



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 14

Text: Rev. 4:1-6a

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2. What the text means.

# The Heavenly Throne

### Greek NT

4.1 Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἦν ἠκούσα ὡς σάλπιγγος λαλούσης μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων· ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δεῖξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.

2 Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθημένος, 3 καὶ ὁ καθημένος ὅμοιος ὀράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, καὶ ἶρις κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου ὅμοιος ὀράσει σμαραγδίνῳ. 4 Καὶ κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρας πρεσβυτέρους καθημένους περιβεβλημένους ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς.

5 Καὶ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί, καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, 6 καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνῃ ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ.

### La Biblia de las Américas

1 Después de esto miré, y vi una puerta abierta en el cielo; y la primera voz que yo había oído, como sonido de trompeta que hablaba conmigo, decía: Sube acá y te mostraré las cosas que deben suceder después de éstas.

2 Al instante estaba yo en el Espíritu, y vi un trono colocado en el cielo, y a uno sentado en el trono. 3 Y el que estaba sentado era de aspecto semejante a una piedra de jaspe y sardio, y alrededor del trono había un arco iris, de aspecto semejante a la esmeralda. 4 Y alrededor del trono había veinticuatro tronos; y sentados en los tronos, veinticuatro ancianos vestidos de ropas blancas, con coronas de oro en la cabeza.

5 Del trono salían relámpagos, voces y truenos; y delante del trono había siete lámparas de fuego ardiendo, que son los siete Espíritus de Dios. 6 Delante del trono había como un mar transparente semejante al cristal;

### NRSV

4.1 After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

2 At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! 3 And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. 4 Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads.

5 Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; 6 and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

### NLT

4.1 Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after these things."

2 And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it! 3 The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones -- jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. 4 Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads.

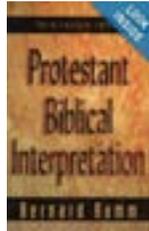
5 And from the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven lampstands with burning flames. They are the seven spirits of God. 6 In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

## INTRODUCTION

With this study we begin looking at part two of John's vision that came to him on the island of Pat-

mos. This vision segment covers chapters four through twenty-two of the book of Revelation. Clearly it is the

most controversial part of the book in the nearly two thousand years of interpretive history. Almost every generation of Christian leaders have understood it differently from the previous generations. Various dynamics have produced this, and we will give some consideration to those that have been more influential over the centuries. The Baptist theologian Bernard Ramm in his book *Protestant Biblical Interpretation. A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (3rd rev. ed., Baker Book House, 1970), includes a lengthy depiction of what should be required of every Biblical commentary writer before attempting to write a commentary on the book of Revelation. The list is massive and should humble any would-be interpreter of this document of the New Testament. But as the old saying goes, “where angels fear to tread men rush right in.” And with the expected disastrous consequences!



Thus we approach the understanding of this segment of John’s vision on Patmos with due humility and with a keen desire to hear God speak to us through the details of what was disclosed to John centuries ago. The greatest challenge will be to clear out the clutter of all the human voices who arrogantly assume they are speaking God’s Word. The promise of the initial beatitude in 1:3 must be claimed as we work through these chapters.<sup>1</sup>

**1. What did the text mean to the first readers?**

The background issues will often times take on huge importance, especially the literary ones. We are dealing with what even most of the ancient world considered to be a strange, almost incomprehensible way of communicating ideas. Visionary language such as controls most of the though expression in chapters four through twenty-two was overwhelmingly an eastern Mediterranean Semitic way of communicating. Only in the Jewish traditions from the intertestamental era forward do we find these patterns of thought formulation. To be certain, these forms emerge from the earlier Israelite prophetic oracle tradition in the eighth century. And while dependent at times heavily on this tradition, the apocalyptic visionary means of communicating develops its own style and patterns among the Jewish people. The Revelation of John stands squarely in the middle of this tradition and depends extensively on it for the framing of ideas, which themselves are distinctly Christian rather than Jewish.

Our challenge is to always remain sensitive to this

<sup>1</sup>**Rev. 1:3.** Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

**Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.**

background dynamic.

The encouraging aspect of the recent history of interpretation is that a growing number of New Testament scholars are recognizing this and giving more attention to it in their approaches to the book. Seldom any more does one encounter a millennialist question as an introductory assumption to understanding the book. Such assumptions come out of a narrow stream of post enlightenment ways of thinking and represent a hermeneutic long since proven to have enormous failures incorporated into it. The consequence is that the majority of recent commentaries -- outside of one very narrow segment of evangelicalism -- has learned to go directly to the text against its ancient background and thus bypass the distortions and false directions that have made Revelation such a controversial book for the past three hundred years.

**Historical Aspects:**

The various aspects of the history of the text will move their own individual directions. The external history, i.e., the hand copying of the text of Revelation for until the middle ages, will remain essentially the same as was true for the first three chapters. It is in the internal history section where some occasional shifts will occur simply because the text material in chapters four through twenty-two is primarily apocalyptic visionary materials. This means most of the perspectives are reflecting a beyond human history view. Careful attention to this angle must be given in order to understand the point of the text more correctly.

**External History.** In the evaluation of the variations of wording in this passage in the known manuscripts the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed) did not consider any of them to seriously impact the translation of the passage. Consequently in the text apparatus of this printed Greek New Testament no variations are listed.



This does not mean, however, that no variations of wording surface in examining the existing manuscripts containing this portion of the book of Revelation. The text apparatus of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (UBS 27th rev ed.) contains some twenty three places where variations are found.<sup>2</sup> As we



<sup>2</sup>**Offenbarung 4,1**

\* ἰδοὺ κ 2344 t; Prim (ἰδοὺ inserted before θύρα)

\* λ. μ. ε. λεγουσα (κ') M<sup>A</sup> (various word substutions of λαλούσης μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων)

| μ. ε. λαλουσα 2329 pc

have typically discovered in previous considerations, the variations either are made by very insignificant manuscripts, or else they reflect attempts at stylistic improvement of the reading of the text.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in the full confidence of it being the original wording.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside the text reflect the visionary language such as one finds in Isaiah 6:1-8 and similar OT prophetic visions.

One background issue that needs to be sorted out concerns a frequent misinterpretation of Μετὰ ταῦτα, the first two words of the passage. The meaning ‘after these things’ does not in any way imply a shift in time. The natural meaning of the prepositional phrase is simply the next thing that John saw in his vision after the initial vision introduction set up in 1:9-11. The first

**Revelation 1-3**  
Christ comes to John on Patmos and reveals the messages to the seven churches.



**Revelation 4-22**  
John comes up to Heaven where Christ is and then sees things on earth from a heavenly perspective.



The two angles of John's vision do not imply temporal progression, but instead conceptual shift. No shift from the present to the future is implicit in the language of 4:1. Clearly nothing to do with the span of human history is present in the text. They are merely two parts of a single vision.



| λεγουσα μ. ε. 1854 ar  
\* οσα A (ἄ is replaced by ὄσα)  
\* [ . et <sup>1</sup> ] (Greek : located either before or after μετὰ ταῦτα rather a period after)

**Offenbarung 4,2**

\* και 0169<sup>c</sup>. 1854. 2344 M<sup>A</sup> vg<sup>sl</sup> sy (και inserted before Εὐθέως)  
\* του -νου M<sup>A</sup> (τὸν θρόνον replaced with τοῦ θρόνου)

**Offenbarung 4,3**

\* M (και ὁ καθημενος omitted)  
| txt κ A P 046. 0169. 1611. 2050. 2329. 2351 al latt sy co  
\* και σμαραγδω 046 pc (και σμαράγδω inserted before και σαρδίω)  
\* ιερεις κ\* A 2329 pc (ιερείς replaces ἱρις)  
\* ομοιως -σις -δινων 1006. 1841<sup>vid.</sup> (2351<sup>c</sup>) M<sup>K</sup> (sy<sup>ph</sup>) (ὁμοίως ὄρασις σμαραγδίνων replaces ὁμοιος ὄρασει σμαραγδίνω)  
| txt κ<sup>2</sup> A 1611. (1854, 2050). 2344 M<sup>A</sup> lat (sy<sup>h</sup>) sa<sup>mss</sup> bo (κ\*, 2053. 2351\*: h.t.)

**Offenbarung 4,4**

\* 1006. 1841 M<sup>K</sup> (Και is omitted)  
\* † -νους εικ. -ρας 0273 pc (various sequencing and spelling of θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες)  
| -νοι εικ. -ρες (v1 κδ') M  
| txt κ A 2053 pc  
\* 2 3 1 A 1854. 2050. 2344 pc (θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρας in various sequences and spellings)  
| 1 2053. 2329 pc  
| θρ. τους ει. τεσ. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2351 mK  
| txt M<sup>A</sup> (κ: h.t.)

\*<sup>1</sup> A P 1854 pc lat (ἐν is omitted)

\*<sup>2</sup> κ 1854. 2050. 2329 pc (ἱματίους is omitted)

**Offenbarung 4,5**

\* αυτου 1006. 1611c. 1841. 1854. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> sy<sup>h\*\*</sup> sa<sup>mss</sup> (αὐτοῦ added after θρόνου)

\* α εστιν A (ἄ εισιν is spelled differently)

| αι εισιν 1006. 1841 M<sup>K</sup>

| εις 2329

\* 1006. 1841. 2344 M<sup>K</sup> (τὰ is omitted)

**Offenbarung 4,6**

\* 2053 al sy<sup>ph</sup> sa; Prim (ὡς is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 639–640.]

part of this vision covered the seven messages to be written down for delivery to the seven churches in Asia. Μετὰ ταῦτα in 4:1 simply specifies the next stage of this vision begins here. The spacial marker ἀνάβα ὦδε, **Come up here**, does not mean that John was physically transported to Heaven from Patmos. This is apocalyptic visionary language. Instead, in his mind John moved from earth to Heaven in order to understand what Christ wanted to reveal to him. In the first part of the vision in chapters one through three, Christ appeared to John on Patmos. Now Christ is speaking from Heaven inviting John to join Him in order to see the rest of the vision, the ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, **the things after these things**. In making this move John in no way leaps forward thousands of years to the end of time in order to see this. This is not what the text even hints at, much less implies. There is no forward movement of time for John. In his mind through the vision, he simply moves from Patmos to Heaven. John's label for this is ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι. But notice 1:10 where the same phrase, ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, is used to introduce the initial vision. His physical body remains on Patmos.

This kind of experience is fundamental to the ancient Israelite prophetic vision. What John experienced was very similar to what Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-8), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1) and others experienced centuries before. Interestingly, John will in his vision moves back and forth from earth to Heaven and vica versa. The OT prophets usually remained on earth but through their vision could see into Heaven.

**Literary Aspects:**

When one considers the literary aspects of this passage it must be remembered that this passage is but one part of a much larger unit of material that essentially covers chapters four through twenty two of the book. Although sub-genre variations will surface the

larger genre pattern of an apocalyptic vision will dominate the text.

**Genre:** The larger issue of apocalyptic vision as the controlling genre is pieced together in three segments: 1:1-2, 9-20, and 4:1. Together these three texts introduce the reader to the visionary nature of this document. The vision was given to John in two parts: 1:9-11, the instruction to write down the seven messages to the seven churches in Asia; and 4:1, the continuation of the vision containing the Heavenly picture of actions by God.<sup>3</sup> They are not two separate visions, but rather two parts of one inclusive vision.

Central to the vision is the verb εἶδον, I saw. Uniformly this first singular form will have John as the one seeing.<sup>4</sup> This Aorist verb in the first person singular from ὁράω defines seeing something with one's eyes. The verb ὁράω is used some 74 times in Revelation, with 56 instances being εἶδον. Thus the Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1) given to John (ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός) represents ὅσα εἶδεν, whatever he saw (1:2). What John saw, as well as heard, came to him while he was ἐν πνεύματι, in the spirit, or as he describes in 9:17, seeing εἶδον...ἐν τῇ ὁράσει, in my vision. Additionally, one must pay close attention to the shifts in verb tense that shifts the narrative perspective, especially in chapters four through six.<sup>5</sup> In his

<sup>3</sup>One of the interpretive questions, which is addressed in more detail below, is the setting of 4:1. Does this initial scene introduce just the seal narrative in 4:2b-6:17 or the entire section of 4:2b-22:9. Given the distinctive nature of trumpets emerging out of seals etc., the weight of evidence favors it introducing the entire central section of Revelation.

<sup>4</sup>The NRSV will use either 'saw' or 'looked' for εἶδον.

<sup>5</sup>The sequence of tenses exhibits the author's characteristic shift from past tenses in the first part of the vision narrative, to present and future tenses in the middle, and then back to past tenses toward the conclusion of the vision episode. In this chapter, John begins with two aorists, εἶδον, 'I saw' (v 1), and ἤκουσα, 'I heard' (v 1), followed by a brief invitation uttered by a voice from heaven in direct discourse introduced by the present participle λέγων, 'saying' (v 1). This is followed by two more past tenses in v 2, an aorist, ἐγενόμην, 'I was,' and an imperfect, ἔκειτο, 'situated.' Thereafter follows a series of three generic presents emphasizing habitual or characteristic actions (excluding the verb εἰσίν, which is also a generic present with a timeless significance): ἐκπορεύονται, 'was emitting' (v 5), 'they are covered' (v 8), and ἔχουσιν, 'they have' (v 8).

"More remarkably, these are followed by four verbs in the future tense: δώσουσιν, 'they will give' (v 9), πεσοῦνται, 'they will fall' (v 10), 'they will worship' (v 10), and προσκυνήσουσιν, 'they will throw' (v 10). These future tenses present a formidable interpretive problem. One solution is to regard them as representing Semitic past tenses (on this problem see Mussies, Morphology, 343-47). Lancellotti (Sintassi Ebraica, 65) regards these futures as Semitisms representing imperfects. These cannot simply be ascribed to vividness; they must be attributed to the seer's awareness that these events have not yet occurred.

"The vision report concludes with a hymn in direct discourse, which concludes the text unit when a new unit is introduced with

vision, John mostly looks back, but sometimes into the present, and sometime forward. But this is apocalyptic time, not regular historical time. The challenge is knowing how to connect up the two properly.

What then is an apocalyptic vision? One angle of examining the meaning is by looking at the process of communication assumed by the term and described inside Revelation.

On the giving side stands Ἀποκάλυψις, apocalypse (cf. 1:1) with its verb ἀποκαλύπτω meaning "I disclose." In 1:1-2, John has defined the process of God disclosing to Christ who then made the disclosure to John via an unnamed angel, although in the vision texts in the book it is Christ disclosing directly to John with no mention of an angel standing between them as the channel of disclosure. The primary means of communicating this disclosure was visual as ὅσα εἶδεν, whatever he saw, stresses. This does not preclude speaking, for Christ will do a lot of that in the vision to John. But the visual aspect will dominate the communication from Heaven to John.

On the human receiving side stands John who receives this divine disclosure while on Patmos at the end of the first Christian century. In 1:1-2 emphasis is given to John presenting (ἐμαρτύρησεν) this disclosure as μαρτυρία, testimony. Now here, this disclosure is labeled both τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, the Word of God, and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, the testimony of Jesus Christ. But in 1:3 it is further labeled as τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, the words of this prophecy. The injection of the label προφητεία carries with it the responsibility for John to pass on this disclosure to the people of God. Later the vehicle for passing on this disclosure is defined as writing down what John saw: ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, what you see write in a book and send to the seven churches (1:11).

Thus central to John's receiving this disclosure while on Patmos will be verbs stressing seeing, with the primary one being εἶδον, I saw, with 56 instances in Revelation alone. With the root verb ὁράω, I see, standing behind εἶδον, the past time Aorist form and also the noun ὄρασις,<sup>6</sup> vision, the central idea of a vision is a depiction either orally or in writing of what the individual saw in the vision.<sup>7</sup> For John, writing down

an aorist verb in the narrative formula εἶδον, 'then I saw' (5:1)." [

<sup>6</sup>"In the LXX ὄρασις is used some 110 times (38 in Ez., 18 in Da.), also 49 times in Da. Θ (including the lists of visions in Cod. A; elsewhere, too, more common in Θ than in ΑΣ)."<sup>4</sup>" [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 370.]

<sup>7</sup>In the vocabulary of the Greek New Testament a variety of words surface referring to a vision: ὄρασις, ὄραμα, ὄρασις, ἔκστασις. In the larger context of the NT, dreams are occasionally

what he saw was the divinely commanded channel of communicating the disclosure.

While ἔκστασις (the source of the English word ecstasy) does imply an ‘out of the body’ experience (cf. Act 10:10; 11:5), and ὄναρ or ἐνύπνιον define a dream while sleeping as the means of a vision, ὄρασις carries none of these implications about special situations accompanying the receiving of a vision. What, however, John does describe is being in the Spirit when the vision was received: ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, 1:10; cf. also 4:2). Physically John did not leave Patmos; rather, the vision came to him in that location. To be ἐν πνεύματι does not imply some kind of trance, but rather to be focused on the things of God very intently. This happened on a day when John was able circumstantially to completely devote his attention to the Lord (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ).

But the vision John received will carry with it two postures. First in chapters one through three, Christ comes to Patmos to John and speaks directly to him with the words to be written down as messages to the seven churches. But beginning in chapter four a second posture is added where John in the vision sees an open door to Heaven with Christ inviting him to come up there so he can continue to receive the vision. John does not physically travel to Heaven, rather, only in his thinking and understanding. No mention is ever given that this has the nature of a dream (ὄναρ/ ἐνύπνιον/ ἐνυπνιάζομαι) nor any kind of ‘out of body’ experience (ἔκστασις). Rather, the angle of John’s seeing moves from Patmos to Heaven. But will shift back and forth between earth and Heaven in chapters four through twenty-two.

The adjective ‘apocalyptic’ added to the term ‘vision’ carries some implications about the nature of the vision. The prophetic visions of the eighth century Israelite prophets such as Isaiah (cf. Isa. 6:1-10) focused mostly on a divine calling to proclaim the message of God’s impending doom on covenant Israel because of its waywardness to the Law of God. The “Day of the Lord” then took on different meanings and pointed to first the destruction of the northern kingdom (722 BCE) at the hands of the Assyrians in the messages of Amos and Hosea. Then with Isaiah and Micah it pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom (586 BCE) at the hands of the Babylonians.<sup>8</sup> From the vehicle of communicating a vision as reflected in specialized vocabulary in the NT: ἐνυπνιάζομαι, I dream and what is dreamed is a vision, Also ὄναρ and ἐνύπνιον as nouns referencing a dream as a visionary experience (cf. Mt. 1:20; Acts 2:17).

<sup>8</sup>“The Day of the Lord’ (= ‘the Day of Yahweh’) is a central feature of the prophets’ message to their contemporaries. This phrase and such closely related expressions as ‘the day of the anger of Yahweh,’ or ‘Yahweh has a day,’ occur over two dozen times in prophetic books (most frequently in Isaiah, Joel, and Zephaniah), and once in Lamentations (2:22). Similar terms, particularly “that

exile onwards the concept shifted to a more general judgment of God on the wickedness of His people.

To be sure, the scope of divine judgment was not limited to covenant Israel, since the “judgment of the nations” was an integral part of most of the messages.<sup>9</sup> In part this was to be a vindication of God’s people, even though the harshest judgments were reserved for them because of their wickedness.

Another aspect of the “Day of the Lord” looked forward to a better day of restoration and blessing for the remnant of faithful Jews in covenant Israel.<sup>10</sup> The turning point for the emergence of this positive theme was the Babylonian exile of Israel. The prophets whose ministry occurred during this period and in the subsequent postexilic era tend to highlight the aspect of hope for the people of God in the coming future more than

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day,” “the day of,” and “the day when,” appear nearly 200 times in the prophets, occasionally in Lamentations, and twice in Psalms (Pss 110:5; 137:7). These terms often are used interchangeably with the fuller expressions or in contexts that refer specifically to one or the other of them, e.g., Isa 2:12–22 (see vv 12, 17, 20); Jer 46:10; Ezek 7:5–27 (see vv 7, 10, 12, 19); and Ezek 30:2–3. In most instances, the same ranges of meaning are suggested.” [Richard H. Hiers, “Day of the Lord,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 82]

<sup>9</sup>“Most of the prophetic books contain oracles against foreign nations. The ‘Day of Yahweh’ and similar expressions frequently appear in these oracles. Commentators generally agree that in Amos’ time ‘the Day of Yahweh’ popularly was thought to mean the time when Yahweh would vindicate Israel by defeating its enemies. See the expressions ‘day of battle’ and ‘day of the whirlwind’ in Amos’ denunciation of the Ammonites (1:14). In contrast, Amos warns his Israelite hearers that ‘the Day of Yahweh’ will not be what they wanted (Amos 5:18, 20. See part B, below.). Several later prophets declared that the Day of Yahweh would be one of disaster for certain other nations, namely, Egypt (Isa 19:16; 20:6; Jer 46:10, 21; Ezek 30:9, 18), Edom (Isa 34:8; 63:4; Jer 49:22), Ethiopia (Ezek 30:9), Babylon (Isa 47:9; Jer 50:27, 30, 31; 51:2), the Ammonites (Ezek 21:29), Damascus (Jer 49:26), Moab (Jer 48:41), the Philistines (Jer 47:4), and Tyre (Isa 23:15). A few prophetic texts suggest that ‘that day’ will be one of judgment against many or even all nations: Isa 24:21 (‘the kings of the earth’; cf. Ps 110:5–6), Jer 25:33 (see 25:30–32 for context), Ezek 30:2–5 (particularly Arabia, Egypt, and other African nations), Joel 3:14 (see 3:11–12 for context), and Obadiah 15–16. The Ezekiel and Obadiah passages warned that the day was ‘near.’ Zechariah declared that ‘on that day’ Yahweh would destroy all the nations opposed to Jerusalem (Zech 12:3–9; 14:12–13). See also Ezek 38:17–39:8 as to the fate in store for Gog and Magog.” [Richard H. Hiers, “Day of the Lord,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 82.]

