Who Are They?

The Messengers, the Ages, and the Elders in the Revelation Given to John

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (public domain), with the names YAHWEH, Elohim, and Yahshua restored in place of the titles LORD, God, and Jesus, and its archaic wording modernized into contemporary English.

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Contents

Foreword 1

Section I — Who Are the Angels of Matthew 24:31? 3

Section II — How Truth Moved Through the Seven Church Ages 13

Part I. The Four Living Creatures 16

Part II. The Seal, the Beast, and the Age 17

Part III. The Seven Stars, and What They Carried 22

Part IV. Thomas Brightman, with the Man-Faced Cherub 27

Part V. The Black Horse Rider 28

Part VI. What Comes After Laodicea 29

Part VII. True and Yet Transitional 29

Section III — Who Are the Twenty-Four Elders? 33

Foreword

This book began as three separate studies, written at different times, about three different pictures in Scripture. But put side by side, I noticed they were really asking the same kind of question in three different rooms.

Who Are the Angels of Matthew 24:31? asks who the messengers are that Yahshua sends with the sound of a trumpet to gather His elect. How Truth Moves Through the Seven Church Ages asks who carried the light of truth forward — and who let it dim — across seven periods that Revelation names but history has spent two thousand years living out. Who Are the Twenty-Four Elders? asks who sits in the twenty-four seats around the throne in Revelation 4, a question Scripture raises and then, deliberately or not, leaves open enough to study.

Three studies, three sets of "who" — messengers, ages, elders. None of these questions has a chapter-and-verse answer waiting to be looked up. Each one asks you to hold several passages together at once and see what shape they make, the same way you'd piece together a face from a few photographs taken years apart. I don't offer any of this as settled doctrine. I'm not an orthodox teacher, and I didn't set out to write one more. What follows is one man's best attempt to take Scripture seriously on its own terms, state plainly where the evidence is strong and where it's only suggestive, and invite you to search it out for yourself rather than take my word for it.

If you read something here that convinces you, test it against the whole of Scripture before you believe it. If you read something that doesn't sit right, say so — iron sharpens iron, and I'd rather be challenged than comfortable.

Brother Brian Neill

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Section I
Who Are the Angels of Matthew 24:31?

An Investigation into the Mystery Messengers

As Proverbs wisely counsels, *"in the multitude of counselors they are established"* (Proverbs 15:22). What I'm offering here is one perspective—an invitation to search the Scriptures together to see whether these connections hold up under scrutiny.

Setting the Stage: Understanding the Timeline

Before we can identify who these "angels" are in Matthew 24:31, we need to establish the timeframe Yahshua is addressing. Let me walk you through the context carefully, because understanding when this occurs is crucial to identifying who is involved.

Matthew 24:27 — How, Not When

Mat 24:27 For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines even to the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:27 describes Yahshua's physical return to earth—like lightning flashing from east to west—yet He doesn't announce *when* it will occur. Instead, the verse establishes the visual nature of His return: sudden, unmistakable, and visible to all. This description sets the context for verses 28-31.

Matthew 24:28 — Fresh Manna for Israel

Mat 24:28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered.

Verse 28 speaks of the elect of Israel receiving fresh manna—the Word. We're now squarely in the first half of Daniel's 70th Week. The eagle gathering symbolizes Elohim's messengers bringing revelation to His chosen people during this prophetic period.

Matthew 24:29 — The Sixth Seal and Judgment

Mat 24:29 And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

Verse 29 brings us to the sixth seal and the seventh bowl angel—a time of judgment triggered by Yahshua's physical return to earth. He descends with His armies, fresh from the wedding feast. As they touch down, they will walk on the ashes of the wicked, as Malachi 4:3 prophesied. Revelation 19 details the sequence of these dramatic events.

Notice Yahshua's phrase: *"immediately after those days."* What days? If we trace back to Matthew 24:14, Yahshua is bringing the Gentile grace age to a close. Then verse 15 shifts the focus to Israel at the midpoint of the 70th Week. From verses 15 through 43, Yahshua delivers prophecies directed at Israel's elect at the end of the 70th Week. Although these verses target Israel specifically, that doesn't mean a few believers outside Israel can't gain understanding from them as well.

Let me emphasize the sequence again: Immediately after *this* tribulation—referring to the decimation of Jerusalem prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and recorded in Revelation 14:19-20—after this, the sixth seal is enacted as Yahshua and His armies descend to earth (Revelation 19). I want to point out that the word "immediately" is not intended to indicate 24 hours. It denotes a short period. We see this language in Ezekiel concerning Israel's judgment in 586 BC. The thought "time is at hand" turned out to be closer to 7 years. But here, the timeline of the 70th week indicates a short time in weeks, or possibly a month.

Matthew 24:30 — The Son of Man Appears

Mat 24:30 And then the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in the heavens. And then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the heaven with power and great glory.

Verse 30 describes the Son of Man's appearance, fulfilling the prediction in verse 27. As the earth rotates, Yahshua's glory will first appear like lightning across the sky—visible from every vantage point as the planet turns.

The Mystery Verse: Matthew 24:31

Mat 24:31 And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

We now arrive at our central question. Matthew 24:31 appears out of chronological order relative to verse 30. Why? Because Yahshua teaches in parables—layered truths that require spiritual discernment. Who will comprehend these mysteries? Daniel 12:10 tells us that the elect of Israel will.

Verse 31 closes Yahshua's prophetic teaching on the 70th Week within this larger parable. Then, in verse 32, He resumes with additional parables directed at Israel's elect—those who will witness Jerusalem's decimation and the abomination, and His triumphant return as King of Kings.

This brings us to the angels and the trumpet mentioned in Matthew 24:31. We know with certainty that this verse describes events in the 70th Week. Now let's read it carefully to catch the precise wording that unlocks our mystery:

Matthew 24:31 — "And He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Notice the key elements:

- Yahshua will send angels
- The sending occurs by way of a trumpet sound
- These angel-messengers will gather His elect
- The gathering spans the four winds (all directions across earth)

Understanding Biblical "Angels" as Messengers

Throughout Scripture, we often see trumpets associated with angels who carry the Word to a ministry or a minister. Consider Revelation 8, where trumpets sound as the two prophets bear witness to Israel and the world. I realize I'm mentioning the two prophets before we've established their existence in Scripture—don't worry, we'll validate that shortly by showing that Israel will indeed have two prophets during the 70th Week.

The Process of Elimination: Which Angels Aren't These?

Let's start by ruling out which angels aren't the trumpet and angel-messengers mentioned in Matthew 24:31.

Not the Seven Trumpet Angels of Revelation 8

These angels appear at the start of the 70th Week to warn of upcoming prophetic judgments. Their trumpets signal impending wrath, not Israel's gospel of salvation. Therefore, we can confidently dismiss them.

Not the Seven Bowl Angels of Revelation 16

These seven angels hold bowls that execute judgment on unrepentant mankind, as detailed in Revelation 16:2 and 16:8. They pour out divine wrath rather than gather the elect. These are not the figures we're seeking.

Not the Judgment Angels of Revelation 9

Chapter 9 depicts judgment angels from chapter 8, charged with leading Israel to repentance via plagues and eventual destruction for the unrepentant. Their role focuses on calling Israel to repent through suffering because of a hard heart, not gathering, so we can dismiss them as well.

The Promising Candidates: Revelation 7 and 14

This brings us to Revelation chapters 7 and 14, which may contain both the angels we're seeking and the trumpet angel who sends them. Let's examine these passages carefully. I'll share the Scriptures first, then see whether they fit with Matthew 24:31.

Revelation 7:2-4 — "And I saw another angel ascending from the East, having the seal of the living Elohim: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our Elohim in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel."

