

## Thoughts and Clues on 24 Elders

By

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- John sees 24 elders sitting on 24 thrones in a concentric circle around the throne. "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" (4:4).
- They are not called the church. They are not called saints. They are not called believers. They are not called Christians. They are not called patriarchs. They are not called prophets. They are not called apostles. They are not called men. They are not called people. They are called elders.
- Of the seven groups described in Revelation that are BEFORE and AROUND the throne ([see diagram](#)), why would the 24 elders be singled out as representing a symbolic number of the total group?
- There doesn't appear to be a good logical reason why John would see only a symbolic number of representatives of the elders, while on other occasions he sees real numbers of the other six groups around the throne.
- On two occasions, one of the elders speaks to John (Rev. 5:5 and Rev. 7:13). Is that 1/24 of the elders speaking to John, or one elder? Is the speaking elder a real person or symbolic? If the elder is real, with which elder out of the symbolic number is he speaking? Does the speaking elder have a history?
- Going from a symbolic number of elders in one instance to a real elder in another instance is confusing.
- It is more natural to view the 24 elders as real persons with real histories instead of symbols.
- Does John realize he is seeing a symbolic number of elders?
- Why doesn't John give us a clue to the identity of the 24 elders if they are anything more than what he described?
- On one occasion John doesn't understand who one of the groups around the throne are or where they come from (Rev. 7:13,14). One of the elders gives John the answer to their identity (Rev. 7:14-17).
- Nowhere in the text do the elders tell John that the 24 elders are a symbolic representative.

- **If the 24 elders are from the human race, what are they doing alongside the 4 living creatures with golden bowls full of prayers of the human saints? "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8). This seems strange that humans after dying and going to heaven would have a responsibility for the prayers of their human counterparts on earth. Is this where the Roman Catholic praying to the saints is based?**
- **Furthermore, there are seven passages in Revelation that deal with the 24 elders (4:4, 4:10, 5:5-14, 7:11-17, 11:16, 14:3, 19:4). Five out of the seven passages link the 24 elders with the 4 living creatures... As an example, "And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures" (7:11). Beginning with the angels who are further out in a concentric circle around the throne, the next concentric circle is the 24 elders either seated on 24 thrones or standing in front of their thrones, then to the closest group around the throne, which is the 4 living creatures. This linking of the 24 elders with the 4 living creatures is peculiar if the elders were once mortal beings. The 4 living creatures and the 24 elders appear to be paired together along with God's throne since the beginning. The passages make more literal sense if the elders are non-human (i.e., angelic class), especially if the 24 thrones have always existed around the throne before there were human occupants of heaven. "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" (4:4).**
- **No one really questions the fact the 4 living creatures aren't human. Yet both the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders sang a new song: "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10). The context is clearly third person. It doesn't divide up the song into two parts, but both are seen singing the entire song together. The 4 living creatures and the 24 elders sing about humanity's future - from whose race they don't originate.**
- **If half of the number of the 24 elders were the twelve apostles, did John see himself on a throne since he is one of the twelve apostles? John doesn't recognize the elders as the apostles because he addresses one of them as "My lord."**

- **Why would John address the speaking elder as "My lord" (Rev. 7:14) if the 24 elders were merely human? The elder should have addressed John as "My lord" since John is one of the original apostles. There can be no more honored Christians than the twelve apostles.**
- **On the other hand, if the elder isn't human, but one whose existence was before the human race, the passage makes more literal sense, and it would account for John's awe and respect when he calls the elder "My lord!" (See Daniel 12:8, where Daniel addresses the angel as "My lord" with a little "L").**
- **Should we believe that a human elder living before or after the apostle John is given the duty of describing future events in heaven? Did the elder speaking to John really exist or is he a symbol? If the elder is real, when did he live on earth? Before John or after John? If the elder lived before John and died who could he possibly be since John was the last of the apostles to die? If the elder lived after John, did he pre-exist in time before he was born in order to speak to John? I would propose that last scenario is definitely impossible. There appears to be a strict rule that is in place in John's Revelation experience. While John definitely is transported in time to see future people and events (e.g. he sees the antichrist, he sees the 144,000 witnesses, he sees the tribulation saints, etc.), John never interacts with anyone who is out of his own time sequence or in other words isn't born yet. John only interacts with those who are alive contemporaneously with his own Patmos timeframe when John experienced Revelation. He does not interact with people from the future. What I mean by interact is to speak to and/or to respond in other ways (e.g. weeping, wondering, falling to feet) to persons he encounters in his experience. It appears very definitely that no person that John observes from the future seems to ever acknowledge his presence, or to even know of his presence in the sequence of events. Let's look at this specifically.**
- **John speaks only two times to the persons he encounters. First, he speaks to one of the 24 elders. "Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.'" (7:13-14). Then, he speaks to the strong angel. "So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, 'Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.'"(10:9).**
- **Several other times John is spoken to, and interacts in other non-verbal ways. "Then I began to weep greatly because no one was**

