

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the word of God

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APRIL

Revelation- Victory Book Chapters 1-11

Introducing

The awesome glory of God's
eternal throne

From Study Groups

The throne of heaven
(Revelation 4)

Feature

Gemstones of Biblical times



Revelation 4:3



THE AWESOME GLORY OF GOD'S ETERNAL THRONE

The scene which the Spirit of God brings before us in this awe-inspiring chapter, is one that is, literally and figuratively, 'out of this world.' John is immediately captivated by the breathtaking glory and majesty of the person who sits on the rainbow circled throne.

The great, trumpet-like voice that he heard before, tells him he is about to be shown 'the things which must come to pass hereafter' (v.1). This initial scene is of paramount importance in our recognition of the rightness of the judgements which follow. It underlines the absolute authority and sovereignty of the one who sits on heaven's throne— 'the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy' (Is. 57:15 RV).

The eulogy of the twenty-four elders who cast their golden crowns before the throne saying: 'because of your will they were, and were created' (v.11) reminds us that all things exist because of God's pleasure and for the furtherance of His purposes.

It is fitting that several papers dwell on the spontaneous, joyful outpouring of gratitude, praise and worship that belongs to 'him that sits on the throne...that lives forever and ever' (v9)— elsewhere made known to us as the 'King of the ages' (Rev. 15:3).

In this chapter the scene is set for the thrilling revelation that the Lion of Judah is the newly slain Lamb, (the subject of next month's study), who alone is worthy to open the book and preside over the apocalyptic events that follow. Where 'blind unbelief is sure to err', the eye of faith previews God's final brushstrokes on the canvas of time and things impenetrable to the natural mind come into sharp relief.

An enhanced appreciation of the significance and imminence of these things will galvanise our service in the sanctuary and in reaching out to our fellows with the good news of God's sovereign grace.

J.J.

From Study Groups . . .

THE THRONE OF HEAVEN (Revelation 4)

From Aberdeen: The aged apostle John was given a glimpse of heavenly things: 'I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven' conveys the meaning that this door *was standing open* and thus afforded John a vision of the rainbow-circled throne and the twenty-four elders surrounding the throne (Rev. 4:1-4 RV). The one sitting on the throne needs no explanation, as it is clearly God who is being worshipped by those four living creatures who, 'have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was and which is and which is to come' (Rev. 4:8). The fact that each of the four living creatures had six wings indicates that they were angels. Isaiah's vision of the six-winged seraphim likewise presents us with a picture of angels worshipping in heaven (Is. 6:2-3) [Comment 1].

But who are the twenty-four elders? These elders worship the one who sits on the throne. A clue as to who they are, or whom they represent, might be indicated by the fact that they are 'arrayed in white garments' and are wearing 'crowns of gold' (Rev. 4:4). The original Greek wording, 'having been clothed in white garments' brings before us the thought that God's provision had been made for those elders. It could be that the twenty-four elders were angels, although the combination of white garments, crowns of gold and being described as elders would suggest they were earthly pilgrims who had reached their heavenly destination [Comment 2]. But whether they were angels or redeemed sons of Adam's race they were created beings that fell down and worshipped God their Maker. They 'cast their crowns before the throne' in fitting worship of the Lord God. Such an attitude of worship is a good example for redeemed saints. Remember how David also acknowledged God as the great giver when he declared, 'of thine own have we given thee' (1 Chr. 29:14). In our spiritual sacrifices as a priesthood we offer thoughts of Christ, which the Spirit of God has first impressed upon our hearts and minds (cp. 1 Pet. 2:5, Rev. 5:9).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: The word 'throne' is used some 46 times in Revelation and nearly one third occur in this chapter (i.e. 14 times) making it a key word for our consideration [Comment 3]. Clearly the emphasis is on worship of Him who sits upon the throne. When we realise that John was given this vision we are surely lost for words as we reflect on its importance. He was spiritually raised from Patmos, a tiny island on earth, to be ushered into the indescribable presence of God. The first thing that he is aware of is an open door, through which he saw the throne. His record shows all aspects of that throne.