Revelation 14:1, 3-6 — "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads... And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth... These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto Elohim and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of Elohim... And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

Connecting the Pieces

In Revelation 7:1-8, we encounter 144,000 servants from the twelve tribes of Israel being sealed. Let me pose the critical question: It seems to me that the seal would be the seventh seal opened in Revelation chapter 8—the seal containing the gospel of salvation for Israel's elect (2 Corinthians 1:22).

2Co 1:22 And He has sealed us and having given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Are these 144,000 servants a called ministry commissioned to preach the gospel to Jews scattered around the world?

Notice the specific language in Matthew 24:31: Yahshua will send "His angels"— sent with the sound of a single trumpet (not multiple trumpets). These angel-messengers shall gather His elect. From where? From the four corners of the earth.

The Timeline Clue

Revelation 7:3 provides a crucial timing indicator. Notice it says, "Till we have sealed the servants"—in the future tense. This means verse 7:2 describes something that hasn't happened yet when John sees it. The angel's trumpet remains in the future at this point in the vision.

Then in Revelation 14:3, we see the fulfillment: "which were redeemed from the earth." The 144,000 are *now* redeemed—past tense. The sealing has been completed. The trumpet has sounded. The mission has begun.

Does Revelation 7 Fit with Matthew 24:31?

Let's read these key verses together and see if the connection becomes clear:

Revelation 7:2 — "And I saw another angel ascending from the East, having the seal of the living Elohim: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea."

Revelation 7:4 — "And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel."

It seems increasingly likely that the seal in 7:2 represents the seventh seal opened in Revelation 8:1—the gospel seal delivered to Israel's elect.

The Trumpet Angel Identified

For me, an angel sounds the trumpet in Matthew 24:31 and proclaims the message of salvation. I believe this angel appears in Revelation 7:2. John describes him as "ascending from the East," soaring westward across the sky. But Matthew 24:31 says this angelic flight must include north-south as well as east-west movements—crossing back and forth around the entire earth.

Why must the trumpet-angel traverse the globe in all directions? Revelation 12:13-17 answers: these verses illustrate the elect of Israel fleeing and scattering across the world during the tribulation. Another witness confirming this worldwide scattering appears in Revelation 12:6 and 14, where the woman (representing Israel) flees into the wilderness for 1,260 days.

The 144,000 messengers must go wherever the scattered elect have fled. I will add: the scattered include those escaping the nations that make up the beast's flood. They must escape that specific government that has entered into the False League of Nations peace agreement.

First Fruits and Second Fruits

We find these 144,000 messengers fully redeemed and prepared in Revelation 14:1-5. Whereas in Revelation 7:4 their sealing was still future ("Till we have sealed the servants"), by chapter 14 they stand complete:

Revelation 14:1 — "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads."

Revelation 7:4 — "And I heard the number of them which were sealed."

Now watch what happens next. These 144,000 servants—angels—messengers receive their commission in verse 14:6 to go across the earth.

But first, notice something critical in verse 14:4, which confirms that these 144,000 servants constitute Elohim's ministry: "These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto Elohim and to the Lamb." We see the same in Romans 16:5.

Do you see it? These 144,000 receive the gospel first—they are the firstfruits. Then, in verse 14:6, we see who receives the gospel second—the second fruits:

Revelation 14:6 — "And I (John) saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

The 144,000 are sealed first, then they carry the everlasting gospel to the scattered elect worldwide.

A Linguistic Clue: "Another Angel"

Did you notice anything intriguing about the language in Revelation 7:2 and 14:6? Both verses begin with the same wording: "And I (John) saw another angel."

But here's where careful reading pays off. In Revelation 14:6, the phrase "another angel" refers to the first angel in a sequence of three (14:6, 14:8, 14:9). In Revelation 7:2, however, "another angel" is a *distinct* angel —separate from the four angels who hold the four winds.

To clarify this seeming riddle: In Revelation 7:2, John genuinely observes a different angel—one who speaks to the four angels holding back the winds. This angel will blow his trumpet later. That moment occurs in Revelation 14:6, where "I John saw another angel" shows John continuing the vision from 7:2—the same angel ultimately sounding his trumpet.

It appears to me that the "another angel" in Revelation 14:6 and the "another angel" in Revelation 7:2 are the same individual—the trumpet angel who sends the 144,000 on their mission.

Summary: The Angels Identified

To sum up our investigation:

- The trumpet of Matthew 24:31 is the angel-trumpet in Revelation 7:2 and 14:6
- The angels (plural) of Matthew 24:31 are indeed the 144,000 servants
- These servants are sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel

- They function as angel-messengers carrying the everlasting gospel
- They gather the elect from the four winds during the 70th Week

Who Teaches the 144,000?

This raises another crucial question: Who will teach the seventh seal—the gospel of salvation and prophetic understanding—to these 144,000 angel-messengers? Will it be the two olive tree prophets who stand before the whole world?

Let's look into the future by examining the past, specifically Zechariah chapter 4, with a focus on verse 14, which describes two olive tree prophets standing before the whole earth:

Zechariah 4:11-14 — "Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What are these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Do you not know what these are? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by YAHWEH of the whole earth."

Verification: The Two Prophets Stand Before the Whole Earth

Now let's verify that these olive trees indeed stood before the entire earth, witnessed by all nations.

Revelation 11:9-11 — "And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and a half the Spirit of life from Elohim entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them."

Notice that people from every kindred, tongue, and nation see their dead bodies—this worldwide witness confirms that these prophets ministered before the whole earth, just as Zechariah prophesied. Notice also that fear falls upon those who saw them resurrected from the dead. So this will be a worldwide fear, and so it should be, as judgment has its beginning.

The Golden Oil Flows to the 144,000

These two prophets pour out the golden oil from themselves, as Zechariah describes. This oil then flows to the 144,000, sealing them with the gospel of salvation and insight into prophecies, as mentioned in Revelation (Ephesians 1:13).

Notice how perfectly Zechariah 4:14 aligns with Revelation 11:4:

Revelation 11:4 — "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the Elohim of the earth."

Zechariah 4:14 — "Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by YAHWEH of the whole earth."

The alignment is precise. The two anointed ones—also called the two olive trees, candlesticks, and prophets—all represent the same ministry: instructing and sealing the 144,000 with divine revelation in the first half of the 70th Week.

Why the Gospel Must Travel Worldwide

As we've established through Scripture, the gospel will need to travel worldwide during the 70th Week. Consider the current demographics: about 46% of the Jewish population lives in Israel, and 38% lives in the United States. The remaining 16% live in other nations.

At the start of the 70th Week, the two prophets urgently instruct the elect to flee Israel to a place Elohim has prepared, where they will be protected for three and a half years (Revelation 12:6, 14). They are called to escape the dragon's wrath, as described in Revelation 12:17.

It appears probable that certain countries rejecting the false peace accord will turn into a "wilderness" refuge for Jewish believers. For these Jewish refugees, such a foreign land will resemble a wilderness—an unfamiliar place far from their homeland.

The 144,000 Follow the Flood

Revelation 12:15-16 depicts the dragon releasing a flood like a river to overpower the fleeing woman, representing Israel's elect. The 144,000 angels—the messengers mentioned in Matthew 24:31—will forage through this flood, carrying the gospel and reaching out to the scattered elect. They will deliver the message of salvation and, during earth's darkest moments, spiritually gather them into the body of Messiah.

