

The Twenty-Four Elders

In the Book of Revelation, we see many groups of people and different personalities. In Revelation 4:4 we find the first mention of a special group called the "Twenty-Four Elders." This group is very mysterious yet very interesting. Who are they? What is their purpose? Are they angels or are they men? All these questions will be answered in this article.

Revelation 4:4 says:

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

The Twenty-four Elders are found through the entire book of Revelation in prep for a marriage.

- Revelation 4:4-7
- Revelation 4:8-11
- Revelation 5:8-14
- Revelation 7:11-13
- Revelation 11:16-18
- Revelation 19:4

Here is what we learn about the 24 elders:

- They are seated on 24 thrones
- They are clothed in white garments
- They are wearing golden crowns on their heads

I believe that the 24 elders represent the Church. They are not the Church but they represent the Church. This is not a strange interpretation for we see this in the Old Testament. 1 Chronicles 24 shows us that King David appointed twenty-four priests to represent the entire priesthood. Doesn't 1 Peter 2:9 call the Church a "royal priesthood." The 24 elders represent this entire royal priesthood. What about the thrones, the white garments and the golden crowns? Was the Church promised these?

Revelation 3:21 says, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Revelation 3:5 says, "He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Revelation 2:10 says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 3:11 says, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

These references to thrones, crowns and white garments fits perfectly with Revelation 4:4. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 says that man will be awarded for his works. Since the Church has already received salvation at the cross by believing in Christ by faith, the Church is going to be judged for her works, the things that they have done for the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:10 calls this the Judgment Seat of Christ! The mere fact that the 24 elders have white garments and golden crowns suggests that the Judgment Seat of Christ has taken place already suggesting that the rapture already occurred.

This brings us to the question - Are the 24 elders men or angels? Well...

- Only men wear crowns
- Only men wear white garments
- Only men sit on thrones (except God and Satan)
- Only men are elders

The Greek word for crowns in Revelation 4:4 is *stephanos*, which is a victorious crown in contrast to a kingly crown (*diadem*), which Christ wears (Revelation 19:12). No angel can wear a victor's crown for they never have gone through the battle of life on earth to earn these crowns. Another evidence that the 24 elders are men is Revelation 5:9. It says, "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased men for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'"

The New American Standard Bible says purchased them while the King James Version says redeemed us. Many people say that Revelation 5:9 proves that the 24 elders are redeemed men yet others say that the 24 elders are not redeemed men. All this from the same verse and from two different readings of the same verse (the KJV & NASB). We see that in the KJV it uses the first person pronoun while most of the other translations use the third person pronoun. Since the 24 elders are singing here, the conflicting readings are significant. But the conflicting readings doesn't have to worry those that believe that the 24 elders are redeemed men. At least it doesn't bother me. It is possible for people to sing a song about themselves in the third person. Exodus 15:13,16-17 is an example of this.

Further proof that the 24 elders are not angels is Revelation 7:11. It says, "And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God." In this verse all the angels were present "around the thrones" and "around the 24 elders." My question is – How can the 24 elders be angels when all the angels are around the elders? This verse distinguishes between angels and elders so the author knew that the elders are not angels. Revelation 7:11 automatically proves that the 24 elders are not angels.

Many people believe that the 24 elders are angels because they interpret events to John (Revelation 5:5; 7:13). We see that two angels interpreted events to John. One showed John the Harlot and the City of Babylon (Revelation 17:1-19:10). The other angel showed John the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-22:11). Both times John fell down and worshiped the angel that interpreted the events to him (Revelation 19:10 & 22:8-9). He did this twice. You would think that John learned his lesson the first time. He didn't. There was something about these angels like an overwhelming presence. John never did this to the 24 elders. On two occasions, one of the 24 elders spoke to John (Revelation 5:5; 7:13) and John never fell down and worshiped them. Obviously John didn't see anything overwhelming about the 24 elders for he never attempted to worship them. The important thing is not that both the angels and the 24 elders interpret events to John but the interpretation itself. The angels show John future events and seem to focus on the two cities – Babylon and the New Jerusalem and the difference between the two. The 24 elders describe past redemption and people being redeemed to Christ. One of the elders introduced the slain Lamb (Jesus Christ) in Revelation 5:5 and the white-robed multitude in Revelation 7:13. My question is – Why doesn't an angel do this? Obviously the elder can better understand this because he himself is a redeemed man.

