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The Twenty-Four Elders.

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

The Twenty-Four Elders.

Topics.

- The first mention of the twenty-four elders.
 - Elders seated on the thrones and why they are called elders.
 - Elders clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads.
 - An overview of the twenty-four elders and who they symbolize.
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A PERSONAL NOTE

Though I have always loved reading and studying the Scriptures and have now walked with Christ and in God's grace for around fifty years the following studies should not be taken to be dogmatic, inflexible or the final word on the matter since I am fully aware that my mind is limited by mortality and that greater understanding of God's revelation is continually becoming clearer before our eyes as we move closer to the time of Christ's glorious return in glory.

THE FIRST MENTION OF THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

Following is the first mention of the twenty-four elders:

- 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. (Revelation 4:4).

1

SEATED ON THE THRONES

The word throne comes from the Greek word (*thronos*), and means to sit, it refers to a stately seat such as a throne, and by implication power and potentate, monarch and sovereign ruler. The twenty-four elders sitting on thrones with crowns of gold on their heads signify they have a royal and kingly order.

ELDERS

Elders are called elders because it was common for them to have great faithfulness, wisdom, knowledge, authority, responsibility and devotion to God and they formed the government of the community and the church. We know these twenty-four elders are not angels, for they are said to be clothed in white with golden crowns and seated on thrones (Rev.4:4), which is only spoken of the redeemed who have by faith been washed white in the blood of the Lamb and not of angels, neither are angels exalted to sit on thrones. In the book of Ephesians, it is written:

- The household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Ephes. 2:19-22).

These verses show us that the church of God is built upon the prophets and the apostles, which means the twenty-four elders most likely embraces the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles and symbolise the whole global church made up of faithful Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

CLOTHED IN WHITE GARMENTS (V4)

White raiment in KJV signifies the faithful being clothed with the spotless robes of Christ's imputed righteousness. It carries the idea of holiness and purity which is often referred to as fine linen, clean and white which is emblematical of the righteousness the faithful have, because of their faith in Christ.

GOLDEN CROWNS

With golden crowns on their heads: (v4) signifies:

- The glory the faithful have with Christ.
- The state of dignity and glory to which God through Christ has granted the faithful.
- The faithful being made kings by Christ as well as priests unto God.
- The church being victorious and triumphant over the world, sin and the devil.
- The faithful dwelling in a kingdom of grace and reigning as kings over the world, sin and the devil.

The Lord Jesus Christ will make the faithful a Kingdom of priests to his God and Father, (Rev. 1:6) and they will reign with Christ the King on the earth a thousand years as kings and priests to God (Rev. 5:10) and then reign with him throughout all eternity in glory.

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

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Revelation chapter seven shows that in this vision of John God the Almighty is seated on the throne, the Lamb is standing around it and there are four different groups of creatures and beings around the throne:

- The twenty-four elders.
- The four living creatures (four beasts in KJV).
- The angles.
- A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, tribe and languages, who had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-14).

Amongst theologians there are different ideas concerning who the twenty-four elders seated around the throne represent. Following are the four most common:

1. The two sets of twelve typify the heads of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. The heads of the twelve tribes are taken to represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles are taken to symbolize the New Testament church and onward. Taken together they represent the whole global church made up of Jews and Gentiles from Adam to Christ's return in glory.
2. The twenty-four Levite priests spoken of in the book of Chronicles. The LORD God of Israel had commanded Aaron to appoint twenty-four Levite priests to serve in the House of the LORD. According this command David organized twenty-four Levite priests to serve in the temple. The names of the twenty-four are recorded in (1 Chronicles 24:3-19). It is supposed by some commentators that the twenty-four elders around the throne of God typify these twenty-four Levite priests

who attended the service of the Old Testament temple daily and represent the whole Israel of God, being all the faithful members of the church, from the first faithful believer to the last faithful believer, typifying the entire global body of Christ under the Old and New Testament as a heavenly priesthood around the throne of God, which harmonizes with the following verse:

- You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9).
3. The twenty-four elders are symbolic of those of the Old Testament and New Testament who sing the new song in Revelation chapter five saying:
- Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, (Revelation 5:9).

Here they are symbolic of the whole church of every age and nation and represent the overcoming church triumphant.

4. The twenty-four elders surrounding God's throne signifies the whole universe ascribing power and dominion to God.
- I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13).