Final Thoughts

This investigation has led us from Matthew 24:31 through multiple passages in Revelation, connecting the dots among:

- The trumpet angel of Revelation 7:2
- The 144,000 sealed servants of Revelation 7:4

[C]The redeemed first fruits of Revelation 14:1-5

[C]The everlasting gospel carriers of Revelation 14:6

[C]The two prophets who teach them in Revelation 11

[C]The scattered elect they gather from the four winds

The angels mentioned in Matthew 24:31 are not celestial beings coming down from heaven. Instead, they are redeemed Jewish believers—144,000 in number—sealed through revelation, instructed by the two witnesses, and tasked with spreading the everlasting gospel to their scattered fellow Jews around the world during the tribulation. However, they are aided by celestial angels, foremost the cherubim described in Ezekiel.

This is one man's understanding, offered for your consideration. Search the Scriptures. Prove all things. May the Spirit of Truth guide you into all understanding.

Brother Brian Neill

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Section II
How Truth Moved Through the Seven Church Ages

True and Yet Transitional

A Working Discussion for Anyone Asking the Question

Introduction

This is not a doctrine handed down as settled fact. It is a working discussion — the kind of thing a small fellowship builds together, iron sharpening iron, not a pamphlet meant to end an argument. Some of what follows is well-anchored in the text. Some of it is the best available reading of thin evidence, offered honestly as that and nothing more. When a choice is tentative, it is stated plainly, because accuracy matters more than a tidy chart.

The question beneath it all is this: are the dispensations real, or are they merely a shape we impose on history after the fact? This study answers both. The seven church ages of Revelation 2-3 are real periods, each with a real start date, a real messenger, and real content that changes from one to the next. Yet none of them starts or ends cleanly. Every age is still finishing the work of the one before it and already planting the seed of the one after. Dispensations are true and transitional — not a contradiction, but the actual shape of how Elohim has always worked in time.

Revelation 2:11's plural address — "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" — helps explain why this holds together: every age's dynamics are unfolding in every literal church at once, not sealed off in its own historical box. Genesis 1's six days, Matthew 24's "then" moments, and these seven ages all share the same structure — a real sequence with soft, overlapping edges rather than fixed lines.

A Word on the Six Days and the Six Thousand Years

Someone will eventually ask whether 2 Peter 3:8 really carries the weight this study puts on it — whether "one day is with the Sovereign as a thousand years" is a stated principle at all, or just a loose figure of speech, the same kind of rounded exaggeration that lets an ancient writer speak of a battle fought by "a million men" when it never held anywhere near that many. It is a fair question, and I would rather answer it plainly than assume the connection and move past it.

Peter is not estimating a crowd. He introduces the line with "be not ignorant of this one thing" and states it twice, in mirrored form — a day as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day — the language of a deliberate principle, not a rounded guess. He is quoting Psalm 90:4, and his immediate purpose is to answer scoffers questioning the delay of Yahshua's return, not to hand Moses a key for Genesis 1. That much is true, and it would be dishonest to claim Peter had the creation week specifically in view when he wrote it.

But reading the creation week's six days plus a Sabbath rest as a template for six thousand years of history plus a thousand-year reign doesn't make a modern chart work. It is one of the oldest readings in the church, predating even the final settling of the New Testament canon. The Epistle of Barnabas, written around 130 AD, states it almost word for word: "in six days, that is in six thousand years, everything shall come to an end… when His Son shall come… then shall he truly rest on the seventh day." Papias, Methodius, Lactantius, Theophilus of Antioch, Tertullian, Melito, Hippolytus, and Victorinus of Pettau all held some form of the same reading in the two centuries that followed — not because 2 Peter 3:8 forced it on them by itself, but because the shape of Genesis 1 (six days of labor, one day of rest) and the shape of the New Testament's own hope (labor now, rest at Messiah's coming) were too close to read as coincidence.

The same reading appears independently in Jewish tradition, resting on the same verse. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a, also Rosh Hashanah 31a) records Rav Kattina's teaching: "Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand], it shall be desolate" — drawn from Psalm 90:4, the same verse Peter himself draws on. Tanna devei Eliyahu divides those six thousand years further: two thousand years of desolation, two thousand of Torah, two thousand of the days of Messiah, with the seventh millennium standing as the world's own Sabbath rest. Two traditions, Christian and Jewish, arrived at the same reading of the same verse without either one depending on the other.

None of this claims the day or hour Yahshua Himself said no man knows (Matthew 24:36) — it claims the season, which is a different promise. The same discourse that withholds the hour gives the fig tree so the season could still be read (Matthew 24:32-34), and Paul tells the Thessalonians the day only overtakes as a thief those who are in darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:4). A framework carrying a lifetime's margin of uncertainty is not the same claim as naming the hour, and this study has never pretended otherwise.

This is also why Hosea 6:1-2's "after two days… in the third day" carries real weight rather than standing alone — the same day-for-a-thousand-years pattern applied to the time already spent since Yahshua's own crucifixion, two thousand years now behind us, with the third day, the Millennial rest, still ahead. Genesis 1's six days, Matthew 24's "then" moments, and these seven church ages share one shape, as this Introduction already said: the same pattern showing up a third time—not a single verse pressed into service alone, but one structure Scripture keeps returning to.

The fading is already underway before Ephesus's own light has fully passed. None of the earliest fathers — Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen — taught anything resembling the Trinity as it was later formalized; that doctrine reached its creedal form only at Nicaea in 325 AD, backed by a pagan Roman government rather than a settled apostolic consensus. The emperor who forced that settlement, Constantine, was not baptized himself until he lay dying in May 337 — twelve years after Nicaea — and the bishop who performed that one and only baptism, Eusebius of Nicomedia, was himself an Arian, trained under the same Lucian of Antioch whose teaching shaped Arius. The man who forced the Trinity's creedal victory left this world baptized by a bishop from the losing side of his own controversy.

A clarifying word belongs here before the rest of this study unfolds. Standing firmly against the Trinity, as I do, is not the same as claiming that a Trinitarian believer is thereby predetermined to hell—those are two very different statements, and I do not intend the first to imply the second. Luther and Wesley, two of this study's own seven stars, were both Trinitarian men, and nothing in what follows diminishes the real anointing and real fruit of either one. The doctrine, as I read it, is a stumbling block to the fullness of what a wise virgin carries in the end — not a wall between brothers in the meantime. We are all still in the learning transition this whole study keeps describing, and I count men who differ with me here among those still walking toward more light, the same as I am.

To avoid misreading, let me draw the lines more sharply. I am not a Trinitarian, for the reasons this study lays out. I am equally not a Oneness teacher in the mold of the 20th-century United Pentecostal doctrine — Elohim is not a single, undifferentiated identity wearing three names, any more than I am three men because I am a father, a son, and a brother at once. What I hold is closer to the older sense of the word binitarian: Father and Son as two genuinely distinguishable identities, with the Holy Spirit as their shared Spirit rather than a third identity of some sort. Scholars like Larry Hurtado have documented that the earliest Christians worshiped Elohim and Yahshua together in a way that resisted both a flat singularity and a fully separate third figure — I don't know that Hurtado held my own theology, and I'm not claiming he did, but the pattern he describes in the historical record is the same shape I find in the text.

The word "person" itself carries this same problem, and it is worth naming plainly. Latin persona originally meant a theatrical mask or a legal role — the part an actor played, or the capacity a man acted in before the law — not a distinct center of personality the way the word is heard today. Tertullian was the first to pin "one substance, three personae" together, around the turn of the third century, likely reaching for that older sense of role rather than anything resembling a separate self. The Greek-speaking East had its own version of the same problem: hypostasis originally meant almost the same thing as ousia, substance, so when Eastern bishops spoke of three hypostases, Western ears heard three substances — three gods; when Westerners spoke of one substance, Eastern ears heard Sabellius all over again. It took the Cappadocian fathers decades of careful redefinition through the 370s and 380s before hypostasis and ousia could be pried apart enough to function as two different words. The vocabulary was not ancient

wisdom that later got misread. It was a patched-together compromise that confused people from the decade it was coined, and it has drifted further from its own original sense ever since. That is reason enough to reach for a plainer word instead.

