

Who Are the Twenty-Four Elders?

An Open Discussion, Not a Closed Conclusion

A Discussion Document — Offered for Study and Conversation

“The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne” — Revelation 4:10

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A Discussion, Offered and Not Demanded

This document did not begin as another chapter in this collection's verse-by-verse studies. It began as a conversation — the kind this whole project has always sought to make room for, testing a thought against Scripture together rather than asserting it from a distance. In my own words, offered at the start of this discussion: “Building a thought or position without demanding a hard conclusion is appropriate. We want to offer an idea that others can consider and discuss... never a hard doctrine, but an opportunity for anyone, including myself, to continue learning.” Everything that follows should be read in that spirit. Where Scripture speaks plainly, this document says so. Where it does not, this document says that as well and offers a reading — one among more than one possible reading — for the reader's own testing against the Comforter, not as a substitute for it (John 14:26; John 16:13).

Where This Started

The starting point is Revelation 4:4 and 4:10 — twenty-four elders seated around Elohim's throne, who fall down and cast their crowns before Him. Scripture names them, describes their posture and their worship in real detail, and never once states outright who they are. That silence is where this discussion lives, and it is worth sitting in honestly rather than rushing past.

Quick Reference

Element	This Discussion's Reading
The Twenty-Four Elders (Revelation 4:4, 10)	Twelve Old Covenant prophet-figures and the twelve apostles, together — one reading among several this document will name
Twelve Stars (Revelation 12:1; Genesis 37:9)	Israel's twelve tribes — an image already used in this collection's Daniel 8 study, extended here toward Revelation 4
The Twelfth Apostle	Weighed here as a genuinely open question — Matthias (Acts 1:26) or Paul — not resolved
What Ties the Two Twelves Together	The New Jerusalem's own architecture — twelve gates named for the tribes, twelve foundations named for the apostles (Revelation 21:12–14)

The Text Itself: What Revelation Gives, and What It Withholds

Key Verses

“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold” — Revelation 4:4

A Deliberately Unnamed Number

Revelation is not shy about naming things elsewhere — the seven churches are named outright (1:11), the twelve tribes are listed by name at the sealing (7:5–8), and the twelve apostles' names are said to sit on the New Jerusalem's twelve foundations (21:14). Twenty-four elders, by contrast, are described only by number, posture, and clothing. That silence is worth taking seriously rather than filling in too quickly with confidence Scripture itself does not offer.

Twelve Stars, Once and Still

Key Verse

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” — Revelation 12:1

Israel's Own Crown

This collection's study of Daniel 8 already laid this groundwork: Revelation 12:1's woman, clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars, pictures Israel herself, crowned with her twelve tribes — an image that reaches back to Joseph's dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing before him (Genesis 37:9), with Joseph himself completing the number as the twelfth. This document picks up that same thread and carries it to a different question: if twelve stars can crown Israel as a whole, could a smaller set of twelve—specific prophetic figures, rather than the tribes generally—be part of what the twenty-four elders represent?

A Reading Already in Circulation: Twelve and Twelve Together

Key Verses

“And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel... And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” — Revelation 21:12, 14

Not a New Idea

The reading that the twenty-four elders represent twelve Old Covenant figures and the twelve apostles together — the redeemed of both covenants, seated as one body around the throne — is not a fringe position invented for this discussion. It is one of the more commonly offered readings among commentators who address the question directly, and it draws real support from Revelation's own architecture: the New Jerusalem itself is built exactly this way, twelve gates carrying the tribes' names and twelve foundations carrying the apostles' names, side by side in the same city (21:12–14). If Revelation is willing to pair twelve and twelve as the city's own structure, pairing twelve and twelve as the throne room's own council is, at minimum, a consistent reading rather than an invented one.

What Remains Open

Two real questions remain even if we accept this pairing. First, which twelve Old Covenant figures — specifically patriarchs, tribal names, or prophets, since Scripture itself does not say. Second, which twelve New Covenant figures — the original Eleven plus Matthias, or the Eleven plus Paul. This document addresses both questions in turn, offering them as reasoned possibilities rather than settled answers.