On the throne—Almighty God John did not intend to depict God precisely but merely to give us a glimpse of God's glory. He saw God's matchless worth represented by precious stones. God cannot be seen by man: He remains hidden despite John's vivid description—He 'who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable' (1 Tim. 6:16 RV). His power and character can be seen through, for example, His works of creation.

Around the throne—a rainbow It was suggested that this was not just an arc but would be a complete circle, because in heaven all things are completed. It reminds us of God's covenant, not only with Noah but with all creation (Gen. 9:11-17). It would also remind us that while judgement is about to fall, God is merciful (Hab.3:2). By far the best covenant of all is the New Covenant, under which we shelter and in which we trust.

Around the throne—elders and living creatures The identity of the 24 elders may remain in dispute, and it is unwise to conjecture: sometimes God has left out such detail for a purpose. The four living creatures are generally accepted as being the same as were seen by Ezekiel (1,10), and in the parallelism of Isaiah 6; but the seraphim are not the same as cherubim. It has also been postulated that they are a representation of the differing aspects of the Lord, as in the four Gospel accounts:

Matthew—royal; the lion. Mark—the servant; the ox or the calf [Comment 4].
Luke—compassionate; the man. John—the deity of Christ; the eagle.

Many other analogies have been suggested over time, but the important thing is their continual adoration giving 'glory, honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne.' There must be more reasons why we who have been redeemed should worship the one on the throne.

Out Of The Throne—Storms There were the signs of forthcoming storms reminding us of God's infinite power (see also Rev. 8:5;11:19). God's throne is prepared for judgement, but He is also a God of grace. Both of these were evident at Calvary.

Before the throne—lamps and a sea The lamps would symbolise the Holy Spirit, whereas the pure crystal sea denotes God's holiness and the fire (i.e. lamps of fire) speaks of His holy judgement.

Praise before the throne—true worship The elders typify the people of God; so

why shouldn't we praise Him and join the chorus: 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord ... ' (v.11)!

Bill Paterson

From Buckhaven: There are many similarities between the visions seen by Ezekiel (Ezek. 1) and John (Rev. 4). Both were exiled captives and both saw a vision of the Son of God on the throne of God. Ezekiel, by the river Chebar, saw the Son of God in pre-incarnation glory; John, on the Isle of Patmos, saw Him in glory after the incarnation [Comment 5]. Ezekiel saw the throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone with the likeness of a man above it. John saw a throne set in heaven and one sitting upon the throne 'like a jasper stone and a sardius' (Rev. 4:3 RV).

Both Ezekiel and John saw a rainbow surrounding the throne. This reminds us of the bow that God set in the clouds after the flood—a token of God's covenant promise never again to destroy the earth in that way. Ezekiel saw the throne of God surrounded by brightness 'like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain' (Ezek. 1:28), and thereafter was given a vision of the everlasting covenant that God will yet make with Israel (Ezek. 37). The rainbow-circled throne radiates the glory of God and is an everlasting witness that God will never break the eternal covenant that was sealed and ratified by the blood of Christ (Heb. 13:20).

The seven lamps of fire speak of the Holy Spirit in power and majesty. The four living creatures, whose wings sound 'like the noise of great waters' (Ezek. 1:24), have faces which speak of the four highest orders of natural creation. High-ranking beings as Satan once was, they do God's bidding like 'a flash of lightning' (Ezek. 1:14), as guardians of the holiness of God [cp. Comment 1]. Satan was at one time among such a high-ranking order of heavenly beings before he rebelled and was cast out of the mountain of God (Ezek. 28:16). We believe the Lord referred to this in Luke 10:18: 'I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven'.

Revelation is a book of numbers: for example, the numbers seven and six. We notice that the number twenty-four in Revelation only occurs in relation to the twenty-four elders who sit on thrones around the throne of God. These elders have been debated for centuries. In our understanding they are not part of the Bride the wife of the Lamb but appear to signify rule of some order. They belong to the 'thrones or dominions or principalities or powers' in heaven (Col.1:16), each in their own order. There are mysteries here that we cannot grasp and we would rather not speculate.