Part I. The Four Living Creatures

Revelation 4:7 describes four living creatures before the throne: "the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle." When read alongside Ezekiel 1:10, it becomes clear that Revelation's own wording, spread across four separate verses, tends to obscure: in Ezekiel, all four creatures carry all four faces at once — "they four had the face of a man... the face of a lion... the face of an ox... the face of an eagle." The four faces are not four competing categories. They are four ways one and the same anointing shows up, present together in some measure in everyone, with one dominant and the others minor at any given time.

The eagle is not merely a fourth peer alongside the other three. It is the wings — the covering, carrying function on which the other three ride. "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4). The cherubim over the mercy seat "stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another" (Exodus 25:20; repeated almost word for word in Exodus 37:9). Wings cover; faces look toward each other and toward the seat of mercy. And when the woman flees the serpent in Revelation 12:14, she is given "two wings of a great eagle" to escape into the wilderness — the eagle as the office of deliverance itself, not one contender among four.

So three working modes, one covering office:

The lion is the most powerful of the four because Messiah Himself is "the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David" (Revelation 5:5). This is the anointing of confrontation — strength and fidelity that will not bow, even to martyrdom.

The calf, or ox, is the anointed sacrifice — the beast of burden, the one who carries the load and is finally laid on the altar.

The man's face is the anointing of the intellect — reasoned argument, the written word wielded as a weapon, and true books standing against false ones.

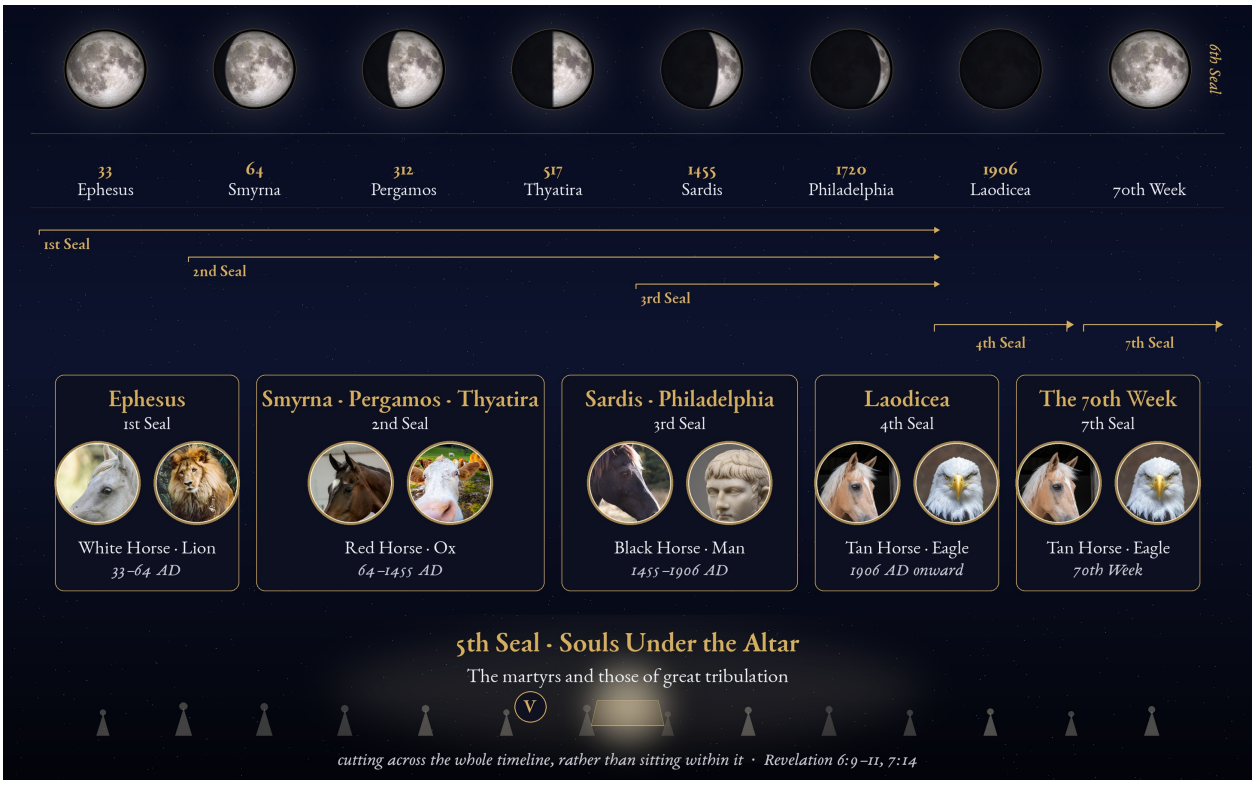
The eagle is the office of the New Testament prophet—one who receives the Word directly, as Paul described being "caught up to the third heaven... caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words" (2 Corinthians 12:2-4), and then teaches what he received as an apostle. This is a different shape of prophet than the Old Testament kind: an Elijah or a John the Baptist is wilderness-raised, unlettered, and sent to announce; a Paul or a John is sent to unfold what the older prophets already spoke and to teach it

in the same breath. Yahshua Himself carried all four anointings at once, in fullness—the dove that "abode upon him" at His baptism marking their full weight landing on the human Messiah for the first time (Matthew 3:16).

This same Father-Son reading of the Godhead — one Spirit, neither three persons nor an undifferentiated single one — is worked out in full in my theology in "Who is God and How He was Made Flesh," in chapter One Spirit, Two Identities, including how it resolves at the very end in 1 Corinthians 15:28's "that Elohim may be all in all."

Part II. The Seal, the Beast, and the Age

Seal	Horse	Living Creature	Church Age(s)	Span / Note
1st	White	Lion	Ephesus	33–64 AD
2nd	Red t White	Calf (Ox) t Lion	Smyrna	64–312 AD — pagan Rome's persecution, in real waves; ends at the Edict of Milan (313)
2nd	White t Red	Lion t Calf (Ox)	Pergamos	312–517 AD — persecution gives way to institutional compromise (the Nicene Creed replacing the Name)
2nd	Red	Calf (Ox)	Thyatira	517–1455 AD — the long papal, Jezebel age; persecution returns, now Christian-on-Christian
3rd	Black	Man's Face	Sardis & Philadelphia	1455–1906 AD — reasoned confrontation with a corrupted church
4th	Pale	Eagle	Laodicea	1906 AD onward, into the 70th Week
5th	—	Souls under the altar	All ages	The martyrs and those of great tribulation — cuts across the whole timeline
6th	—	—	Day after the 70th Week ends	Last part of the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5–6); Dan. 12:11's last 30 days of the 1,290
7th	Pale	Eagle	Opens the 70th Week itself	The pale horse closes out at the fourth seal, the last Gentile virgins receive the seventh seal to close out their faith. It opens the 70th Week decreed specifically for Israel (Daniel 9:24)



The four living creatures are linked to the four horsemen of Revelation 6, and the four horsemen, in turn, are linked to specific spans of church history — but linked as who is riding out in front, not as who is the only one on the field. Ezekiel's own vision already settles that question. Every living creature in Ezekiel 1:10 carries all four faces at once — the lion, the ox, the man, and the eagle together on a single creature, not four creatures taking turns wearing one face each. Revelation 6 does not overturn that pattern; it plays it out across time. The four horsemen are the same four faces Ezekiel already saw riding together, shown one at a time only in the sense that one of them is dominant at a given hour — never in the sense that the other three have left the field. All four ride through the whole church era and on into the 70th Week; what changes from age to age is which one is out in front.

Messiah's own ministry carried the same four anointings before the ages ever did — the lion's authority clearing the temple and silencing every trap His accusers set for Him, the man's face in His reasoned teaching and His tears at Lazarus's tomb and over Jerusalem, the eagle's farsight in what He told His own disciples would come upon the age, and the ox's sacrifice completing all three at the cross. The cross is where the calf finishes the work — not a fourth anointing added onto the first three, but the same ministry's labor reaching the altar, red with what an ox's sacrifice has always cost. Everything in the Old Covenant and the New points to Him, and then, from Him, out through the ages that follow His own pattern rather than inventing a new one.

With that in view, the four spans below name which rider is dominant in a given stretch of church history, not which rider is the only one present:

The first seal opens at Ephesus in 33 AD, and the white horse is dominant there from the start — the apostolic age itself, the first rider out of the gate, though never the only one on the field.

The second seal opens at Smyrna in 64 AD, and the red horse is dominant there too, though not yet securely — it wavers at Pergamos, where the white horse resurges, before red finally wins the field outright at Thyatira, 517 to 1455 AD, the long age of the papal Jezebel, persecution returning now in a Christian-on-Christian form. This is the calf's own sacrifice riding out in front, uncontested this time; the white horse's older compromise and the black horse's coming commerce have not left the stage, only stepped back from it.

The third seal opens at Sardis in 1455, dominant through Sardis and Philadelphia together — 1455 to 1906 — the age of reasoned confrontation with a corrupted church, the man's face finally answering what the balances and the sale of salvation had done to the Word.

The fourth seal opens at Laodicea in 1906, dominant from there onward, through Laodicea and into the 70th Week. Revelation 6:8 names it in the same breath as the other three — Death and Hades riding together — because by this hour the earlier riders are no longer taking turns at all. They converge, each one's own fullness compounding the others' rather than yielding the field, the whole weight of Satan's power arriving at once rather than one color at a time, ending in Revelation 14:20's judgment.

Smyrna and Pergamos sit inside the second seal's own span, not outside every seal. The seal that opens at Smyrna keeps running, uninterrupted, through Pergamos and on to Thyatira before any new seal opens — Revelation 6 opens its seals one after another, in order, with nothing held back waiting for a rider to win an age outright first. Revelation gives four horses to seven churches on purpose, and the second seal's long span over these three ages together is where that math does its most interesting work. What moves between them, then, is not whether the seal is open — it is, continuously, across all three — but which rider happens to be out in front at a given hour: red dominant at the seal's own opening in Smyrna, white resurging to take the lead at Pergamos, and red securing the age outright again, cleanly this time, by Thyatira. Smyrna and Pergamos carry the sharpest edge of that back-and-forth, each one a mixed story rather than a single-note one: one rider dominates, and a second rides quietly alongside it — present, but not yet in control.

Smyrna's persecution came from pagan Rome, and it came in real waves rather than one steady pressure: Nero after the Great Fire of Rome in 64, blaming Christians for a disaster the city itself blamed on him; Domitian around 90 to 96; a lighter, more selective policy under Trajan, who ordered Christians punished only when formally accused rather than hunted down; scattered local persecution under Marcus Aurelius; then two later empire-wide campaigns, under Decius in 249 to 251 and Valerian in 253 to 260;

and finally the worst of all of them, Diocletian's Great Persecution, from 303 to 311. It ends hard, not gradually, at the Edict of Milan in 313 — Constantine and Licinius jointly declaring religious freedom across the empire. The red horse's color is a fair one for this age: real blood, spilled by an outside power that hated the church's truth — and it is dominant here, the visible, defining story of the age.

But Smyrna is not only the age of martyrs. It is also the age that first opens the door to apostolic succession as a claim — Irenaeus, writing against the Gnostics by appealing to a traceable line of bishops back to the apostles rather than to the Spirit's own present witness; Tertullian doing much the same from Carthage; intellectualism beginning to settle in as a governing instinct even while the blood is still being spilled. Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the church at Smyrna itself around 107 AD, already used the phrase "the catholic church" as though it were a settled term, not a new one: "wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church." The foundation of what became the Roman Catholic Church was being laid by bishops calling themselves catholic — universal — a full two centuries before any single event like the Great Schism of 1054 made that identity official on paper. That instinct is the same one that fully arrives as Pergamos's own white horse, just not yet in control of anything here. It is present in Smyrna only as a secondary rider, quiet beneath the dominant red — the institution's paperwork came late, but its self-understanding came early, the same "true and yet transitional" pattern this whole study keeps finding everywhere else.

Pergamos tells a different story, because the persecutor changes shape entirely. After 313, pagan Rome stops killing Christians and starts sponsoring Christianity instead — Constantine's own conversion, then Theodosius making Nicene doctrine the empire's official religion by 380. The threat in this age is not an outside sword; it is an inside deception, a conquest that looks like victory and is actually loss. The white horse of Revelation 6:2 goes out "conquering, and to conquer" — a rider with a bow and no arrow ever mentioned, a hollow triumph — and the clearest fulfillment of that hollow triumph in this age is the Nicene Creed itself, hammered out over decades of argument, force, and imperial self-interest, finally settling on a formula that does not carry the Name. Removing the Name and replacing it with a creed is the same beguilement the serpent used on Eve: not an open denial, but a substitution dressed up as truth. Antipas stood against exactly this pressure and was martyred for it — Revelation 2:13 names him directly, "my faithful martyr," in the very letter that calls Pergamos the place "where Satan's seat is." White is dominant here, the age's defining rider, because this is a bluff rather than a purchase — nothing is bought or sold at Nicaea, a name is simply replaced and the counterfeit is dressed up as the real thing. That is a different mechanism than the black horse's own sign, the balances and the cry over wheat and barley — a literal selling of the truth for gain — which belongs instead to Sardis and Philadelphia's own confrontation with exactly that trade, centuries later. Red does not vanish from Pergamos; it stays present as a secondary thread, the sword sheathed rather than broken, waiting to be picked back up by a different hand once Thyatira's own age arrives.

Thyatira's own persecution completes the pattern by flipping the persecutor one more time. It is no longer a pagan empire killing Christians, and no longer a creed quietly replacing a name — it is a professing Christian empire enforcing that creed by force against its own dissenters. Constantine-Silvanus, Thyatira's own star, was stoned to death in 684 on the order of the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV; and after Byzantine Iconoclasm ended in 843, the empire ordered every Paulician who would not recant killed outright, an attempt at total eradication rather than mere suppression. The calf's sacrifice recurs in every one of these three ages — Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira — but the hand doing the killing changes shape every time: first a pagan empire, then a corrupted creed, then a professing church enforcing that creed on its own.

The fifth seal stands apart from the four horses: it is the souls under the altar, the martyrs and those of great tribulation, cutting across the whole timeline rather than sitting within it, Revelation 6:9-11.

The sixth seal opens the day after the 70th Week of Daniel, marking the end of the church age and the final stage of the first resurrection, as detailed in Revelation 20:5-6. This coincides with the thirty extra days mentioned in Daniel 12:11 beyond the usual 1,260 days, as well as the seventh bowl plague in Revelation 16. The seventh seal carries the pale horse and the living creature, the flying eagle—the four horsemen belong to the Gentile church age, and that age closed at the fourth seal, but the last Gentile virgins receive the seventh seal to close out their faith. The completeness the seventh seal carries belongs more broadly to Matthew 25's ten virgins; its late-night close matches Matthew 25:6, and it opens the 70th Week itself—a week Daniel 9:24 decrees specifically for Israel and Jerusalem, not for the Gentile Christian world the first four seals already covered. These connections align with previous findings in the Daniel 12 and 1,335 Days study and are directly linked to the church-age timeline.

