

Rev 25-12-14a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It's the 14th of December 2025. We're going to continue our study in Revelation chapter 4 this morning.

We are going to see the four living creatures and the 24 elders. Who are they? What do they do? Why are they there? And what possible meaning and application could that have for us? Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and studying. We'll begin.

Father, what a wonderful encouragement and comfort it is to know that our lives are not lived in our own strength. It is not by might nor by power, but by your Spirit. We're grateful for the presence and ministry of your Holy Spirit sent to us through the agency of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, our head over all things to the church.

We thank you for him and for his faithful example of endurance and obedience and agency in bringing your purposes to pass on this earth. We hope to represent him as his body and do the same. We pray that our study this morning will contribute to that goal.

We pray that each heart will be blessed. Each one of us will be drawn closer to you through the Lord Jesus as we endeavor to be good stewards of what you have entrusted to us in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're in chapter 4 and John has gone into the heavens because of the call of the Lord Jesus. We know from our rapture passages in Thessalonians and Corinthians that the voice of the archangel sounds, the trump of God sounds, but these are not what call those who sleep in Jesus from the grave.

They are not what call those who are alive and remain to join the Lord Jesus in the air. It is the Lord Jesus himself that calls us to himself. If we are qualified, he will ultimately present us before the Father's throne.

More about that as we move through chapter 4. Here, this trumpet call is emblematic. It is the Lord Jesus who enables us along with John to enter into the heavenly realms and behold the fulsome presence and glory of God. What does he see? Come up here and I will show you things which must take place after this.

Immediately I was in the spirit and behold a throne set in heaven and one sat on the throne. He who sat there was like a Jasper and a Sardius stone in appearance. Hopefully these images, these metaphorical references to translucent and reflected and amplified light have some meaning to us having studied the colors.

The red stone, the Sardius was the first stone in the breastplate of the high priest. We imagine representing the tribe of Reuben who despite his other failings does remain the first born. It is

the color, it is the stone, it is the sign of the first born.

It is representative both of judgment which Reuben experienced and atonement, redemption through blood. So this red color is multivalent. It has multiple meanings.

It is so significant as it represents these concepts at the throne of God as we view the throne. He who sat there is like a jasper, the clear, white, brilliant, almost impossible to look at stone, like a diamond. And the Sardius with the emerald, with a rainbow around the throne.

This is not the word for bow or rainbow specifically. The word here in Greek is iris and this means something circular. You can see where they would use it for the rainbow, but iris simply means that it is circular, like it's used for the eye.

And this surrounds, encompasses the presence of God on his throne. And we've seen the significance of that green color last time. Around the throne, verse four, 24 thrones.

And on the thrones, I saw 24 elders sitting clothed in white robes. They had crowns of gold on their heads. Okay, look up from your page.

How many details can you remember about the 24 elders? First of all, before you even see the elders, you see the thrones, which tells you why they are there. They wouldn't be there if not to occupy thrones. What do thrones signify? Ruling authority.

This of course, because they surround the throne of God, which was mentioned first, indicate delegated ruling authority, delegated opportunity to represent and to help carry out the policies, the purposes of the one who sits on the throne. He doesn't do everything himself. He incorporates his sentient creation, and sometimes even the non-sentient creation, if you think about Balaam, in the accomplishment of his purpose.

So we want to talk a little bit about these 24 elders. There are many interpretive opinions about who they are, why they are there, what they represent. It is meaningful to us, and it is important for us to understand who they are, why they're there, how they got there, and what they do.

But we move on because you see the throne and the one who sits on the throne in almost unbearably bright and impenetrable light. God is clothed in light. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

There's no physical description other than this brightness, the effulgence of glory. Around the throne, these 24 thrones, and on them seated 24 elders, presbuteroi. This is where the Presbyterians get their name.

Anytime you see elders mentioned in Timothy and Titus and in other letters of Paul and so on, it is presbuteroi. These are senior representative individuals. There are 24 of them.