Perhaps the best way to discover who these twenty-four elders might be, is to start from the first mention of them and trace them through to the last mention of them. The first mention of the twenty-four elders is:

- 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. (Rev. 4:4)
- The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,¹¹"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Rev. 4:10-11).

In these two verses the twenty-four elders (with the four living creatures) are seated on thrones in heaven clothed in white wearing crowns worshipping the One seated on the throne and while humbling themselves they credit Him with all honour and kingly power by casting their crowns down before Him. The one seated on the throne is the Lord God Almighty, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. We know this, because in (Rev. 5:5-7) the Lamb takes the scroll from His right hand. The next mention of the twenty-four elders is in the following verses though in these verses they are referred to as elders only:

- One of the elders said to me (John), "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."⁶And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (Rev. 5:5-6).

Here we see that the Lamb is amongst the twenty-four elders (with the four living creatures) around the throne of God. The next we read of the twenty-four elders is in the following:

- When he (the Lamb) had taken the scroll (from the One seated on the throne), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.⁹And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:8-10).

Here the twenty-four elders (with the four living creatures) are pictured holding the prayers of the faithful and singing a new song worshipping the Lamb, because he is worthy and because he has made the faithful a kingdom and priests to God, who shall reign on the earth. (Rev. 5:8-10). (Keep in mind this is a vision of future things to come). In (Rev. 8:3) an angel with a golden censer is pictured offering incense of all the prayers of the faithful (i.e., the saints) on the golden altar before God's throne.

The representation here is, that the service of the angel is to present the prayers of the faithful that were offered on earth before the throne. The twenty-four elders can be seen in the same way. The allusion would be to the temple service, and to the fact that incense was offered by the priest in the temple at the time that the people offered prayer in the courts of the temple.

- According, to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. (Luke 1:9-10).

The idea is, that the representatives of the church in heaven (signified by the twenty-four elders) are offering incense before the throne of God in the heavenly temple above on behalf of the church still on earth, while it is engaged in prayer. There would be no need for the twenty-four elders to offer prayers themselves since they are in heaven. This is no doubt why we are only told that they offer incense signifying the prayers of the faithful. It is a beautiful representation that the prayers of adoration, praise and thanksgiving that the faithful pray and offer up on earth ascends into the Most Holy Place above before the throne of the Almighty Holy God and are acceptable to Him. The whole verse signifies the prayers, praises and adorations, that God should have from his ministers and people, for raising His Son up to be the head of His church and making him their High Priest and King. The next mention of the twenty-four elders is in the following verse though in this verse they are referred to as elders only:

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- I (John) looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. ¹²saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:11-12).

After the second woe, had passed and the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and loud voices in heaven was heard, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," we then read of the twenty-four elders (with the four living creatures) worshipping God:

- The twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God. (Rev. 11:14-16).

Here we see that the twenty-four elders (with the four living creatures) around the throne see that the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of God and that this event is still future as there is still the third woe to come. This perhaps could read, "The kingdom of the world has almost become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. The next mention of the twenty-four elders is in the following verses though in these verses they are referred to as elders only:

- Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" Rev. 7:13

This elder is no doubt one of the twenty-four elders. In this chapter, he acts as interpreter of this vision of the future glorified church the body of Christ being raised to the throne of God. Some point out that this idea has the following problem, if the twenty-four elders symbolise those washed in the blood of the Lamb, and here we have those washed in the blood of the Lamb standing before the twenty-four elders it means that this elder would be one of the redeemed washed in the blood of the Lamb. However, this supposed problem is overcome by the following two facts:

1. Old Testament Israel offered animal sacrifices to God, but they were not saved by them, they were a type and shadow of Christ the Lamb of God without blemish, they signified the Saviours' sacrifice (i.e., the innocent for the guilty). It was not the blood of bulls and goats that cleansed them, but Jesus blood. This is because the power of Christ's cleansing blood flows back to the foundation of the earth so that the faithful of the Old and New Testament are saved by the same Saviour and the same Redeemer. In the book of Revelation, it is written:

- All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8).

Here we read that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world and the following verse shines a brilliant spotlight on the truth that Jesus was not only the central focus of God's eternal mind and of His eternal plans and purposes for mankind's salvation and for eternity, before time began, but also the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world:

- You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot foreordained before the foundation of the world and manifest in these last times for you. (1 Peter 1:18-20).

