

# Revelation 5:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

## Analysis

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The elders' harps and golden vials (bowls) of incense symbolize worship and intercession. Harps accompany Psalmic praise; incense represents prayers of the saints (Psalm 141:2), mediated through Christ our High Priest. This heavenly scene depicts corporate worship where earthly prayers ascend as pleasing fragrance. Reformed theology affirms that believers' prayers, imperfect in themselves, are perfected through Christ's intercession. The 'saints' (Greek 'hagiōn') refers to all believers, emphasizing the church's priestly role in corporate worship and intercession.

## Historical Context

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Temple worship featured incense offerings at the golden altar, symbolizing prayers ascending to God. Early Christians, lacking temples, understood themselves as living temples offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5). This vision encouraged persecuted churches that their prayers were not ignored but treasured in heaven's throne room.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## 1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

### Study Questions

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1. How does seeing your prayers as incense in golden bowls before God's throne elevate your view of prayer's importance?
2. What does the combination of harps (praise) and incense (prayer) teach about balanced worship?

### Interlinear Text

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καὶ ὅτε ἔλαβεν τὸ βιβλίον τὰ τέσσαρες ζῶα καὶ  
**And** **when** **he had taken** G3588 **the book** G3588 **four** **beasts** **And**  
G2532 G3753 G2983 G975 G5064 G2226 G2532

οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσον ἐνώπιον τοῦ  
G3588 **and twenty** **four** **elders** **fell down** **before** G3588  
G1501 G5064 G4245 G4098 G1799

ἀρνίου ἔχοντες ἕκαστος κιθάρας, καὶ φιάλας χρυσᾶς  
**the Lamb** **having** **every one of them** **harps** **And** **vials** **golden**  
G721 G2192 G1538 G2788 G2532 G5357 G5552

γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων αἱ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν  
**full** **of odours** **which** **are** G3588 **the prayers** G3588  
G1073 G2368 G3739 G1526 G4335

ἀγίων  
**of saints**  
G40

### Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 141:2** (Prayer): Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

**Revelation 5:14** (Parallel theme): And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

**Revelation 4:10** (Parallel theme): 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, saying,

**Revelation 4:4** (Parallel theme): 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 5:6** (Parallel theme): And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

**Revelation 19:4** (Parallel theme): And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

**Psalms 33:2** (Parallel theme): Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.

**Revelation 4:8** (Holy): And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

**Revelation 15:7** (Parallel theme): And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

**Revelation 15:2** (Parallel theme): And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.