

Rev 25-12-17b

We resume our study here and we're going to pick up the pace a little bit. We have quite a bit to cover and quite a bit to understand. We've labored a bit over the characteristics, qualities, and symbolic values associated both with the 24 elders and with the four living creatures.

I submit to you that the purpose of this is to tell us something important as church age believers. These living creatures were seen in Old Testament visions of God's throne. The 24 elders were not.

What has changed? Isaiah didn't see the elders, Ezekiel didn't see the elders, Moses didn't see the elders, Daniel didn't see the elders. Daniel, at one point, when you see the Ancient of Days, there is a reference to thrones that are set up. And it's way toward the end, he's looking into the far future, he's seeing through a glass darkly, and he says, there's not just God's throne, there are some other thrones set up.

Don't know who's on them, don't know anything about them. John sees this with much greater clarity. So let's talk about the rapture, one of the most unpopular, vilified, attacked, ignored, scorned understandings in this day.

As long as you insulate yourself and don't talk to anybody, you think everything is fine. We can get out our Scofield reference Bible and read the late great planet or watch left behind or something, and we're cool with the rapture. But in the outside world, beyond those who really know their Bible, the whole notion of dispensations in general and the rapture, especially a pre-tribulation rapture or a rapture separate from the second coming of the Lord Jesus, is completely rejected.

The millennial kingdom as a literal fulfillment of God's promises is mostly rejected. Most people who claim to be Christians, most large denominational churches don't believe in a literal millennium. And therefore, if the millennium is not coming, then what's the tribulation for? And so then the tribulation gets spiritualized away.

And well, that was just John telling people, don't let the Roman Empire suborn you into its service and deceive you into materialism. And you've got to be rebellious and dissident. And don't let the Romans put their sandaled foot on your neck and keep you down.

It's all spiritualized. It's what? Dissident disciples. Yeah.

Dissident disciples is the phrase you find in more than one book. Here's the thing. We believe the word of God and I don't care what anybody says, what the word of God says, that's what goes.

And if the word says it, we believe it. And we move forward from there. Now, there are different understandings and different interpretations, but this is not hard.

I say again, look at this. It's not hard. You've got seven churches in Asia that are representative of all believers in this church age.

Everything Jesus says to all of them is applicable to us, either by way of avoidance or by way of remedy, right? And opportunity to him who overcomes he that has an ear. We've all got ears. So we're listening.

That's the church age. Now what's going to take place after this? Come up here. Revelation four, one, you enter the throne room and at God's throne, there is an innovation.

Unlike anything that was ever seen in the old Testament, there are 24 thrones with 24 seated, robed, and crowned presbuteroi elders sitting on them. Presbuteroi is a new Testament church term for those who lead those who superintend those who are the presbyters, sometimes translated bishops or others who endeavor to lead. They are enjoined to shepherd the flock of God, the Ephesian elders that Paul addresses when he's on his way to Rome.

He says, you've got to be careful. Vicious wolves are going to come in to the flock and try to prey on them and scatter them and harm them. And it's your job to be protective.

So they are leaders. And the presbuteroi elders has the idea that they have been around long enough to have gained some wisdom and experience. And they are leaders, both by status and by qualification.

The crowns we saw are the Stephanos. This is an earned and awarded crown. It is not a ruling crown that is inherited or taken by force of conquest.

I conquered another king and now I'm sitting on his throne and taking his crown. This is not the crown. This is the athletic victor's crown.

This is the overcomer's crown. And all five of the crowns that we've seen named in scripture, there may be more, but crown of life, crown of righteousness, crown of rejoicing, these other crowns, they're all Stephanos crowns. These individuals wear those, not angels.

They're human beings. Where did they come from? These individuals are in no way identified with Israel. It doesn't say two from every tribe.

There's not 12 thrones with one guy from each tribe. They don't have banners. They don't have emblems.

They don't each have a stone from the breastplate of the high priest. It would have been so easy and straightforward to identify these elders with Israel. They are completely disassociated from Israel.

There is not a word or a hint or a detail that has anything to do with Israel in their description. Furthermore, as you get to chapter five, John says, chapter five, verse one, I saw in the right hand is in italics there. The right pretty much means hand.

It's assumed and implied. I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. This is the hand of the father, the one seated on the throne.

This is God, the father, and nothing has been seen of his form, only described in terms of light and brightness, but there is a hand. When's the last time you saw something that was just the hand and the presence of God was involved? Mene, mene, tekel ufarsin, a hand appears and writes on the wall of Belshazzar's feasting banquet hall. So there is a hand.

John sees the hand. He doesn't say he sees anything else, but he sees the hand. And in the right hand of the one who sat on the throne, a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals. No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look at it. John looked.

John saw the scroll. John saw that it was written on the front and the back. Right? This is a supernatural enablement for the purpose of the vision, because in reality, nobody can look at the scroll.

Not only can they not open it or read it. Now, and read is not in some manuscripts, and it could be that they can't open it or to read it. So John can see that it's written, but you can't read the content because there's only a few letters visible.

In any case, one of the elders said to me, this is not one of the living creatures. Living creatures are going to speak to John real soon, but it's not a living creature that speaks to John. It is one of the elders.

This chapter is going to nail down with no doubt who these elders are and what they represent. And one of the ways we know it is they're the ones here. One of the elders speaks to John and says, do not weep.

Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals. Loose may or may not be there. It doesn't matter.

Can't open the scroll if you don't break the seals. Do not weep. And I looked and in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders stood a lamb as though it had been slain, not previously seen by John.

Now he becomes visible. He didn't initially see the scroll or the hand that holds it. This is a progressing vision that changes as John watches.

Initially, he sees the throne. He sees the elders. He sees the living creatures.

Then he sees the hand with the scroll. Now he sees the lamb as it had been slain in the midst of

the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders. And this repetition of the fact that the elders are there tells you that it's important to note their presence.

Their presence is important. It's not sort of a tossed off detail. It is essential to understanding this scene.

And the lamb as it had been slain, it doesn't say something like a lamb. This is a lamb as it had been slain. It doesn't just resemble a lamb.

It doesn't remind him of a lamb. He says, I saw a lamb standing as it had been slain. And seven horns, seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Once again, seven horns and seven eyes. Horns speak of power. Eyes speak of observation and knowledge.

This is why the living creatures have eyes all around, because they are aware of any approach made to the throne of God by those qualified or unqualified to do so. Eyes are reconnaissance. This is why we have cameras, security cameras.

I was tuning a piano the other day and glanced to my left and there was a screen and there were nine security cameras showing every different aspect. I could see my truck parked out in front. I could see the way I came in.

I could see the backyard, see the pool with the cover on it, see the dog running around in the backyard wanting in. I could see everything because there were eyes in front and behind of the house. Nobody can creep up on that house.

It is completely 360 degree coverage by security cameras. The lamb knows everything directly. He's got the eyes and he's got the horns.

He has the ability to act directly and to exercise his own power. God seated on the throne does things through agency. He's got living creatures with eyes that tell him what's going on, metaphorically speaking.

He's got seven spirits before the throne that go out into all the earth to accomplish his will and to perpetrate acts of power and accomplishment. So God is one level removed, if you will, from contact directly with the earth, not the lamb. The lamb sees what's going on in the earth because he's been here.

He's one of us. And he has his own God-given power and authority represented by the horns. He doesn't have to say, hey angel, come over here and do something.

Not that God has to, but this is the way he is portrayed. He is more directly involved in what goes on in the earth. And this ought to be a Our Savior knows what it is like to be us and he can act on his own behest.

We pray to the Father in the name of the Son. And the Lord Jesus is aware of our prayers. They are not addressed to him.

They are addressed to the Father. But the Lord Jesus knows our prayers. So does the Holy Spirit.

All three members of the Trinity are involved in communication with us up and down. It doesn't change because we know that the Lord Jesus hears our prayers. We don't start praying directly to him.

That's bad protocol. That's bad etiquette, bad practice. We are given a protocol for addressing requests.

And we, by God's grace, address our requests to the Father in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit. That's how it works. It just is worse than fingernails.

