

Rev 25-12-14b

We're ready now to look once again at Revelation chapter 4 at the 24 elders. We have established that they are human. We have established that their function is both to exercise delegated authority and the number 24 indicating that there is a worship function which is then fulfilled as they cast their crowns before the creator God on the throne and worship him with this doxology, the first of seven doxologies that we will see in the book of Revelation.

And it is the first that is given by human beings. We see the previous doxology given by the four living creatures up in verse eight, but we're looking at the elders and they proclaim the worthiness of our creator father God to receive glory and honor and power because he created all things and it is his will by which they have existed and have been created. So there is creator glory prominently established and proclaimed here.

And we know that creation has unfolded across time. There have been developments. We sometimes refer to these in terms of dispensations.

We sometimes see it in the establishment or renewal of covenant and covenant promise. Both things are and can be true without conflicting with each other. So what do we know about these elders and what does it mean to us? In first Chronicles chapter 24, oddly enough, the 24 courses of priests are detailed that were established by David.

He divided the sons of Aaron into these divisions. Notice they are courses and there is a priest from each course that will serve as Zechariah did, the father of John the Baptist in a representative role. First of all, the Levites represent all of Israel in worship.

These courses of the sons of Aaron represent the Levites as a subset and the priests as a subset. So each of these courses has a representative function in establishing and conducting and encouraging worship in Israel. So when any one course of priests was serving in their twice a year rotation, they are representing the entire nation of Israel.

And this was well known down through the days of the second temple. The elders reflect this priestly function, but no Levitical priests sat on thrones. Once a year, the high priest, who is the ultimate representative priest, would go in before what amounts to the throne of God, the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

But he can't remain in God's presence. Elders from the 24 courses or priests from the 24 courses did not come and sit in God's presence. You remember the extra biblical legend that they tied something around the ankle of the high priest so that if he messed up in some way and was slain in the Holy of Holies, they could drag him back out of there and designate the next one.

It was a very sobering experience for the high priest to enter into the very presence of God. He can only do it with the blood, only temporarily, only once a year on the day of atonement. So

these Presbuteroi that we are looking at in Revelation chapter 4 are constantly in the God directly in the throne room, sitting on thrones themselves.

This is a different kind of priesthood. 24 very clearly indicates that this is a priestly function. The worship that they engage in and the song that they sing, you are worthy to receive glory and so on, is a worship function.

They are fulfilling a representative priestly service for a group of which they are a part. Levites, sons of Aaron, were Levites from Israel and they represented all of the people, but they were Israelites. There was no such thing as a Levitical priest that wasn't an Israelite, a Levite, and a son of Aaron.

These elders that we are looking at are from a different order. What order would you imagine they are from? Think the book of Hebrews. Who is our faithful high priest? The Lord Jesus.

And what is his order of priesthood? Is he a Levitical priest? He is from the tribe of Judah. He is not a Levite, much less a son of Aaron. So what is his priesthood? A high priest after the order of Melchi Tzedek, king of righteousness.

Tzedek is righteousness. Melchi, Malchus, Melech, this is king in Hebrew. You go back to Genesis.

You go back to Abraham. We don't have time to review it, but you know what happens when Abraham, after his victory, goes and renders a tithe to Melchi Tzedek, king of Salem, priest to God without antecedents in the writing of the text. And what does Abraham share with Melchi Tzedek in an act of fellowship and shared worship? Bread and wine.

Bread and wine. Fascinating story to go back and read. So what is different in the order of Melchi Tzedek and the Levitical priesthood? The Melchi Tzedekian priesthood involves rulership, Melech, as well as priesthood.

He is a priest to the Most High God, but he is also the ruler of Salem, king of Salem. So these elders, because they sit on thrones, not the crown, but the throne. The crown indicates that they are fulfilling this function because of faithfulness, endurance, and diligence as individual believers.

But the throne, this is ruling authority delegated from him who sits on the throne and the Lord Jesus who sits with his father on his throne. We saw this in the letters to the churches. So this is a royal function that these elders fulfill and a priestly function, king-priest function, ruling-worship function, relates them to the Lord Jesus as the high priest after the order of Melchi Tzedek and separates them as not being from Israel.

This is not half Israel, half the church, 12 plus 12. There is that concept, but it's going to be later. They sit on thrones.

They wear these golden crowns. The Lord Jesus is going to wear the diadem. These elders wear the Stephanos.

Now, did the high priest in the Levitical priesthood wear a crown? He did not. He wore a turban. I was amusing myself looking at the garb that Cherokee men wore in days past from head to toe, and there are depictions of Cherokee men in the 1800s and after where they're wearing a turban.