The number 24 only occurs one place in Scripture, and that is back in 1 Chronicles when David

sets up the 24 courses of Levitical priests. They change out every Sabbath, and so each of the courses, if you think double the 24 and get 48, how many weeks are there in a year? In our year with the Julian calendar and whatnot, we have 52 weeks. But with a 360-day year and the complications of the Jewish calendar, basically each course will serve twice in a year.

This comes into play when you look at the Jesus and Zacharias serving and entering the temple and being accosted by Gabriel. So 24, that is the only precedent. We're going to see more about that shortly.

And from the throne proceeds, well, let me finish. What other details can you remember? They sit on thrones. What else? White robes, crowns, and what is their posture? They are not standing, they are sitting.

It says they are sitting clothed in white robes with crowns of gold on their heads. The word crown here is stefanos. We saw this last time, stefanos is an earned crown.

This is the victor's crown. This is the overcomer's crown. You can put in your notes all five crowns that we have studied in the past, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory, the incorruptible crown, the crowns, all five of them.

I'll give you the full list here shortly. All of those are stefanos. There is another word in Greek for crown, and you will recognize it immediately.

It is diademos or diadem. That is the kingly crown. That one can be inherited.

That one is the anointed king's crown. These elders are wearing the victor's crown, the overcomer's crown. In the letters to the seven churches, when we saw references to crowns, see that no one takes your crown, to him who overcomes, and so on.

That is all stefanos. So, crowns of gold on their heads, and from the throne, lightnings, thunderings, and sounds, or voices. Saw this last time as well.

Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. These are angels. He maketh his angels speak.

And his ministers a flame of fire. These spirits are not people. They are angels.

This is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is referenced in the Singular, all the way through the New Testament, as well as the Old, and also in the Revelation. No need for him to be sevenfold in some places, in Singular and others.

These are ministering spirits. We will see this when we come to the description of the Lamb here shortly. Seven spirits of God.

There is the Holy Spirit, who is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son, member of the Trinity, part of what they call the trisagion, holy, holy, holy, one for the Father, one for the

Son, one for the Singular Holy Spirit. These are spirits. And they are in the presence of God to carry out his bidding.

We are going to see seven angels as we progress through the Revelation. And they may well be the same seven angels. Before the throne, the something like a sea of glass.

Be sure you put that text note up into the text. It is something like a sea of glass. It is not a sea of glass.

It's like it. Glass is translucent. It is transparent.

It amplifies, enhances, and makes beautiful and wonderful sources of light. So, something like a sea of glass, like crystal. And once again, as there's almost a chiastic effect here, because you start with the Jasper, the clear as crystal light that emanates from the one who sits on the throne.

It's not his throne. It is he himself who emanates this light. Then you have the Sardius.

You have the Emerald. You have the thrones and those who are seated on them with their robes and crowns. Now you have this something like a glassy sea, and it is also clear as crystal.

And the holiness and the glory of God are undiminished as it passes from him through the spirits and the elders that surround his throne. In the midst of the throne and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. Four living creatures.

Some early translations called them beasts, but these are the Zoe living creatures. They are not Therion, which is going to be translated beast later on. The first beast, the second beast, like the first beast, and so on.

Therion, this is the wild beast idea. These are living things. And so living creatures is a much superior translation.

First living creature was like a lion. The second living creature like a calf. The third living creature had a face like a man.

And the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. We're going to note these in detail. The four living creatures each have six wings full of eyes around and within, and they do not rest day or night giving the holy, holy, holy.

So 24 elders, they are given first. Four living creatures are detailed afterward, even though they are closer to the throne than the elders. Do you notice they surround the throne and they are in the throne? In the midst of the throne and around the throne.

This is something I can't find anybody to comment on. Why are they both in the midst? I can understand them surrounding the throne, but in the midst of the throne, their presence seems to have an aura or an emanation or something beyond themselves. I don't know what you

would call it, a radius of presence or energy or something that obviously they are not co-existent with God.

They are not in the throne itself, seated on the throne as the father is, but their glory evidently shines across and into the midst. They are almost indistinguishable from not the one who sits on the throne, but the throne itself. Now, I think this probably harks back to ancient throne imagery, where there would be carved creatures on the arms and legs and the sides and the back of the throne.

