpless and needy. It could not be otherwise, for a priest is one who “stands between” the throne and the great multitude, and the moment a priest ceases to touch both God and man, unifying the two, he simply ceases to be a priest. He may be a worshipper who speaks *to God*, or a king who rules *for God*, or a prophet who speaks *on behalf of God*, but no man can have a one-sided ministry and be a priest! The priest ministers unto God on behalf of men and unto men on behalf of God. The priest touches God with one hand and mankind with the other hand, bringing the two together by his priestly ministration. *That is priesthood!* Anything less or different than this is not priesthood at all.

Let us then stand assured of this marvelous truth: the four Living Creatures represent *kingship*, for they dwell *in the midst of the throne*. The twenty-four Elders reveal within themselves the ministry of *priesthood*, for they are *round about the throne*, standing between the God of the throne and the vast multitude “before” the throne. These are not *two separate companies*; these are rather *two aspects of ministry* that have their source and power in the throne. This is the KING-PRIEST MINISTRY OF THE MANIFEST SONS OF GOD! These are all sons of God in the power and outflow of life and glory from the throne. God is raising up within each of His called and chosen elect the *spirit and nature of sonship*, the *spirit and nature of kingship*, and the *spirit and nature of priesthood*. These are the realities John saw in the throne room! Oh, the mystery of it!

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY