

Do We Cast Our Crowns Before Christ's Throne in Heaven?

By Dave DeWitt

There is only one reference in the Bible to casting crowns before a heavenly throne.

Revelation 4:4 & 10 *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. ...the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne.*

At no time does Scripture mention anything about anyone, except *the twenty-four elders*, casting crowns before a throne in heaven. The use of the definite article [οἱ, (hoi)] *the*, in verse 10, points to the group mentioned in verse 4. It narrows the reference, limiting it to the 24 individuals called *elders*. *Twenty-four* is a literal cardinal number. The word *elders* [πρεσβύτεροι, (presbuteroi)] and its Hebrew counterpart are used commonly in both testaments to refer to male leaders in the cities of Israel and the church. The word never refers to people in general nor is it ever symbolic or representative of any group of people. Biblical elders have responsibility for the care of certain people (1 Peter 5:1-5). They are not representatives of a group of people. The Bible never tells us who these elders are, but the only reasonable conclusion is that John witnessed 24 older men taking off *golden crowns on their heads* and laying them down before a throne.

In order to assume this represents something any other heavenly saints do, one would have to deny a literal understanding of the words, place a figurative meaning on the numbers, and inject an interpretation found nowhere in the text. It imposes a context that the author did not mention.

The twenty-four elders are listed 12 times in Revelation (4:4 & 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11 & 14; 7:11 & 13; 11:16; 14:3; and 19:4).

- In Revelation 5:5, one of the elders makes the announcement that Jesus would come and open the book. Does that symbolically mean the whole church will make such an announcement? I've never heard anyone teach that.
- In 5:8, *the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*. Is that symbolic of all of us saints in heaven falling down holding bowls which represent the prayers of the saints? I've never heard anyone teach that. Notice *the saints* here are a different group from *the twenty-four elders*. The elders are holding golden bowls representing the prayers of the saints. This is not a picture of saints representing their own prayers, or the prayers of other saints.
- In 7:13ff, one of the elders talked with the Apostle John about the saints who are martyred during the tribulation. Is that a symbol of all saints talking about the martyrs? I've never heard of anyone who thinks so. Once again, we have *the twenty-four elders* talking about saints, not saints talking about saints.

What is clear from the context is that *the twenty-four elders* are a specific group of leaders who are continually around the throne of God, very close to the four living creatures. There is absolutely no indication that they represent any other saints in heaven, nor is there any indication that what they do symbolizes what other saints in heaven do.

If *the twenty-four elders* are a metaphor of a group of saints in heaven, then one could also conclude that the *four living creatures* are not literally four such beings but representative of multitudes of such creatures. But this is unlikely, since they are given as four, and only four, 9 times in Ezekiel and 11 times in Revelation.

The biggest problem with assuming believers cast crowns from their head at Christ's feet is that there is absolutely no indication believers have any crowns at all on their heads to cast at Christ's feet. The idea

comes from ignoring the context and transporting the meaning of *crowns* from one context to another. The crowns *the twenty-four elders* have are something they wear *on their heads* which can be taken off and *cast...before the throne*. The same word “crown,” used for believers in the epistles, is a metaphor representing their spiritual rewards. The actual physical representation of believers’ rewards in heaven are *white robes...fine linen bright and clean* (Revelation 7:9 & 13; 19:8 & 14; 22:14), not golden crowns *on their heads*.

**There is no reference whatsoever to saints, in general,
wearing crowns of any kind in heaven**

The word “crown” occurs seven times in the New Testament in reference to rewards of believers:

- **Philippians 4:1** *Therefore my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown...*
Paul’s crown is the people whom he reached for Christ, not something to wear on his head.
- **1 Thessalonians 2:19** *For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?*
Paul’s crown was his hope for rewards *in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming*.
- **2 Timothy 4:8** *in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
Paul’s crown was the reward he would receive for *righteousness* along with all the other saints who *loved His appearing*.
- **James 1:12** *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*
James’ *crown* is a victory over trials on earth. The context has nothing to do with heaven. The *crown of life* is a way believers respond to trials on earth, not something they wear in heaven.
- **1 Peter 5:4** *When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
Peter uses the word *crown* as a metaphor of the *unfading glory* believers will be rewarded with *when the Chief Shepherd appears*.
- **Revelation 2:10** *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*
Jesus told the believers at Smyrna if they endured martyrdom He would give them eternal rewards.
- **Revelation 3:11** *hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*
Jesus warned the church at Philadelphia not to give in to the *hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world* (v. 10), so they will not lose their eternal rewards.

This idea, that the crowns are something believers give back to God, implies that whatever rewards we might receive for righteous acts don’t matter much eternally. We just give them back to Jesus anyway. That contradicts the dominant New Testament teaching of heavenly rewards given as a result of a judgment on the works of the saints (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 10:32-39). The difference in rewards allows the saints to serve God in greater or lesser ways throughout eternity (Matthew 13:23; 25:28). The crowns, referred to for the saints, are symbols of our eternal destiny, not some head covering to be thrown down in a ceremony.

In Revelation 4, where *the twenty-four elders* cast their crowns before the throne, there is no gathering of believers at all. There are only the four living creatures and the 24 elders. In chapter 19, the scene is quite different. In chapter 19, there are rewarded saints, *clothed in fine linen bright and clean*, not wearing crowns, and what they are doing is very different from what *the twenty-four elders* were doing in chapter 4. In Revelation 19, where the saints are also present, there is worship and praise, but not the casting of crowns.

The idea that in heaven we cast crowns before Jesus is without any biblical support.

Appendix

What about the Priests in 1 Chronicles 24

In order to justify the idea that all saints cast their crowns at Christ's feet, some have abandoned the Revelation 4 passage altogether and jumped to a completely different passage in a completely different context in the Old Testament.

1 Chronicles 24:4 *Since more chief men were found from the descendants of Eleazar than the descendants of Ithamar, they divided them thus: there were sixteen heads of fathers' households of the descendants of Eleazar and eight of the descendants of Ithamar, according to their fathers' households.*

In a seemingly desperate attempt to find 24 representative leaders, some have gone to the 16 priests who were leaders of the family of Eleazar and the 8 priests who were the leaders from the family of Ithamar, then add 16+8 to get 24. The argument from 1 Chronicles 24 is made by adding up the leaders of the two remaining lines of priests as representative of all the priests, then making the jump to say all believers are priests, then saying these 24 represented all the priests, therefore, the 24 in Revelation represent all of the saints.

First of all, only the Eleazar line through Zadok survived. After Zadok was involved with Nathan to insure the inauguration of Solomon (1 Kings 1:34-45), Solomon eliminated the Ithamar line (1 Kings 2:35). That elimination was the line of Eli, and its elimination was revealed to Samuel as a boy in the temple at Shiloh. It is only the Zadok priests that serve in the Millennial temple described by Ezekiel 44:15. So only the 16 leaders of the priests of Zadok end up representing the Levitical priesthood.

Second, these *heads of fathers' households* in 1 Chronicles 24 were chosen by lot. They were not designated by their spiritual maturity but by the casting of lots among those of a certain genealogy. How on earth could these have anything to do with the elders around the throne in the book of Revelation?

Third, these were priests, not elders. The leaders of Revelation are elders, not priests. To suggest these Levitical priests represent believer priests is a far stretch. The elders in Revelation 4 are never connected to any priesthood. Levitical priests do animal sacrifices in the temple for Israel. Believer priests represent God to the world. Once again tying the two together violates the most basic rule of interpretation: the context determines the meaning of the words.