What Complicates the Twelve-and-Twelve Reading

I have raised a fair complication about this pairing, worth stating plainly rather than smoothing over: Revelation 4:4 describes the elders in language that reads as individual and personal rather than symbolic — “upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.” Seats sat upon, robes worn, crowns placed on heads — this is the vocabulary of twenty-four actual persons, not a poetic stand-in for two categories. If the twelve-and-twelve reading holds, in my view it has to mean twenty-four real individuals who together represent both covenants, not tribal names or apostolic titles pictured abstractly as elders. That is a real distinction, and it shifts the weight of the rest of this document: not which two categories

the number twenty-four divides into, but which twenty-four specific figures actually occupy those seats.

Which Twelve? A Few Candidates, Offered Loosely

Summary

My instinct here is to match by calling and function rather than simply filling a headcount — asking which figures' own commissions most resemble an “elder” witnessing before the throne. That approach cannot be proven from the text; it can only be illustrated and offered, exactly as I have said: “I can't prove it intellectually... each person must take everything I teach to the Comforter and learn it themselves.”

Abraham, Named a Prophet Outright

“For he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live” — Genesis 20:7

This is Scripture's first use of the word “prophet” anywhere in the Old Testament, and it is applied to Abraham by name, at Elohim's own instruction to Abimelech. Whatever else may be uncertain in this discussion, Abraham's inclusion among a company of prophet-figures is not a stretch — it is the very first instance of the title in the whole Bible, attached to him directly. Also, the covenant of faith was established through Abraham and pointed to the crucifixion.

Ezekiel and Daniel, Both Called “Son of Man”

This collection's own Ezekiel and Daniel studies have already traced how both men are addressed by this shared title across their books, and both are given visions that lay out, in my own words, “the plan of salvation” and testify before the nation each lived under. A shared title given to only these two prophets in the Old Testament is, at minimum, a pattern worth noticing when looking for candidates.

An Alternative Candidate Pool: The Book of the Twelve

Worth naming alongside my own call-and-function approach is a different kind of answer: Scripture already contains a fixed, pre-existing group of exactly twelve named prophetic voices — Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, together called “the Book of the Twelve” in the Hebrew canon. This is a different method than matching by individual calling, but it is worth holding alongside my own list as a genuine alternative, not a rival conclusion.

Comparison Table: Two Different Methods, Both Offered Loosely

Matching by Calling and Function	Matching by a Fixed Canonical Group
Abraham — first named “prophet” (Genesis 20:7), covenant received	Hosea through Malachi — the Book of the Twelve, already exactly twelve by name
Ezekiel and Daniel — shared “Son of Man” title, each laying out salvation's plan to a watching nation	A pre-existing, uncontested grouping, requiring no additional selection
Isaiah, and others still to be considered — this document does not claim a finished list	A cleaner fit for a fixed count, at the cost of not matching by individual calling

Is Paul the Twelfth Apostle? Weighing the Case

Summary

This is the heart of the discussion, and I hold it as my own reading — shared previously in the “Daniel Chapter 9 Bible study” notes and in “This Generation and the 70th Week of Daniel,” both documents of which already called Paul “the twelfth apostle” before this conversation began. What follows lays out the case as fairly as possible, including the parts of the text that complicate it, so the reading can be tested rather than simply asserted. I will add this thought: If Paul is the twelfth, in what way? Does he sit on a seat or only on one of the twelve foundations?

What Acts 1 Actually Required

“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection” — Acts 1:21–22

Peter's stated qualification for filling Judas's seat was narrow and specific: it had to be a man who had personally accompanied the apostles throughout Christ's earthly ministry, from John's baptism onward. By lot, that seat fell to Matthias, “and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26). Paul could not have met that qualification, even if he had

been present in the room — he was not yet a believer and had no history of walking with Yahshua during his earthly ministry. This is the strongest point in Matthias's favor, and it deserves to be stated plainly rather than argued around.

