

# Who are the 24 elders before the throne of God?

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## LESSON 7

# WHO ARE THE 24 ELDERS BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD?

You are welcome to another edition of **Insights from God's Word**, a Bible study programme that is committed to sharing God's Word by allowing the Bible to speak for itself.

In this edition, we continue with our series on **Heaven**. The topic for this study is: *Who are the 24 elders before the throne of God?* In as much as some in Christendom may want to discard this topic as a non - salvific issue, the truth is that there are many among God's children who are so interested in getting higher and brighter beams of light on such celestial topics. For I have discovered that a healthy discussion of topics like these will actually draw our hearts from this earth unto our home above. In fact, besides our main goal of trying to uncover the identity of the 24 elders in this study, it is my sincere prayer that the Lord will use this study to draw our hearts closer and closer unto Himself.

The term 24 elders only appear in the book of Revelation. Many Bible scholars and theologians have suggested who they believe this group might be. In this study, I want us to consider the major viewpoints in relation to the identity of the 24 elders. I believe this approach will place us in a better position to make an informed decision on the subject.

## FIVE MAJOR VIEWPOINTS

Several viewpoints abound when it comes to the identity of the 24 elders in the book of Revelation. Some of the interpretations view the 24 elders in a symbolic way while others see them literary as representing particular beings. In this study, we are going to consider five major viewpoints. The first two viewpoints do consider the 24 elders in a symbolic manner while the latter three view them in a literal

sense. The five main views that are popular today in regard to the identity of the 24 elders in the book of Revelation are as follows:

## 1. THE 24 ELDERS AS A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

One of the prevailing viewpoints expresses the point that the apostle John in his usage of the 24 elders had in mind the 24 courses of the Levitical priesthood ([1 Chronicles 24:1-19](#); [2 Chronicles 8:14](#)). The proponents of this view postulate that just as 24 priests and Levites ministered before the Lord in the earthly sanctuary over a period of time, so does John see 24 elders ministering before the Lord in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, in this interpretation, the 24 elders are viewed as a symbolic depiction of the Levitical priesthood of ancient Israel. The problem with this interpretation is the fact that after the death of Christ, the 24 courses of the Levitical priesthood ceased ([Matthew 27:50-51](#)). From the book of Hebrews, Christ is portrayed as the High Priest who ministers on behalf of the people of God. From [Hebrews 4:14-16](#), we read the following:

"14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#)).

From [1 Timothy 2:5](#), Christ is described as the only Mediator between God and man. Thus, with Christ being the only high priest in the heavenly courts, there is no room for another order of priesthood. What this means is that the 24 elders cannot be viewed as representing the 24 courses of the Levitical priesthood of ancient Israel.

## 2. THE 24 ELDERS AS A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF THE HEADSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Some interpreters have also viewed the 24 elders as a symbolic depiction of the headship of the church. These interpreters view the 24 elders as representing the 12 patriarchs and the 12 apostles; the leadership of the Old and New Testament Church respectively. From this background, the 24 elders are thus viewed as symbolic figures instead of saints who are now in heaven.

The problem with this symbolic interpretation is that it is unable to explain the various roles that we find the 24 elders performing in the book of Revelation (such as in [Revelation 5:8](#)). This point brings out the fact that the 24 elders cannot be just viewed as symbolizing the headship of the church without seeking for a deeper meaning which addresses their roles as portrayed in the book of Revelation.

## 3. THE 24 ELDERS AS THE RESURRECTED SAINTS WHO ASCENDED WITH CHRIST TO HEAVEN

One of the old and prominent views regarding the 24 elders is that they are the saints who ascended with Christ to heaven after His resurrection. From [Matthew 27:50-53](#), we read the following: "50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. 51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; 52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, 53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

Christ spent 40 days on the earth after His resurrection ([Acts 1:3](#)). During these 40 days, He united the disciples, strengthened their faith, and gave them instructions in relation to the gospel commission to the world ([Matthew 28:18-20](#); [Mark 16:15](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). He then ascended to heaven to be with the Father ([Acts 1:9-11](#)). But Christ did

not ascend to heaven alone. He went with the resurrected saints as first fruits of His work of redemption for the human race. From [Ephesians 4:8](#), we read the following: "That is why the Scriptures say, When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people" (NLT). In this text, we gather the fact that Christ ascended to heaven with the resurrected saints as trophies or first fruits of His work of redemption for mankind.