There aren't enough chalkboards and fingernails anymore. People don't know that screeching noise or a piece of new chalk squeaking in that high, obnoxious fashion on a chalkboard, freshly cleaned chalkboard. There's nothing more grating on the nerves when it comes to audible sounds.

If you hear someone toss off a prayer and say, in your name we pray, they do not know their scriptures. They're not paying attention. It's sloppy and it's disrespectful.

It is discourteous to not follow the protocol that, by God's grace, we have been given to come boldly before God, the Father's throne, for grace to help in time of need. And we do so in the name of the Lord Jesus. His name is on us.

We represent Him. We belong to Him. We are God's gift to Him.

And like Esther coming before Xerxes, we are not going to be slain for coming into the presence because of the Lord Jesus. But to shortcut the system, to pray to the Holy Spirit or pray to the Lord Jesus or pray to an angel or pray to a saint, reflects a serious lack of comprehension, understanding, and obedience to what we have been clearly told in several places in scripture. So, He has the seven horns.

He has the seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. So, again, seven spirits sent out into all the earth, the same seven spirits that are before the throne. And God has given His Son, the Lord Jesus, authority to detail those seven spirits to go out and accomplish what He wants.

All authority has been given to me, Jesus said, in heaven and on earth. He didn't used to have that authority. It was given to Him upon the accomplishment of our salvation.

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Right at the end of the gospel, lo, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28, 18, 19, 20, long in there.

So, He has authority to detail these seven spirits. So, He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. You can imagine, even for the Lord Jesus, even the Lamb as it had been slain, to approach this throne of God Almighty, Creator of all things.

Do you think the Lord Jesus schlepped up there in His shower shoes or His hoodie and went up there to approach the throne? To approach the throne of God Almighty and to receive this scroll from His right hand? This is a formal act. This is something that is accomplishing the will of God the Father. And it's serious.

It is not light. It's not casual. This is formal as anything in the universe gets, that the Lord Jesus will take upon Himself the commission.

He is worthy to open it and He is also willing to open this scroll. He is qualified in the same way that the elders are qualified to sit on those thrones, around God's throne. The Lord Jesus is worthy.

He is qualified. So, He comes and takes it. When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each, and this each refers to the elders, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

What do you know about incense? Think back to Old Testament Levitical worship. There is an altar of incense before the curtains that lead to the Holy of Holies. The golden altar of incense.

Think about this, by the way, in talking about the seven spirits that are before the throne. Let's go back to the tabernacle and later the temple. Do you remember what happens? You come into the courtyard.

You've got the laver, a place to get clean. You've got the bronze sea there. That's the laver.

Then you've got the altar. From the altar, you can then move to the holy place if you're a priest. What's inside the holy place? You go in through the door there.

On the right side is what? It's a good pop quiz review. What's on the right side as one enters? The table of showbread. How many loaves of bread are on there? And what do they represent? The 12 tribes of human beings made of that which comes from the dirt.

They're anointed with oil to sanctify them. Holy Spirit activity there for sanctification. What's on the left side as you go in? Right in front of you is the golden altar of incense and the veil into the Holy of Holies.

Only the high priest can go in once a year, Day of Atonement. On the left is what? The menorah, which is what? How many branches? How many lamps? Seven lamps. What's it made of? Solid gold.

Table of showbread is wood overlaid with gold. The menorah is not wood overlaid with gold.

The menorah is solid gold.

Right? So, suppose, just for the sake of argument, that on the right hand side, the table of showbread, wood overlaid with gold, representing, we think, the humanity and the deity of the Lord Jesus, his heavenly and earthly identities, is the support for the people of God, which at that time are Israel, represented by the 12 tribes. On the left, you have this lamp with never-to-be-extinguished flame. And what is beyond the altar of incense, beyond the veil? You have the Ark of the Covenant, God's footstool, if you will, his throne, the mercy seat there, and the covenant tables and so on, representative, Aaron's rod, pot of manna, and so on in there, cherubim woven into the curtains and so on.