And so they are almost part of the throne. This comports with Old Testament imagery that we are about to review. So that's why it says they're not in the midst of the one who sits on the throne, but they are almost a component part of the throne itself.

You get the idea, you would never see the throne without these living creatures. And if you imagine looking at this thing from the front, there would be four aspects, maybe something above, something to the left, something to the right, and something at the foot or below. And so you have then these four aspects.

So 24 elders described first, we need to figure out who they are. This is a fascinating study. How can we identify them? We need to, first of all, understand the clothing that defines them and identifies them.

A Stephanos, the crown, was a victor's wreath that was given in athletic games. It was a reward for valor or faithful service. It was sometimes a festive or honorary garland in times of celebration.

It symbolized approval, joy, and triumph. The one exception to that, which we think of around the time of Passover, the time of the crucifixion, the crown of thorns was a mocking Stephanos. And that is the word that is used for the crown of thorns, a Stephanos.

They felt that the Lord Jesus had earned this by being considered to be the king of the Jews. So a Stephanos was not taken. It wasn't seized.

It was bestowed. It was awarded by someone who had the authority or the ability to do so. Judges in an athletic context, a king who wanted to reward faithful service, a general who wanted to recognize accomplishment above and beyond the call of duty.

It was earned. It is granted, not inherited. It wasn't given by someone else's accomplishment.

It emphasizes recognition, singling someone out for special praise, special appreciation. It doesn't in and of itself represent governing authority. And when you look at the elders, why would we think that they have ruling authority? It is not because of the crown.

It is because of the throne. This becomes important when we see the difference in what happens with the crown versus what happens with the thrones. And usually when someone has

a Stephanos, it is because they have come through with flying colors, testing, endurance, or conflict.

They are victorious. They are overcomers. They have overcome in testing.

They have overcome in hardship. So, for us as believers, this would represent perseverance, faithfulness, and future inheritance and reward. Something devoutly to be wished.

The diadem, diadema, was a royal diadem. It was an emblem of kingship. We are going to see the diadema later in Revelation, when the Lord Jesus appears wearing many crowns.

They are not Stephanoi. They are the diadema. Many of them.

King of kings. Many crowns. Diadema, dia means around, diameter, and so on.

And dema means to be bound. So, this was bound around the head. And this represents rule, sovereignty, and dominion.

Different concepts entirely from the crown worn by the elders. When we get to Revelation chapter 12, verse 3, the dragon with seven heads and ten horns, on each of his seven heads there is a diadema, a ruling crown. Revelation 13, verse 1, the beast has ten diadema, the plural.

There, ten of those crowns. And, of course, Revelation 19, verse 12, I just referenced the Lord Jesus Christ. Crown Him with many crowns, the hymn, those are the diadema.

Now, take note. Nowhere in the New Testament are believers said to wear diadems. Never promised, never referenced, never bestowed.

Nowhere in scripture. Diadema is associated with authority to rule, and anybody other than the Lord Jesus wearing one is a usurper, an antichristos, an instead of king, an instead of ruler. Ruler.

And when He returns in Revelation 19 wearing many crowns, this is emblematic of Him being the King of kings and Lord of lords. So, what's the contrast here? Stephanos given to overcomers. We're going to see what the elders do with theirs coming up in verse 10.

And if you look, the 24 elders in verse 10 fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever and cast their Stephanoi before the throne. The two postures that you see of the 24 elders are seated on thrones. When they leave their thrones, they fall before Him who sits on His throne and they cast their Stephanos, each of them casts his Stephanos before the throne saying, you are worthy, our Lord and God.

That's another text change you need to have up in your text there. You are worthy, our Lord and God. That's the best text to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things.

Put a star or an asterisk next to that. What is the basis for His worthiness? The Father's worthiness, He who sits on the throne. What is the basis for the worship and the casting of the crowns? You created all things by your will, they existed and were created.

They came into existence and were created. Both of those are past tense. Not everything that God created still exists.

Look at the archeological digs of dinosaur bones and such, but everything that has ever existed has come into existence by God's will. This is creator power, creator glory, put it in the margin of your Bible, creator glory. It's important.