This pattern was previously detailed in the project's document, "God's Time," in chapter "The Day of YAHWEH and the 12 Minor Prophets." Zechariah's initial night vision (1:7-17) depicts a man on a red horse among myrtle trees in a low valley, with more horses—red, speckled, and white—lying in wait but not yet ridden. The patrol's report states, "all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest," echoing Satan's "to and fro" language in Job 1:7 — indicating boundaries, permissions, danger, and a delay in release. The valley itself is part of the picture: a ravine holding riderless horses back, the same shape of restraint as the River Euphrates holding back the four angels bound there in Revelation 9:14-15, "prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year," until they are finally loosed to do what they were always prepared to do. Both pictures are the same kind of restraint — power already assigned, already waiting, simply not yet released. Zechariah's first vision finds its own fullest landing not somewhere in the church ages still unfolding beneath it, but at the 70th Week itself, when the valley's own boundary finally gives way.

Zechariah's eighth vision (6:1-8) sends the same patrol out again, this time as four chariots to the four winds, which this study's companion volume interprets as the horsemen of Revelation 6 — their forces traced through seven church ages. Nearby, in the same myrtle grove, the angel of YAHWEH mourns

Jerusalem's false peace and prays, "O YAHWEH of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem?" (Zechariah 1:12). This question is answered in the 70th week of Daniel, when the seventh seal of this study opens: Daniel 9:24 decrees the seventy weeks "for your people and for your holy city," referring to Israel and Jerusalem, the very city the angel laments. The once-confined patrol is finally unleashed, and the angel's intercession is answered in the same hour.

For a fuller explanation of Zechariah's horses and chariots, consult the document, "God's Time," in the chapter The Day of YAHWEH and the 12 Minor Prophets, Part II of that volume.

Part III. The Seven Stars, and What They Carried

Church Age	Star / Messenger	Span	Dominant	Secondary / Minor
Ephesus	*Paul of Tarsus*	33–65 AD	Lion	Eagle — real but secondary
Smyrna (tentative)	*Sabellius*	64–312 AD	Calf	Not assigned in this study
Pergamos	*Antipas*	312–517 AD	Calf	Man's Face (minor); an Eagle is likely but unproven
Thyatira	*Constantine-Silvanus*	517–1455 AD	Calf	Man's Face (minor); no lion or eagle evident
Sardis	*Martin Luther*	1455–1720 AD	Man's Face	Lion (minor) — inferred, not certain
Philadelphia	*John Wesley*	1720–1906 AD	Man's Face	Lion (minor) — likely
Laodicea	*William Branham*	1906–present	Eagle	No secondary anointing: Rev 10:7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound. His messaged ended there.



In every age, Elohim gave a light of truth. And in every age, the darkness of doctrines continued. A new church system would rise up and spiritually die, only to transform from one form of theology into another. Some religious systems were more dead than alive when they began. Let me ask you: how did you come to this present truth in the year 2025? Where did you come from? Why did you leave your theological organization to start another? Where did I come from? Why did I have to leave my church group? I am separated by my theology; my faith has moved on, or I am a fool, or always was. It is evident that the ten virgins left their respective organizations. How could the ten virgins not leave, given that only ten attended the wedding and only five were allowed to enter? Except for Paul, no candlestick taught the Scriptures in purity. Yet five wise virgins will remain at the end of the Gentile age.

Revelation 1:20 names seven stars in the Messiah's right hand, one messenger to a church. Every choice below is my own reading of this historical evidence, shaped by my theology of Elohim and Messiah — offered as the best available candidate for each age, not a settled roll call. Two are explicitly marked as tentative. Please fill in the names as your study would lead you.

Paul of Tarsus — Ephesus, 33-65 AD

Paul's dominant anointing is the lion — the same anointing carried by Messiah Himself as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." Alongside it, he carries the eagle in a real but secondary measure: his own third-heaven experience required a prophet's sight, even though his ordinary work was the apostle's work of teaching what he'd received. Paul and John together taught "in that purity of the Word" that marks both the beginning and the end of this whole arc — the church begins under the pure, unblemished linen garment, and Revelation says it must end the same way, "without spot or wrinkle," Eph 5:27.

Sabellius — Smyrna, on(tentative)

No writings by Sabellius have survived; we know only from hostile sources, as with Marcion. He was condemned for modalism by Pope Callixtus I around 220 AD. The case for dating him based on this era's prominence rests on three points: Paul, who was at the end of his own period, suggests that a late occurrence isn't problematic; the logic of the moon-chart indicates each era's influence wanes toward the next, so a star shining its last light during the transition is fitting rather than problematic; and Sabellian modalism aligns with the non-Trinitarian interpretation of the Godhead explored elsewhere in this study. Most modalism ideals are problematic, and we only know he was not a Trinity teacher. While Sabellius remains the best candidate, I am neither a Trinity nor an Oneness thinker, so this is not a definitive identification.

Antipas — Pergamos, 312-517 AD

Yahshua's own words name him directly: "Antipas was my faithful martyr" (Revelation 2:13). His dominant anointing is the calf — he stood and would not bow to the idolatry pressed on the church of his age, and was martyred for it. Underneath that main anointing sits a minor cherub anointing of a man's face: he had to understand Paul's own arguments, and the false church's arguments against them, well enough to answer them, which took real education. Whether he also carried a minor eagle — an office of New Testament prophet, understanding and teaching the revealed doctrine of Paul and John so effectively that the false prophets of his day needed him dead — is likely, though it cannot be proven outright.

Constantine-Silvanus — Thyatira, 517-1455 AD

Founder of the Paulicians, martyred by stoning in 684 AD after Emperor Constantine IV's soldiers arrested him for heresy. Like Antipas, his dominant anointing is the calf — sacrifice, the beast of burden, ending in martyrdom. Like Antipas, he had to do the man's-face work first: stand against the Catholic Church's doctrine and creeds on pure intellectual grounds before he could ever be martyred for it. The minor anointing is what makes the main one possible in both these men's cases — they had to argue their way to the altar before they were laid on it. No lion or eagle anointing is evident in what little survives of him.

His own path to that stand began around 653 AD, when a freed Armenian captive named Soghmon gave him a copy of the Gospels and Paul's letters. Reading them changed his name from Constantine to Silvanus, after Paul's companion, and led him to preach against what he saw as the Byzantine Church's image-worship and superstition. He founded his first congregation at Kibossa, near Colonia in Armenia — the beginning of what became known as the Paulicians.

His movement was later accused of holding an Adoptionist Christology, denying Christ's full deity until some point in His earthly life. A 2022 paper by Sean Finnegan, presented to the Unitarian Christian Alliance, argues this charge doesn't hold against the Paulician text known as The Key of Truth: it affirms the virgin birth directly in its twenty-third chapter and uses the phrase "only-born" of Christ in chapters two, seventeen, twenty-one, and twenty-two — language inconsistent with a Christ who became divine only later. Like the Nestorians, the Paulicians reportedly rejected the title "Theotokos," Mother of God, for Mary, and refused to venerate her —the same instinct against elevating Mary that runs through this whole study's own reading of Genesis and John.

The persecution was severe. After Byzantine Iconoclasm formally ended in 843, the empire attempted something unique in its own history: an order to kill every Paulician who would not recant, an effort to eradicate an entire sect rather than merely suppress it. Chroniclers report as many as 100,000 killed, though the true figure is disputed and likely inflated by the sources that report it.

This age is also where Thomas Brightman's history belongs, though he is not this age's star — see Part IV below.

Martin Luther — Sardis, 1455-1720 AD

Luther's dominant anointing is the man's face — an apostle for his hour, arguing against the theological current of his own day rather than simply repeating it. His Ninety-five Theses (1517) answered the sale of indulgences with reasoned argument, not martyrdom; the calf's sacrifice is not his story, as it was Silvanus's. Whether he carried a minor lion — strength and fidelity to Messiah beneath the intellectual main anointing — looks likely, though it remains an inference rather than a certainty.