<sup>10</sup>“Some 60 occurrences of ‘the Day of Yahweh’ and similar expressions refer to the future time when Yahweh would reestablish the fortunes of Israel/Judah or the Jewish people. A few, particularly in Isaiah, look for the redemption of other nations as well: Isa 2:2–4 (= Mic 4:1–3); 11:10; 19:18–25; 25:6–9; Zech 2:11.” [Richard H. Hiers, “Day of the Lord,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 83.]

did the earlier preexilic prophets.<sup>11</sup>

The transition from prophetic oracle to apocalyptic vision builds off the foundation of some of the exilic and postexilic prophets such as Zechariah (chaps. 9-14) with some influence from the earlier Isaiah 24-27. Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah play a prominent role here. Important here is a longer view of history rather than the immediate future that concerned the preexilic prophets.<sup>12</sup> Another noticeable trend here is the growing emphasis on transcendence in the divine action in history. That is, stronger emphasis to determinism surfaces in that human events stand more and more under the control of God. Coupled with this is a greater stress on divine intervention in human events in order to carry out His plans for His creation (e.g., Zech 14).

During the postexilic a dual trend emerged with some of the prophets moving toward a more 'liturgical' institutionalized role, but a smaller segment continued in the 'protest' mode of indicting covenant Israel for its sinfulness. Joel and Zechariah 9-14 reflect this tenden-

<sup>11</sup>"The most obvious shift in the message of the prophets which begins with the Exile is the gradual loss of the sense that God was about to bring disaster on Israel and Judah. Scholars continue to disagree about the extent to which the preexilic prophets had seen hope beyond judgment, or had even thought that the judgment they predicted could be averted; but whether or not the preexilic message of judgment was total, there can be no doubt that it was an important part of the prophets' teaching. Amos had said 'The end has come upon my people Israel' (Amos 8:2); Hosea, 'Compassion is hid from my eyes' (Hos 13:14); Isaiah, 'His anger is not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still' (Isa 9:12, 17, 20). In Jeremiah, and in the early oracles of Ezekiel, we hear the same message of impending doom, foretelling the disaster of the Exile. But once the Babylonian invasion had happened and all false hopes of averting it had come to nothing, prophets began to look beyond disaster to more favorable divine purposes for Israel, 'plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope' (Jer 29:11). This is already clear in some of the oracles collected in Jeremiah 30-33 (although many scholars believe these to be additions to the words of Jeremiah, they cannot be much later than the work of the prophet himself), in Ezekiel 36-39 and the early postexilic appendix to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-48), and above all in the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55)." [John Barton, "Prophecy: Postexilic Hebrew Prophecy," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 489].

<sup>12</sup>"Instead of foretelling the immediate consequences of national sin, prophets now came to be interested in a longer sweep of history; and, in particular, they started to think that God has a detailed plan for the history of all the nations which he was working out in a more or less predetermined manner. The preexilic prophets give the impression that Yahweh reacts sharply and immediately to human conduct, but not that he has a grand design coming to fruition in preplanned stages. But already in Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, and to an increasing extent in the thought of Trito-Isaiah, Zechariah, and the forerunners of apocalyptic—such as the authors of Isaiah 24-27 or Zechariah 9-14—history seems to form an orderly progression, with human volition playing a role clearly subordinate to the divine plan." [John Barton, "Prophecy: Postexilic Hebrew Prophecy," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 491-492.]

cy. Out of this comes the Jewish apocalyptic tradition anticipating the coming of a messiah who would deliver faithful Israel from corruption and restore the nation to its former grandeur of the reigns of David and Solomon. But the emergence of the apocalyptic tradition is not homogeneous by any stretch of the imagination. The huge diversity of viewpoint developing pushes the idea of restoration in several different directions. Both the extent of and the means of restoring covenant Israel are hotly debated in this literature.

Indications of the visionary aspect reach back to earlier exilic prophets especially, such as Ezekiel, e.g.,<sup>13</sup> 1:1, εἶδον ὁράσεις θεοῦ, I saw visions of God. Note the frequency of εἶδον in Ezekiel; some 44 instances in the LXX translation of the Hebrew text. The role of the Spirit of God is also very prominent. Note Ezekiel's commission from God in 2:4b, καὶ ἔρεῖς πρὸς αὐτούς Τάδε λέγει κύριος, you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Further, in the postexilic literature a noticeable focus on visions and dreams develops.<sup>14</sup> Perceived increasingly by the postexilic prophets, God primarily communicates to the prophet via visions and visionary dreams. But in the later apocalyptic pattern these visions become more and more highly obscure and riddling, so that appended explanations become necessary for understanding them. Inside the OT, Daniel would be a prime example, and outside the OT is

<sup>13</sup>The LXX will be cited rather than the Hebrew due to the heavy dependency of John on Greek sources for both terminology and imagery. Sometimes the English translation will seem to be somewhat different, in large part because it mostly reflects the underlying Hebrew text that the LXX translators handled differently.

<sup>14</sup>A more significant shift may lie behind the greatly increased interest in visions and dreams in postexilic prophetic books. The passage from Joel just cited glosses the extension of prophetic gifts to all by saying, 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.' If it is right to see significance in the insistence by preexilic prophets on hearing the word of Yahweh rather than on seeing visions or dreams, this change may well indicate an important new departure. Jeremiah once explicitly distinguishes true prophecy from seeing visions: 'Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord' (Jer 23:28). This appears to imply that true revelations from Yahweh do not come in visions or dreams, though it is not clear what experience is concretely implied by 'him who has my word.' Does this refer to 'audition,' a supernatural but literal hearing of voices, or to some more subtle inner conviction that Yahweh has spoken in the heart? In any case, preexilic prophets are not uniformly opposed to visions: both Amos (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1; 9:1) and Isaiah (6:1) report visions which enshrine the word Yahweh is speaking to his people, and they show no embarrassment about this mode of revelation—unless these reports are the work of postexilic redactors." [John Barton, "Prophecy: Postexilic Hebrew Prophecy," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 493-494.]

Enoch in the various books attributed to him. Connected to this seems to be a growing emphasis on written communication of the apocalyptic visions even to the decline of an oral communicating of them to their targeted audience.<sup>15</sup>

Thus what John experienced -- and describes in these narrative introductions in chapter one and in 4:1-2 -- stands clearly within the framework of his Jewish heritage. An apocalyptic vision in John's view is a divine revelation of a longer view of God's plan for intervening in human history, and especially in behalf of, and sometimes against, His people. But the center of this vision is Christ as the exalted Son of God functioning to carry out this Heavenly plan.

Here John departs radically from his Jewish counterparts<sup>16</sup> in the first Christian century.<sup>17</sup> Their focus was

<sup>15</sup>One should also note the well established Israelite tradition that divine inspiration occurs in the receiving of the vision from God in a dream or some other kind of experience. It is then up the prophet to write down what God has shown him in the vision. Divine inspiration is not linked to the writing aspect, only to the initial visionary reception by the prophet.

<sup>16</sup>Two significant first century Jewish counterparts are 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, both written after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. These two works are closely tied together by common themes and a shared setting in the aftermath of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. In 4 Ezra three dialogues between seer and an angel are followed by three visions which, in an allegorical fashion recalling Daniel and the Maccabean period apocalypses of 1 Enoch, describe the movement of history through the ages down to the concluding divine denouement. 2 Baruch similarly combines dialogue and visions into a tapestry of apocalypses and other genres subservient to the eschatological theme of the fulfillment of human history in final judgment and salvation.

[Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: The Genre," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 280.]

<sup>17</sup>"Historically this corpus [Jewish Apocalypticism] has been recognized because of its resemblance to the canonical Apocalypse of John, or book of Revelation. 'Apocalypse' was a well-known genre label in Christian antiquity, beginning from the end of the 1st century C.E., when it appears as the introductory designation in Rev 1:1 (Smith 1983: 18-19). Thereafter apocalypses are attributed to both NT (Peter, Paul) and OT figures (e.g., the gnostic Apocalypse of Adam, the Cologne Mani Codex speaks of apocalypses of Adam, Sethel, Enosh, Shem, and Enoch). Prior to the late 1st century C.E. the title is not used. (Its occurrence in the manuscripts of 2 and 3 Baruch may be secondary.) It is possible, nonetheless, to identify a corpus of Jewish writings from this earlier period which fit a common definition (Collins 1979: 21-59). This definition is first of all formal: *an apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient. It also recognizes a common core of content: an apocalypse envisages eschatological salvation and involves a supernatural world. Finally, there is, on a rather general level, a common function: an apocalypse is intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine*

on covenant Israel being vindicated by the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in the tradition of David and Solomon. Torah obedience was the heart of covenant Israel, and the political dominance of the restored nation of Israel ranged all the way from purging out all non-covenant Jews from the Promised Land to world-wide control over all human governments. Thus John's Christian perspective offers a very different view of God's activity in human society. And his work will set a model for subsequent so-called 'Christian' apocalypses that will be produced in subsequent centuries.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of the specific genre of 4:1-6a, the *pas-* authority (Yarbro Collins 1986: 7). This definition fits all the Jewish writings which are generally classified as apocalypses: Daniel, 1 Enoch, 2 Enoch, 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch, 4 Ezra, Apoc. Abraham, and a few works of mixed genre (Jubilees, T. Abraham). Note also T. Levi 2-5 which is part of a larger work, and Apoc. Zephaniah, which is problematic because of its fragmentary character. It also fits an extensive corpus of Christian writings, beginning with Revelation, Hermas, and Apoc. Peter. Examples can also be found, with some distinctive variations, in Gnosticism (Apoc. Adam, 2 Apoc. James), among the later Jewish mystical texts (e.g., 3 Enoch), and also in Greek, Latin, and Persian literature (see the various essays in Collins 1979).

"The definition of apocalypse given above fits an extensive body of literature, which was produced over several hundred years. It is not suggested that the genre remained static or was consistently uniform. In fact, the definition serves only to delimit the corpus, and allows for considerable variation and development within it. To begin with, it is possible to distinguish two broad types of apocalypses: the historical type (e.g., Daniel) in which revelation is most often conveyed in symbolic visions and presents an overview of history culminating in a crisis, and the otherworldly journeys (of which the earliest example is found in the Book of the Watchers, 1 Enoch 1-36), which are more mystical in orientation. It is also possible to distinguish various historical clusters of apocalypses which have their own distinctive emphases and concerns—e.g., within the Jewish corpus one might distinguish the early Enoch literature, the apocalypses of the Diaspora, or those composed after the fall of Jerusalem, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch (see Collins 1984). Moreover, there is always some overlap between the apocalypses and other genres, e.g., the historical reviews which are characteristic of the historical apocalypses are also typical of the Sibylline Oracles and of the testamentary literature. While the apocalypses constitute a distinct genre, they cannot be understood in isolation from the various types of related literature."

[John J. Collins, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: Early Jewish Apocalypticism," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 283.]

<sup>18</sup>This includes at least the following documents. Several works frame themselves as visions, often discussing the future, afterlife, or both: *Apocalypse of Paul* (distinct from the Coptic Apocalypse of Paul); *Apocalypse of Peter* (distinct from the Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter); *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*; *Apocalypse of Thomas* (also called the Revelation of Thomas); *Apocalypse of Stephen* (also called the Revelation of Stephen); *First Apocalypse of James* (also called the First Revelation of James); *Second Apocalypse of James* (also called the Second Revelation of James); *The Shepherd of Hermas*. For a helpful discussion see "Apocalyptic literature," [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org) online.

sage stands as the beginning of the larger “throne-room report” in 4:1-6:17. Such literary forms were common in the ancient Jewish literature, both inside and especially outside the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Such depictions functioned in one of six different ways in ancient literature:

**(1) Enthronement Scenes**, i.e., someone is rewarded by God by coronation, enthronement, or investiture (Dan 7:13–14; 4 Ezra 2:42–48; Ezekiel Trag. Exagoge 68–82; Odes Sol. 36; Rev 3:21 [see Comment on 3:21]).

**(2) Judgment Scenes**, i.e., God or the Messiah judges (i.e., rules) and rewards the righteous and punishes transgressors (Ps 82:1–8; Zech 3:1–7; Dan 7:9–12; 1 Enoch 25:3; 45:3; 47:3–4; 62:1–6; 69:26–29; Apoc. Mos. 22:1–29:6; Matt 19:28–30 [= Luke 22:28–30]; 25:31–46; Rev 20:4–6; 20:11–15).

**(3) Commission Scenes**, i.e., God commissions an emissary to perform a particular task (1 Kgs 22:19–22 = 2 Chr 18:18–22; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Isa 6:1–13; Ezek 1:4–3:11; Amos 7:14–15 [see Andersen-Freedman, Amos, 399–400]; 1 Enoch 14:816:3; 71:5–17 [Enoch is carried by the spirit to the presence of God in the highest heaven, where he is installed as the Son of Man; an elaboration of Gen 5:24]; Asc. Isa. 10: 1–16; Jub. 17:15–16).

**(4) Eschatological Heavenly Festal Gathering Scenes**, i.e., scenes based on the real or imagined cultic practices of the second temple or of the Sinai theophany are used to depict an eschatological gathering of heavenly and earthly beings to praise and worship God before his throne (Rev 7:9–12 [see Form/Structure/Setting on Rev 7; Rev 14:1–5]; Heb 12:22–24; 4 Ezra 2:42–45; 13:5–50; Odes Sol. 36).

**(5) Vision of God as the Goal of Merkavah Mysticism** (3 Enoch 1:6–12; 7:1; Sepher ha-Razim 7 [ed. M. Mor-

<sup>19</sup>“The vision in Rev 4:1–6:17 is set in the heavenly throne room, and when it begins John is apparently on earth, or more specifically on Patmos. He sees an open door in heaven and hears an invitation to ascend to heaven (4:1): ‘Come up here, and I will reveal to you what must happen after this.’ This vision, then, begins explicitly with the heavenly ascent of the seer, though this feature is neither a necessary nor invariable feature of such visions. Throne-vision reports, often involving heavenly ascents, occur frequently in both prophetic and apocalyptic literary contexts in early Judaism as well as in the later rabbinic hekalot literature. Throne-vision reports (a narrated revelatory experience associated with prophets) must be distinguished from heavenly throne-room descriptions (though both types share the same imagery); both occur within a variety of literary and liturgical settings (e.g., T. Levi 3:4–9; Ladder of Jacob 2:7–22; Questions of Ezra 21; 3 Enoch 28:7–10; 32:1–2; 35:1–6; the Christian liturgy of St. Mark from Alexandria [F. E. Brightman, *Eastern Liturgies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896) 1:131]; *Orig. World* 104.35–106.11). The focus of the throne vision is God enthroned in his heavenly court surrounded by a variety of angelic beings or lesser deities (angels, archangels, seraphim, cherubim) who function as courtiers. All such descriptions of God enthroned in the midst of his heavenly court are based on the ancient conception of the divine council or assembly found in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Phoenicia as well as in Israel.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 276–277.]

gan, 81–86]; cf. T. Levi 5:l). **(6) Literary Throne Scenes**, i.e., the primarily literary use of the throne vision is as a vehicle for commenting on earthly events in the narrative (2 Kgs 22:19–20; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Rev 4:1–6:17; 11:15–18; 14:1–5; 19:1–8; Jub. 17:15–16).<sup>20</sup>

David Aune sees 4:1-6:17 as falling into the sixth category, which seems to be correct.

One additional aspect is the Heavenly Ascension of John described in 4:1-2a. This motif is commonly found in the Jewish literature as well. Comparing John’s experience against these patterns is helpful.<sup>21</sup>

**Literary Setting:** The literary setting of 4:1-6a is multi-layered. The opening statements present a narrative introduction that serves to set a terminus to the first part of the vision found in chapters two and three. But it also introduces a new phase of the vision. What is not entirely clear is whether this new vision extends just to 6:17 (with *Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον* in 7:1 introducing the next phase), or to include 4:2b-22:9. The seal narrative in 4:2b-6:17 comes up first and is clearly introduced, but because of the inner connectedness of all of the seven cycles one cannot exclude 7:1-22:9 from inclusion here as well. All of these material stands as a large inter-related unit of material. And in reality the 4:1-2a introduction continues what was initially put on the table in 1:9-20. It serves to shift the initial perspective from Christ and John being on Patmos in chapters two and three to their now being in Heaven.

Thus with this opening passage we clearly move into the heart of the message of Revelation: God is on

<sup>20</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 277–278.

<sup>21</sup>“One important though optional introductory motif to the throne vision of Rev 4:1–6:17 is the heavenly ascent motif found in vv 1–2a. D. Halperin (“Heavenly Ascension,” 218–20) divides Jewish heavenly ascent literature and references to heavenly ascents into five groups: (1) Rabbinic sources contain several third person accounts of individuals who made heavenly journeys: Alexander the Great (t. Tamid 32b; y. Abod. Zar. 3.1, 42c), R. Joshua b. Levi (b. Ketub. 77b), and Moses (Pesiq. R. 20). (2) Some Jewish apocalypses contain first-person accounts narrating the heavenly ascensions of famous biblical characters such as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Levi, and Baruch. One problem with this literature is the extent to which the ‘I’ of the narrator may be identified with the ‘I’ of the implied author. (3) The hekalot literature (see Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literature*) contains descriptions of heavenly ascents (some in the first person, some in the third), as well as prescriptions for such ascents (often in second person). An example of the latter is the discourse of R. Nehuniah b. ha-Qanah in Hekhalot Rabbati (summarized in G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 9–13). (4) There are supposed experiences of ‘ecstatic mysticism’ associated with Talmudic references to ‘the four who entered pardes,’ *merkabah*, and *ma.asah merkabah*. (5) Paul gives an account of his heavenly ascent in 2 Cor 12:1–10, and John describes his heavenly ascent and what he saw in the heavenly court in Rev 4:1–22:9.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 278.]

His throne in Heaven and is in full control of events taking place on earth as well.

**Literary Structure:** The block diagram below reflects the thought structures of the primary and sec-

ondary ideas found in these verses and presents them in a visual arrangement to enable easier understanding of their connectedness.

4.1  
135       **I saw,**  
          and  
          indeed  
136       **there was an opened door**  
          in Heaven  
          and  
137       **a voice was there**  
          the first one  
          which I heard  
                  like a trumpet  
                  speaking  
                  with me  
                  saying,  
                          Come up here,  
                          and  
                          I will show you  
                                  the things necessary to happen  
                                  after these things.

4.2  
138       **I was**  
          in the Spirit  
          and  
          indeed  
139       **there stood a throne**  
          in Heaven,  
          and  
          upon the throne  
140       **there sat One**  
4.3  
141       **the One sitting was**  
                  like a transparent stone  
                                  of jasper and carnelian,  
          and  
142       **a rainbow was**  
                  encircling the throne  
                  like a transparent emerald.

4.4  
143       **there were twenty four thrones**  
          and  
          upon the thrones  
144       **there were twenty-four elders**  
          sitting  
          clothed  
                  in white robes,  
          and  
          upon their heads  
145       **there were golden crowns.**

4.5  
146       **there were coming out flashes of lightening and noises and claps of thunder,**

and  
 147 **there were seven lamps of burning fire**  
 before the throne  
 which are the seven spirits of God,  
 4.6 and  
 before the throne  
 148 **there was something**  
 as a sea of glass  
 like crystal.

### Summary of Rhetorical Structure

Clearly a literary break between statements 135-137 (v. 1) and 138-148 (vv. 2-6a) exists by the nature of the content. A scene shift takes place with transfer from Patmos to Heaven. As discussed above in Literary Setting, one major interpretative issue is how extensive is the introductory role for this initial scene. Does it cover just the series of seals, or extend through the remainder of the document down to the Conclusio in chapter twenty-two?

Scene two in statements 138-148 introduce the reader to the throne of God (#s 138-142) surrounded by the twenty-four thrones of the elders (#s 143-146) and the seven spirits and sea of glass in front of the throne (#s 147-148). Thus two subdivisions are present first describing the throne, and second describing what appears either in a circle around the central throne (#s 143-146) or what appears in front of the throne (#s 147-148).

### Exegesis of the Text:

The twofold structure of this passage should first stress the two scenes (on Patmos and then in Heaven), and then the initial portrait of Heaven in terms of the central throne of God with the secondary elements located either in a circle or in front of this throne.

This natural idea structure in the text will be brought out in the exegesis of the passage that follows.

### A. What's next?, v. 1

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἶδου θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἦν ἠκουσα ὡς σάλπιγγος λαλοῦσης μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων· ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δεῖξω σοὶ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.

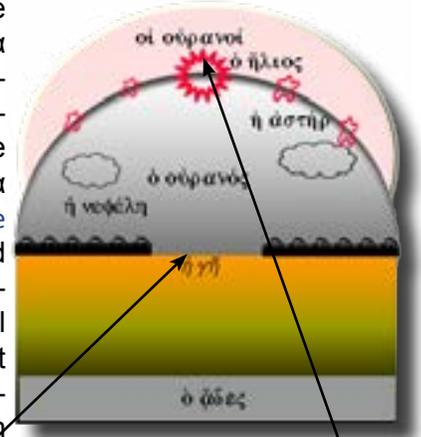
**After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."**

Boy, here we go with absolutely wild Greek grammar that is far more convoluted than anything in chapter one. The Aorist verb εἶδον from ὁράω ordinarily functions as a transitive verb with a wide variety of direct objects. But here we are left hanging with nothing specified as an object grammatically. The next several statements constructed in unusually elliptical form contain no main clause verb, but, in the nominative case

form rather than the required accusative case, θύρα and ἡ φωνή conceptually function in this role but not grammatically. For an English translation to be intelligible, all of this has to be washed out and proper English grammar rules followed with complete sentences. We are starting to see a deeper involvement of John in the maize of apocalyptic writing style in ancient Greek. It reflects some tones of Aramaic grammar underneath but not exclusively or even dominantly.

The first core statement, Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, raises some interesting issues. Critically important is the realization that Μετὰ ταῦτα, **after these things**, is not a forward movement in time. Instead this is sequential movement to the next topic. As John transcends to Heaven from Patmos, he does not step into the future. Instead, he moves from an earthly angel of perceiving to a Heavenly one.<sup>22</sup> This phrase either Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἶδου (7:9) or just Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον (15:5; 18:1) shows up later as clearly a sequential expression.<sup>23</sup>

The verb εἶδον with its past time perspective continues<sup>24</sup> to show up signaling to the reader what John



<sup>22</sup>Interestingly, the vast majority of futurist commentators have taken Rev. 4:1 as one of the most obvious indicators of their position.<sup>17</sup> However, as in 1:19, μετὰ ταῦτα ('after these things') is likely synonymous with Daniel's ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ('in the last days'), so that the visions of Rev. 4:2-22:5 are generally eschatological in scope (see discussion of the use of Dan. 2:28-29ff. in 1:1 and 1:19 above). μετὰ ταῦτα is probably also equivalent to such inaugurated latter-day phrases as are found in Mark 1:15; Acts 2:17; Gal. 4:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Cor. 6:2; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; Heb. 1:2; 9:26; Jas. 5:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 317.]