Both Ezekiel and John are associated with a book. To each, our covenant-

keeping God, who sits on the rainbow-circled throne, gave the roll of a book in which He revealed to His servants something of His eternal purposes of grace, judgement and mercy.

Martin Notman

From Cromer: *The Throne of God* John says 'I looked and there before me was a door standing open in heaven.' He heard the voice again that he had previously heard at the beginning of the revelation (1:10) with a loud voice like a trumpet. At the coming of the Lord for His church 'the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible' (1 Cor. 15:52 RV). 'For the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God ...' (1 Thes. 4:16 NIV). Could this voice that John heard be the voice of the same archangel? The voice said, 'Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.' [Comment 6]

To be in the Spirit was to experience a state of heightened spiritual awareness. It enabled John to be in heaven and hear and see things he had not seen or heard before, not even on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). John sees God on the throne of heaven. How could this be possible? The scripture says in 1 Timothy 6:15-16 'God the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.' So how is John able to see God on the throne of heaven, unless it is God the Son he sees? John 1:18 says, 'No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only who is at the Father's side has made him known.' [Comment 7]

Isaiah says about the vision which he had: 'I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple' (6:1; see 2-5). John in his gospel tells us that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him (12:41). We suggest that the one Isaiah and John saw was God the Son, but that the Father and Holy Spirit were also present; otherwise we are in danger of trying to divide the Godhead [Comment 8].

In some modern versions John says the one on the throne had the appearance of jasper and cornelian. The AV has jasper and sardine stone [see Comments 5 and note on 'Gemstones in Biblical Times']. John struggled to describe what he saw and had to use earthly symbols to convey the wonder of the glory of God. He also said there was a rainbow that encircled the throne, resembling an emerald. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and wore crowns of gold on their heads. We are not told who these beings are. From the throne came flashes of

lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. In the centre around the throne were four living creatures, and they never stop saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and is to come.'

John Parker

From Greenock: We have looked at the relationship between the Churches and our Lord Jesus in the previous chapters. There is now a major transition—from walking in the midst of the lamp-stands, He is now seated on the Throne.

The thunderings link back to the children of Israel standing before Mount Sinai. The events seem to be after the Rapture. The 'cartoon' picture of heaven as lots of white clouds and brightness is incorrect. The intense colours of the materials listed let us see that the beauty of the creation before the fall is still evident here [cp. Comments 9,15 and note on 'Gemstones in Biblical Times'].

The sea of brass—a vessel for ritual cleansing represented by the laver in the tabernacle, is now as clear glass. This suggests that there is no cleansing required, for nothing impure can get into this scene [Comment 10].

The description of the living creatures reflects the all-seeing eye of God. The appearances seem to express the characteristics of the four Gospels.

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *Come up hither* After seeing Christ walking between the seven lampstands John went on to see a door standing open in heaven. He then heard once more that great trumpet-like voice (Rev. 4:1; cp. 1:10)—the voice of the glorified Lord. Upon the Lord's instruction 'Come up hither', John was raptured immediately in the Spirit into heaven, there to see the things which must come to pass hereafter (1:19). Here John observes one who, sitting on a throne, 'had the appearance of jasper and carnelian' (4:3ESV); 'the Lord God Almighty' (v.8); the creator of all things (v.11). Before the throne there were seven torches of fire—the seven Spirits of God (v.5; note the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit in Is. 11:2).

The twenty-four elders wore golden crowns which were, as John Miller points out, 'marks of honour befitting their being seated on thrones around the throne of God' (*Notes on the New Testament Scriptures*, p.663). Crucial to the identification of these twenty-four elders is whether the text of Revelation 5:9 should read 'redeemed us to God' (KJV) or simply, 'redeemed to God' (see RV, ASV). Some understand these elders to be angelic beings: however, it may be noted that the

word 'elder' (Gk. *presbuteros*) is applied elsewhere in the New Testament only to people. Also, as Chas. C. Ryrie (*Study Bible*, 1995) says, 'Angels are never said to be given crowns, though believers are' (see 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10). In that case it may be supposed that these elders are representative of the redeemed who have been glorified, crowned, and enthroned, prior to the Tribulation—kept from the hour (Rev. 3:10), kept from the wrath (1 Thes. 5:9) [see Comment 2].