So the honor that has been earned by the 24 elders is in this sense recognized as coming from God, made possible by God, and symbolically is returned to God. The crowns are cast before Him. Notice, it doesn't say they cast their crowns before Him who sits on the throne, they cast them before the throne.

Everything is significant. You know this, I don't have to tell you. The details matter, the details are there for a reason.

They don't cast them before Him, they cast them before His throne, then they give glory to Him as creator. But what does it say that they cast their crowns before His throne? This acknowledges His rulership, His authority that has granted them authority to sit on their thrones. And they are only there because God has put them there.

And this is a fulfillment and a culmination of His creative agency, His creative purpose. This was a part of God's creation design, is to ultimately have human beings in His presence, carrying out His will in the perfection of holiness. So we see here these things tied to holiness and creative purpose.

Now, how do we know that these are people and not angels? There are those who think that these are 24 ruling angels, they are the council referred to in the early chapters of Job or in the Genesis chapter 3, man has become like one of us, and that God is talking to these 24 somehow. Let's take a look at what we know about these 24 elders, so we are confident of who they are, because it makes a difference in our own expectation. We know five things about them.

I've already detailed these, gave you a little pop quiz when you looked up. What do you know? How many are there? You can say it, 24. Only one other place in scripture does 24 occur, and that is a priestly functional number, right? What do priests do? They accomplish and promote worship of God.

What do these guys do? These people, I'm not saying they're all guys, there could be ladies, it doesn't say. They are elders, the term is masculine, but we know that that can be used for anybody in the human race. There are 24 elders.

Presbyteroi means they have advanced, they are assumed to have wisdom and experience, they are assumed to have a leadership role to those who are looked to for those things by a great number of others who are led by them, both by example and by wisdom and guidance. 24 in number, Revelation 4.4, they are seated on thrones. There's a symbolic act of worship here, but they can't constantly be throwing their crowns.

It's not like, I've seen somebody with a cat toy and they put it on a fishing rod, they throw the cat toy, then reel it back in, and they throw it out there and reel it back in, and you know, the cat's chasing it back and forth. They can't, I think there's even a Christian singing group called Casting Crowns, as though this is just a continuous thing. This is an emblematic, symbolic representation.

Their constant acknowledgement is that their opportunity to be seated on these thrones comes from God. But obviously, when John sees them, they weren't already casting the crowns. So these are symbolic, these are metaphorical, this is not a literal, constant activity.

They're not getting on the throne, putting on their crown, getting off the throne, bowing, throwing their crown, going grabbing their crown. When you think about graduation at the service academies, everybody throws their cover in the air, and then people that want it for a souvenir, you know, how are you ever going to find yours? There's 4,300, well, there's not, there's about 12 or 1,300 covers all on the ground, and little kids are grabbing and running off with them. How could you get it? Go back, put it back on, throw it in the air again, go get it, sit back down, stand up, huzzah, throw it in the air.

It's symbolic, right? It's symbolic. It is representative. So, 24 of them, they are seated on thrones.

This is their normal function and constant mode of operation. They are seated on a throne, meaning they are exercising delegated authority. They are clothed in white garments.

White garments consistently signify justification and victory. We saw this in Revelation 3, verse 5. We saw it in Revelation 3, verse 18, white garments. It also represents faithful endurance.

We will see this when we come to Revelation chapter 6, verse 11, and Revelation chapter 7, verse 14. So, justification, overcoming, and faithful endurance, is this something we typically associate with angels or with people? It's people. Now, all we have to figure out is, are these Old Testament people or New Testament people, right? Because there are people.

So, Stephanos crowns, this is the next thing we know about them. They are golden crowns. They are reward crowns.

No angel anywhere in Scripture has ever been depicted with a crown. Once again, we know that these are human individuals, not angels. It's never an angelic insignia.

They're never associated with crowns. And they are explicitly promised to those who overcome.

Go back and review our study of the five crowns.

We have seen these in the past. There is the crown of life in James 1, 12, Revelation 2, 10. That's number one.