But think about the seven lamps that are before God's throne. If God's throne is represented metaphorically by the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, and you've got seven lamps outside, could it be that the menorah is in some ways representing and anticipating the seven spirits of God, which are before the throne? And you have both heavenly, solid gold presence near to God's absolute metaphorical presence, and you have humanity. You've got both kinds of creation in there.

And the illumination are these messenger angels. The law was delivered by messengers in the Old Testament. Much of God's communication was given through Gabriel and through other angelic messengers to Manoah and his wife for Samson's birth and Gideon and so on, the commander of the armies of the Lord.

So it is possible that we have an early anticipation of these lamps before the throne in the tabernacle and later in the temple in the holy place with the seven-branched candlestick. In any case, you have this scene where the 24 elders, as well as the four living creatures, they fall down before the lamb. Remember, the elders fell down before the throne of the father.

Now they are falling down before the lamb. So there is the suggestion of equivalent worthiness here. God the father is worthy because he's the creator.

The lamb is worthy because, in verse nine, you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain and have redeemed them to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth. That is the correct set of pronouns in this. So as we finish up tonight, think about this.

This is a new song. Why is it a new song? I'll tell you why. Because the rapture has taken place and there are raptured church-age believers now on the heavenly scene.

So it's a song they could sing before the church arrived, before the lamb as it had been slain, had finished his work, and had been given his special gift, his bride as it were, those who are Christ's, those who are given to him by the father as to be a peculiar people, a special people. So you are worthy to take the scroll and open his seals. But who's singing this song? They here,

the ones singing the song, are the 24 elders.

Okay? They are the ones that have a harp. They're accompanying themselves on the harp. They're in a sort of a squatting position because they have gotten off their thrones.

They have fallen before the lamb. They are playing the harps. They are singing this new song.

But we glossed over a detail. 24 elders, each having a harp and what else? Golden bowls full of incense, which are what? The prayers of the sanctified ones, the prayers of the ones made holy. Who is that? Who else can it be? The Old Testament saints have not yet been redeemed.

They died not having received the promise. Abraham went to his grave waiting for a city whose founder and builder is God. He's not there.

So these are the prayers of the saints. Throughout the New Testament, the saints, look at the introduction to almost any of Paul's letters to the saints and faithful in this place or that place, give prayer for the saints. This is a description of believers in this age, believers who attend church, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So these bowls contain the prayers of the saints. Now, we had an altar of incense in the Old Testament. Who kept that altar burning? Who ensured that this incense smoke, which was symbolic of and representative of the prayers of Old Testament Israel, ascending as close as they could get to the throne of God without entering the throne room itself.

They're on the other side of the veil, right? So who made sure that incense was burning? The Levitical priests. Who is making sure that the incense of these prayers is being presented before the throne of God? The 24 elders. They are executing a priestly function.

What is the qualification of a priest? If you're a Levitical priest, you have to be a son of Aaron, which means that you are a Levite, which means that you are an Israelite, right? You can't be a Moabite and be a Levitical priest. You can't be a priest in Israel. You have to be an Israelite, not just an Israelite, but a Levite, not just a Levite, but a son of Aaron.

There were other Levites, other sons of Levite that weren't sons of Aaron, but Aaron's sons are priests. So you must partake of the same flesh as the people you represent. The Lord Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, according to the book of Hebrews.

And why is he qualified to represent us as our faithful high priest? Why? He is one of us. He partakes of our human flesh that qualifies him to be a priest. So if these guys have bowls of the prayers of the saints that they are offering before God, what do they have to be? They have to be church age believers partaking of, they are leaders of the saints and they are priests on behalf of the saints and they are qualified to bring these bowls of prayers.

These are the prayers of the saints. These are recent prayers. These are the saints that we saw in chapter two and three.

These are those who worship God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice, you have redeemed them to God by your blood. This is the church.

These individuals, so these pronouns, in other words, when it says you have redeemed them and have made them kings and they shall reign, the they there is the saints whose prayers are in these bowls. That is the antecedent of the pronouns. Does it make sense? It says they shall reign.