Luther's own record here is not a clean one, and it shouldn't be smoothed over. He remained within reach of the Catholic Church longer than his own break with it might suggest — by his own account, he hoped for a time when he could persuade Rome rather than leave it outright. And he was sharply, personally bitter against Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer who broke further than Luther did — Zwingli denied the literal Real Presence in the Eucharist that Luther still held to. At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, the two men actually agreed on fourteen of fifteen points, including infant baptism; only the Eucharist divided them, and Luther never fully forgave the difference. The man most responsible for beginning the Reformation did nearly as much to fracture it as he did to start it — and even in that failure, Luther's pattern holds: he was a great minister for the faith he had, not a perfect one.

This pattern, worth recognizing, recurs frequently. Zwingli's opponents, the Anabaptists, aimed to restore key practices from the apostolic epistles, notably believer's baptism. However, in every reformation, the same cycle emerges: passionate early leaders die, and their successors transform the

movement into a denomination rather than continuing the original restoration. This halt in progress ultimately leads to splits. Luther's era exemplifies this pattern vividly, showcasing how initial zeal often gives way to division.

John Wesley — Philadelphia, 1720-1906 AD

Wesley shares Luther's principal anointing: embodying the face of a man, symbolizing an apostle for his era. He aligns with the third creature's profile, the face of a man, engaging in intellectual warfare against the black horse rider and the sale of salvation via paperbacks — responded to with a prolific output of around 5,000 writings, dubbed the 'Father of the Religious Paperback.' His focus is on ordinary people rather than scholars. Similar to Luther, a lesser lion anointing probably exists beneath the primary one.

Beyond his Oxford education, he learned at least seven languages and read roughly a hundred books a year. He rode some 250,000 miles on horseback in his lifetime — the equivalent of circling the world ten times — and is estimated to have preached 40,000 sermons, often to crowds of more than ten thousand gathered in the open air, since the Church of England had largely closed its own pulpits to him. He was attacked by mobs more than once, on at least one occasion escaping by swimming across a pond, and he described specific occasions of what he took to be divine protection, thrown objects landing all around him without striking him. His writing output earned him the title “Father of the Religious Paperback” — roughly 5,000 items in all — and he used the profits to relieve poverty rather than to enrich himself: his income eventually grew to £1,400 a year, and he lived, every year of his life, on the same £28 he had set for himself as a student.

William Branham — Laodicea, 1906-present

Branham opens this final age, but he is not its closing office. He is more like an Old Testament prophet than a New Testament one — wilderness-raised, without formal education, following the John-the-Baptist pattern rather than the Paul-or-John pattern. His own teaching, that the seven seals on the back of the scroll were not yet revealed even to him in 1962 and that the seventh could not be broken “at this time,” matches this: he moved the church ages forward and functioned as the thunder of Revelation 6 for the first six seals, but the finishing work belongs to an office still to come.

He himself was explicit about the limits of his office. In a 1962 sermon, In His Presence, he described the seven seals on the back of the scroll in Revelation 5 as “not even written in the Bible” — mysteries to be compared with the whole of Scripture once revealed, rather than something he was giving in that hour. Six months later, he taught the first six seals; the seventh he never taught, consistent with his earlier statement that it could not be broken “at this time.” He also advanced the Precept of the seven church ages.

His own account of his 1933 commissioning — involving a voice at the Ohio River instructing him to precede a second coming, just as John preceded the first — is key to how his followers interpret his ministry. It warrants an honest mention rather than silence: this story changed significantly in his retellings between 1950 and 1964, with details such as crowd size, the presence of a voice, and even the date shifting each time. Additionally, the earliest published accounts mention no voice at all. This ambiguity does not resolve the spiritual question — no documentary record can do that. Ellicott's commentary on Acts 9:7 notes that the disciples heard a voice but saw no man, referencing Paul's own statement (Acts 22:9) that they "did not hear the voice." The point is that they did not hear the words, as they could attach no meaning to the sounds, though for Saul they had profound significance. Similarly, they saw the light but not the form. These details matter in this study and should not be glossed over.

Part IV. Thomas Brightman, with the Man-Faced Cherub

Thomas Brightman (1562-1607) is not one of the seven stars — his own scheme for the seven churches of Revelation assigns whole national churches to each age rather than individual men — but he is a real forerunner of the same fight Luther and Wesley later carried, intellectual warfare against the black horse and rider. He is also the first person on record to read the seven churches as successive ages of history rather than seven first-century towns with a moral lesson apiece. His Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, published in 1609, eight years after his death, laid the actual foundation for this whole study, roughly 350 years before it was picked up again.

Brightman himself never saw his own work in print. He was Cambridge-educated at Queens' College, never married, and died at forty-five in 1607 — he fainted while reading in a moving coach and was dead before he could be helped out of it. His Apocalypsis Apocalypseos appeared in Latin two years later and was translated into English in 1611, entirely posthumous.

While this study assigns a single star messenger to each age, Brightman instead assigns whole national churches. Ephesus was the apostolic age itself; Smyrna, the persecuted church down to Constantine's toleration in 313; Pergamos, the compromised, worldly church from there to roughly 500; Thyatira, the long papal age, his own "Roman Jezebel." Sardis he applied to the Reformation churches of Switzerland, France, and Holland; Philadelphia to godly Geneva, the Reformed church he most admired; and Laodicea — lukewarm, self-satisfied, rich — to the Church of England of his own day, a bold thing for an Anglican clergyman to write about his own communion.

He also broke with the standard Reformation reading of Revelation 20, arguing for two separate thousand-year periods rather than one symbolic one — the first beginning with Constantine in the fourth century and the second around 1300. Historians credit him and a later writer, Joseph Mede, as the two men who most reshaped English apocalyptic thought after John Foxe, feeding directly into the wave of Puritan millenarianism that followed in the 1640s and 1650s.

His identification of Thyatira with "the Roman Jezebel" draws a direct Old Testament parallel: the historical Jezebel led Israel to worship Ashtaroth, the "Queen of Heaven," and Brightman read Rome's elevation of Mary under the same title as a repeat of that corruption. He dated this age roughly from 590 to 1517 — from Gregory the Great to Luther's Theses — a span that is close to, though not identical with, this study's own 517–1455 boundary for the same age.

He also argued that the pope was the Antichrist under a fixed 1,290-year reign, using the same day-year method this project uses elsewhere in Daniel. More strikingly for a man writing in 1600, he predicted a literal national restoration of the Jews to Palestine — "Shall they return to Jerusalem again? There is nothing more certain." Fifty years after his death, Cromwell convened the Whitehall Conference to weigh readmitting Jews to England, reversing the 1290 expulsion. The timing and the shared argument in Puritan circles make Brightman a real intellectual tributary to that decision, not just an isolated curiosity.

Brightman's own scheme is proof of this study's opening claim: his ages don't have hard edges either. He was inspired in his moment, not infallible in it — a first precept, in the sense of Isaiah 28's precept upon precept, with another precept and more lines still needing to be laid on top.

Part V. The Black Horse Rider

The black horse rider of Revelation 6:5–6, weighing bread on scales while sparing the oil and the wine. He is an agent — a human being motivated by demonic thinking, self-interest, and a gospel turned to profit, power, or self-recognition, empowered by "the power of darkness" that is the horse itself. Satan mimics everything Yahshua has done or will do, patterning his counterfeit after the original, which is exactly why it beguiles fallen human nature so effectively: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). The horse riders who oppose each age's star are fallen angels with real rank and power in that counterfeit realm, motivating men of unbelieving hearts rather than simply possessing them.