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *The lamps and the sea* Seven lamps, which are the seven spirits of the Lord, might suggest Isaiah 11:2 and the seven ministries of the Spirit mentioned there:

- Spirit of the Lord
- Spirit of wisdom
- Spirit of knowledge
- Spirit of understanding
- Spirit of counsel
- Spirit of power
- Spirit of the fear of the Lord

This shows that the light of the Lord is displayed by the Spirit of the Lord. They bring illumination.

The crystal sea interprets the holiness and purity of the Lord. There is no hiding. Everything is clear and plain before Him. Revelation 22:1-2 explains the river of the water of life, which also talks about the purity of the word of God that brings us life. Life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

The function of the living creatures and the twenty-four elders was that they worship God day and night in purity and holiness. We should do the same in our behaviour daily and when we are gathered together on the Lord's Day. The Remembrance service is a solemn assembly and not where we can misbehave. There are other innumerable numbers of worshippers in heaven. They worship in the presence of our God, which is full of awe. Our God is the King of glory!

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: Revelation 4:2 matches Revelation 1:10, i.e. 'I was in the Spirit.' First the scene is the Lordly Day and the glorified Lord walking among the lampstands; here it is where God is enthroned. The first reference transported John from his earthly setting of Patmos, and the call here to 'Come up' involves an elevation in heaven to its highest heights. John will see horrifying visions of the enemy's actions and God's judgment; but first (in chapters 4 and 5) something of

the supremacy of God, which predetermines outcomes. Only then he sees what must take place after the 'these things' of Revelation 1:10-3:22. There he had seen aspects of the majestic Christ and then saw them applied in messages to the churches, to stir them in service until Christ's return as the 'Coming One'. In Revelation this coming is usually His return as Son of Man, not to the air but to the earth at the end of Daniel's 70th Week (Dan. 7:25-27; 9:27; Rev. 11:2,15; 16:15-16), for He comes 'as a thief in the night' and 'every eye shall see Him' (1 Thes. 5:2-4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 1:7; 3:3; 16:15; 22:12 cp. Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 12:10; Mat. 24:30 also referencing the return to earth). Thus, 'these things' of Revelation 4:1 may have been preparation for the first half of that Week, and the day of the Lord (but with lessons for disciples in John's time and ours). The title in Revelation 4:8 will later change, reflecting Christ's return to the earth (Rev. 11:17; 16:5), and therefore omit '... and who is to come'. Also, 'Coming One' most properly applies to the Son rather than to the Father (cp. Rev.1:4) [Comment 11].

The Father occupies a throne of His own in heaven. This is also the throne of the Lamb, whom John first sees in 'the midst of the throne' (Rev. 5:6 Gk.; cp. 3:21; 4:8-11; 6:16; 7:17). God is spirit, so 'throne' indicates pre-eminence, not merely a physical place. Whether the Holy Spirit is included in the title 'Lord God, the Almighty' we are not told, though 'holy' is said thrice. It is hard to understand how God as three-in-one would exclude enthronement of the Spirit [Comments 5 and 8]. Of course, this book's focus is the revealing of or by Jesus Christ, not the Spirit's equality in deity. If the 'seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God' (Rev. 1:4; 4:5) are actually the Holy Spirit, then He is 'before' not *on* the throne with the Father and the Son. Do not these 'spirits' differ from Spirit (singular) in Revelation 4:2? [See Jan. issue, Comments 5 and 6.] Perhaps, like the 4 living beings and the 24 elders (which together make four sets of 7!), also 'before' the throne, they are not just angels, but a class of spirit beings different from angels (cp. Acts 23:8) with very special significance as indicated by their closeness to the throne of God [Comment 12]. Are they visible agents of the Holy Spirit, who as God is invisible (Col. 1:15-16; 1 Tim. 1:17)? Some manifestations (e.g. 'right hand' Rev.5:2) are impressions serving a human mind. John nine times in this short chapter chose the words 'as it were', the indefinite 'a', or 'like', so we must be careful not to over-reach what is given.