<sup>23</sup>The expression (καὶ) εἶδον, καὶ ἶδου, '(then) I saw, and behold,' occurs more frequently (6:2, 5,8; 14:1, 14; 19:11; see LXX Ezek 1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1,9; 37:8; Dan 10:5; 12:5; Zech 2:1, 5; 5:1, 9; 6:1)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 280.]

<sup>24</sup>Cf. "Rev 1:2, 12, 17, 19, 20; 4:1; 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10; 7:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 8:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 9:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 10:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 11:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 12:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 13:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 14:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 15:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 17:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 18:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 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32:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 33:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 34:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 35:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 36:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 37:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 38:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 39:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 40:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 41:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 42:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 43:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 44:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 45:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 46:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 47:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 48:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 49:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 50:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 51:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 52:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 53:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 54:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 55:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 56:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 57:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 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71:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 72:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 73:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 74:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 75:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 76:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 77:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 78:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 79:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 80:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 81:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 82:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 83:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 84:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 85:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 86:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 87:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 88:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 89:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 90:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 91:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 92:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 93:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 94:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 95:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 96:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 97:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 98:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 99:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 100:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 101:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 102:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 103:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 104:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 105:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 106:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 107:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 108:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 109:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 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123:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 124:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 125:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 126:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 127:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 128:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

saw earlier in the vision and now is writing down.<sup>25</sup> The ‘seeing’ that John does here is in his vision as ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι in verse two signals. He was not transported physically into Heaven in order to see what he did.

Although almost unintelligible in terms of ancient Greek grammar, the background of Jewish apocalyptic writings in Aramaic suggest a pattern for the subsequent statements introduced by καὶ ἰδοὺ, and indeed.<sup>26</sup> This phrase in Greek reflects a formal introduction of the contents of a visionary experience. The delineation of the contents of a vision dominantly come in a non-sentence type listing of contents. Thus in this initial scene of John’s vision while still on Patmos (actually scene 1 is in 1:9-20, and ὅσα εἶδεν, as much as he saw in 1:2) continues what was set up in Revelation as one vision.

Two items in this opening scene in 4:1 are put on the table: θύρα (a door) and ἡ φωνή (the voice). Both are visionary rather than literal objects.

The first is θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, a door opened in Heaven.<sup>27</sup>

Access to Heaven is pictured in terms of a door or entrance gate (θύρα covers both). The θύρα defines access to Heaven for John in this vision. Literal entrance into Heaven requires a radically different form of bodily existence based on authentic salvation, and physical death. But in his vision



12; 7:1, 2, 9; 8:2, 13; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 12:13; 13:1, 2, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2, 5; 16:13; 17:3, 6 (2), 8, 12, 15, 16, 18; 18:1, 7; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 22;” [The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (Logos Bible Software, 2011).

<sup>25</sup>Another possible implication of the Aorist is that John is assuming the vantage point of the reader sometime after the vision experience. But this highly specialized use of the Aorist tense centers in the epistolary materials of the ancient Greek literary world, and not in other literary forms. .

<sup>26</sup>“The particle ἰδοὺ ‘behold,’ is also used to introduce visions in 4:2; 12:3, but it is used more frequently elsewhere in the NT (Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19; Acts 1:10; 10:30; 12:7). The Aramaic particle ܫܗ hā. is similarly used to introduce vision narratives in 1*QapGen* 19:14; 22:27.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 280.]

<sup>27</sup>“Just as the keys to Death and Hades (1:18) presuppose a door to the underworld, so here the entrance to the heavenly world is also conceptualized in terms of a door. The passive perfect participle ἠνεωγμένη, ‘was opened,’ is used as a circumlocution for divine activity; i.e., it is God who opens the heavenly door for John. Parallels in ancient literature suggest that the image of the open door in heaven is appropriate for introducing a divine revelation, particularly in the form of an epiphany. Three important motifs are closely interwoven in vv 1–2: the door to the heavenly world opened by God, the voice from heaven that summons John, and the ensuing vision of God upon his heavenly throne.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 280.]

John is given access to the dwelling place of God in order to see what is there.

The two modifiers further define the nature of this access for John. The perfect tense passive participle ἠνεωγμένη specifies that God was the One who opened the gate to allow John access. He did nothing to open the door or gate himself. It was opened to him by God. The image of an open door into eternity was relatively commonplace in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture and thus provided an understandable backdrop to John’s picture here.<sup>28</sup> Further, in the Roman province

<sup>28</sup>“In the OT, the conception of a ‘door of heaven’ occurs just twice (Gen 28:17; Ps 78:23), and only Gen 28:17 concerns an epiphanic revelation (on the motif of the ‘open heavens,’ which occurs just once in the OT, see Comment on 19:11).

“In 1 Enoch 14:14b–15, there is an exceptionally close verbal and conceptual parallel, ‘I saw in my vision, and behold another door was opened before me,’ and in vv 1-8ff., Enoch sees a throne upon which God is seated.

“The conception of a ‘door of heaven’ is much more common in Greek tradition; see Iliad 5.749–50, where the Horai are designated as the gatekeepers of the gates of heaven and Olympus. Another close parallel to Rev 4:1 is in a fragmentary hexameter poem in the epic tradition entitled “On Nature,” by Parmenides, written toward the beginning of the fifth century (Diels-Kranz, FVS 1:227–31 [Parmenides, frag. B1]; English translation in K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948] 41–46; the interpretation of this fragment varies widely, see Taran, *Parmenides*, 17–30). In the introduction, Parmenides depicts himself as drawn along in a chariot escorted by maidens (line 5) also called Heliades, i.e., daughters of the sun (line 8), upward to the gate dividing night from day. The goddess Dike, who possesses the appropriate keys, is persuaded by the Heliades to open the large door. Once inside, an unnamed goddess takes his right hand and expounds various philosophical doctrines to him. In the remaining fragments of the composition, the goddess provides cosmological information on the nature of the heavens and the origins of the sun, moon, stars, fire, and other aspects of the cosmos. That this kind of revelatory journey experience has numerous parallels in ancient literary remains suggests that the revelatory vision report of Parmenides is in fact a literary device serving as a formal proem, which expresses his attainment of truth as divine revelation (Taran, *Parmenides*, 30–31). Since the imagery blurs the traditional distinctions between a celestial journey and an underworld journey, it is clear that the motif of the journey itself (understood as a quest for knowledge) is of central significance (Mourelatos, *Route*, 14–16). Though the journey motif is certainly dependent on the prototypical epic journey the *Odyssey* (Mourelatos, *Route*, 16–25), the motif of a divinely guided tour and the use of revelatory discourses attributed to a divine reveler (an unnamed goddess in Parmenides) are independent of the epic tradition (frag. B2). The similarities between these widely separated conceptions cannot be based on historical connections but belong rather to a widespread ancient revelatory topos based on common cosmological conceptions. The common function of each ‘open door’ presage (Rev 4:1; 1 Enoch 14:14b–15a; Parmenides frag. B1) is to introduce a revelatory scene. A close parallel occurs in the Coptic-Gnostic tractate *Apoc. Paul* 21.2–28 (Robinson, *Nag Hammadi*, 258–59): ‘[Then I gazed] upward and [saw the] Spirit saying [to me], ‘Paul, come! [Proceed toward] me!’ Then as I [went], the gate

of Asia even more significance was present from the extensive image of the open door to the throne of Artemis in the temple at Ephesus.<sup>29</sup> Thus John's initial readers would have anticipated a revelatory tour of Heaven coming ahead in the vision, which is what happens in the following segments.

The second item in this opening scene is ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἣν ἤκουσα ὡς σάλπιγγος λαλούσης μετ' ἑμοῦ λέγων, *the first voice which I heard as a trumpet*

opened, [and] I went up to the fifth [heaven].’ T. Levi 2:6 contains a close parallel to Rev 4:1 (and 1 Enoch 14:14–15a), though a door is not explicitly mentioned: ‘And behold the heavens were opened and an angel of God said to me, ‘Come in, Levi’ ‘ (M. de Jonge in Sparks, AOT, 526). Yet the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs are late, and it is possible that this and other passages (see T. Judah 24:2) are dependent on the NT. Similarly, in T. Levi 5:1 we read, ‘And thereupon the angel opened to me the gates of heaven, and I saw the holy temple, and upon a throne of glory the Most High’ (M. deJonge in Sparks, AOT, 528). Gnostic cosmologies often conceive of seven or more heavens, each of which has a door that must be opened before recent through the various levels is possible (Apoc. Paul 21.22–24.1; Great Pow. 41.7–8).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 280–281.]

<sup>29</sup>“The motif connecting divine epiphanies with a heavenly door is particularly important in southwest Asia Minor in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The world-famous Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, according to numismatic and literary evidence (Hommel, IM 5 [1955] 29–55), had a door in the front pediment that was apparently used for a ritual epiphany of the goddess (Trell, “Further Study,” 346–49; Oster, JBL 101 [1982] 217). Pliny (Hist. nat. 14.2.9) refers to a stairway to the roof of the temple, and a coin in the Berlin collection shows a figure in the central opening of the temple (Price-Trell, Coins, 129, fig. 229). In addition to the inscriptional and literary evidence for epiphanies at the Ephesian Artemision in the second century A.D. (SIG 867.35; Pliny Hist. nat. 36.97), there is numismatic evidence suggesting that Greek and Roman temple pediments (in a tradition originating in the Near East; see Hommel, IM 5 [1955] 33–38) often depicted the heavenly world, with the presence of such figures as the Horai who possessed the keys to the door of heaven (Pausanias 5.11.7; Lucian Trag. 33; Sac. 8; Eusebius Praep. evang. 3.11.38; Quintus Smyrnaeus 2.598; Nonnus Dion. 2.175; see Hommel, IM 5 [1955] 47). The pediment as a symbolic representation of the heavenly world is also found on Roman temples (Hommel, Studien). This suggests that even though the association of divine epiphany with heavenly doors is found in one form or another throughout the ancient world, the associated motifs are not only literary but cultic and a familiar phenomenon in Asia Minor. Since the motifs of the open door or open gate of heaven and the conception of the ‘open heavens’ are used occasionally in the same documents (see Rev 4:1; 19:11; T. Levi 2:6; 5:1), it is probably as incorrect to regard the door image as limiting the vision only to the seer as it is to regard the ‘open heavens’ as a more inclusive image (against Swete, 66; Charles, 1:107). A passage from the so-called Mithras Liturgy contains both the motif of the open doors and that of the trance (PGM IV. 625–28): ‘Then open your eyes, and you will see the doors open and the world of the gods which is within the doors, so that from the pleasure and joy of the sight your spirit runs ahead and ascends.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 281–282.]

*speaking with me saying*. This is the φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος, *a loud voice like a trumpet*, in 1:10.<sup>30</sup> Again this visionary understanding intends to stress the clearly attention getting and hugely authoritative tone of the heavenly voice. Quite clearly from chapter one, this is Christ speaking to John.<sup>31</sup> The comparison to a trumpet in the ancient world had the additional signal of the announcing of the king and his arrival in the everyday life of the people. It is some kind of image of how Christ is going to speak to John, and ultimately to the readers and hearers of this document.