The million dollar question at this point in our study is this: Are these resurrected saints who ascended with Christ to heaven the 24 elders spoken of in the book of Revelation? Proponents of this view provide the following biblical viewpoints to support their belief that the 24 elders are the resurrected saints who ascended with Christ to heaven:

#### A) THEY WEAR CROWNS OF VICTORY (STEPHANOS)

Some interpreters who view the 24 elders as the resurrected saints point to the fact that in [Revelation 4:4](#), the 24 elders are portrayed as wearing crowns (stephanos) of gold which is actually an emblem of victory for the saints (see [Revelation 2:10](#); [2 Timothy 4:7-8](#); [1 Corinthians 9:25](#); [James 1:12](#); [1 Peter 5:4](#)). The concept of being victorious which is derived from these texts has made this group of interpreters to suggest that the 24 elders do represent redeemed men. This is because they reason that other heavenly intelligences such as angels have not gained the victory over sin, and thus the word 'stephanos' will be inappropriate for them.

#### B) THEY SIT ON THRONES

Some interpreters have become convinced that the 24 elders are redeemed men because they are portrayed as sitting on thrones before the Lord in heaven ([Revelation 4:4](#)). According to these interpreters, this picture in relation to the 24 elders is actually a symbol of the part the redeemed men are playing in the investigative judgement; where they serve as human jurors in relation to their peers (fellow human beings) on the earth. Thus, according to these interpreters, the 24

elders are likely to represent human beings who have been redeemed from the earth.

### C) THE WORD ELDERS (PRESBUTEROI) AS USED IN SCRIPTURE

Some interpreters have also pointed out that the word 'elders' (presbuteroi) as used for the 24 elders in the book of Revelation has always been used in reference to human beings in all of Scripture. Even though some argue that the word 'elders' or 'ancients' as used in [Isaiah 24:23](#) do refer to angels, some scholars hold the view that they might as well refer to humans. Thus, according to these interpreters, the 24 elders are likely to be redeemed men, particularly the resurrected saints who ascended with Christ to heaven.

### D) THE ELDERS AS REDEEMED MEN (The Context of [Revelation 5:8-10](#))

Moreover, interpreters who view the 24 elders as human beings also make use of the word 'US' as used in [Revelation 5:8-11](#) from the KJV to support their position that the 24 elders are human beings who have been redeemed from the earth. To bring out this point well, let us read the passage of [Revelation 5:8-11](#) from the King James Version:

"8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. 9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, AND HAS REDEEMED US to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 AND HAS MADE US unto our God kings and priests: AND WE SHALL REIGN ON THE EARTH" ([Revelation 5:8-10](#) from KJV; Capital Emphasis Added).

Some interpreters who view the 24 elders as the resurrected saints lean heavily on this passage which seems to suggest that the 24 elders are humans who have been redeemed by the shed blood of Christ. Beloved, it is clear that those who assert that

the 24 elders represent redeemed men, particularly the resurrected saints who ascended with Christ to heaven do have several strong points. However, there are some serious questions and loopholes that have been identified in relation to this way of interpreting the 24 elders. These are some of the issues that some have raised to question the interpretation which suggests that the 24 elders are redeemed men:

i) Some interpreters such as Pr. Stephen Bohr have pointed out that the passage in [Revelation 5:8-10](#) was translated wrongly as far as the word 'US' is concerned. These interpreters have pointed to other reputable Bible translations such as the NASB, NIV, RSV etc. which actually utilize the word THEY instead of US in the passage under discussion. For instance, the New American Standard Bible which is another literal translation just like the KJV utilizes the word THEM instead of US. From the NASB, we read the contents of [Revelation 5:8-10](#) as follows:

"8 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. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood MEN from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made THEM to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and THEY will reign upon the earth ([Revelation 5:8-10](#), NASB; Capital Emphasis Added).

Friends, this passage brings out a different meaning in relation to the identity of the 24 elders. The Word MEN and THEY as used in the passage indicate that the 24 elders do not consider themselves as redeemed by the shed blood of Christ. The conclusion from this statement is that the 24 elders cannot then be referred to as humans if we want to go by the NASB and many other modern translations which seem to correct the apparent mistake in the KJV.

ii) Some interpreters such as Pastor Stephen Bohr have also pointed out from the passage in [Revelation 5:8-10](#) that the song that we read about in the passage was

not sung only by the 24 elders. From the context, it is clear that this particular song was done by both the four living creatures and the 24 elders. This fact, according to these interpreters show clearly that the right word in the passage should have been THEY instead of US as the four living creatures who partook of that song are clearly seraphim and cherubim (see [Isaiah 6:1-3](#); [Revelation 4:6-8](#); [Ezekiel 1:26-28](#); [Ezekiel 10:1](#); [Revelation 5:6-10](#)) who were not redeemed by the shed blood of Christ, and will not also reign on the earth as the text in the KJV suggests.

