

## SACRED WINDOWS

An invitation to gaze into  
heaven's stained glass windows  
Beauty, Truth, and Goodness

May 29, 2022 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

### The Radiant Jewels and Precious Stones of Heaven

Greetings!

The reality that **there is a Heaven** and that God wants us to live with Him there forever is one of the most deeply-rooted notions of Christianity. In fact, it's the end-point of everything we believe.

But it's logical to ask: If Heaven is so all-important, **why is the Bible so vague about it?** If you look carefully, you'll find that nowhere in scripture is Heaven spoken about in anything but general terms.

A good example of this is St. Paul who had been granted an **extraordinary mystical vision** of Heaven. All he could say about it to the Corinthians was "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).



See how helpful that is? **Not.**

It's understandable, though. Paul was very concerned about **Christian living** so he used a lot of earthy terms in his letters like "running the race" and "fighting the good fight" to encourage his people to live well.

St. John the Evangelist, on the other hand, was writing for a persecuted Church, so he was **more concerned about Christian dying**.

In the Book of Revelation, he talked a lot about ultimate things like Heaven, Hell, and the final judgment (**spoiler alert:** the bad guys get what's coming to them.)

It was John who gave us the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which may help us understand *to some degree* what Heaven will be like.

### For the Senses and Imagination

The two final chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, are a foretaste, or preview, of Heaven. I use words like *fore-taste* and *pre-view* deliberately because they are sense words (taste and sight) and **require the use of the imagination** rather than the logical mind to reach an understanding of something.

These chapters **describe Heaven, not in doctrinal terms**, but in images and metaphors, which is why the imagination is the key faculty. It's as if God is saying to us, *"You guys just can't handle the beauty, truth, and goodness of Heaven right now. So here's an appetizer for you. Trust me, the meal will be much better!"*

Symbols, metaphors, and analogies lead us to *contemplate the mystery of Heaven* rather than try to analyze it (which our minds are too small to do anyway).

## The Rich Symbolism of the New Jerusalem

The imagery of Revelation 21-22 is so rich and varied that I can only give an overview of the images before we turn our attention to the jewels.

These chapters describe the afterlife variously as **a new heavens and a new earth** (21:1); a **beautiful bride** coming to meet her husband (21:2) preparing for their **wedding banquet** (see 19:7-9); a **magnificent city** (21:10-27); and a **life-giving tree** (22:2) that spans out over the **River of Life** flowing from God's throne (22:1).

We could spend a whole lifetime contemplating these beautiful images!

### Gates, Walls, Pearls, and Gems

We'll focus only on one image: **the city**, which St. John calls "a new Jerusalem" (verse 2). He says that it "gleamed with the splendor of God. **Its radiance was like that of a precious stone**, like jasper, clear as crystal" (verse 11). Wow! He goes on to describe its dimensions, its walls, its gates, and its streets, which are paved in gold.

I particularly love the description of the **twelve gates of the city**, each of which is made of *one single pearl* (imagine that!) This is where we get the image of the "pearly gates" of course, and each gate has **one glorious angel** standing guard over it who lets nothing unclean enter the city (22:3).

Interestingly, the twelve gates are engraved with the names of the **twelve tribes of Israel** signifying that all who enter them are members of God's chosen people. Then, the number twelve is repeated in the stones that give strength to the wall – **the foundation** – and here the stones are engraved with the names of **the twelve apostles**.

The Greek word for "**foundation**" is **actually plural**, indicating that this wall is so fortified that it actually has *twelve foundations* that are "decorated with every precious stone" (verse 19). That makes for a complex and radiantly beautiful image of strength.

If I make it to heaven some day, I think the precious stones that make up the foundation are going to be among the most dazzling of all its visions.

### Twelve Courses of Precious Stones

Here is the list of the English names of the stones and what their names would look like in the original Greek. Even though most of these stones appear in **a range of colors**, I've tried to choose an image of a stone that is representative of its class.

As you contemplate these gems, use your imagination and envision them as "gleaming with the splendor of God," radiant, precious, and "clear as crystal." As beautiful as earthly gemstones are, they are just a **shadow of the heavenly gemstones** whose luster is literally out of this world.



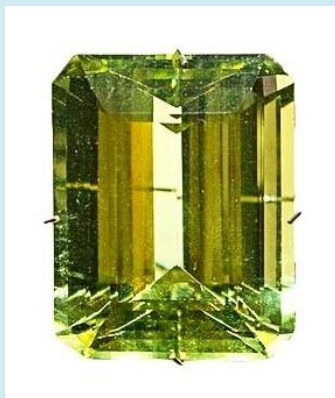
**Amethyst** – (améthustos)



**Sardonyx** – (sardónux)



**Emerald** – (smáragdos)





**Beryl** – (bérullos)



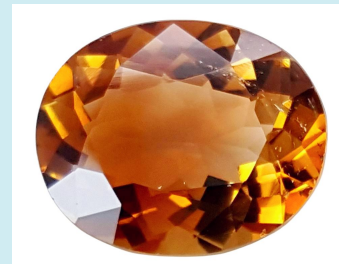
**Carnelian** – (sárdion)

**Chrysolite** – (chrsolithos)



**Sapphire** – (sápphíros)

**Jasper** – (Greek: iáspis)



**Topaz** – (topázion)



**Chrysoprase** – (chrsóprasos)



**Chalcedony** – (chalkedón)



**Hyacinth** – (huákinthos)

*Just beautiful, right?*

## The Old Testament Parallel

As with any New Testament image, however, there's some history to it. The precious stones image didn't just appear out of nowhere.