The Case for Paul

Set against that, Paul's own commissioning is described in Scripture as direct, personal, and entirely apart from any human process: “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)” (Galatians 1:1).

Yahshua's own words to Ananias describe Paul's assignment specifically — “he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), Gentiles named first. In my own reading, Paul did not immediately follow that order — going first to Israel, and, in this reading, insisting on going up to Jerusalem even after being warned through the Spirit not to (Acts 21:4; compare Agabus's own warning, Acts 21:10–11), a choice that led directly to his arrest and eventual journey to Rome in chains. Only afterward, at Antioch in Pisidia, does Paul's commission become fully effectual in the order first given: “Lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us” (Acts 13:46–47).

Paul's own preparation is described as unusually direct as well — three years in Arabia before he ever met the other apostles (Galatians 1:17–18), and, in this reading, Paul's account of a man “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2) is taken as his own experience. He calls himself “one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8) — a phrase that, in this reading, marks him as outside the normal sequence rather than simply late to it. And he describes his own ministry in exactly the language this discussion has already tied to the New Jerusalem's foundations: “as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation” (1 Corinthians 3:10) — read alongside Revelation 21:14's twelve foundations bearing “the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb,” a verse that, worth repeating, never actually lists which twelve names those are.

A Different Door: What Paul Was Given to Teach

My own reading does not claim Paul retroactively satisfied Peter's stated qualification as Acts 1:21–22 states it — that bar was specific to physical companionship during Yahshua's earthly ministry, and Paul plainly did not meet it. What I argue instead is that Paul was given a different door to the same room: a direct commissioning “not of men, neither by man” (Galatians 1:1), taught the gospel's own mystery “by the revelation of Jesus Christ” rather than by human instruction (Galatians 1:11–12). In my own words, this is the same kind of direct encounter with the Messiah that qualified the original Eleven, arriving by a different road rather than failing to qualify at all.

There is a real textual pattern worth noting alongside this. Yahshua told the Eleven directly, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7). Decades later, Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you” (1 Thessalonians 5:1) — the same paired words and phrasing that imply Paul had already taught them this directly. In my own reading, Paul's vision of the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), deliberately left undescribed in the text itself, is what pressed him toward that teaching — not a shared vision with John, received decades later, but Paul's own vision looking forward toward the fuller unveiling John would eventually receive and write down. This is offered here exactly as I have offered it: a reading of what Scripture leaves unstated, not a claim Scripture makes outright.

What the Wider Tradition Actually Says

It is worth being honest here: a real, documented theological tradition treats Paul as a distinct, specially commissioned apostle apart from the Twelve—Mid-Acts, or Pauline, Dispensationalism, associated with teachers like Cornelius Stam and the Berean Bible Society. But that tradition's clearest voice does not argue that Matthias was a mistake or that Paul fills his seat. Stam himself wrote directly against that specific claim, arguing instead that Paul stands entirely outside the count of Twelve, as the apostle of a separate and later dispensation (Ephesians 3:1–3) — not a corrected twelfth man. This does not settle the question either way, but it means my own reading is not simply borrowed wholesale from that tradition; it is its own position, sitting closer to Matthias's seat being reassigned, so to speak, than that tradition's own founders were willing to go.

Where This Leaves the Question

Revelation 21:14 names no names. Acts 1:21–22 sets a real qualification Paul could not have met at the time it was written. Paul's own commissioning, preparation, and self-description all mark him as extraordinary in a way none of the original Eleven claim for themselves. This document does not resolve which of these facts should carry more weight — it lays them beside each other, as I have asked, for the reader to weigh personally.