iii) Some interpreters such as Pastor Stephen Bohr see the passages of [Revelation 4](#) and 5 to be the time of the triumphant return of Christ to heaven after His death for the human race on earth. From the explanations of these interpreters, [Revelation 4](#) presents the throne of God in heaven where God the Father ([Revelation 4:2-3](#)), the Holy Spirit ([Revelation 4:5](#)), the four living creatures ([Revelation 4:6-8](#)) and the 24 elders ([Revelation 4:4](#)) are portrayed as waiting for the return of Jesus, the war hero from the earth. According to this interpretation, Christ appears with the angelic host in [Revelation 5](#) to join those already assembled before the throne of God in heaven ([Revelation 5:6-7](#); [Revelation 5:11-12](#)). When Christ finally appears before the Father, He is glorified as the victorious Redeemer of the human race. The argument from these scholars as far as the background above is concerned is that, the 24 elders cannot be the resurrected saints who ascended with Christ to heaven because they (that is, the 24 elders) were already present in heaven before the arrival of Jesus and the angelic host from the earth.

iv) Pr. Stephen Bohr in his work on the 24 elders also notes that even though the word 'stephanos' is generally used to describe the crown of one who has gained a victory, there are exceptions (see [Matthew 27:29](#); [Mark 15:17](#); [John 19:2](#); [Revelation 14:14](#)). Have you ever wondered whether the angels also wear crowns? Pr. Stephen Bohr provides the following clear quotes on this issue from the pen of inspiration:

\*) "The news of man's fall spread through heaven. Every harp was hushed. The angels cast their crowns from their heads in sorrow." (EW 148.2; commentary on the fall of man)



\*) "There was no joy in heaven. The angels cast their crowns and harps from them and with the deepest interest silently watched Jesus." (EW 167.1; commentary on the suffering of Christ in Gethsemane)

\*) "Then all the heavenly host surrounded their majestic Commander, and with the deepest adoration bowed before Him and cast their glittering crowns at His feet." (EW 190.2; commentary on the ascension of Christ)

\*) "And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."" (EW 279.2; commentary on the end of probation)

\*) "A retinue of holy angels, with bright, glittering crowns upon their heads, escorted Him on His way. No language can describe the glory of the scene." (EW 286.2; commentary on the second coming of Christ)

v) Other interpreters also view the 24 elders sitting on thrones or seats (KJV) before the Father ([Revelation 4:4](#)) as of a symbolic expression. Thus, according to this mode of interpretation, the 24 elders cannot thus be viewed as redeemed men who serve as human jurors in relation to their peers (fellow human beings) in the investigative judgement.

vi) Moreover, from [Revelation 5:8](#), the four living creatures and the 24 elders are portrayed as ministering the prayers of the saints. Some interpreters see this work performed by the 24 elders as of a nature that will not be committed to humans in heaven.

Friends, I think these are serious issues which I believe those who see the 24 elders as redeemed men, particularly the resurrected saints should endeavour to address.

## 4. THE 24 ELDERS AS THE REPRESENTATIVES OF UNFALLEN WORLDS

Many today see the 24 elders as the representatives of the unfallen worlds. The term "unfallen worlds" basically mean other worlds which were created by God that never sinned. Friends, in as much as the Bible does not specifically use the term "unfallen worlds", there are hints in Scripture which give us such an understanding. In fact, the Bible provides hints that God has created other worlds beside our world. From the book of Hebrews, we read the following in relation to this point:

i) "1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, BY WHOM ALSO HE MADE THE WORLDS" (Hebrews 1:1-2; Capital Emphasis Added).

ii) "Through faith we understand that the WORLDS were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3; Capital Emphasis Added).

In these texts, we obtain the biblical insight that God did not just create our world; He created other worlds as well. Moreover, from the book of Job, we obtain very special insights about the possibility of other worlds in the universe of God. Let us consider the evidence:

i) "6 Now there was a day when the SONS OF GOD came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. 7 And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job 1:6-7; Capital Emphasis Added).

ii) "1 Again there was a day when the SONS OF GOD came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the

LORD. 2 And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" ([Job 2:1-2](#); Capital Emphasis Added).

Beloved, from these two accounts in the book of Job, it is clear that unlike the angelic hosts who reside in heaven, these sons of God are representatives of other worlds who assemble for a council meeting in heaven from time to time. It is important for us to note that on the two occasions when the sons of God met the Father in heaven, Satan joined them. Now, based on the answer Satan gave to God as to why he came with the other sons of God (review [Job 1:6-7](#); [Job 2:1-2](#)), we gain the insight that Satan was there in heaven to represent planet earth at those heavenly meetings.

Satan was bold to identify himself with the sons of God, the representatives of the other worlds, because he viewed himself as the legitimate representative of our world. He had stolen the planet's dominion from Adam by tempting him to sin against the commandments of God (see [Genesis 3:1-6](#)). You see, Adam should have been the right person to represent planet earth. He was the true son of God by creation (see [Genesis 1:26-28](#); [Luke 3:38](#)), and was given the dominion of the planet (see [Genesis 1:26-28](#); [Psalm 8:3-8](#)). However, his decision to obey Satan rather than God made him a subject to Satan ([Romans 6:16](#)). Thus, Satan could claim that the world had been delivered to him ([Luke 4:5-6](#)). In fact, Christ even referred to him (Satan) as the "prince of this world" ([John 12:31](#)). Now, if it is clear that Satan was at those heavenly meetings to represent our world (review [Job 1:6-7](#); [Job 2:1-2](#)), then it follows that the other sons of God at those heavenly meetings must have also come to represent their respective worlds in the universe of God. Thus, we can conclude from the lens of Scripture that these sons of God are the representatives of the worlds in the universe of God that have never sinned.