**A Jew reading this passage** would have immediately thought of the prophecies in Isaiah (54:11-14) and Tobit (13:16-18) which envisioned a future ideal Jerusalem to be a walled city encrusted with gems and precious stones.

But the **crucial Old Testament metaphor** is something quite striking and unexpected.

The gemstones of Revelation mirror, almost exactly, the precious stones in the **holybrestplate of the high priest** of Israel, Moses' brother Aaron. In fact, the comparison between the passages in Exodus and Revelation is quite astonishing, despite the fact that they were written a thousand years apart!

### Exodus 28:15-20

On [the breastplate] you shall mount four rows of precious stones: in the first row, a carnelian, a topaz, and an emerald; in the second row, a garnet, a sapphire, and a beryl; in the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; in the fourth row, a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper.

### Revelation 21:19-20

The first course of stones was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh hyacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

**Eleven of the twelve gemstones** on Aaron's breastplate found their way into the New Jerusalem list although some have alternative names (sardonyx is onyx; jacinth is hyacinth, and chalcedony is agate), but the similarities are **too close to be a coincidence**.

What is this near perfect parallel meant to signify? Simply that the New Jerusalem will be **holier than even the Tabernacle/Temple** in which the Old Testament priests offered sacrifice.

It will be more than just a holy garment the high priest wears. It will be the **very dwelling place** of the High Priest Himself.

We don't have any more details about that divine dwelling, just as we don't know what those mysterious "mansions" will be like that Jesus says He is preparing for us (John 14:2). But we can be assured that the **New far surpasses anything of the Old** by orders of magnitude of beauty that simply cannot be



described in human words.

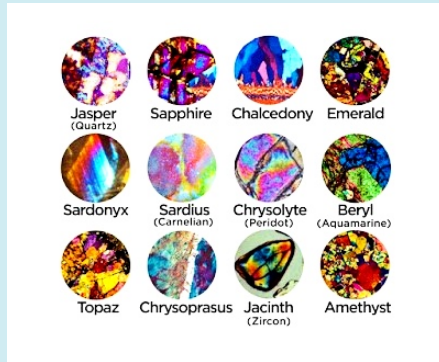
## Curious Omissions

One final thought. There are also some interesting omissions. Two jewels one would expect to be in a list of precious stones are conspicuously absent from the Revelation list: **diamonds and rubies**.

But these are the most beautiful of all precious stones! *Why were they left off the list?* The answer may have **something to do with light**.

[One author](#) suggests that when the twelve stones of Revelation are imbued with a type of pure light called “polarized white light” and viewed under a microscope, they **glow with super-radiant color**.

When diamonds and rubies are imbued with the same light, however, they – amazingly – *go dark*. Despite their external beauty, they **give off no color at all at the microscopic level**!



Truly fascinating.

Apparently **God chose the twelve stones** of the city's foundation for *their radiance*, not for their intrinsic value. And this fact could only have been discovered in the modern scientific era.

What matters, above all, is **the divine symbolism** of the stones: they are all the precious, durable, and radiantly beautiful foundations of His home, which we all hope to share some day.

And how, really, can one adequately describe such splendor?

Not with such poor instruments of communication as human words. **God used jewels instead!**

And if the **symbols themselves are so beautiful**, *what must the reality be like?*

## Feature Articles

**Dazzling beauty** is something we should pay attention to in the Easter season, and angels fit the bill perfectly. This week's feature article, "[Angels of the Resurrection and their Dazzling Glory](#)" explains **the different appearances of angels** at the Tomb of Christ on Resurrection morning. You may find it interesting to learn how to explain the discrepancies about them in the Gospel accounts.

Also, don't miss the **three exquisite stained glass windows** by the English Romantic artist, Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), that appear at the top of the post (there are arrows on the sides of the images so you can scroll sideways and see all three in sequence.) The Easter blessings continue!

### [Angels of the Resurrection and their Dazzling Glory](#)

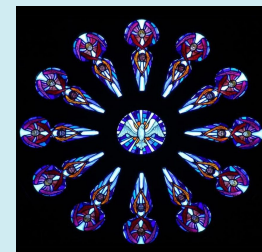


## The 7 Truth Categories on Sacred Windows

Just a reminder to all our readers – especially our new subscribers – that the *Sacred Windows* website is **structured around the three transcendental values: Beauty, Truth, and Goodness**. Entering the site, you will see that each of these is **divided into seven categories**, reflected in the articles and newsletters. Today's newsletter addresses a point of scripture, so it falls under Truth. Here are the **seven Truth categories**:

Church & Sacraments / Faith & Mysticism / God & Jesus Christ / Intelligent Humor / Prayer & Spirituality / Scripture / Virgin Mary & Saints

All Truth articles can be found on the [Truth page of the website](#), which can be accessed from the blue **stained glass window icon** on the front page or from Menu on the top bar of every page. Take some time to look around at the variety of articles there and enjoy!



**Many thanks and blessings!**



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