And so people thought, well, these Cherokees wore turbans when they were here as Native American people before the white man came, but no. Cherokees were gathered up and taken to Europe, and they saw people in Europe wearing turbans, and they thought it was cool, and they got themselves a turban and came back, and then everybody wanted one. And so they started wearing them later, but initially they would just pull their hair through a piece of hollow bone, tie a couple of feathers to it.

Cherokees also did not wear the full feathered headdress that you see some of the other Plains tribes wear. They just would adorn themselves with a few beads and a few feathers, but turbans. And the headdress of the high priest is a different thing, and it's fascinating to look at this because what a priest does or does not wear on his head makes a difference.

So this is the Mishnefet is what the high priest in Israel wore. It's a wrapped linen headdress. It was a symbol of his consecration and separation.

The other priests didn't wear this, only the high priest. And there was a simpler one that was worn by the sons of Aaron, but for the high priest, there is a gold plate attached. It's a thin plate of pure gold, and it is inscribed, Kodesh L'Yahweh, holy to the Lord.

And it is fastened to the front of his turban with a blue cord. I wish we had time to go through all the symbolism there, but it is not a crown. It's never called.

There's a perfectly good word for crown in Hebrew, the Atara, and this is used for kings, whether it's David and his line, whether it is foreign kings or the Messianic king that will wear a crown. It's used in Zechariah chapter six for royal coronation imagery, but it is not to be thought of as a ruling crown or some kind of ruling authority for the Levitical priest. It is not kingly regalia.

It is a worship headpiece, if you will, much as the breastplate of the high priest and signifies representation for worship. To distinguish the 24 elders, you don't have a turban with a gold plate. Their entire Stephanos is gold.

It's gold for a reason. The plate on the Levitical high priest's headdress signified holiness and was something for bearing guilt. If you look this up, the scripture says that it is for sin.

Exodus 28, 38, write it down in the margin next to the 24 elders crowns. Exodus 28, 38, the headdress of the Levitical high priest, this headpiece with its gold plate, holy to the Lord. So it

shall be on Aaron's forehead, Aaron and the subsequent high priests, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things.

The iniquity of the holy things. The high priest has to come in once a year and make atonement for the priests, for himself, and for the nation. Sin is unresolved in the Levitical priesthood.

Read the book of Hebrews. The blood of goats and bulls can never take away sin. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission.

But these things year by year can never take away sin. Only the perfect sacrifice by the high priest from the order of Melchizedek, who offers himself once and for all. Now worship before the throne of God doesn't have to account for sin.

So the priestly headgear is now solid gold. There is not the linen that can be stained, that can be soiled, that needs to be sprinkled to represent covering atonement. So why are the elders wearing these reward crowns in the presence of God? And they don't cast the crowns out of heaven because they are somehow in contact with sin or there's not sufficient holiness.

They are cast toward the throne, not away, because this is the perfection and the holiness that comes through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the high priest never sat down in God's presence. The Levitical high priest did not have a solid gold headpiece, only a representative anticipation.

There's a plate and the gold plate says holy to the Lord. They didn't stitch it or weave it into the linen, only that gold plate. And it is for sin.

The elders sit on thrones. The Levitical high priest never sits in God's presence. He never rules.

He never judges. And he never wears a bestowed crown. This was a hereditary office, sons of Aaron and so on.

The elders sit. They are going to exercise throne authority. They will deliberate.

They will judge. They worship God as overcomers. And they are already crowned before judgment begins.

This is important. The first thing John sees after he sees the throne is he sees these 24 seated elders. This is really important because it impinges on the rapture.

Turn back to Ezekiel chapter one, verse four. Ezekiel looks, there's a whirlwind coming out of the north, great cloud raging fire engulfing itself, brightness all around and radiating out of the midst like the color of amber out of the midst of the fire from within the likeness of four living creatures. This was their appearance.

They had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces. Each one had four wings.

They've got legs. They've got feet. They sparkle.

They have the hands of a man, their wings, their faces in verse 10. There's the face of a man, face of a lion, face of an ox, face of an eagle. Very reflective of what we see in our four living creatures in Revelation chapter four and following.

They've got wings stretching upward, touching one another, cover their bodies. When you get to Isaiah and see what we call the seraphim, the burning ones, and they have six wings, they have another pair of wings that cover their feet. But each one goes forward.

The likeness of the living creatures in verse 13, their appearances like burning coals of fire, torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire is bright. Out of the fire goes lightning.

Living creatures go back and forth in appearance like a flash of lightning. You get the idea that this overlap in the midst of the throne as well as surrounding the throne that John sees reflects this presence beyond an immediate individual. Then you have the wheels, the wheels within a wheel and so forth.