Some Bible interpreters such as Pr. Stephen Bohr have asserted that these sons of God who represent the unfallen worlds are the 24 elders we read about in the book of Revelation. In an attempt to explain this position, Pr. Stephen Bohr makes use of

several Ellen White quotes that identify the elders as strong angels who are differentiated from the regular angelic hosts. Pr. Stephen Bohr then utilises two particular Ellen White quotes [The Great Controversy, page 519 (GC 518.3) and The Desire of Ages, pages 833-835] to make the point that the 24 elders are strong angelic beings who serve as representatives of the unfallen worlds. In as much as Pr. Stephen Bohr's study presents very insightful revelations on the subject of the 24 elders, I believe there are still some issues that his study does not address. Let us briefly consider some of these issues:

A) If the 24 elders are not permanent dwellers in heaven as Pr. Stephen Bohr's study suggests, why do we find them ministering the prayers of the saints in [Revelation 5:8](#)? Can we deduce from this text that these representatives of other worlds are actually given salvific roles on behalf of mankind? I believe the opposite is rather true. You see friends, the picture portrayed in [Revelation 5:8](#) clearly shows that the 24 elders must be situated in heaven to regularly perform such an important work on behalf of the saints who dwell on earth.

B) How do we explain the other appearances of the 24 elders (who are supposed to be the representatives of other worlds) in other portions of the book of Revelation (see [Revelation 7:13-17](#); [Revelation 11:15-18](#); [Revelation 19:1-4](#))? Are they there in heaven in these instances for a council meeting or for some other work? Friends, it is clear that in the other instances where we encounter the 24 elders in the book of Revelation, there is nothing that suggests that they have come for a meeting in heaven as we read from the book of Job (review [Job 1:6](#); [Job 2:1](#)). However, we find them most of the time worshipping God, or ministering on behalf of the human race.

C) If the 24 elders are the sons of God we read about in the book of Job (see [Job 1:6](#); [Job 2:1](#); [Job 38:7](#)), why is the term "sons of God" as used repeatedly in the book of Job not even once employed to describe these elders in the book of Revelation? Why are these beings repeatedly referred to as elders instead of the sons of God in the book of Revelation?

D) If the 24 elders are representatives of the unfallen worlds, does it follow that there are only 24 other worlds in the universe of God? I know Pr. Stephen Bohr sees the number 24 as symbolic instead of literal. But that notwithstanding, it is also clear throughout Scripture that the number 24 which is actually 2 groups of 12 basically represents the headship of the church on earth; with the 12 patriarchs representing the leadership of the Old Testament church and the 12 apostles, the leadership of the New Testament church. Thus, it is clear that the number 24 is tied to the human family, and cannot be used to symbolically refer to intelligences from other worlds.

Friends, in as much as I agree with Pr. Stephen Bohr that the 24 elders are the same as the strong angels, the issues I have enumerated above make me to be very skeptical about his additional position that the 24 elders are also the representatives of the unfallen worlds in the universe of God.

## **5. THE 24 ELDERS AS A GROUP OF THE HIGHEST ANGELS IN HEAVEN THAT MINISTER IN A SPECIAL WAY FOR THE SALVATION OF MANKIND**

There are other interpreters who see the 24 elders as part of the angelic hosts who are stationed in heaven instead of human beings. These interpreters point out that the 24 elders are portrayed in [Revelation 5:8](#) as ministering the prayers of the saints, a work that according to them would hardly be committed to human beings in heaven. In fact, from the account in [Revelation 5:8](#), it is clear that both the four living creatures (seraphim and cherubim; review [Isaiah 6:1-3](#); [Revelation 4:6-8](#); [Ezekiel 1:26-28](#); [Ezekiel 10:1](#); [Revelation 5:6-10](#)) and the 24 elders are all portrayed as ministering the prayers of the saints. This gives a clue that like the cherubim and seraphim, the 24 elders must also be angels to be given such a salvific role on behalf of the saints. The pen of inspiration settles this issue with the following clear statement: "Angels offer the smoke of the fragrant incense for the praying saints" (Pr 190.2).

Besides the clear evidence above, we also read the following from the beloved apostle: "3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" ([Revelation 8:3-4](#)). From this passage, we find another Angel (obviously Jesus Christ Himself) who is presented to John as an angelic being ministering the prayers of the saints in the heavenly sanctuary.

