

By Rev. J. van Vliet

Look! A Rainbow!

A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Revelation 4:3b

The dark, sullen storm clouds rolled in with little advance warning, as storm clouds are wont to do around Salmon Arm, BC. The only advance warning they gave was that sudden, but strange, calm which is often the silent overture introducing a storm. Charcoal-coloured and saturated with precipitation, the clouds soon covered the sky and proceeded to soak everything with refreshing rain. It did not last for long, though. As quickly as the clouds rolled in, they started to roll out again. At one point, the firmament was equally divided: half was blue and shining, the other half was black and raining.

Suddenly a family member said, "Look! A rainbow!" There it was. A spectrum-bow of colours arched through the sky, standing out brilliantly against the black background of the storm clouds. Then someone else said, "Look! Another rainbow!" Indeed, there were two of them. The first shone more brightly than the second. However, both were clearly visible. In unison the parallel arches were joyfully declaring the glory of God and proclaiming the work of his hands (Ps 19:1). We were a spellbound audience listening to their song. That double rainbow we saw was a unique rainbow which we will not soon forget.

Yet there is a rainbow that is even more unique than the one we saw close to Salmon Arm. To read a description of this rainbow you must turn to Revelation 4. The apostle John receives a vision of the most holy throne of God Himself. Look! A door is standing open in heaven, as he describes in v. 1. Look! In heaven there is Someone sitting on a throne (v. 2). He is the holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty (v 8). And look! "A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne."

Two things make this rainbow unique. First, it was *green* like an emerald, whereas we are used to seeing rainbows display a spectrum of colours. Second, this rainbow *encircles* the throne, meaning that it circled a full 360 degrees around the throne. The rain-

bows which we usually see form an arc of 180 degrees, not 360.

What is the LORD revealing to us with this unique rainbow in John's vision? The best place to begin is with the rainbow the LORD displayed to Noah. The Flood receded. The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. Then the LORD made a covenant promise. "Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen 9:11). The God who made this promise also set his rainbow in the clouds as a reminder sign. The LORD declared, "Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant" (9:14,15). So, when you see a rainbow, you know *for sure* that the LORD will never destroy the whole earth with flood waters again.

However, the LORD has revealed more than this. For although the apostle Peter does not speak specifically about the rainbow, he does speak about the LORD's covenant promise not to destroy the world by flood waters again. Peter goes on to explain that on the day of Christ's return "the elements will be destroyed by fire" – not water – and "in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heavens and new earth, the home of the righteous" (2 Pet 3:10,13).

Let's pull these Scriptural threads together. The LORD made a covenant promise that He would not destroy the earth by water again. The LORD reassures us of this promise whenever He sets a rainbow in the sky. In addition, from 2 Peter 3 we learn that although this world will not be destroyed by water, it will be "laid bare" by fire. Moreover, the LORD will bring us the new heavens and the new earth. Of this, too, we can be reassured when we see a rainbow.

Taking this knowledge along with us, we see a unique rainbow in Revelation 4. This rainbow, like the Genesis 9 rainbow, reminds us that God will most certainly remember his covenant promise to bring the new heavens and new earth on the day of Christ's return.

In fact, this covenant promise *circumscribes* God's government of the entire universe from his heavenly throne. God sends out his commands in all directions – north, south, east and west – to all his creatures. Yet in whatever direction his command goes out, it always goes *through* the covenant rainbow which encircles the throne a full 360 degrees.

Some of God's decrees in Revelation can unsettle our souls. Famines, earthquakes, plagues of disease, and disasters in economics. From his throne in heaven the Lord decrees them all. On earth we weak saints may shudder. But remember: Where did the decree come from? It came from God's throne and *through* God's rainbow. Therefore, be assured of one thing. Everything the Lord decrees is designed to advance the fulfillment of his rainbow promise, the new heavens and new earth.

Some of God's decrees for your life will baffle you. Why this sickness? Why this loneliness? Why this sorrow? Remember this: The decree came from God's throne. However, before it arrived in your life, it was filtered *through* the emerald mist of God's covenant promises. He uses everything to bring you closer, step-by-step, to the new creation.

The unique, double, spectrum rainbow near Salmon Arm faded after a little while. Just like the storm clouds, it appeared, but it also disappeared. *This* earth and *this* life are full of things that fade, flux and fail.

The unique, encircling, emerald rainbow of Revelation 4 is not fading, neither will it ever fade. Things in God's heavenly throne room are not prone to decay. The emerald rainbow will shine securely forever. In a world of flux, it is good to know that the LORD of all creation is faithful to his promises . . . forever.

Do you still have doubts once and a while? Look! There is a rainbow encircling your Lord's throne!

Rev. Jason van Vliet is the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Lincoln, Ontario.