What do you not see in Ezekiel's vision here? There is no one seated in God's presence. There are no thrones. There are no elders, right? Flip over to Ezekiel chapter 10.

We have another vision here. I looked and in the firmament above the head of the cherubim, there is something like a sapphire stone having the appearance of the likeness of a throne. He spoke to the man clothed with linen and said, go in among the wheels under the cherub, fill your hands with coals and so on.

So in Ezekiel's visions, there is a single throne. There is a likeness of someone seated upon it. There are angels, cherubim that surround it.

There are no elders. There are no plural thrones and there is no human presence or participation whatsoever. So what do we know about Ezekiel? He is a prophet.

He is a seer. He is a watchman. And his vision communicates to Israel that God is moving.

God's throne is moving. The living creatures that surround his throne are moving. There is motion.

There is activity. God is bringing things to be. He is accomplishing his purpose in an active sense.

A lot of activity. So God's sovereignty, God's activity are emphasized in both Ezekiel 1 and Ezekiel chapter 10. What about Isaiah? Turn back a few pages.

Isaiah is before Jeremiah. Go back to Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah also sees the throne. In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.

The train of his robe filled the temple. Above it the seraphim, six wings, cover their face with two, cover their feet with two, fly with two. They cry to one another, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Very similar. They call this the trisagion.

The threefold hagion means holy, hagios. So they're saying holy, holy, holy. This is what we see in Revelation chapter 4. Get the idea that the seraphim may in fact also be the cherubim.

They are defined more in terms of their function than an individual order or difference in kind among the angels. The posts of the door are shaken by the voice of him who cried out, the house is filled with smoke. Woe is me, I am undone.

But what do you have? The Lord is seated on a throne. There are these angels attending him. The worship song is holy, holy, holy.

There are no secondary thrones. There are no crowned figures. There are no human representatives.

Isaiah is standing in God's presence. He is undone and he can't be commissioned until someone takes the coal and touches his lips so that he can be cleansed. So this is a prophetic commissioning vision, much as with Ezekiel.

The third passage, turn back. We're kind of working our way backward. Go to 1 Kings chapter 22.

This is also reflected in 2 Chronicles 18, but we'll look at it in Kings. 1 Kings chapter 22. You will remember this.

This is Micaiah. This is 22:19 of 1 Kings. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the hosts of heaven standing by on his right hand and on his left.

The Lord said, who will persuade Ahab to go up that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead? One spoke in this manner and another spoke in that manner. A spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, I will persuade him, and so on. Once again, in Micaiah's vision, and of course, all these visions have a purpose, but the Lord is on his throne and the hosts of heaven, the angels, are on his right hand and on his left.

But the host is standing in the presence of the Lord. They offer counsel. They do not rule.

There are no thrones mentioned. This is sort of a heavenly counsel, if you will, and they're suggesting one thing and another that can be done. And then there is a spirit that comes forward.

I think this is analogous to one of the seven spirits we've seen before the throne. We'll go a bit forward. If you go to Job chapter 1 and 2, you remember this.

We don't have to turn there. In Job chapter 1 and 2, the sons of God present themselves before God's throne. Satan appears among them.

It is God alone that initiates and authorizes what will and won't happen. There is no enthronement. There are no human representatives.

There's no crowning. Always in the Old Testament, when you see the Most High high and lifted up, at Sinai, you could turn back to Exodus with the elders who ascend partway up the mountain, and there's a vision of God and his throne. You do not see enthroned elders or human representation anywhere in there.

The elders of Israel who come and share that vision with Moses and Joshua, this is sort of an anticipation. They don't stay. They don't offer any advice.

They don't perform any function, but they are in vision form at the presence of God on his throne. So what you never see in the Old Testament are plural thrones. You don't see crowned figures.

You don't see any human representatives in heaven, much less enthroned in heaven. And you don't see delegated authority or dominion or rule in terms of those thrones exercised by sanctified human beings. That is the pre-kingdom, pre-inheritance state of things.

The one place in the Old Testament, here's a pop quiz. There is one place in the Old Testament that is an exception to what I've just said. Can you think what it is? Turn forward to Daniel chapter seven.

Daniel chapter seven, verse nine. I watched until thrones, plural, were set in place. And the ancient of days was seated.

His garment was white as snow. The hair of his head was like pure wool. Throne, fiery flame, wheels of burning fire.

Fiery stream issued and came forth from before him. A thousand thousands ministered to him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court was seated and the books were open. And you come forward and see the ancient of days and thrones are established. Notice in Daniel seven, which is way forward, way after the time of the Old Testament, way after the time of Christ, the ancient of days is seated.