Number two, these are in no particular order, but to get all five, is the crown of righteousness, 2 Timothy 4, 8. Number three is the crown of glory that Peter mentions in 1 Peter 5, 4. The incorruptible crown, 1 Corinthians 9, 25, and the crown of rejoicing that Paul mentions twice, 1 Thessalonians 2, 19, and Philipians 4, 1. Doesn't mean that there aren't more, but there are at least five. All of them are Stephanoi. So, crown of life, Stephanon zoes, crown of righteousness, hates dekaiousunes Stephanos, dekaiousune, beautiful word for righteousness, crown of glory, doxas Stephanon, the incorruptible crown, tharton Stephanon, atharton, incorruptible, can't fade away, and the crown of rejoicing, kaukeseos, that K-A-U-C-H, that's rejoicing, that's joy.

So, the crowns that represent reward, victory, honor, faithfulness, are only worn by human beings. These individuals are seated on thrones. This is a promise made to believers, Revelation 3, verse 21.

Jesus mentions this, that his disciples will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel, slightly different context and occasion, but same idea. Thrones are never promised to angels. You never see angels sitting on thrones.

They ascend and descend the Jacob's ladder, ascend and descend on the Son of God. They fly, they do a lot of things, they move the chariot throne of God, they don't sit on thrones. The closest you can get are the four living creatures, which we will look at in our second session.

So, elders versus angels, what do we know? The angels in Revelation, here are six things that they do and don't do. Angels in Revelation, they stand, they fly, they execute commands, they do not sit on thrones, they do not wear crowns, and they're never called elders. So, the elders, they take thought, they worship, they are going to interpret for John.

We'll see this in Revelation 5.5 and in Revelation 7.13, one of the elders will speak to John and explain. Interestingly, when John is getting an explanation throughout the Revelation, when it's something earthly, an angel will explain it to him. When it is something heavenly, an elder will explain it to him.

The elders introduce what's, you would think it would be the other way around, but an elder will explain a heavenly scene, an angel will explain an earthly scene. It's really cool to see. So, Presbyteroi, they are called elders for a reason.

It reflects maturity, authority through experience, and generally you have elders in some sort of covenantal context. Elders in Israel reflecting, teaching, guiding people in their covenant relationship with God in Israel. Elders in the church do the same thing in the new covenant, the covenant in Jesus' blood.

So, these are the glorified, rewarded people of God. They are church age. Now, this is going to become critical when we get to chapter 5, verse 9, and we're going to look at that when we come back from the break, because they are going to use a third person pronoun that makes it sound like they are not church age, but they are.

So, we're going to find that out, and we're going to look at the four living creatures, see the Old Testament roots and the New Testament synthesis, and why there are both elders and angels surrounding God's throne. But what does this mean to us? We are given this by way of revelation through John from the Lord Jesus Christ for a reason. Why do we tell people what's coming up? Got plans for the holidays? People are coming.

People are traveling. You might be traveling. You might either be going or receiving visitors.

There's planning. There's purchases. Christmas is coming up.

How many days, how many shopping days left till Christmas? What is the purpose of all of this anticipation? There's one word, readiness. Readiness. Are you ready? This is what is coming up.

Are you ready? Will you know what's going on? Will you have your feet under you? Will you have your center of balance and your center of gravity sorted so that you can stand, and having done all, to still be standing? Can you employ the full armor of God? Can you understand and apply what the Lord Jesus reveals to us throughout the New Testament Scriptures on an hour by hour, day by day, conversation by conversation, task by task, thought by thought basis? Take every thought captive for what? For Christ. For Christ. Haven't seen Christ in this heavenly throne scene yet.

Because what did Jesus say in John 14, 6? I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life.

No one comes to the Father. Here is the ultimate goal. To come to the Father.

To be qualified like John. To enter the throne room. We talked about this last time in terms of what we can already do by means of prayer, based on the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His flesh, torn like the veil of the temple that grants access. This is important to know. Who are we dealing with as our Heavenly Father? He is our Father, but you can imagine someone who's got a five-star general for a father, back in World War II when we had five stars, a senior admiral.

He's my dad, but in other contexts, he's got tremendous authority. So, it's important for us to understand this. That's why the Lord Jesus is revealing it to us through John.

We'll see more of it when we come back from the break.