You have redeemed them. These 24, they can't be from every tongue and kindred and tribe because there's only 24 of them and there are far more than 24 kindreds and tribes, right? So they can't say you've redeemed us 24 from every kindred and tribe and people and nation, right? And tongue. 24 people can't represent that many different categories, but the throng that we are about to see is.

So in conclusion, be sure you get the pronouns right. These elders, these priestly representatives in heaven partake of and represent these saints. They have the bowls of their people's prayers.

They are the ones who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb that was slain from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. And they have been made, this actually says a kingdom. They have a kingdom coming and this is the kingdom of the father and priests to our God.

They have made them kings and priests to our God. Remember there are 24 courses of priests. These elders are just the leaders of the courses.

So there is a hierarchy. There are functions. They shall reign on the earth.

These priests are going to continue to minister before God's throne throughout the time of the tribulation and into the millennial kingdom. They're not going down to earth to reign. These elders, they've got a chair in the throne room and that's where they will stay.

But these whom they represent and for whom they function as priests and whose prayers they present to the father as ruling priests, as king priests, representing the kingdom of priests. These individuals are going to rule on the earth. They will serve to help administrate the millennial kingdom and beyond.

So then look at verse 11 now. I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, riches, and wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing.

That's a sevenfold description. It is an enhancement over the earlier doxologies. We've already seen three previous doxologies.

We saw the four living creature one in verse eight of chapter four. We saw the elders in verse 11

of chapter four. We saw the elders again in verse nine of this chapter.

Now we have another doxology. Worthy is the Lamb. Sevenfold.

Handel did a great job of setting this to music. And every creature which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, and are in the sea, and all that are in them are heard saying, blessing and honor, glory and power be to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Four living creatures say amen.

24 elders worship. So this number that surround the throne are there before. Notice the elders are there.

The saints with their prayers are there before the first seal gets cracked. You have no choice but to understand that the Lord Jesus is going to take his church to himself, his bride, his body to heaven. The elders will be seated.

Their prayers will be presented. And this is before the scroll is ever opened. So you have redeemed them to God.

They are present and they are now singing a doxology in heaven. So the church is in heaven before the tribulation starts. That's the only conclusion you can draw.

Well, that gets us ready for chapter six, because the Lamb is going to start breaking the seals. We will be safely off the earth at this point. And all of the language from this point forward is Israel language, tribe language, Jerusalem language.

It is the time of Jacob's trouble. Saints, king priests, all of that is in heaven. All of that language is in heaven.

But after chapter five, all of the language is Israel. It is the last seven years of the age of Israel. Those who come to faith will be heirs of the Old Testament covenant promises.

They're still saved, but they will join Israel. They will be on the earth for the millennial kingdom. They will inherit a city whose founder and builder is God and so on.

Nothing wrong with Old Testament salvation. A lot of people have it and will be happy to have it, but it's a different strand of God's plan and program. And in the same way that if you came to faith during the Babylonian captivity or during the Assyrian crisis or during the conquest or at any time from the creation until Pentecost, you have Old Testament covenant promises.

And in that last seven years, which is yet to run, salvation for those few who choose it will be of the Old Testament variety. Listen, after the millennial kingdom, Old Testament and New Testament covenant promises and opportunities converge. That's what the new heaven and the new earth is all about.

There is little distinction. That's why the foundations of the new Jerusalem are named for the

apostles and the gates are named for the tribes. The walls represent the integration and the unification of God's program for Israel and his program for the church.

But it's not until the kingdom of the father, millennial kingdom is a fulfillment of Old Testament promises to Israel, not to the church. We have a kingdom, but it is yet future. So exciting stuff.

We managed to cover an entire chapter tonight. We will pick up a chapter six this coming Sunday. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this exciting revelation, a glimpse into the realms where you dwell with the holy angels, with the cherubim, the prospect that we have of seeing in the future representatives from our own group seated before your throne, representing the Lord Jesus as high priest, the opportunity to see him reveal his glory in the opening of the scroll and fulfillment of the consummation of all things in anticipation of both his kingdom and yours. We pray that we will be ready, that we will be aware and be of service, that we can be good stewards and be thoroughly equipped to serve now and in those times to come. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.