

### ***Bible Study Revelation 4-5***

*“<sup>1</sup>After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”*

**Up until this point, it appears that John was receiving a vision while still in a cave on Patmos. But now he was ascending to heaven, and receives visions as an eyewitness. What he sees is the throne room of heaven.**

*“<sup>2</sup>Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. <sup>3</sup>And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.”*

*“jasper, (ιάσπιδι) probably of foreign origin; a precious stone of various colors (for some are purple, others blue, others green, and others the color of brass)*



*There is one kind called the Aizusa, like to air and another Crystal lizusa, clear as crystal. So Pliny speaks of a white Jasper called Astrios, and which, he says is "crystallo propinquans", near to crystal, found in India, and on the shores of Pallene.”*



***“sardios” (σάρδιον) [Only used twice in the New Testament, both times in Revelation.]  
“This stone was of two kinds, the transparent-red or female being our carnelian, the  
transparent-brown or our sardine...”***

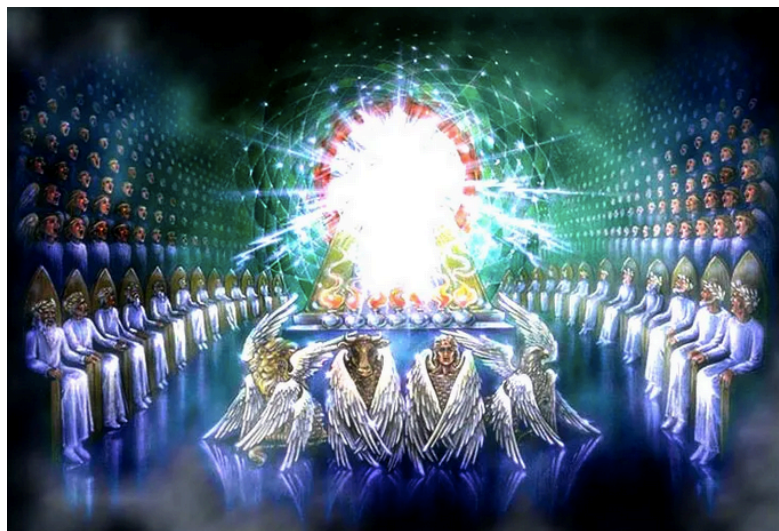


***“emerald”***



**The One who sat on the throne is not depicted with human features. This and later context indicates that “the One who sat on the throne “ is God the Father.**

***“<sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup> And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”***



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## Lightnings and thunderings

The presence of God was also demonstrated at Mt. Sinai:

*“Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled” (Exodus 19:16).*

Who were the 24 elders?



*“So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).*

*“And there were 24 elders... these are the books of the prophets of the law which give testimonies of the judgement. However, these twentyfour fathers are also the twelve apostles and twelve patriarchs” (Victorinus of Petovium).*

Who were the seven spirits of God?



St. Andrew of Caesarea says these are the seven angels over the seven churches of Asia (see 1:20) Primasius says these burning lamps of fire represent the Holy Spirit, who appeared at Pentecost as burning flames on the heads of the Apostles. Irenaeus believed that these are the seven chief angels named in Tobit.

*“And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.”*



*“The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.”*

This part of John’s vision is strikingly similar to the heavenly vision given to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah:

John	Isaiah chapter 6
<i>“<sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”</i>	<i>“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple...”</i>
<i>“And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back... “The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within.”</i>	<i>“Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew...”</i>
<i>And they do not rest day or night, saying:  “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”</i>	<i>“And one cried to another and said:  “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!”</i>

This vision of heaven, as seen by both John and Isaiah, is directly incorporated into the Orthodox divine liturgy:

*“We who mystically represent the Cherubim sing the thrice holy hymn to the life; giving Trinity...”*

*“For You are praised by the angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities, powers, and the many eyed Cherubim. Round about You stand the Seraphim, one with six wings and the other with six wings; with two they cover their faces; with two they cover their feet; with two they fly, crying out to one another with unceasing voices and ever resounding praises:*

**Priest:** *Singing the victory hymn, proclaiming, crying out, and saying:*

**People:** *Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory. Hosanna in the highest...”*

Heaven is, above all, the central place of worship in the Universe. It is where worship of God is perfect. But when we worship in the Divine Liturgy, our imperfect and earthly worship is harmonized with perfect and heavenly worship. The two become one. The Cherubim and the Seraphim do not represent us. We represent them.

It is not merely the angels who worship God, but also deified humanity:

*“<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever...”*

At the Little Entrance we sing:

*“Come let us worship and fall down before Christ. Save us O Son of God, who is risen from the dead. We sing to you, alleluia.”*

During Lenten liturgies we prostrate ourselves in worship:



*“...and cast their crowns before the throne...”*





***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).***

**As precious as crowns are, the saints in heaven toss them away as worthless in comparison to the majesty of God.**

*“<sup>5:1</sup> And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.”*

*<sup>6</sup> And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.*



**John the Evangelist understood the symbolism of the “*Lamb as though it had been slain.*” He remembered when John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the**

*sin of the world!” (John 1:29). John the Evangelist was present when Christ the Lamb was slain on a Roman cross.*

**This vision of the Lamb is profound to Orthodoxy; the Lamb that John saw is both Christ and a SYMBOL of Christ. John saw THROUGH the image of Christ as a sacrificed lamb and, in faith, beheld Christ Himself. This is the very definition of an icon – a visual depiction of someone which draws our reverential attention to the person being depicted. This is the first icon recorded in the Bible. If someone asks us where are icons in the Bible, we should refer them to this verse.**

*<sup>8</sup> Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp...*



*“... and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”*

**This is another profound detail for Orthodox Christians; incense is a part of heavenly worship and is used throughout earthly Orthodox worship. “Let my prayer arise before You as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice” (Orthodox Vespers hymn).**

*<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying:*

*“You are worthy to take the scroll,  
And to open its seals;  
For You were slain,  
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood  
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
<sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God;  
And we shall reign on the earth.”*

*<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,*

*<sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice:*

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”*

**This is a liturgical hymn-prayer sung by all present, just as we Orthodox do in all our services. Heavenly worship is not a series of spontaneous prayers offered by individuals, as is common in Protestantism.**

*<sup>13</sup> And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:*

*“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”*

*<sup>14</sup> Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.*



**When we worship in the Orthodox Church, we experience a small foretaste of this sublime scene: all human and angelic creatures gathered in worshipping the Holy Trinity. This is the precise purpose for which we were all created. This scene was described by the Apostle Paul:**

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***“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).***