Additionally the common link of the voice speaking to John on Patmos in 1:9 and 4:1 forms a book marker enclosing the initial stage of the vision that takes while John is on Patmos. The one difference is that the voice begins to speak to John from behind him on Patmos and ends up speaking to him from Heaven. Only in visionary experience can such a dramatic shift in location take place in such rapid succession.

The participle phrase λαλούσης μετ' ἑμοῦ, *speaking with me*, further highlights the connection of this voice to the voice in chapter one verse twelve ἥτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἑμοῦ, *which was speaking with me*. The use of the prepositional phrase μετ' ἑμοῦ rather than the dative of indirect object, i.e., ἐμῷ or the substitute indirect object πρὸς ἑμὸν highlights a friendly conversation with John.

The content of what was said is introduced with <sup>30</sup>The adjective ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἣν ἤκουσα, *the first voice that I heard*, clearly links the voice in 4:1 to that in 1:10.

But the view that this voice in 4:1 is distinguished from the voice in 1:17–20 is clearly wrong and either ignores or falsely twists the meaning of the adjective ἡ πρώτη ἣν ἤκουσα:

However, the author apparently wishes to distinguish the “first voice” of 1:10–11 from the “second voice” of 1:17–20; i.e., the “first voice” is not the exalted Christ that summons John to the heavenly world in 4:1 but an angelus interpres, or “interpreting angel.” Though a distinction between two speakers cannot be found in 1:9–20 (Beckwith, 436), Zahn (1:317–18) and Roloff (44–45) nevertheless think that the speaker in 1:11 is an angel, while the speaker in 1:19 is Christ. *For Bousset ([1906] 243) and Beasley-Murray (111–12), the ‘first voice’ was that of Christ in 1:10–20, and so is the voice of 4:1. This is clearly a redactional attempt to unify the textual units of the final edition of Revelation (see Introduction, Section 5: Source Criticism).*

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 282.]

<sup>31</sup>Some contend that this voice is of an angel in Heaven, on the assumption that the voice speaking in 1:10 was that of Christ on earth. Thus it would be illogical for Him to suddenly be in Heaven to speak this second time. But such thinking flounders on modern reasoning and fails to consider the visionary nature of the scenes depicting both voices. No time interval is clearly specified between the initial vision in 1:9–20 and this one beginning in 4:1. The Μετὰ ταῦτα in v. 1a is sequential rather than temporal. That is the continuation of the vision introduced in 1:9–20 provided first the seven messages in chapters two and three. Now it is providing a continuation of the vision with the depiction of the seals (4:1–8:1) which opens up the rest of the vision in 8:2–22:9.

λέγων, a second participle referencing speaking or talking. This more easily introduces the direct statement: ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δεῖξω σοὶ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, *come up here, and I will show you what is going to happen next*. The voice from Heaven (cf. 1:10) first invites John to come up to Heaven. In John's vision Christ could speak to him while on Patmos and offer such an invitation.

In visionary experiences beginning with the prophets in ancient Israel and continuing to the beginnings of Christianity in the first century, invitations to 'come up' and tour Heaven were relatively common beginning with Ezek. 1:1. "The notion of a 'heavenly tour' is common in apocalyptic; e. g., 1 Enoch 1–36; 2 Enoch."<sup>32</sup> Such experiences reveal both what is in Heaven and what is happening on earth from a heavenly viewpoint.

With the invitation to join Him in Heaven comes also the promise: καὶ δεῖξω σοὶ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, *And I will show you the things that must happen after these things*. Even more clearly, the μετὰ ταῦτα here is sequential rather than temporal. Thus this segment of John's vision represents a spatial shift in location from Patmos to Heaven, not a temporal shift from the present to the distant future. Subsequent instances of μετὰ ταῦτα in 7:1, 9, 15; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1 uniformly signal the next sequential item in the vision of John.

Important also to note is the literary function of this prepositional phrase. This same expression μετὰ ταῦτα both begins the sentence and concludes the sentence as a literary bracket defining the sentence as a single unit of thought expression. It stands in close linkage to μετὰ ταῦτα in 1:19 where the command from Christ for John to write down what he sees will cover the full scope of the divine actions: ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, *what you seen and what exists and what is going to happen next*. Additionally this prepositional phrase will serve as boundary markers for the various subunits of text material. Thus 4:2 through 6:17 are held together by μετὰ ταῦτα, in 4:1c and 7:1a, as a unit of text material.<sup>33</sup>

Contextually the demonstrative pronoun ταῦτα, *these things*, at the beginning of the sentence in 4:1 alludes to the seven messages as the first segment of this vision given to John. But the second instance of ταῦτα at the end of the sentence alludes to the next

<sup>32</sup>Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 16, *Sacra Pagina Series* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 79.

<sup>33</sup>"Structurally, Rev 4–6 is a single text unit. The scene clearly shifts in 7:1 to a new text unit introduced with the phrase μετὰ τοῦτο, 'after this,' which is used in Revelation only for major breaks in sequence. Rev 4:1 is introduced with the phrase μετὰ τοῦτο, 'after this'" so that the entire unit 4:1–6:17 is framed by these two narrative formulas." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 276.]

items to be shown to John, that is, the seals that are described through 8:1. But because embedded in the seven seals are the items presented in 8:2–22:9 they would also be included in the second ταῦτα.

Also interesting and important is that Christ tells John that these things are what He will 'show' (δείξω σοὶ) John, rather than 'tell' John. The eight uses of δείκνυμι in Revelation (1:1; 4:1; 17:1; 21:9, 10; 22:1, 6, 8) underscore visionary communication by either Christ (1:1, 4:1) or one of the angels in Heaven (17:1; 21:9, 10; 22:1, 6, 8). That is, a visionary image was communicated to John rather than a verbal description. Verbs of speaking do surface but central to the divine communication to John are the visual images that John sees. His challenge is then to find adequate words to write down a clear depiction of what he has seen -- and also heard: Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων ταῦτα, *John who hears and sees these things* (22:8). Thus at the end of Revelation it becomes the written down words of John that become faithful and true: οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί (22:6). That is, what John writes down is consistent with the images shown him from Heaven.

## B. God's throne, vv. 2-3

2 Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, 3 καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ὁμοῖος ὄρασει λίθω ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, καὶ ἶρις κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου ὁμοῖος ὄρασει σμαραγδίνῳ.

**2 And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it! 3 The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones -- jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow.**

Upon hearing the voice speak to him John entered into the visionary trance that placed him in Heaven: Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, *immediately I went into a spirit*. The adverb Εὐθέως signals an instant response to the Heavenly invitation. The verb ἐγενόμην from γίνομαι is almost impossible to translate clearly into English. The idea is to go from one existence into another, and thus sometimes can be translated as 'become.' The sense here is that John instantly moved into a visionary trance state of being.

This statement echoes 1:10, ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, *I was in a spirit on a day dedicated to the Lord*. This is the language of an ancient Israelite prophetic trance out of the OT.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>The introductory section of 4:1–2a concludes with a reflection of the prophet Ezekiel's repeated rapture in the Spirit. This scene is a reproduction of the angelic council visions that other OT prophets in addition to Ezekiel witnessed (note the allusions to such scenes as Isa. 6:1ff. and 1 Kgs. 22:19ff. in Rev. 4:2b, 8a, b, 9a, 10a). John catches a glimpse of Yahweh's heavenly council. Like the OT prophets, he is commissioned and called as a prophet by being summoned into the secret heavenly council of the Lord (see on 1:10–20 for the initial commissioning vision). In his prophetic

This phrase ἐν πνεύματι, in a spirit, occurs four times in Revelation: 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10. The last three of these are part of an invitation to be shown some activity of God in Heaven.<sup>35</sup> Although πνεύματι is often understood to refer to the Holy Spirit, this very distinct construction ἐν πνεύματι in contrast to the clear references to the Holy Spirit by using the article, τὸ πνεῦμα, in 2:8, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17, strongly signal that ἐν πνεύματι refers to entering into or being in a visionary trance. The term would infer being out of the body and in a spirit. Elsewhere in the NT, the phrase ἐν πνεύματι signals a 'spiritual encounter' with the divine.<sup>36</sup>

role he is to go back and communicate God's hidden purpose to his people and tell them what part they are to have in carrying it out.<sup>26</sup> He has been ushered into the timeless dimension where truth and reality can clearly be discerned. Thus, in vv 1–2a John identifies himself again with the prophetic authority of the OT (cf. 1:1, 10, 12, 19–20).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 319.]

<sup>35</sup>“The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, literally ‘in the spirit,’ occurs four times in Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Three of these involve responses to an invitation by an angelic being to come: 4:1, ἀνάβα ὄδε, καὶ δεῖξω σοι; 17:1, δεῦρο, δεῖξω σοι; 21:9, δεῦρο, δεῖξω σοι. The term πνεῦμα, ‘spirit,’ in these passages is commonly taken to refer to the Spirit of God, and therefore capitalized in modern English translations (AV [1:10 only]; RSV; NEB; NIV), and is so understood by many commentators (Beckwith, 435; Beasley-Murray, 112; Sweet, 114; Mounce, 133; Lohse, 19, 37; Lohmeyer, 44–45). Yet in all four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι, ‘in [the] spirit,’ the noun is anarthrous. Of the seven uses of the term πνεῦμα in the singular in Revelation, ten use the articular form τὸ πνεῦμα, and all but 19:10 (see Comment) clearly refer to the Spirit of God (2:8, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17). John uses the preposition ἐν, ‘in,’ followed by an articular noun in the dative case seventy times in Revelation, so he exhibits no hesitancy in using such a common Greek construction. Strangely, the phrase ἐν τῷ πνεύματι in the sense of ‘inspired by the Spirit’ occurs just once in the NT in Luke 2:27, of Simeon (the phrase is twice used in the instrumental sense of ‘by the Spirit’ in Luke 4:1; Acts 19:21). The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, however, does occur several times in very different senses in the NT (Luke 1:17; John 4:23, 24; Acts 1:5; Rom 2:29; 8:9; 1 Cor 14:6; Eph 2:22; 3:5; 5:18; 6:18; Col 1:8; 1 Tim 3:16), often in an instrumental sense (Matt 22:43; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor 14:16). There is, then, no compelling reason for understanding any of these four passages as references to the Spirit of God. The phrase ἐν πνεύματι is an idiom indicating that John’s revelatory experiences took place not ‘in the body’ but rather ‘in the spirit,’ i.e., in a vision trance (Charles, 1:22; Swete, 13; Kraft, 95). In 1 Cor 14:15, Paul contrasts two states in which Christians can pray, τῷ πνεύματι, ‘with/in the Spirit,’ and τῷ νοῖ, ‘with/in the mind.’ Caird (59) correctly and idiomatically translates ἐγένετο ἐν πνεύματι with the phrase ‘I fell into a trance.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 283.]