This is plural thrones. This is more of a courtroom type setting, a judgment and delegated authority type of setting. There is a formal judgment process.

And look at verse 18. The saints of the most high shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever. So there is an explicit mention of dominion assigned to human saints.

You see this again in verse 22. The ancient of days came. Judgment was made in favor of the

saints of the most high.

And the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. Look at verse 27. The kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people, the saints of the most high.

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominion shall serve and obey him. So nowhere else in the Old Testament do you have this anticipatory scene that Daniel sees, that Daniel communicates. But Daniel, because this is still the Old Testament, he doesn't see who is occupying the thrones, plural, and he's only told later who they are for.

So this is promise. This is anticipation in the future. In Daniel 7, thrones are set, the court is seated, judgment begins, and the kingdom is promised to the saints.

In Revelation chapter 4, the thrones are occupied, elders are seated, crowns are already awarded, and judgment is about to proceed. That's what's going to happen in chapter 6 of Revelation. So what Daniel anticipates in chapter 7, Revelation shows as fulfilled in chapter 4 and 5. So again, can't be angels.

Angels don't wear crowns, they don't sit on thrones, they're never called elders, they're never pictured wearing white robes. And if you look at Revelation chapter 19, verse 10, and chapter 22, verse 9, angels are explicitly separate and distinct from redeemed humans. These are not Israel's patriarchs in whole or in part, because there's only 12 tribes, 13 at most in Israel, if you count the double tribe of Joseph.

But 24, you would have to add somebody else in. People say, well, that's Israel and the church. But Old Testament saints are never shown as enthroned, and they have not yet been raised, because the 70th week of Daniel that is determined upon Daniel's people, which is Israel, has not yet taken place at this point.

So who is new in heaven before the lamb is handed the scroll and even cracks the first seal? Somebody is in heaven before the first beast is revealed, before the first horseman rides out, before anything takes place in chapter 6 and following, there are sanctified, redeemed, enthroned, and crowned overcomers in heaven, in God's presence. And they are representative of a much larger group. So who would that be? That is us.

That is the church. If you wanted to leave off Thessalonians, if you wanted to leave off Corinthians, if you wanted to leave off, come up here and I will show you things hereafter, as communicating the rapture of the church prior to the wrath of God being poured out on the earth. If you wanted to leave off the scriptures that say he has not appointed us to wrath, but to deliverance, take all of that aside.

You cannot get the 24 elders wearing white robes and crowns, worshiping God without the church being in heaven prior to the tribulation. This is why we are pre-tribulation rapture people. Not everybody is going to be an elder, but everybody is going to be a priest.

And these representative elders of the priests, the 24 courses, all of us are going to belong to one or another of these courses, symbolically speaking. And the greatest of the overcomers will be these who represent their course before God's throne. And they will representatively assign all glory and praise for all of us, much as the high priest did for the sons of Aaron and for the Levites and for all of Israel in the shadow priesthood of the Old Testament.

But you don't need any other proof of the pre-tribulation rapture. If you understand what's going on in the throne room here, the lamb has not yet been presented. The scroll has not been wept over or handed to the lamb, and the first seal has not been cracked.

The tribulation period, however you understand that, has not yet taken place. And these white robed redeemed elders are in heaven. Take a quick look here.

We just have a minute. Look ahead in Revelation to chapter five, verse nine. After the scroll, which we will see in more detail, has been handed to the lamb, he takes the scroll in verse eight.

The four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense. More details about these elders. Once again, they fall down before the throne.

Who's the only people we've seen fall down before the throne up to this point? It is the 24 elders. Now they are depicted as falling down not to cast their crowns before the throne, but they each have a harp. This is a musical instrument.

Only human beings play musical instruments until you get to the revelation and you have the blowing of trumpets. Who, Satan? No, he doesn't. The pipes, and that's the starts and stops.

That's his cherubic custodianship of the throne room of God. He's not a musician, unless you read the old King James and don't know what the Hebrew says. But each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

We'll talk about this when we get there. It doesn't mean you should be a Catholic. Pray to the saints.

They'll put it in a bowl and hand it to God. Once again, this is representative. The elders are representative.

These bowls full of prayers are representative of all of our direct prayers, which are addressed to the Father in the name of the Son by the power of the Spirit, never to a saint. But this is partly where the Catholics get the idea that you can pray to saints. But they sing a new song saying, you're worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.

This is what we're going to see next time. Don't miss Wednesday. What did I say about chapter four? What is the glory ascribed to God? Why is it described? What is the basis of God's glory by

the four living creatures? What do they say? You created all things.

