

# Revelation

Notes #4B

4 Living Creatures & 24 Elders

Chapter 4

**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. (Revelation 4:4 NASB)**

**(6) And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. (7) The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. (Revelation 4:6-7 NASB)**

**(8) And the four living creatures each one had six wings around, and within being full of eyes. And they had no rest day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," the One who was, and is, and is coming! [Isa. 6:3] (9) And whenever the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to the One sitting on the throne, to the One living to the ages of the ages, (10) the twenty four elders fall down before Him sitting on the throne; and they will worship the One living to the ages of the ages, and will throw their crowns before the throne, saying, (11) Lord, You are worthy to receive the glory and the honor and the power, because You created all things, and through Your will they exist and were created. (Revelation 4:8-11 LITV)**

As with most symbols in the Bible, there is disagreement over their meaning or, in the case of the above verses, their identity. Some say that the 24 elders symbolize the Church through the 12 patriarchs or the elders of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ. As for the living creatures, they are often seen as the animated creation.

The question is whether there is a better way to interpret these symbols, allowing that scripture might reveal the answer elsewhere. The fact of the matter is that two other prophets saw the same living creatures that John saw, and they called them cherubim and seraphim. This is where we need to start in order to identify the 24 elders.

## **The Living Creatures: Cherubim & Seraphim**

While exiled in Babylon, Ezekiel was caught up in spirit, as John was caught up in spirit, by the river Chebar where he saw the same living creatures that John saw with a few minor differences.

**(5) Also from its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was how they looked: they had the likeness of a man, (6) and four faces were to each, and four wings to each of them, (7) and their feet were straight feet, and the sole of their feet like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. (8) And the hands of a man extended from under their wings on their four sides. And their faces and their wings were to the four of them, (9) joining each one to the other by their wings. They did not turn in their going, each one went toward the front of their face. (10) And the likeness of their faces: the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side to the four of them; and the face of an ox on the left to the four of them, and the face of an eagle to the four of them. (11) So their faces were. And their wings were spread upward, to each, the two wings were joined, and two wings of each covering their bodies. (Ezekiel 1:5-11 LITV)**

Comparing the visions given to Ezekiel and John, it is obvious the two prophets saw the same four living creatures with faces like those of a man, a lion, an ox or calf, and a flying eagle, full of eyes and winged.

To add to the proof, the Greek word used for *living creatures* in Ezekiel is the same word used in John (some translations use the word *beast*).

The question is: Did Ezekiel identify these creatures? Yes!

In the tenth chapter, Ezekiel described the same beings a second time. He called them *cherubim*.

**Then the cherubim rose up. They are the living beings that I saw by the river Chebar.** (Ezekiel 10:15 NASB)

**These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they were cherubim.** (Ezekiel 10:20 NASB)

**As for the likeness of their faces, they were the same faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar. Each one went straight ahead.** (Ezekiel 10:22 NASB)

To add more proof; Isaiah saw the same living beings and called them *seraphim*.

Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. (Isaiah 6:2-6 NASB)

**Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs.** (Isaiah 6:2-6 NASB)

Thus, scripture does not leave us in doubt about the identity of the beings. They are cherubim or seraphim described in such a way as to symbolically indicate their nature and work.

The cherubim were stationed in the Garden of Eden to guard the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24). They covered the mercy seat in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:20). The Lord dwelled between them (Exodus 25:22). They were associated with the brightness of the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 1). They were in the midst and around the throne (Revelation 4:6).

Scripture tells us that they represent the courage of a lion, the patient strength of an ox, the intellect of a man, and the swiftness of an eagle. They are full of eyes, meaning they see all things. Their wings are in perpetual motion, meaning tireless activity; and they continually cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," meaning they continually minister to the glory of God.

All of this imagery proves that the cherubim and seraphim are intelligent living creatures in the heavenly realm, and that they are intimately associated with the throne and glory of God. To make them into something else goes against God's word.

With an understanding of the living creatures, we can consider the meaning of the 24 elders.

### **The 24 Elders**

It is usually believed that these elders are literally immortal men that represent all the redeemed of both the old and new covenant, meaning they represent the 12 patriarchs and the 12 apostles.

However, is another way to view this matter in light of all the passages of their appearance in conjunction with what has been shown about the living creatures? Perhaps they represent the second of two different types of intelligent heavenly creatures.

After all, there are many similarities in the Revelation.

1. They are seen together about the throne (4:4).
2. They worship and give glory to God together (4:10).
3. They sing the new song (5:9-10) together. Note that they sing a new song that praises the Lamb for redeeming men and making them a kingdom and priests; however, the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders never in any place in scripture offer praises for their own redemption. Thus, it appears that they do not belong to the redeemed.
4. When the angels honor the Lamb, they unite in saying, Amen (5:14).
5. When the great multitude praise God for salvation, the angels and elders, and the 4 living creatures are not with the multitude of Christians, but about the throne, and they join together in a separate praise from that offered by men (7:9-12).
6. One of the elders informed John of the identity of the robed saints. He does not indicate that he belonged to their number (7:13).
7. When the angel proclaimed that [the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ](#), the 24 elders got off their seats that were before the throne and fell upon their faces and gave thanks to God (11:15-17).
8. The Lamb has 144,000 saints about Him, who sing a new song **before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders** (14:3).

From all these passages, there are some obvious conclusions.

First, the elders are grouped, not with the martyrs, or the redeemed, or the 144,000, that is, not with the saved, but with the angels and the cherubim about the throne of God. This distinction marks their character.

Second, they belong to the heavenly host, that is, to the same class as the cherubim and angels. They are among the heavenly beings that surround the throne in the presence of God, constantly joining in with others in the adoration of God. One commentator has said that they are princes of heaven.

Third, they are 24 in number. This number is probably associated with the 24 courses of priests engaged in the service of the temple, all of which were "patterns of things in the heavens."

Fourth, they are continually engaged in carrying out God's plans for the salvation of the world and, ultimately, all mankind until **God is all in all new**.