found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals'" (5:4-5). Second example, "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me, 'Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns'" (17:6-7). Third example, "Then he said to me, 'Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'" (19:9-10).

- Other times, John is told to do something, and he obeys. "Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.' I looked, and behold, a white horse..." (6:1-2). John subsequently also obeys the command to "Come!" by the second (6:3), third (6:5) and fourth living beast (6:7).
- On two occasions a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet told John to do something. The voice turned out to be Jesus. "I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, 'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches'... Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me... When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things' (1:10-19). Second instance, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things'" (4:1).
- Last, there is an unidentified voice from heaven that speaks specifically to John, and gives him a command. Twice it is the same voice (10:4 and 10:8). And one time it may or may not be the same voice from heaven (14:13). This voice can neither confirm nor deny the observation that John never interacts with persons from the future.

- The following is a summary of the interactions John experienced. He interacted with Christ, the strong angel, his angel guide, all of the 4 living beasts, and the unidentified voice from heaven. These are clearly interactions with persons from the present tense, not the future. Then, there are the two personal interactions John has with one of the 24 elders. John interacts with the elder that tells him not to weep (5:4-5); and he speaks with an elder. "Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My, lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes'" (7:13-17).
- Given the fact that all of John's other interactions are with persons from the present tense, and not from the future, why would we again make an exception for the elders? It seems we are accommodating the interpretation of the elders for other reasons instead of letting the text say what it means. It doesn't make sense that John is speaking and interacting with someone from the future. It is one thing to show persons and events from the future. It is quite another thing for John to interact with persons from the future, and for them to see, recognize, and to speak to him, and for John to speak with them. Does the person's mind from the future remember the information from the past? In other words, will the elder remember the encounters he had with John when he is born sometime in the future? If so, this seems to breach the biblical law: "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgement" (Heb. 9:27). In a way, the future elder was born when he exchanged information with John, and died when John left heaven, only to be reborn again sometime in the future, and to die again. It makes more sense that John is speaking and interacting with an angelic class of being who is known as an elder. Such a person who is immortal and present since the beginning of time would have a much better resume and portfolio than a human to deal with the matters that the elders deal with in Revelation. If nothing else, the 24 elders could serve as God's continual, unbroken and immortal legal witnesses to all things that

have occurred in heaven and earth since the beginning. Perhaps they even keep the books in order etc.?

- **What will we see around the throne? Does John describe the scene accurately and literally in Revelation 4 and 5? Will we see 4 living creatures in a concentric circle around the throne? Will we see twenty-four elders seated on twenty-four thrones in a second concentric circle around the throne?**
- **If the twenty-four thrones around the throne don't exist, the force of the passage is weakened. There is a sense that John is seeing a mist, not reality. What is real, and what is symbol?**
- **There are occasions when symbol strengthens a truth; for example, describing Satan as a *dragon*: "*And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war...*" (Rev. 1:7).**
- **Other occasions, symbol doesn't make sense, as with the 24 elders. Why out of the seven groups before and around the throne is the number of elders symbolic? It is natural to interpret the other six groups (i.e., 2 witnesses, 4 living creatures, the 7 angels, myriad angels, 144,000, and tribulation saints) as literal numbers. Why not a literal 24 elders?**
- **Perhaps some like to see a symbolic and representative number of elders because they ask: where is the church? Or where are the Old Testament saints? Another question may arise in the minds of those who lean toward or embrace the symbolism. Why does the God of heaven and cosmos need a divine council of 24 elders?**
- **However, a more intriguing question is: Why does God love - period? And why did God tie his destiny to the free will of men and of angels? This is the most surprising information of all.**