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation are a glimpse into Christ's glory. This part of the book as understood in 1:19 begins here, where we see into the throne room of heaven. God is orchestrating all the events that John records. All the details in the vision are, of course, to be understood in a symbolic way: we will certainly not see any physical throne in heaven. The interpretation of these

symbols, however, is by no means left to our imagination: it is given to us in other passages [Comment 13].

In order to see these things we must be in the hereafter—i.e. after the church has been taken away [Comment 14]. John was invited to ascend into heaven. The Christian should always consider events on earth from a heavenly viewpoint to see them in their true perspective, with Christ as the centre-piece of the vision.

Functions Since there were twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament, twelve apostles in the New Testament and the 24 elders in the vision (Rev. 4:4) these probably represent all the redeemed of God for all time (both before and after Christ's death and resurrection). They symbolized both Jews and Gentiles who believed in Jesus as the Christ, and are now part of God's family. The 24 elders show us that all the redeemed of the Lord are worshipping Him [see Comment 2]. The four living creatures represent attributes of God, especially His holiness; faithfulness (the ox); majesty and power (the lion); intelligence (the man); and sovereignty (the eagle).

Twice in the Book of Revelation (4:6 and 15:2) John mentions a sea of glass near the throne of God. John does not elaborate much about what this sea of glass actually is. Is it water that looks like glass? Like broken glass? Revelation 4:6 says, 'Before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass like crystal'. Considering 15:2 likewise, in neither verse does John say that he saw a *literal* sea of glass. We might consider it as the 'floor of Heaven', 'the Sea of Glass', or 'the firmament'. Cp. Rev. 4:6; 15:2; Ezek. 1:22-26; Gen. 1:6-15; Ps. 148:4; Job 22:14; 37:18; Amos 9:5-6 and Ex. 24:10. [see Comment 15]

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: The centre-piece of the vision is the throne of God. God is ruling the entire universe. All the events in this Book are under His control. God's throne appears about forty times in the Revelation, and He performs His purposes through it. We can also see this from 1 Kings 22:19; Psalm 9:4; Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26-27 and Daniel 7:9-10. Here John gives us his impression of the enthroned one in incomparably magnificent words. He perceives a serene, scintillating beauty like that of lustrous, gleaming gemstones. How appropriately this agrees with the disciple James' description of God as 'the Father of the celestial lights' (James 1:17)! Shortly after writing Revelation, John himself stated, 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5 ESV). What a superbly glorious Person God really is!

John sees around the throne a rainbow, coloured emerald green [see Comment 9]. The first instance of a rainbow was in Noah's time, when God

confirmed that it would be a token of everlasting covenant between Him and every living creature of flesh on earth (Gen. 9:16). The rainbow is a symbol of the mercy of God.

Around the throne of God are 24 thrones on which are seated the elders wearing white robes, and on their heads are golden crowns. There are seven 'burning lamps of fire' which could symbolise the divine completeness of the enlightening force of the Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus' words in John 5:35, describing John the Baptist as 'a burning lamp of fire' when he was filled with the Spirit.

The glassy sea, like crystal in front of the throne, reminds us of the cleansing word of God. Paul spoke of the way that Jesus sanctified the congregation, 'cleansing it with the washing of water by means of the word' (Eph. 5:26). 'You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you' (John 15:3). Unlike in Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles 4:2 the people in heaven need not wash their feet, since they had already been cleansed (Heb. 10:19-20; 1 John 1:9). 'An important factor to be noted is that there is no sea in heaven, when the new heavens and earth are seen (21:1) [Comment 15].

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *The centre-piece of the vision* In Chapter 4, the Revelation gathers astonishing pace as John is exposed to unspeakably awe-inspiring visions of the abode of the Almighty God. The one who inhabits eternity (Is. 57:15 NKJV) and whom heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain (1 Kin. 8:27) is revealed as sitting on a throne. Whether such description should be taken literally or not since God is Spirit (John 4:24), it is nevertheless a gripping description of the glorious excellence of His being [see Cromer paper, paras. 2-3].

John undoubtedly was a more composed man when the voice like a trumpet spoke in chapter 4, unlike in chapter 1 (Rev. 1:12). The sight which John describes is clearly beyond mortal comprehension, and despite the sophistication in modern cinematic technology, cannot be recreated. Chapter 4 provides a rich mixture of amazing sights and sounds: a throne set in heaven, lightnings, thunderings and voices, twenty-four elders, four living creatures, a sea of glass, like crystal. These are all refreshingly captivating but not the centre-piece. That is the one who sat on the throne, who appeared like jasper and a sardius stone, and over whose throne was a rainbow in appearance like an emerald (vv. 2-3).

The twenty-four elders and four living creatures, the latter having been earlier spoken of by Isaiah and Ezekiel (Is. 6:2-3; Ezek. 1:4-27), could not compare with

the awesome majesty of the one who sat on the throne. Everything and everyone in heaven is focused on the creator and sustainer of all things. It is the joyful lot not only of mortal beings but also of celestial powers, unceasingly to render praise and adoration to the Almighty. It is not of compulsion, as though the Almighty required the same for His own fulfilment or validation. It is an outpouring of gratitude, a thing known to all the redeemed of the Lamb, but one deeply appreciated too by celestial beings such as the twenty-four elders, four living creatures and angels.

As one has said: 'Joy is the serious business of heaven.' Paul says: '... rejoice in the Lord always and again, I say rejoice' (Phil. 3:1 NKJV). It is clear that nothing else would or could engage the heavenly beings other than the one who is absolute holiness and purity. All the descriptions, from the throne and its appearance and surroundings to the transcendent Being on it, evokes deep joy and overflowing praise. So it was, so it is now and so shall it be, as revealed to John in the eternal state of things in heaven: 'You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created' (Rev. 4:11).

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): The possession of wings by the 'living creatures' seen by both John and Isaiah, would not necessarily identify them as the heavenly messengers of the sort that visited men and women on earth at various times. The appellation 'living creatures' rather than 'angels', coupled with the unique details of their appearance, suggests that they belong to another angelic order entirely, compared with for example, Gabriel or Michael. The beings seen by John are similar to the seraphim seen by Isaiah (Is. 6) and the cherubim seen by Ezekiel (Ezek. 10), although even these may be distinct in office and attributes.

J.J.

There are quite a number of similarities and differences in the descriptions of the four living creatures of Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1 and the cherubim of Ezekiel 10. In Ezekiel the 'appearances' listed would appear to confirm they are more than likely one and the same, with the exception of the four in chapter 1 having the face of a cherub, while chapter ten omits that and has the face of an ox. The first chapter has far more to say about their activities. So, we cannot be definite about it.

On the other hand, one striking analogy between Revelation 4 and Isaiah 6 is the ascription of holiness in the form of worship given by the living creatures of Revelation and the seraphim of Isaiah, the difference being that in the latter book that worship is constant before the throne of deity ('no rest day and night' v.8), as opposed to angelic interaction both tangible and verbal with a human being in the former (Is. 6:7). What cannot be doubted is a hierarchy with delegated responsibilities in the collective body of angels (cp. Dan. 10:13,21; Luke 1:19; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 12:7).

R.B.F.

2. (Aberdeen and others): If *the twenty-four elders* are human, their number must at various points have been incomplete, so angels are more fitting. This is suggested also by Isaiah 24:23 (ESV)—'the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.' Mount Forest paper prefers a being distinct from angels, nearer to the living creatures; Colossians 1:15-16 may support this.

M.A.

3. (Aberkenfig): Young's *Concordance* lists thirty-eight occurrences of the Greek word *thronos*, (throne), in the book of Revelation. Thayer's *Lexicon* counts thirty-six or thirty-seven occurrences, depending on the Bible version used. Other references give between forty and forty-seven depending on whether it is the throne of God or Christ or the beast or Satan. The recurring references to the throne of God underline the completeness of His authority and control of events in both heaven and earth.

J.J.

For good measure, Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* has 39 in the singular and 1 in the plural.

R.B.F.

4. (Aberkenfig): *Ox or calf? (4:7)* The Greek is *moschos*, a young bull, with the thought of prime power in service, so 'ox' or 'bull' is nearer. Compare the face of a bull (Heb. *shōr*) seen by Ezekiel (1:10), and the status of 'cherub' in 10:14.

5. (Buckhaven): We do not dispute the place Christ has at the right hand of God, but Ezekiel could hardly be aware of the Son of God who during the Old Covenant was yet to be revealed to man (cp. 1 Pet. 1:10-11); and John distinguished between the throne-sitter (the Father), the Lamb (the Son) between the throne and the elders (5:6), and the Spirit depicted by the lamps of fire. If we stay in chapter 4, John could well be regarding the three-Person God as his eyes

met the throne-sitter, but we doubt if he saw the Son exclusively there. We agree, of course that it was the Son whom John saw in the vision of chapter 1.

M.A.

6. (Cromer): There is no definite article before both ‘voice’ and ‘archangel’ in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, so what we are being told is that it is the Lord’s own voice that will be heard, as we would surely expect (cp. S. of S.; Rev. 22:20), but it will be characteristic of what an archangel’s voice would sound like (e.g. Michael’s)—clear and distinct (see also Jude 9).

R.B.F.

Our fellow editor’s view is made probable by the use of Gk. *en* = ‘with’, but the presence or absence of the article in N.T. Greek varies in significance according to context, unlike its much narrower use in English. Thus translators render *salpigx Theou*—also without articles—as ‘the trump(et) of God’ (RV, NAS, ESV, NIV).

M.A.

7. (Cromer): When the Lord Jesus as Son of Man returns as king to reign over all the earth, all will see Him, acknowledge Him, and bow and confess Him as King of kings, and Lord of lords (Zech. 4:9; Mat. 24:27,30; Phil. 2:9-10). In taking humanity He became mortal, subject to death; in resurrection He has taken on immortality, never ceasing to live forever in the power of an endless or indissoluble life (Heb. 7:16). Meantime, He is unseen to human, mortal eye.

Other scriptures verifying Him bearing this title of dual honour are Revelation 17:14 and 19:16.

R.B.F.

8. (Cromer): Before we accept reasoning that the throne-sitter must be the Son alone, let us give full value to John’s careful words, ‘he who sat there had the appearance of a jasper and carnelian’ (Rev. 4:3 ESV). Is John not describing a veiled impression rather than a direct view of the Person of God? See also Comment 5.

M.A.

Yes, the Father and Spirit were present too, reflected in the thrice mentioned ascription of holiness by the seraphim (Is. 6:3); also beautifully expressed in Lady Cockburn-Campbell’s hymn of praise to Jehovah, Lord God Almighty – ‘God in three Persons, blessed Trinity’ (PHSS 123).

R.B.F.

9. (Greenock): The scene viewed by John is ‘not of this creation’ but describes the

uncreated, unapproachable light in which the eternal God dwells.

10. (Greenock): While the thought that nothing impure can enter the presence of God is exceedingly precious, the idea that the laver of Exodus 30 and the bronze 'sea' of 1 Kings 7:23 are equivalent to the glassy sea of Revelation 4, doesn't 'hold water'. The function of both OT vessels was for the ritual purification of the priests—'that they die not' (Ex. 30:20-21); but, since nothing unclean will ever enter the presence of God in heaven (Rev 21:27), the same function cannot be attributed to the glassy sea.

J.J.

11. (Mount Forest): The Lord Jesus, being in and of the Godhead, is 'to come', just as He 'is' and 'was', all in common with the Father and the Spirit. The Lord Jesus also is the Coming One as far as His coming to earth is concerned. These are two discrete truths. So when the Coming One has come to earth He will still be the one who is to come (and evermore will be so as will all the Persons of the Godhead). The non-use in 11:17 and 16:5 of the full title of 4:8 does not warrant the contention that the title of the Godhead has changed nor that it signifies that Christ has then returned to earth.