Now friends, is it possible that we can infer from these two passages ([Revelation 5:8](#); [Revelation 8:3-4](#)) that the 24 elders are among a group of the very highest angels in heaven to whom are committed an extraordinary task in relation to the salvation of mankind? Well, does not the Scripture say concerning the angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" ([Hebrews 1:14](#)).

Beloved, as I have studied the subject of the 24 elders, I have become more and more convinced that the 24 elders are among a group of the highest angels in heaven to whom have been committed special responsibilities in relation to the salvation of the human race. Let us consider some scriptural passages that lend credence to this point:

#### A) REVELATION 7:13-17

"13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

7:15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

7:16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

7:17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

(Revelation 7:13-17)

In this passage above, we find one of the elders giving John crucial information in relation to the great human multitude before the throne of God. This elder reveals to John how a great host of the human family will one day be also found at the throne of God in heaven because they washed their clothes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

#### B) REVELATION 11:16-18

"11:16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

11:17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

11:18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

(Revelation 11:16-18)

Beloved, from this passage, we find out how the 24 elders are closely in touch with issues on planet earth. They are thrilled that the time of God's judgement has come and that the prophets, the saints and those who fear the name of the Lord will be

rewarded while justice is meted out to the wicked who destroy the earth.

Friends, these passages provide hints that the 24 elders are a special group among the angelic hosts in heaven working for the salvation of mankind, and not some intelligent beings from other worlds who may even have been cautioned by God not to meddle in the affairs of a planet in rebellion.

## STATEMENTS REFLECTING BIBLICAL PASSAGES: ELLEN G. WHITE'S COMMENTS ON THE 24 ELDERS

1) Ellen White stated clearly that the elders mentioned in Revelation are angels. Let us consider the S.O.P. evidence:

*A) "This roll was written within and without. John says: I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. The vision as presented to John made its impression upon his mind. The destiny of every nation was contained in that book. John was distressed at the utter inability of any human being or angelic intelligence to read the words, or even to look thereon. His soul was wrought up to such a point of agony and suspense that ONE OF THE STRONG ANGELS had compassion on him, and laying his hand on him assuringly said, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof" (20MR 197.3; Capital Emphasis Added).*

Beloved, it is important to note that in the passage of [Revelation 5:1-8](#), it was one of the elders who told John not to weep. However, in Ellen White's commentary on this Scripture, she categorically uses the word ANGEL instead of an ELDER.



*B i) "John beholds an innumerable company, precious, refined, purified, around the throne of the Majesty of Heaven. The angel inquires of John, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? and John answers, Sir, thou knowest. THEN THE ANGEL DECLARES: These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. Now we have the precious opportunity of washing our robes of character in the blood of the Lamb till they are spotless in his purity. To all who shall do this the promise is, They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (ST December 22, 1887, par. 7; Capital Emphasis Added).*

*B ii) "As John saw the multitude standing around the throne of God, the question was asked, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation, THE ANGEL ANSWERED, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. At an infinite cost a fountain has been prepared for our cleansing. In the blood of the Son of God we may wash our garments of character, and make them white. If now we crucify self, and live for Christ, God will give us a place in the mansions He is preparing for those who love Him" (ST April 17, 1901, par. 18; Capital Emphasis Added).*

Friends, these two quotes capture Ellen White's commentary on [Revelation 7:13-17](#). In these commentaries, we once again see how she replaces the word ELDER with ANGEL. Considering, the three quotes we have considered above, it is clear that Ellen White is consistent in regard to her view that the elders in Revelation are angels? But what kind of angels are they? Are they representatives from unfallen worlds? Her other quotes do not suggest they are representatives of unfallen worlds, but rather, part of a group of the highest angels in heaven who have been

given a special assignment to minister for the salvation of the human race. Let us now consider the S.O.P. evidence in relation to this point:

*C) "Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. THE VERY HIGHEST ANGELS IN THE HEAVENLY COURTS ARE APPOINTED TO WORK OUT THE PRAYERS WHICH ASCEND TO GOD for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an advantage" (LHU 370; Capital Emphasis Added).*

Friends, in this quote from E. G. White, there is a clear parallel link in relation to the work done by the four living creatures and elders who are portrayed as ministering the prayers of the saints as recorded in [Revelation 5:8](#). This quote from Ellen White also shows a parallel link to the work of the Angel who ministers the prayers of the saints as recorded in [Revelation 8:3-4](#). Thus beloved, the E. G. White quotes above come to support the fifth biblical view in our study that the 24 elders (who are also described by her as strong angels) are actually among a group of the very highest angels in the heavenly courts that minister in a special way for the salvation of mankind. It is very clear that our Bible study do synchronise with these quote from Ellen White:

*i) "Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. THE VERY HIGHEST ANGELS IN THE HEAVENLY COURTS ARE APPOINTED TO WORK OUT THE PRAYERS WHICH ASCEND TO GOD for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an advantage" (LHU 370; Capital Emphasis Added).*

ii) *"If Satan sees that he is in danger of losing one soul, he will exert himself to the utmost to keep that one. And when the individual is aroused to his danger, and, with distress and fervor, looks to Jesus for strength, Satan fears that he will lose a captive, and he calls a reinforcement of his angels to hedge in the poor soul, and form a wall of darkness around him, that heaven's light may not reach him. But if the one in danger perseveres, and in his helplessness casts himself upon the merits of the blood of Christ, our Saviour listens to the earnest prayer of faith, and sends a reinforcement of THOSE ANGELS THAT EXCEL IN STRENGTH TO DELIVER HIM" (Pr 256.5; Capital Emphasis Added).*

iii) *"Cherubim and seraphim (four living creatures), and angels that excel in strength (24 elders), stand at God's right hand, all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (ChS 258.2; Emphasis Mine).*

At this point in our study, someone is likely to ask the question: Why is the number 24 related to these elders? What is the symbolism of the number 24 in relation to these angels? Friends, I believe that the number 24 as linked with these angels is basically a symbolic representation of the headship of the entire body of Christ. That is, the 12 patriarchs and the 12 apostles. You see, the 12 patriarchs represent the leadership of the Old Testament church; while the 12 apostles represent the leadership of the New Testament church. Thus, in a way, the number 24 is linked with a group of the highest angels (elders) in heaven who have been ministering in a very special way for the salvation of all of God's children throughout the ages.

Thus, it is clear from the above explanation that the number 24 might not be literal. In fact, it is interesting to note that even though Ellen White uses the word ANGELS in place of the ELDERS (such as in [Revelation 5:5](#)), she never uses the term 24 angels in any of her commentaries on these elders. Thus, the commentaries of Ellen White on these elders might also suggest the symbolic expression of the number 24 as used in reference to the elders.

## 2) A PROBLEM WITH AN S.O.P INTERPRETATION

Pr. Stephen Bohr in his study "THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS" states emphatically that E. G. White identifies the 24 elders through the quote below in the Desire of Ages:

*"All heaven was waiting to welcome the Saviour to the celestial courts. As He ascended, He led the way, and the multitude of captives set free at His resurrection followed. The heavenly host, with shouts and acclamations of praise and celestial song, attended the joyous train.*

*As they drew near to the city of God, the challenge is given by the escorting angels,--*

*"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; And the King of glory shall come in." Joyfully the waiting sentinels respond,--*

*"Who is this King of glory?" This they say, not because they know not who He is, but because they would hear the answer of exalted praise,--*

*"The Lord strong and mighty, The Lord mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O ye gates; Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; And the King of glory shall come in." Again is heard the challenge, "Who is this King of glory?" for the angels never weary of hearing His name exalted. The escorting angels make reply,--*

*"The Lord of hosts; He is the King of glory." Ps. 24:7-10. Then the portals of the city of God are opened wide, and the angelic throng sweep through the gates amid a burst of rapturous music.*

*There is the throne, and around it the rainbow of promise. There are cherubim and seraphim. The commanders of the angel hosts, the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds, are assembled. The heavenly council before which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion,--all are*

*there to welcome the Redeemer. They are eager to celebrate His triumph and to glorify their King.*

*But He waves them back. Not yet; He cannot now receive the coronet of glory and the royal robe. He enters into the presence of His Father. He points to His wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet; He lifts His hands, bearing the print of nails. He points to the tokens of His triumph; He presents to God the wave sheaf, those raised with Him as representatives of that great multitude who shall come forth from the grave at His second coming. He approaches the Father, with whom there is joy over one sinner that repents; who rejoices over one with singing. Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father. The compact had been fully carried out. Now He declares: Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." John 19:30; 17:24.*

*The voice of God is heard proclaiming that justice is satisfied. Satan is vanquished. Christ's toiling, struggling ones on earth are "accepted in the Beloved." Eph. 1:6. Before the heavenly angels and the representatives of unfallen worlds, they are declared justified. Where He is, there His church shall be. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Ps. 85:10. The Father's arms encircle His Son, and the word is given, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Heb. 1:6.*

*With joy unutterable, rulers and principalities and powers acknowledge the supremacy of the Prince of life. The angel host prostrate themselves before Him, while the glad shout fills all the courts of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Rev. 5:12.*

*Songs of triumph mingle with the music from angel harps, till heaven seems to overflow with joy and praise. Love has conquered. The lost is found. Heaven rings with voices in lofty strains proclaiming, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." Rev. 5:13" (Desire of Ages, pages 833-835).*

Beloved, while it is clear that this quote is a right description of the events in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, I do not see any evidence that indicates that Ellen White identifies the 24 elders as the representatives of the unfallen worlds. In fact, the portion of the quote above which is one of the main reasons for Pr. Stephen Bohr's interpretation that the 24 elders are representatives of the unfallen worlds have been repeated below:

*"There is the throne, and around it the rainbow of promise. There are cherubim and seraphim. The commanders of the angel hosts, the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds, are assembled. The heavenly council before which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion,--all are there to welcome the Redeemer. They are eager to celebrate His triumph and to glorify their King" (DA 834.1).*

Friends, from this quote above, we can infer the following:

A) The commanders of the angelic hosts are linked with the cherubim and seraphim not the sons of God. This position is supported by the following quotes in the Spirit of Prophecy:

*i) "Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. LUCIFER, SON OF THE MORNING, WAS FIRST OF THE COVERING CHERUBS, HOLY AND UNDEFILED. He stood in the presence of the great Creator, and the ceaseless beams of glory enshrouding the eternal God rested upon him." -- (PP 35.1; Capital Emphasis Added).*

ii) *"He gloried in his brightness and exaltation and aspired to be equal with God. He was beloved and revered by the heavenly host, angels delighted to execute his COMMANDS and he was clothed with wisdom and glory above them all. Yet the Son of God was exalted above him, as one in power and authority with the Father. He shared the Father's counsels, while Lucifer did not thus enter into the purposes of God." -- (PP 36.3; Capital Emphasis Added).*

iii) *"Taking advantage of the loving, loyal trust reposed in him by the holy beings under his COMMAND, he had so artfully instilled into their minds his own distrust and discontent that his agency was not discerned." -- (PP 38.2; Capital Emphasis Added).*

Beloved, the Spirit of Prophecy quotes above provide a hint that the commanders of the angelic hosts are likely to be the covering cherubs among the four living creatures (cherubim and seraphim). For among the angelic hosts, it is the covering cherubs among the four living creatures who are positioned closest to the throne of God, and are also committed with the highest duties in regard to intelligent beings in the universe of God (reflect on DA 758.4). Clearly, the quotes above from the Spirit of Prophecy contradict the position provided by Pr. Stephen Bohr that Ellen White identifies the 24 elders with the following three synonymous expressions: "The commanders of the angelic hosts, the sons of God, and the representatives of the unfallen worlds". It is clear from what we have gone through so far that the commanders of the angelic hosts are a select group of the four living creatures who are clearly differentiated from the 24 elders.

B) From the Ellen White quote in *The Desire of Ages*, pages 833-835, it is clear that the sons of God we studied about earlier in the book of Job (review [Job 1:6](#); [Job 2:1](#)) are actually the representatives of the unfallen worlds.

C) From the Ellen White quote in *The Desire of Ages*, pages 833-835, it is clear that the sons of God had come to heaven on this occasion to purposely "welcome the Redeemer".

D) Friends, as we studied from the book of Job, these representatives of the unfallen worlds who had assembled in heaven would go back to their particular worlds, sending the glad tidings about the triumph of the King of glory.

E) The biblical fact from point D above is in contrast with what we read about the elders in other passages of the book of Revelation (see [Revelation 7:13-17](#); [Revelation 11:15-18](#); [Revelation 19:1-4](#)). From these passages in the book of Revelation, the elders seem to be situated in heaven, and are actually occupied with works that relate to the salvation of the human race.

F) Ellen White does not state in her commentary on [Revelation 4](#) and 5 (review *The Desire of Ages*, page 833-835) that the sons of God were there in heaven to minister the prayers of the saints as we read from [Revelation 5:8](#). To this work, she pointed to the very highest angels in the heavenly courts (review LHU 370; ChS 258.2; Pr 190.2).

G) Beloved, based on what we have discussed so far, it is quite clear that the biblical accounts in [Revelation 4](#) and 5 do not mention the representatives of the unfallen worlds. Rather, the main focus is on the Redeemer who is the only one qualified to open the seven-sealed book because He had shed His blood for the human race. Other beings described in [Revelation 4](#) and 5 are God the Father ([Revelation 4:3](#); [Revelation 5:7](#)), the Holy Spirit ([Revelation 4:5](#); [Revelation 5:6](#)), the four living creatures (seraphim and cherubim; review [Isaiah 6:1-3](#); [Revelation 4:6-8](#); [Ezekiel 1:26-28](#); [Ezekiel 10:1](#); [Revelation 5:6-10](#)), the 24 elders or strong angels according to Mrs. White ([Revelation 4:4](#), 10; [Revelation 5:6-10](#)), and the innumerable host of angels ([Revelation 5:11-12](#)). From the information above, it is quite clear that the passages of [Revelation 4](#) and 5 do not capture the sons of God, the group we have noted earlier to be the representatives of the unfallen worlds. However, Ellen White in her commentary on [Revelation 4](#) and 5 in *The Desire of Ages* provides this missing detail. Thus beloved, from the points above, it cannot be inferred from the passage in the *Desire of Ages*, pages 833-835; that the 24 elders are the



representatives of the unfallen worlds.