Where I Personally Land

This document leaves the question open for the reader, as I think it should. But my own settled view, for what it is worth, has developed further since I first wrote this section: I now hold that Matthias genuinely was the twelfth apostle in the historical, earthly sense — the man who carried the fullness of the gospel to Israel and beyond through the first century, whatever I still think of the method that seated him there. Peter's decision to fill the seat by casting lots came before Pentecost, before the Spirit had been poured out to

guide the church's decisions the way it would from Acts 2 onward, and I still read that timing as a mistake — a human decision made ahead of the Spirit's own leading rather than a directly commanded one. But the outcome stood, and I don't believe a flawed method erased a real calling. What I now hold is that Paul fills a different twelfth seat: not Matthias's own earthly office, but the twelfth seat among the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:4, and the twelfth foundation of the New Jerusalem in 21:14 — an eschatological seat standing alongside Matthias's historical one, not a replacement of it. I am careful to add that this does not make either man's record spotless—Paul himself publicly rebuked Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14), and I read Paul's insistence on going to Jerusalem against the Spirit's warning (Acts 21:4) as Paul's matching mistake. Scripture records real failure in both men without either forfeiting his calling, which I take as its own kind of instruction: a mistake, even a real one, does not by itself disqualify someone Elohim has genuinely called. Only one is Perfect, and you know His name.

It also ties Paul's twelfth-foundation seat to a larger picture as well. If Paul's voice is meant to reach Israel — a reading this collection has already drawn from Acts 9:15 and Romans 11:25–27 — I hold that this happens through the two witnesses of Revelation 11, ministering during the final week Daniel describes. In this reading, the New Jerusalem's own walls, built of the many-colored stones John describes, picture the whole company of Gentile-Church ministries resting on the same twelve foundations that carry the twelve gates of pearl — one structure, one chief cornerstone, “being singular and one” in the Messiah (Ephesians 2:20). Revelation 21:14 does not name Paul, and this document has said so already; this is my own way of filling that silence, offered with the same openness as everything else here.

What Is Actually Received: The Word, Not the Essence

Key Verse

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Elohim, and the Word was Elohim” — John 1:1

A Gift, Not a Merger

Acts 2:38 promises “the gift of the Holy Ghost” to every born-again soul — but in my own reading, this is not the literal reception of Elohim's own essence, which by definition would make every believer Emmanuel outright. What is received instead is the Word itself — the same “free agent Word” John 1:1 describes as with Elohim and as Elohim — planted as

what Yahshua elsewhere calls a mustard seed, making believers “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17) rather than Emmanuel-as-Messiah themselves.

Word, Spirit, and What Grows in Us

I will expand on this thought a step further: if the Word received at new birth is genuinely Elohim's own Word, then it is also genuinely spirit, since Yahshua Himself said of His own words, “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). On this reading, the token planted at new birth is not inert — it begins to form the believer's own spirit toward the same Word that planted it, without ever collapsing the believer's identity into Elohim's own. Believers remain joint-heirs in, and with Yahshua (Romans 8:17), not Yahshua Himself multiplied — sharing in what He is by gift and growth, not by identity.

My root in this is found in Genesis 2:7, which describes man's formation from the dust as a description of spirit rather than of a body of flesh. Here, this document has to be honest about a real complication: “dust” (aphar) is used consistently elsewhere in the Torah for physical substance, most pointedly three verses later, when the same word describes the body returning to the ground in death — “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). And the phrase translated “living soul” in 2:7, *nephesh chayyah*, is the identical Hebrew phrase used for animals earlier in the same chapter (Genesis 1:20, 24) — the text does not shift its vocabulary when it reaches man. Neither detail supports reading 2:7 itself as a statement about spirit formed from dust. What carries my larger point far more securely is the “image” and “likeness” language of Genesis 1:26 together with the New Covenant's own witness — “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of Elohim... born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of Elohim” (John 1:12–13) and “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Man's deepest identity, being spiritual sonship, in this document's reading, rests securely on those texts rather than on Genesis 2:7's wording alone.

Why This Matters for the Question Above

If this is right, then whatever set Paul apart from the other apostles, it was not a different kind of gift. Matthias and Paul, on this reading, received the same Word, the same token, the same new-creature standing described in 2 Corinthians 5:17 — the same “follow me” Yahshua extends to every disciple. The question this document has been weighing is not whether Paul was given more of Elohim than the others; it is which seat, if any, his own distinct calling and commissioning were meant to fill.