P.D.

12. (Mount Forest): The reference in Acts 23:8 to the Sadducees' disbelief in the existence of angels also extended to the evil spirit world under the aegis of the Adversary, most definitely not a set of beings with close access to God.

R.B.F.

13. (Podagatlapalli): Why should we not understand the vision shown to John in this study chapter as being literal? If taking certain parts of the narrative as being purely symbolical, immense difficulty is encountered in deciding what is one or the other. The safer way of interpretation of Scripture is to look for the literal meaning and application of what is written, and if that appears illogical and unrealistic, endeavour to discover, by the Spirit's help what is emblematic. (In support, see March issue, Comment 7, para. 2.)

R.B.F.

14. (Podagatlapalli): The coming again of the Lord Jesus for 'the church which is his body' (Col. 1:18, Eph. 5:27, Mat. 16:18, 1 Thes. 4), is yet to happen. The things which occur between chapters 5 and 22, take place after that event.

J.J.

15. (Ravulapalem and others): *The sea before the throne* The restless and destructive sea has signified to many the turbulence of events on earth, and the

separation imposed by distance and hazardous travel, explaining the sea being no more in the new earth of the eternal state (Rev. 21:1). The sea before the throne of God may thus portray the calm of His peace.

M.A.

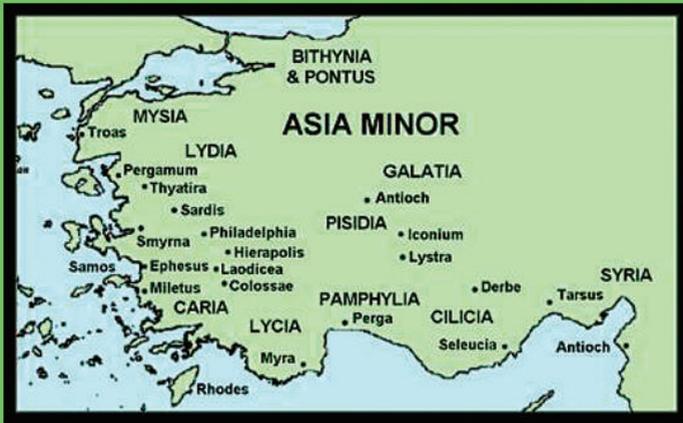
GEMSTONES OF BIBLICAL TIMES

Students will be aware that modern translations give various names to gemstones mentioned in Old and New Testaments. One problem is that some stones of ancient times had different properties from those gems found today, even if there is evidence that the same geological substance is described; and those currently found have marked variations according to the conditions in which they were formed. Jasper today is red, yellow or black with cream spots, because formed in sediment dominated by one of those colours. Ancient jasper, however, was commonly described as green and translucent. Carnelian, chalcedony, or sardius was and is today commonly red. The resemblance of the rainbow to emerald (Rev. 4:3) we may best understand as indicating the transparency or brilliance of the gemstone, rather than its colour.

Some commentators therefore prefer to understand the stones as conveying an overall lustre and splendour, but this loses the distinctiveness of e.g. the gems on the high priest's breast-pouch, with ideas drawn from connotations of the Hebrew words and their use elsewhere by the Spirit of God. We look forward to revisiting the subject when we reach the holy city in Revelation 21, described as brilliant with the qualities of jasper.

We may with profit consider suggestively the jasper on the breast-pouch that represented Naphtali, blessed in Jacob's divinely imparted vision as 'a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns' or 'beautiful words'. The tribe was ready for danger as led by a Barak or a Benaiah, and service of glory stirs us to choice words—'full of the blessing of the LORD', as Moses predicted (Gen. 49:21; Deut. 33:23), and as they became when visited by the Light of the World. All these thoughts lead of course to the glory of the Lord, who is the light of the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. For more on this cp. *Garments for Glory*, A. McIlree, 2012, pp.149-216.

M.A.



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