### 3) SOMETHING FOR FURTHER STUDY

From the book Great Controversy, page 518, we read the following:

*"The Scriptures declare that upon one occasion, when the ANGELS OF GOD came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them (Job 1:6), not to bow before the Eternal King, but to further his own malicious designs against the righteous" (Great Controversy, page 518; Capital Emphasis Added).*

From the quote above, Ellen White identifies the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds as angels. Now, some issues that I want us to be reflecting on as part of our further study on this topic are as follows:

A) We have considered earlier from Scripture that if Adam had not sinned, he will have been the representative of our planet at those heavenly council meetings we read about in the book of Job.

In fact, Ellen White records the following about Adam:

*"In Eden, God set up the memorial of His work of creation, in placing His blessing upon the seventh day. The Sabbath was committed to Adam, THE FATHER AND REPRESENTATIVE of the whole human family" (Patriarchs and Prophets, page 48; Capital Emphasis Added).*

Now, supposing Adam had been obedient and represented planet Earth, will he have been referred to as an angel too?

B) Let us consider another quote from Ellen White:

*"The Lord has given me a view of other worlds. Wings were given me, and an angel attended me from the city to a place that was bright and glorious. The grass of the place was living green, and the birds there warbled a sweet song. The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus, and their countenances beamed with holy joy, expressive of the freedom and happiness of the place. I asked one of them why they were so much more lovely than those on the earth. The reply was, "We have lived in strict obedience to the commandments of God, and have not fallen by disobedience, like those on the earth." Then I saw two trees, one looked much like the tree of life in the city. The fruit of both looked beautiful, but of one they could not eat. They had power to eat of both, but were forbidden to eat of one. Then my attending angel said to me, "None in this place have tasted of the forbidden tree; but if they should eat, they would fall." Then I was taken to a world which had seven moons. There I saw good old Enoch, who had been translated. On his right arm he bore a glorious palm, and on each leaf was written "Victory." Around his head was a dazzling white wreath, and leaves on the wreath, and in the middle of each leaf was written "Purity," and around the wreath were stones of various colors, that shone brighter than the stars, and cast a reflection upon the letters and magnified them. On the back part of his head was a bow that confined the wreath, and upon the bow was written "Holiness." Above the wreath was a lovely crown that shone brighter than the sun. I asked him if this was the place he was taken to from the earth. He said, "It is not; the city is my home, and I have come to visit this place." He moved about the place as if perfectly at home. I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, "You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God." -- EW 39, 40*

From this quote above, Ellen White clearly states that the inhabitants of the first place she was taken to "were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely. They bore the express image of Jesus". Here, Ellen White does not state that these

beings were angels. She rather said these beings bore the express image of Jesus. Like humans who have been created in the image of God (Jesus), these beings also bore the express image of Jesus (I believe E. G. White had in mind the image of Jesus in his glorified human nature in heaven).

Well the big question which is similar to the one above is this: Was the representative of these beings also there at those heavenly council meetings we read about in the book of Job? If yes, was this representative also described as an angel by E. G. White?

Well, I believe these and many other questions will continue to perplex our finite minds till we enter into the knowledge of heavenly intelligences in the soon coming future. But from what we have gone through so far, one thing is clear; Ellen G. White refers to the elders as strong angels in heaven who minister in a special way for the salvation of mankind. Thus, for anyone to use the two E. G. White quotes [that is, *The Great Controversy*, page 519 (GC 518.3) and *The Desire of Ages*, pages 833-835] to push the viewpoint that the 24 elders are unusual angelic beings who serve as representatives of the unfallen worlds is to amplify or stretch the quotes to speak out more than they really do.

**Exhortation:** Friends, in as much as I'm convinced about the thoughts I have expressed in this study, I'm also aware that on this side of the universe of God, we may not fully perceive and understand all the issues in relation to these heavenly intelligences. And so I humbly agree with the apostle Paul when he says: "9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 [Corinthians 13:9-12](#)). Even though these issues may perplex our minds, I believe they are interesting subjects that we should continue to study; for they draw our souls unto a higher ground.

## SELECTED REFERENCES / FURTHER STUDY

1. THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS by Pastor Stephen Bohr.
2. Who Are the 24 Elders in Revelation by Dr. Thomas Ice.
3. Seventh-day Adventist Commentary on Revelation 4:4 as utilized in a response to a question by William Fagal, Director Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office, Andrews University Berrien Springs, MI 49104-1400 USA.

In our next study, we will consider the topic: **Who are the 4 living creatures before the throne of God?** The Bible study references for this study are [Ezekiel 1:3-14](#), [Ezekiel 10:1-22](#), [Isaiah 6:1-3](#), [Revelation 4:6-8](#) and [Revelation 5:6-10](#). Please do well to go through these passages before the next study is released.

NOTE: Unless otherwise specified, all Scriptural References are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Stay blessed and keep shining for King Jesus.

Maranatha!

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