This is why the fight looks different in every age but is always the same fight: indulgence-sellers in Luther's day, competing paperback religion in Wesley's, and whatever the prevailing currency of corrupted faith happens to be in a given century. Thomas Brightman's own "books of truth against books for wholesale" belongs to this same recurring contest — real scholarship standing against literature that served power rather than truth.

Part VI. What Comes After Laodicea

Branham left an unfinished section, and this study completes it. The true close of the seventh church era is marked by the Cry — Matthew 25:6-7's "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go out to meet him." This is neither Branham's sole office nor its final one; rather, it is the office that awakens the virgins, and on this reading, it also completes the mystery of Revelation 10:7: "the mystery of Elohim should be finished, as he has declared to his servants the prophets."

Beyond the Cry stand the two olive trees — Revelation 11's two witnesses, Zechariah 4's two anointed ones — the pair who carry the seventh seal and the seven thunders in the fullness Branham himself said was not yet his to give. The eagle's arc reaches its farthest here: from Ephesus's pure linen garment at the beginning to the two witnesses finishing the mystery of the prophets at the very end, the eagle "seeing far off" across the whole span rather than resting within any one age.

Every age has been given its own light of truth, and in every age the darkness of competing doctrine has persisted alongside it — a new religious system rising, only to die spiritually and transform into another shape of theology, some of these systems more dead than alive from their very beginning. I ask myself the same question I would ask anyone else: how did I come to the truth I now hold? Where did I come from? Why did I leave the theological organization I once stood in to take up another? Did I lead myself out, or was I led — or am I simply a fool, and always was? It seems evident enough that of Matthew 25's ten virgins, all ten eventually leave whatever organization they started in. Except for Paul's own age, every candlestick since has taught the scriptures in something less than full purity. Yet the parable still promises five wise virgins standing at the very end of the Gentile age — and that promise is what this whole study is finally about.

Part VII. True and Yet Transitional

Every piece of the chart in Part III above argues its own opening claim, unintentionally. Paul's purity of the Word doesn't vanish the moment Smyrna begins; it fades toward the edge, and Sabellius, if this reading holds, is the one still holding what light remains when the handoff occurs. Antipas and Silvanus both had to become the man's face before they could become the calf. Wesley's own ministry exists only because Count Zinzendorf's Moravians gave him the Aldersgate assurance that set him on a horse in the first place—the root and the fruit are two different men in two different movements, and neither stands alone. Brightman's own scheme, four centuries earlier, already had the same porous seams his critics could point to.

No age starts clean, and no age ends clean, because the light in the chart itself doesn't switch on and off — it fades and rekindles, one candlestick catching the last spark of the one before it. Dispensations are real enough to name and date. They are porous enough that naming them was never the whole truth. Someone is always standing in the seam between one age and the next, carrying a minor anointing that will become someone else's main one a generation later.

That seam is not only a soft edge between ages. It has an order and a set of dates of its own, and laying Scripture's own sequence beside the dates this study has already used everywhere else turns the seam into something precise enough to walk through directly.

Revelation 6 opens its seals one after another, in strict order, and that order is not negotiable — nothing is held back waiting for a rider to win an age outright before its own seal can open. The white horse goes out first, Ephesus, 33 AD, the lion-faced cherub opening the first seal — and nothing about this rider ever stops running once it is released. The red horse follows immediately behind it, the second seal opening at Smyrna, 64 AD, the calf-faced cherub releasing it, dominant there from the moment it arrives, exactly as Part II above already argues. That same seal keeps running, uninterrupted, for the next four and a half centuries — through Pergamos, where white resurges and takes the lead back for a season, and on to Thyatira, where red finally secures the age outright again. The seal itself never closed and reopened across that whole stretch; only the rider out in front changed hands. The black horse joins them at Sardis, 1455 AD, the man's-face cherub opening the third seal, reasoned argument finally answering what the balances had done to the Word — three riders now running together, white and red both still in the field beneath whichever one is out front at the moment.

None of the three horses ever retires, and the table above already says so without naming the year it becomes undeniable. Laodicea opens in 1906 carrying the pale horse already, the convergence beginning exactly where the chart says it does. But a convergence does not wait until it is visible to be true, and 1940 is where it stops being only a theological claim and becomes a date anyone willing to look could point to: the Holocaust gathering its full force, an ecumenical movement already decades into its own resurgence, the pressure toward Israel's rebirth building eight years ahead of the thing itself, and a technological age accelerating past anything a single generation before it had seen. Four currents, cresting in the same narrow window. I want that named plainly as a reading of history rather than a count laid on a text the way the seventh seal's 2,520 days are below — it names a season, the same kind of claim the Introduction already made about the six thousand years, not a verse proving a date. The order the three riders were released in becomes the order of their standing: white first and therefore first in power, red second and second, black third and third — until the eagle, which was never a fourth face taking its own turn but the covering office over all three named already in Part I, folds them into one undivided weight. This is Revelation 6:8's pale horse, Death and Hades riding together — not a new rider arriving late, but what the first three become once nothing is left to hold them apart.

The lion is not finished even there. The same cherub that opened the first seal opens the sixth — no horse or rider this time, since the four horses already closed out at the fourth, but the lion-faced cherub returning to release 2 Peter 3:10's own dissolution, the heavens passing away with a roar, the elements melting with fervent heat. Peter is quoting rather than inventing that language — the same darkened sun and bloodied moon Joel 2:30-31 already named, the same earth-breaking judgment Isaiah 24 already pronounced. The lion that opened Revelation 6 with a bow and no arrow, a hollow triumph dressed up as conquest, is the same lion standing over its own unmaking: the spirit that beguiled Eve in the garden is the spirit named again at the very end — Revelation 18:23's sorceries deceiving every nation, Revelation 12:9's dragon deceiving the whole world, Revelation 20:10's devil finally thrown into the lake of fire with them. White opens this whole account, and very nearly closes it too.

The seventh seal belongs to the eagle alone, and this is where its own distinct wording in Revelation 4:7 finally does its full work. The other three creatures are each given a likeness — like a lion, like a calf, a face as a man — but the fourth is not a face at rest; it is a flying eagle, the whole creature already in motion, the same wings that carried Israel out of Egypt in Exodus 19:4 and the same wings given the woman in Revelation 12:14 to flee into the wilderness. The Cry already named in Part VI above — Matthew 25:6's midnight cry, Revelation 10:7's finished mystery — is the same office that opens the seventh seal at Revelation 10:3: a 2,520-day week decreed for Israel alone, Daniel 9:24, beginning in the same hour the Gentile fullness already named at the fourth seal finally closes out. The pale horse runs on underneath it, already converged, already equal, carrying its own unfinished weight into a week that was never the Gentile church's to begin with. The eagle that covered Ephesus at the very beginning is the same eagle still carrying someone to safety at the very end — not a fourth face that finally got its turn, but the one office, named already in Part I, that was never about taking a turn at all.

Brother Brian Neill

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Section III
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

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

Element	This Discussion's Reading
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 thread and turns it into 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 you, and you shall live" — Genesis 20:7

This is Scripture's first use of the word "prophet" in the Old Testament, and it applies it 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 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 Yahshua 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 Yahshua Christ, and Elohim 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 has Yahshua 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 Yahshua 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 has put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). Decades later, Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to 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 when 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. I now hold that Paul fills a different twelfth seat: not Matthias's earthly office, but the twelfth seat among the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4:4, and the twelfth foundation of the New Jerusalem in 21:14—an eschatological seat alongside Matthias's historical one, not a replacement for 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. 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 you are,

and to dust you shall 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

C1. 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?

C2. 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?

C3. 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?

C4. 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?

C5. 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?

C6. 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

Theme	Cross-References
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 — "you have no need that I write to 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"