An Invitation, Not a Conclusion

This document set out to do exactly what I asked of it — lay a thought beside Scripture honestly, name what supports it, name what complicates it, and stop short of declaring it settled. The twenty-four elders may be twelve prophets and twelve apostles together, or they may not. The twelfth seat may belong to Matthias, chosen by a method already fading under the New Covenant, or to Paul, chosen directly and apart from any human process. Scripture itself leaves both questions genuinely open, and this document has tried to leave them exactly where Scripture does — open, but not empty, with real reasons on every side worth weighing carefully.

As Yahshua Himself said, the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24) — and, as Paul himself asked, how shall they hear without a teacher (Romans 10:14)? This document is offered as that kind of teaching: not the final word, but a voice inviting the reader's own conversation with the Comforter, who alone reveals truth fully (John 16:13).

For myself, I think that Paul holds the twelfth seat in Revelation 4:4 and is the twelfth foundation. I also think Matthias held the twelfth position for the gospel message to Israel during that first-century period.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Acts 1:21–22 sets a real, specific qualification that Paul could not have met, while Paul's own commissioning is described as direct and apart from any human process. Which of these two facts feels weightier to you, and why?
- 2. This document presents two methods for identifying twelve Old Covenant elder-figures — matching by calling and function, or using the pre-existing Book of the Twelve. Which method do you find more persuasive, and does Scripture offer any hint about which method it prefers?
- 3. If the gift received at new birth is the Word itself rather than Elohim's own essence, as this document suggests, how does that change how you think about what made Paul's apostleship different from that of the original Eleven?
- 4. I frame this entire discussion as an invitation rather than a doctrine. Where else in your study of Scripture have you found it valuable to keep a real question open rather than forcing a conclusion?
- 5. Acts 1:7 tells the original Eleven that the times and seasons are not theirs to know, while Paul later tells the Thessalonians that he has already taught them exactly that. What do you make of that contrast?

- 6. This document corrects one of its own supporting arguments in the section on Genesis 2:7, keeping the larger point but grounding it in stronger texts instead. Has a conviction you hold ever grown stronger, not weaker, after you set aside a weak argument for it?

Appendix: Key Scripture Cross-References

Theme	Cross-References
The Twenty-Four Elders	Revelation 4:4, 10 — the elders themselves, undescribed by identity Revelation 21:12-14 — the New Jerusalem's own twelve-and-twelve architecture
Twelve Stars, Twelve Tribes	Genesis 37:9 — Joseph's dream, sun, moon, and eleven stars Revelation 12:1 — Israel crowned with twelve stars
Matthias's Qualification	Acts 1:21-22 — the stated requirement Acts 1:26 — Matthias chosen by lot
Paul's Distinct Commissioning	Galatians 1:1 — “not of men, neither by man” Acts 9:15 — Gentiles, kings, and Israel, in that order Acts 21:4, 10-11 — warned through the Spirit, and by Agabus, not to go to Jerusalem Acts 13:46-47 — the commission becomes effectual Galatians 1:17-18 — three years in Arabia 2 Corinthians 12:2 — caught up to the third heaven 1 Corinthians 15:8 — “born out of due time” 1 Corinthians 3:10 — “I have laid the foundation”
The Gift Received	Acts 2:38 — the gift of the Holy Ghost John 1:1 — the Word, with Elohim and as Elohim John 6:63 — “they are spirit, and they are life” Romans 8:17 — joint-heirs with Christ 2 Corinthians 5:17 — a new creature
Times and Seasons	Acts 1:7 — “it is not for you to know” 1 Thessalonians 5:1 — “ye have no need that I write unto you”
Two Men, Two Real Mistakes	Galatians 2:11-14 — Paul rebukes Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch Acts 21:4 — Paul warned through the Spirit, and goes to Jerusalem anyway
Man's Nature and New Birth	Genesis 1:26 — image and likeness Genesis 2:7; 1:20, 24 — “living soul,” the same phrase used of animals

	Genesis 3:19 — dust as the body's own mortality John 1:12-13 — born of Elohim, not of flesh John 3:6 — “born of the Spirit is spirit”
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