The cleansing power of Jesus blood shed on the cross of Calvary doesn't just cover and cleanse only those who have come to the Lord after his death and resurrection, but flows all the way back to the foundations of the earth to Adam and Eve like a spiritual river cleansing all the faithful of the Old Testament from the fall of Adam onward who by faith looked to the coming and the appearing of the promised Messiah the Christ.

2. This is a future prophetic vision that John is seeing which means that everyone (other than the angels) are going to be washed in the blood of the Lamb, no matter who they symbolise, since it is only by being washed in Christ's blood that anyone has access to heaven.

The next mention of the twenty-four elders is in the following verses though in these verses they are referred to as elders only:

- I (John) heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, ³and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. (Rev. 14:2-3).

Here the twenty-four elders (with the four living creatures) are surrounded by a great multitude singing a new song around the throne of God. We next see the twenty-four elders worshipping God after He, had judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her abominations and immorality:

- The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" (Rev. 19:4).

After this a great multitude, cried out, saying, "Hallelujah! For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready and the One who is called Faithful and True, sits on a white horse to judge and strike down the nations and will rule them as King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation chapter nineteen). This is the last we hear of the twenty-four elders.

NOTE: whenever the twenty-four elders are mentioned the four living creatures are always seen with them.

The twenty-four elders are seated on thrones in heaven clothed in white signifying their righteousness and wearing crowns signifying their kingly status and, in every verse, they are mentioned in they are either worshipping the Lord God Almighty, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob who is seated on His throne or worshipping the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. Each of the twenty-four elders are pictured holding the prayers of the faithful and singing a new song worshipping the Lamb, because he is worthy and had made the faithful a Kingdom and priests to God, who shall reign on the earth.

They are seen in John's vision (with the four living creatures) after the seven letters to the seven churches were completed and the angel said to John "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (Rev. 4:1) through to chapter nineteen when the kingdom of the world had almost become the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and they were surrounded by a great multitude singing a new song around the throne of God.

The great multitude were singing this new song for the following three reasons:

1. God had judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality.
2. The marriage of the Lamb had come, and his Bride had made herself ready.
3. The Lord had come on a white horse to judge and strike down the nations and to rule over them as King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation chapter nineteen). This is the last we hear of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures.

WHO THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS SYMBOLISE

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The twenty-four elders are seen in John's vision of future things to come and are in heaven from the time John was called up to heaven to the time the Bride appears ready for the Lamb. During all this time the church is still on earth which means that the twenty-four elders most likely signify in vision form the twelve heads of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. Together these two groups symbolise the entire church of God from Adam to Christ's return and show that no matter what terrors, dread and calamities come upon earth the redeemed will be resurrected to heaven and surround God's throne and worship the Lamb with the heavenly host surrounded by the angels. It would be a pointless exercise spending further time trying to pinpoint whether the twenty-four elders symbolise:

- The global church made up of Jews and Gentiles or the twenty-four Levite priests.
- Those who sing the new song in Revelation or the whole universe ascribing power and dominion to God.
- The entire church of God from Adam to Christ's return.

For the following two reasons:

1. Whether they symbolise, the whole global church made up of Jews and Gentiles from Adam to Christ's return in glory; the twenty-four Levite priests; those who sing the new song in Revelation; the whole universe ascribing power and dominion to God or the entire church of God from Adam to Christ's return they all carry the same idea, which is that the twenty-four elders represent the complete Church of God in the past and in the future, in the Jewish and Gentile worlds; and as such represent all faithful spiritual believers as priests to God which is the Great United Church.

2. No matter whether they symbolise the heads of the twelve tribes, the Levite priests, the twelve apostles or some other thing the message is the same, which is to reveal to John what God was to do in future times with His faithful church and to show that the inheritance of those who have been washed by the blood of the Lamb is eternal glory and everlasting happiness with God and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

The twenty-four elders are used as symbols to highlight to John the various stages that will take place on the earth, until the faithful are resurrected and Christ's government is established. They are first seen when John is called up to heaven in Revelation chapter four and last seen in Revelation chapter nineteen when John sees the Bride who has made herself ready for her Groom.

For further information click or tap [Overview of Topics in Revelation](#) and select the following title.

- Four living creatures.

FOOTNOTE

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.