<sup>36</sup>“The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, however, does occur several times in very different senses in the NT (Luke 1:17; John 4:23, 24; Acts 1:5; Rom 2:29; 8:9; 1 Cor 14:6; Eph 2:22; 3:5; 5:18; 6:18; Col 1:8; 1 Tim 3:16), often in an instrumental sense (Matt 22:43; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor 14:16). There is, then, no compelling reason for understanding



Once immersed into his vision, what John sees is fascinating. The so-called throne vision of vv. 2b–6a is introduced in summary at v. 2b with καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνον ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, and behold a throne was setting in Heaven and upon the throne One sitting. This is ‘fleshed’ out with more detail in verse three. Then twenty-four thrones in a circle around the central throne are described next in verse four. Next in vv. 5–6a, John returns to the central throne but with emphasis on actions emanating out from it and also the presence of seven burning torches in front of the central throne, as well as the sea of glass in front of the throne.

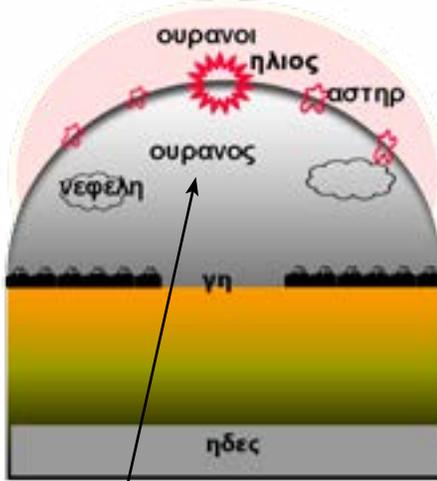
In the sentence found in vv. 2–3 we begin encountering again rather strange Greek sentence construction -- reflecting the unusual apocalyptic writing styles. Only θρόνος, throne, has a stated verb, ἔκειτο, and the rest of the elliptical expressions contain no verb as a foundation to their ideas. But English translations of necessity must supply verbs in order to make the idea understandable in translation. This pattern will continue throughout the subsequent units of visionary description.

The location of the throne is stated as ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, in Heaven. The Greek word οὐρανός has multiple meanings as the chart indicates from how the



any of these four passages as references to the Spirit of God. The phrase ἐν πνεύματι is an idiom indicating that John’s revelatory experiences took place not ‘in the body’ but rather ‘in the spirit,’ i.e., in a vision trance (Charles, 1:22; Swete, 13; Kraft, 95).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 283.]

NRSV translates the word inside the NT. The secular Greek background of the word is even more varied than what surfaces inside the NT, and actually has very little to do with early Christian perspective.<sup>37</sup> The early Christian view of the meaning of οὐρανός develops out of its Jewish background rather than from Greek influences. The primary Hebrew word for heaven, שָׁמַיִם, basically alludes to the



37“οὐρανός,<sup>1</sup> in class. Gk. almost without exception<sup>2</sup> in the sing., always means ‘heaven.’ The word always has a double reference. Heaven is the firmament, the arch of heaven over the earth. But it is also that which embraces all things in the absolute, a θεῖον. In the historical development of the two insights or ideas the definitions change, but the indissoluble duality remains. We find it in the very ancient view, preserved in Orphic writings, of a cosmic egg which bursts open. The upper shell becomes the envelope of the world (→ 500), but it also becomes the God-heaven elevated above the earth and moistening and fructifying it. We also find the double understanding in Homer’s mythical view of the brazen, iron, starry heaven which rests on pillars (→ infra), but which also serves as a habitation for the heavenly beings, especially Ζεὺς οὐράνοισι (→ 500). The same duality underlies the use in Plato, who equates οὐρανός with the πᾶν, the κόσμος, but who also regards it as that which embraces all conceivable life, so that it is seen to be a figure of the absolute and perfect (→ 499). Plato, then, can have the gods mount up to the ἐπουράνιος ὀπίς: θεωροῦσι τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ: to the final perception of pure being. In Aristot., too, we find both the cosmological sense and also the use of οὐρανός to express the θεῖον. Further development does not follow his attempt to differentiate the various aspects in his definitions of the concept (→ 499). For Stoicism, too, regards heaven both as the physical limit of the aether and also as τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν τοῦ κόσμου.<sup>3</sup> Finally, heaven is in Gnosticism ἀήρ and αἰθήρ, and does not lose its substantiality, and yet it also expresses the freedom, knowledge and immortality of God, → 501.<sup>4</sup> In the enlightened imperial age we still find representations of the god Uranos right up to the 3rd cent. (→ 500). The reason why the concept οὐρανός cannot be given clearly separated meanings is to be sought in the fact that it is always an expression both for the natural and physical givenness of what is above and embracing, and also for corresponding speculative data. The heaven which is the firmament, the heaven of μετέωρα, is the same as the heaven of the gods, the heaven which can be thought of as idea, direction, or revelation. It makes no difference to the concept whether the relationship was originally understood in realistic or in symbolical or figurative terms. For antiquity the term gives expression to the unity of the world, of the cosmos which is not only physical but also psychical and metaphysical.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:497–498.]

38“The word for heaven, שָׁמַיִם in Heb., שָׁמַיִם in Phoenician, šmm (or šmym) in Ugaritic, שָׁמַיִם in Aram., is obviously from a root šmw (y). The abnormal Heb. plur. (it should be pronounced šamayim) can only be regarded as a secondary shortening. In Western Semitic the use is plur., in Eastern Semitic sing. The plur. has been explained as that of ‘spatial extension.’<sup>38</sup> Etym. the word is obscure, though the view that it is a compound of the *nora relativa ša* and *mayim*, i.e., the ‘place of water,’<sup>39</sup> is undoubtedly erroneous.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 502.

39“ If we seek examples to show precisely what Israel understood by שָׁמַיִם, we first come across statements which speak of it as something fixed and material: heaven is stretched out,<sup>40</sup> it has windows,<sup>41</sup> also pillars (Job 26:11) and foundations,<sup>42</sup> and can be torn etc.<sup>43</sup> This is not just the language of poetry and symbol, for it seems that שָׁמַיִם is in large measure another word for רָקִיעַ, ‘firmament.’ This is the huge, luminous bell of heaven which has above it the heavenly ocean and whose orb arches over the circle of the earth, → 498.<sup>44</sup> The heavenly ocean (מַבְרֵיתַיִם), whose blue may be seen on the firmament from below, was naturally of great significance both because it blessed the earth (rain) and could also destroy it (flood).<sup>45</sup> To what degree שָׁמַיִם could be used as a synon. for רָקִיעַ may be seen in Ps. 148:4–6, which refers to the ‘waters above the heaven.’ The definition of P in Gn. 1:8 (he called the firmament heaven) pts. in the same direction. Finally the phrase ‘shaking of heaven and earth’ makes sense only if heaven is regarded as something solid, 2 S. 22:8. The distinction is that רָקִיעַ was a technical cosmological term, while שָׁמַיִם was in ordinary cultic and general use, and was thus essentially much more fluid; it had a much bigger range of meaning. Emphasis has been put on the fact that שָׁמַיִם denotes the atmosphere between firmament and earth, as plainly suggested by the very common ‘fowls of heaven.’<sup>46</sup> But the word was in no sense restricted to this sphere. In very many instances it has the more general meaning of the cosmic sphere above the earth with no thought of upper limitation. This is esp. so when the ref. is to God’s dwelling in heaven or to His coming thence.<sup>47</sup> In such cases שָׁמַיִם is the dimension above the firmament.

“Israel seems not to have been acquainted with the idea of many intersecting heavenly spheres. Perhaps there is an echo of this part of the Babylonian view in the phrase ‘heaven of heavens,’ שָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם.<sup>48</sup> But though there may be general connections, the phrase could well be regarded in Israel as no more than rhetorical hyperbole. Sometimes we read of the ‘four ends of heaven,’ Jer. 49:36; cf. Zech. 2:10; 6:5; Da. 7:2; 8:8; 11:4. This is meant horizontally, cf. Dt. 4:32: ‘from one end to the other.’ The height of heaven cannot be climbed by men, Dt. 30:12; Prv. 30:4.49 Proverbially heaven is also the quintessence of lasting duration, cf. the ‘days of heaven,’ Dt. 11:21; Ps. 89:29.

“The commandment in Ex. 20:4 divides the cosmos into three parts, heaven, earth and the chaotic waters under the earth. The same division is found in Ps. 115:15–17. The universe is much more frequently described, however, as heaven and earth, → III, 881. This formula is not based on the sacral picture of the world, like that of Ex. 20:4, but simply on elementary observation. It seems that there never was a sacrally canonised view of the world

‘firmament’ located above the earth.<sup>38</sup> In this sense it is somewhat connected to the ancient Greek meaning of οὐρανός as ‘firmament,’ although with a completely different understanding of origins. Often it is a synonym for the Hebrew רָקִיעַ that means ‘firmament.’<sup>39</sup> The LXX

38“The word for heaven, שָׁמַיִם in Heb., שָׁמַיִם in Phoenician, šmm (or šmym) in Ugaritic, שָׁמַיִם in Aram., is obviously from a root šmw (y). The abnormal Heb. plur. (it should be pronounced šamayim) can only be regarded as a secondary shortening. In Western Semitic the use is plur., in Eastern Semitic sing. The plur. has been explained as that of ‘spatial extension.’<sup>38</sup> Etym. the word is obscure, though the view that it is a compound of the *nora relativa ša* and *mayim*, i.e., the ‘place of water,’<sup>39</sup> is undoubtedly erroneous.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 502.

39“ If we seek examples to show precisely what Israel understood by שָׁמַיִם, we first come across statements which speak of it as something fixed and material: heaven is stretched out,<sup>40</sup> it has windows,<sup>41</sup> also pillars (Job 26:11) and foundations,<sup>42</sup> and can be torn etc.<sup>43</sup> This is not just the language of poetry and symbol, for it seems that שָׁמַיִם is in large measure another word for רָקִיעַ, ‘firmament.’ This is the huge, luminous bell of heaven which has above it the heavenly ocean and whose orb arches over the circle of the earth, → 498.<sup>44</sup> The heavenly ocean (מַבְרֵיתַיִם), whose blue may be seen on the firmament from below, was naturally of great significance both because it blessed the earth (rain) and could also destroy it (flood).<sup>45</sup> To what degree שָׁמַיִם could be used as a synon. for רָקִיעַ may be seen in Ps. 148:4–6, which refers to the ‘waters above the heaven.’ The definition of P in Gn. 1:8 (he called the firmament heaven) pts. in the same direction. Finally the phrase ‘shaking of heaven and earth’ makes sense only if heaven is regarded as something solid, 2 S. 22:8. The distinction is that רָקִיעַ was a technical cosmological term, while שָׁמַיִם was in ordinary cultic and general use, and was thus essentially much more fluid; it had a much bigger range of meaning. Emphasis has been put on the fact that שָׁמַיִם denotes the atmosphere between firmament and earth, as plainly suggested by the very common ‘fowls of heaven.’<sup>46</sup> But the word was in no sense restricted to this sphere. In very many instances it has the more general meaning of the cosmic sphere above the earth with no thought of upper limitation. This is esp. so when the ref. is to God’s dwelling in heaven or to His coming thence.<sup>47</sup> In such cases שָׁמַיִם is the dimension above the firmament.

