

The People of The Apocalypse
“The Twenty-Four Elders”

This section of “The People of the Apocalypse” focuses upon the first group of people described in the prophetic section of the book of the Revelation:

“I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment: and they had on their heads crowns of gold” (Revelation 4:4).

This group of heavenly elders has been somewhat of a mystery to Bible commentators over the years. There are at least thirteen different interpretations given for their identity, and so we cannot be dogmatic concerning just who they are or what they represent.

However, they are an important heavenly group during the time of the end being mentioned twelve different times in the Revelation. Their importance is shown by their position “*round about the throne*” (Revelation 4:4) having access to God, located in close proximity to the Lord of the universe.

Although they are not mentioned in any other book of the Bible, they do serve as worship leaders in heaven for they are repeatedly seen falling down before the throne “*and cast their crowns before the throne*” (Revelation 4:10) causing some to identify them with the church.

However, there is nothing in the Bible text to support this theory, for the church saints are still on earth at this time having been promised to be “*delivered from the wrath to come*” (I Thessalonians 1:10, 5:10) which has not yet begun. For the word “*wrath*” does not appear in the book of the Revelation until “*for the great day of His wrath is come*” (Revelation 6:17) indicating that God’s wrath is just about to begin.

The identity of the twenty-four elders may be rooted in the Old Testament for the Revelation is full of Old Testament parallels, and:

1. Twenty-four is the number of courses of Old Testament priests (I Chronicles 24:1-24).
2. Their vocation was to minister in the presence of God (Exodus 40:15).
3. They wore gold crowns (Exodus 29:30; Zechariah 6:11).
4. There were elders of the priests (II Kings 19:2).
5. They receive [white] robes of righteousness/garments of salvation (Isaiah 61:10).

This same earthly group of old could well be represented here in the heavens. It is the interpretation containing the most Biblical parallels thereby providing a possible identity based upon the truth. Their leading in the worship of God appears at key points in the unfolding of the Revelation. They are the first to be seen in heaven after God Himself is described (Revelation 4:4). As this same scene continues to unfold they are mentioned again:

“The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that lives for ever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power for Thou hast created all things and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:10).

In Revelation 5:5 one of them consoles the Apostle John saying, “*Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.*” This elder has the privilege of heralding the entrance of the Lord Jesus Christ as His title “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” is only mentioned this one time in all of Scripture.

Then they appear again as a group:

“And I beheld, and in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a

Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into the earth.” (Revelation 5:6)

Their importance is emphasized here, as they are present at the introduction and coronation of the central figure of the Revelation and all of Scripture itself, the Lamb of God, the King of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are involved in heavenly praise and worship when the Lamb takes the book [seven-sealed scroll] from the right hand of God the Father:

“And when He had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song” (Revelation 5:8,9).

The next time they appear they are part of the heavenly chorus which includes *“many angels round about the throne and beasts and the elders” (Revelation 5:11,12)* once again proclaiming the worthiness of the Lamb and giving Him praise.

The last time they are mentioned in this opening heavenly throne room scene which encompasses chapter four and five, their now familiar action of worshipping God is repeated:

“And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that lives for ever and ever”(5:14).

In Revelation 7:11 they join the four beasts standing around the throne as the angels *“fell down before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God”* in direct response to the praise given by *“the great multitude”* who have just appeared in heaven.

Then a single elder once again addresses John:

“One of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:13,14).

These references indicate that the elders respond as single entities and are not just a collective group acting only as a unit, but in fact they are actual individuals whom God has chosen to minister to Him around His heavenly throne.

After this, the twenty-four elders are only seen three times, each of which marks a vital and important point in the chronology of the Revelation:

“And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which are, and was, and are to come; because Thou has taken to Thee Thy great power, and has reigned” (Revelation 11:16,17).

This time they worship God for His mighty act of taking the rule of earth and giving it to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ:

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

At this point in time we have come to a climactic point in history. The 70th Week of Daniel has ended 3-1/2 days earlier when the two witnesses were killed (Revelation 11:11,12). *“A great earthquake”* has occurred: *“The tenth part of the city [Jerusalem] fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand, and the remnant [rest] were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly” (Revelation 11:13,14).*

“The nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that

Thou should give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great; and should destroy them which destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18).

These twenty-four elders, without the accompaniment of any other heavenly group or being, mark this momentous time when they alone are seen falling down before God and praising Him for His great power in bringing about a multitude of major events in the history of mankind at the end of the age.

Chapter fourteen records another significant event when the elders are present as *“a Lamb stood on Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand.” (Revelation 14:1).* This scene is split between heaven and earth with the Lamb and the 144 Thousand standing on earth on Mount Zion, and *“the...harpers”* singing in heaven *“a new song before the throne and before the four beasts, and the elders” (Revelation 14:3).*

This marks the first time the Lamb is seen upon earth with the 144 Thousand who are accompanied by a heavenly chorus of harpers in heaven who sang the new song which also occurs at the end of the 70th Week of Daniel when the Lord Jesus Christ redeems the nation of Israel (Romans 11:26).

The last time the twenty-four elders are seen occurs during the now famous Hallelujah Chorus that is sung by *“much people in heaven.” (Revelation 19:1).* They are once again performing their now familiar act of worship with the four beasts:

“And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia” (Revelation 19:4).

Here their ministry as heavenly worship leaders ends, just as it began, in the throne room of God worshipping with the four beasts. But now they are celebrating God’s judgment of Babylon, just prior to the Lord Jesus Christ’s return to bring an end to the Day of the Lord at the battle of Armageddon.