It is by your will and purpose that they came into existence and were created, right? That's what the elders say. Four living creatures, we're going to talk about them a little bit more. They say, holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

They represent the timelessness because they have been in the heavens since before creation. He was, he is, and he is to come. These living creatures dwell in the timelessness of God's throne above and beyond surrounding time and creation.

The elders, who are a part of creation, celebrate God's creative action. But in chapter five, the glory and the basis for it is going to shift. Look at verse nine, you're worthy to take the scroll and open its seals.

Why? You were slain and have redeemed. It says us, scratch it out. It's them.

You have redeemed them to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and have made them kings and priests. Trust me, it's them, not us. And they shall reign on the earth.

They shall reign on the earth. So important. We will see this in detail.

It's going to make so much sense. It'll make you cry. But the basis for glory in chapter five shifts from the father's glory as creator God, who brought all things into existence for his purpose and the glory of the lamb, which is redemptive.

The glory is going to shift, but redemption has taken place and the redeemed by the blood of the lamb are already in the heavenly realms. And the first seal has not yet been cracked. The rapture is pre-tribulation.

You cannot get around it if you know the scriptures. All of the other verses harmonize and support this. There is no partial rapture.

I'll talk about the partial rapture next time. I've run myself out of time for this morning, but the key there is representation. Representation.

I'll give you a clue for this coming Wednesday. Remember when Jesus talks to the seven churches in chapter two and chapter three, and he says, I know your works. You have a few that have not soiled their robes.

You this and you that. Here's a clue. Every one of those pronouns is singular, singular.

He doesn't say, I know y'all's works. It's singular. There is a representative element to those letters where those who are addressed are addressed as a group.

A few times, Jesus will say, there are those among you all, but he addresses each church

through its singular messenger in the singular pronoun. There's a lot of significance there. We'll see it next time.

But what a wonderful assurance we have that we are not appointed to wrath, but to deliverance. We will all go from the least of us to the greatest, from the last to the first. Some of us will have the honor and privilege of serving in various capacities.

Here's a clue. Some of us will serve and remain in heaven. Why do the elders say you have redeemed them? You have made them kings and priests, and they will reign on the earth because the elders aren't leaving to go do that.

They are church age overcomers, but they have a heavenly assignment. Easiest way to describe this, if you have any familiarity with the military, there are in the Army and the Marine Corps, there are company grade officers that are out in the field. And then there are field grade officers who are at the headquarters, largely doing plans.

And they're at a senior level, and they're not out there with a weapon. They're not distributing beans and bullets. They are in an administrative and a command capacity.

And there are others who are executing things in the field. So you have company grade, where your company and your unit is on the ground doing things. The field grade officers are looking over the entire field of battle.

And they have an executive, sometimes administrative and command function. Same thing is going to be true. Some of us will rule and reign and serve in these delegated authority capacities.

Others of us will be on the ground, serving on the earth. You have made them kings and priests, and they will rule on the earth. The elders are still church age believers.

They are still representative overcomers, but they will remain before God's throne. Others of us working in the millennial kingdom on earth. Wonderful opportunities.

Where will we be? What will we do? Depends on whether we take this seriously enough to have it make a difference in the way we live our lives, engage in our conversations, think our thoughts, establish our priorities. This is what determines our role in the eternal future. We may be on the edges, just giving a shout of acclamation, and that's all we know.

We're just huzzah givers. Others of us will have prepared, will have anticipated, will be in readiness for service and function in these roles, in these opportunities to come. It's not just about getting stuff done in this life.

It's not just about avoiding sin and trying to have a little faith. This is preparation. God has got big things going on that He wants to incorporate us into.

And the more prepared we are through awareness, renewal of our minds, consistency in our

faith, production of the fruit of the Spirit, the more eternal opportunities we are going to have in the millennial kingdom and beyond. What we do here, don't be deceived by the serpent and think that it's just about whether or not I bite this apple. What is going to happen down the road? Can you imagine what Eve would have done had she seen the historical future of what that action would entail? We are seeing the future and it ought to motivate us to really get with the program, to be a vital and intrinsic part of the body of Christ, thoroughly equipped for every good work now and in the times to come.

What an opportunity. We're getting a glimpse of it here and we'll see more of it come Wednesday. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for the motivation we have, the bright hope that sustains us and encourages us to faith and love and good works. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us to see the outworking of this in our hours, in the minutes, in the tasks, in the conversations, in the thoughts and activities in which we engage, the stewardship of our time and our resources, our energy, our focus, that we can truly represent the Lord Jesus now so that we can represent Him in times to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.