Finally why did both of those angels carry away John in the Spirit? Because angels are spirits (Hebrews 1:7) but the 24 elders never carried John away in the Spirit for they are men. Lets look into the question – What is an elder? Isn't it someone who is older? Angels don't get older for they are all the same age. Only men get older because of sin for sin causes death. An elder could be someone with wisdom but angels always had perfect wisdom. An elder could be someone who is a ruler. Doesn't the Bible say "that we will judge angels" (1 Corinthians 6:3). Whichever way you look at it, the 24 elders cannot be angels for only men can be called elders.

We see that the 24 elders are not angels but redeemed men. We also see that the identity of the 24 elders is integral to proving that the rapture is before the Tribulation. It is highly significant that the 24 elders are first seen in Revelation. John when he went to heaven to see the throne and see the events of the End Times (Revelation 4:1), he saw the 24 elders. In the other visions of heaven in Isaiah and Ezekiel, there was only the throne and the four living creatures. There were no 24 elders. If the 24 elders were angels then they would've been in the visions of heaven in Isaiah and Ezekiel. It is significant that the 24 elders are seen in the New Testament and not in the Old Testament. If the 24 elders represent the Church then this is understandable for Israel and the Church are different. The Church consists of New Testament saints and all the Christians from Pentecost to the rapture. The resurrection of Church saints occurs at the rapture while the resurrection of Old Testament saints occurs after the Tribulation on the 1335th day (Daniel 12:2,12-13), which is 75 days after the Tribulation concludes. I have proved that the 24 elders are redeemed men and the only choice there is that they represent the Church. This highly favors that the rapture will come before the Tribulation.

- The 24 elders are seated on thrones, wearing white garments and golden crowns. These were promised to the Church at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is at the coming of Christ at the rapture (2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4).
- The 24 elders sing a song of redemption even though they sing it in the third person, which is possible (Exodus 115:13,16-17) to sing a song about yourself in the third person.
- The 24 elders focus in their interpretation to John the white-robed multitude and the slain Lamb, Jesus Christ. Redeemed men would better understand the redemptive work of Christ than angels.
- The 24 elders are distinguished from "all the angels" (Revelation 7:11).
- The 24 elders are only seen in Revelation after John goes to heaven (Revelation 4:1-2) and are absent in the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel of heaven.
- The 24 elders are very different from angels.
- The 24 elders can't be angels for the Church will even judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).

It is clear that the 24 elders proves that the Church is in heaven before the Tribulation. This means that the rapture has to be before the Tribulation for we see the 24 elders (Revelation 4:4) in heaven before the Tribulation starts in Revelation 6. Further proof of the Church not being in the Tribulation is that the Tribulation is a "Time of Jacob's Trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). The seventy weeks prophecy is for Israel (Daniel 9:24) and that includes the seventieth week, which is the Tribulation. We see that Israel not the Church will endure the Tribulation. The Church is promised present-day Tribulation (Revelation 2:10) but Israel is warned of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21). There is no warning for the Church about the Tribulation. The Church was promised that they "will judge the world" (1 Corinthians 6:2) and "will judge angels" (1 Corinthians 6:3). Revelation 20:4 says, "Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them." This is probably referring to the 24 elders so if the Church was promised that they will judge the world and angels and if Revelation 20:4 confirms this through the 24 elders then the Church then this proves that the 24 elders represent the Church. The 24 elders points to the belief that the rapture is before the Tribulation.

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