“Israel seems not to have been acquainted with the idea of many intersecting heavenly spheres. Perhaps there is an echo of this part of the Babylonian view in the phrase ‘heaven of heavens,’ שָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם.<sup>48</sup> But though there may be general connections, the phrase could well be regarded in Israel as no more than rhetorical hyperbole. Sometimes we read of the ‘four ends of heaven,’ Jer. 49:36; cf. Zech. 2:10; 6:5; Da. 7:2; 8:8; 11:4. This is meant horizontally, cf. Dt. 4:32: ‘from one end to the other.’ The height of heaven cannot be climbed by men, Dt. 30:12; Prv. 30:4.49 Proverbially heaven is also the quintessence of lasting duration, cf. the ‘days of heaven,’ Dt. 11:21; Ps. 89:29.

“The commandment in Ex. 20:4 divides the cosmos into three parts, heaven, earth and the chaotic waters under the earth. The same division is found in Ps. 115:15–17. The universe is much more frequently described, however, as heaven and earth, → III, 881. This formula is not based on the sacral picture of the world, like that of Ex. 20:4, but simply on elementary observation. It seems that there never was a sacrally canonised view of the world

uses οὐρανός some 667 times mainly to translate either מַיִם or the Aramaic מַיִם.<sup>40</sup> God created heaven: Gn. 1:1; 2:4; Is. 42:5; 45:18; Ps. 33:6; Prv. 3:19; 8:27 etc. In later writings especially a complex idea emerges where heaven is God's dwelling place but also the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple is His dwelling place and earlier in the tabernacle. Some of the language reflects a dual idea of a place of dwelling and another place of manifestation.<sup>41</sup> The conceptualizations of God's dwelling place remain very fluid through the OT. Elements of several middle eastern religious traditions surface in minor ways through the OT, but none play

in Israel. The basis of this surprising fact is to be sought in the complete absence of a myth uniting and quickening the elements. Only occasionally do we find fragmentary mythical ideas, and these are rather used with poetic freedom as ancient ways of making things vivid, cf. the idea of the two world mountains in Zech. (1:8 textus emendatus; 6:1), which is close to Babylonian as well as Egyptian notions.<sup>50</sup> There can be no question of any more comprehensive mythical connections in the world of Israel's thinking. Along with such echoes we do, of course, find free poetic imagery. Thus it was easy to present the cosmos as a house with the balcony (עֲלֵי) as a cover (Ps. 104:3; Am. 9:6), or as an outstretched tent.<sup>51</sup> Heaven is also compared with the stretched out roll of a book (Is. 34:4) on which the stars are obviously the writing.<sup>52</sup> In heaven, i.e., above the firmament (רָקִיעַ), are chambers for snow and hail (Job 38:22), the winds (Jer. 49:36; Job 37:9, 12; Ps. 135:7), and the water (Ps. 33:7; Job 38:37), which in a cycle, when it has fallen on the earth as rain, returns thither (Job 36:27; Is. 55:10). In these and other instances we are struck by the wholly non-mythological and rational understanding which has made heaven and its laws the subject of sober observation.<sup>53</sup> [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:502–503.]

<sup>40</sup>“In the LXX οὐρανός is used 667 times, almost exclusively for מַיִם or Aram. מַיִם. In only a few instances is it added to the original of the Heb. books.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:509.]

<sup>41</sup>“Historically, then, we cannot fix a sequence of the different views of Yahweh's dwelling, least of all in the sense of showing that the idea of His dwelling in heaven arose only later or is simply the commutation of a very different notion.<sup>64</sup> The vision of Yahweh with a radiant building of sapphire stones at His feet (Ex. 24:9–11 J) is a very ancient tradition, and it contains already the idea of a God of heaven enthroned above the firmament. To the same effect is the tradition that Yahweh comes down to Sinai (Ex. 19:18 J). The concept of Yahweh as the God of heaven is well-known indeed, not merely to J, but to the traditional material worked over by him (Gn. 11:5, 7; 19:24; 24:3, 7). It is hardly possible to separate Canaanite material from the original J material at least (until we come to descriptions of the holy wars). It may be stated, however, that the idea which became so popular in Israel, namely, that of Yahweh as the heavenly king enthroned in the midst of the heavenly host, may be traced back to the influence of the Canaanite pantheon.<sup>65</sup> In particular, Yahweh in the course of His invasion took over important functions from the heavenly Baal (בַּל שָׁמַיִם) long since known to us from inscr.<sup>66</sup>” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:505.]

a significant role in the emerging idea of where God dwells. Although in the later prophets especially heaven becomes associated with the idea of the salvation of Israel, it was a deliverance that came out of heaven to earth as divine blessing upon covenant Israel.<sup>42</sup> No idea of covenant Israel ever spending eternity in heaven with God surfaces in the OT.<sup>43</sup>

In the emerging Judaism from the time of the intertestamental era onward, the major expansion of understanding centered on a plurality of heavens. This is first reflected in the LXX use of the plural form of οὐρανός, spelled οὐρανοί in the nominative case, some 51 times to translate the Hebrew מַיִם or the Aramaic מַיִם in the plural forms.<sup>44</sup> Various ideas emerged suggesting

<sup>42</sup>“If, for all the awareness of God's action in this world, heaven was still regarded as the sphere of Yahweh in a special sense, it was natural to regard this place, which in any event was the source of all blessings (Gn. 49:25; Dt. 33:13; 1 K. 8:35), as the setting of the eternal life inaccessible to man, and indeed as the place where God's planned salvation is already present prior to its working out on earth.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 507.]

<sup>43</sup>“Since heaven is plainly on the same level as earth in view of its creaturehood. and can very commonly be mentioned along with it in this respect, reference may sometimes be made to the shaking of heaven, which is always regarded as an act of judgment by Yahweh. Thus the story of the flood in P depicts a complete collapse of the structure of the world as God established it in Gn. 1–2:4a. In the prophets, too, heaven is affected by the divine judgment, cf. Am. 8:9; Jer. 4:23–26. When Dt. Is. says that heaven ‘is dispersed like smoke’ (Is. 51:6; cf. Job 14:12 textus emendatus), he is obviously prophesying a universal cosmic catastrophe, a kind of end of the world.<sup>87</sup> Tr. Is. goes on to speak of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, Is. 65:17; 66:22. Thus heaven is drawn increasingly into soteriological ideas. On the other hand, one should remember that heaven could not be of central interest for the faith of Israel. Even if it was sometimes depicted as the place of the salvation prepared for Israel, this was a salvation which comes to earth. OT Israel did not, of course, regard heaven as the place of the blessed after death.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:509.]

<sup>44</sup>“In the LXX οὐρανός occurs 51 times in the plur.. This use is almost completely alien to profane Gk. (→ 498, n. 2) and came into Gk. usage by way of the LXX. The model of the Heb. plural makes possible it to use in the transl. of the OT. Finding a basis in the plerophory of hymnic and doxological style, it occurs almost exclusively in the Ps. or similar pieces, e.g., 1 Βασ. 2:10; 2 Βασ. 22:10; Hab. 3:3; Dt. 32:43 εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοί cf. Is. 44:23; 49:13, though 1 Ch. 16:31 sing. Parallelism and poetic considerations determine the plur. of Job 16:19. The only prose instance—and this is in a prophetic saying — is at 2 Ch. 28:9. In later writings, even when it does not rest on the transl. the plur. takes its place increasingly alongside the sing, cf. 2 Macc. 15:23; 3 Macc. 2:2; Wis. 9:10,90 16;91 18:15; Tob. 8:5 etc. In its pure use it serves to express the idea of a plurality of heavens which came in from the Orient, along with the associated speculations. Hence the plur. in the phrase ἔκτισεν τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὴν γῆν (Jdt. 13:18; cf. 9:12;

between two and ten heavens.<sup>45</sup> In general the lowest heaven is closest to the corrupt earth while the highest heaven is the dwelling place of God, the furthest from the corrupted world. Additionally the Hebrew עַמְרָם or the Aramaic אַמְרָם were used as a paraphrase or concealing concept for God in order to avoid direct reference to the unpronounced sacred name for God.<sup>46</sup>

ψ 68:34; 135:5; Prv. 3:19) is to be regarded as a true plur.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:510–511.]

<sup>45</sup> “In Judaism<sup>93</sup> the further use of עַמְרָם<sup>94</sup> is characterised on the one hand by burgeoning speculation about heaven under oriental and esp. Babylonian<sup>95</sup> influences, and on the other by the use of heaven as a synonym for God.

“a. In the different systems which sometimes appealed to the same sayings (heaven of heavens, heaven and heaven of heavens. Dt. 10:14; 1 K. 8:27; 2 Ch. 2:5; 6:18), distinction was made between 2 to 10 heavens. The notion of 7 heavens, however, was the usual one.<sup>96</sup> A biblical basis was sought for each and a corresponding name developed.<sup>97</sup> ‘All (these) sevens are beloved before God,’ Ab RNat, 37 (9d); Pirke R. Eliezer, 154b. A frequently repeated story tells of the ascent of the divine Shekinah from the 1st to the 7th heaven in aversion from the sin of men, and then of its descent from the 7th heaven beyond the first to the tabernacle in view of the piety of the patriarchs and Moses.<sup>98</sup> The idea of 2 heavens (more commonly firmaments) occurs in En. 1:3; 71:5, cf. 1 K. 8:27 and Midr. Ps. 114 § 2 (236a); Chag., 12b; Dt. r., 2 (199b) on the basis of Dt. 10:14; appeal was also made to Ps. 68:34. We also find 3 heavens in 1 K. 8:27; Midr. Ps. 114 § 2; Test. L. 2:9; 3:1–4; Slav. En. 8 (B). Acc. to this ref. Paradise is in or by the third heaven. There are 5 heavens in Gr. Bar. 1:1, unless we follow Orig. Princ., II, 3, 6: *denique etiam Baruch prophetae librum in assertionis huius testimonium vocant, quod ibi de septem mundis vel caelis evidentius indicatur*. Slav. En. (A) 20:3; 22f. speaks of 10 heavens. In the uppermost is the throne of God, and hence there is direct access to God there.<sup>99</sup> A vivid depiction of heaven may be found in En. 71:5–10: ‘Then the spirit caught up Enoch into the heaven of heavens, and I saw there in the midst of that light a building of crystal stones, and between those stones tongues of living fire. My spirit saw how a fire ran around that house, on its four sides streams of living fire which encircled that house. Round about were seraphim, cherubim and ophanim; these are they who never sleep but guard the throne of his glory. I saw countless angels, thousands of thousands and ten thousands of ten thousands, around that house. Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel and the holy angels up aloft in the heavens go in and out of that house. From that house came forth Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel, and innumerable holy angels. And with them came the Ancient of Days; his head white and pure as wool, and his garment indescribable. Then I fell on my face ...’ Cf. also in En. 14:9–23 the description of heaven all aflame to express the fact that ‘I cannot give any description of its glory and greatness,’ v. 16.<sup>100</sup> The distance between the individual firmaments, and their individual extent, is said to be a way of 500 years.<sup>101</sup> It can also serve to denote abs. separation, e.g., between man and woman, Ned., 11, 12.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:511–512.]

<sup>46</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand

Eschatological thinking among the rabbis centers on a new creation of both earth and heaven in the last time.<sup>47</sup>

With the NT writers the word οὐρανός is used 284 times with 94 of them in the plural form.<sup>48</sup> Note: a slight variation in total numbers will surface in the secondary sources depending upon which printed Greek text the commentator is using. But the variations will be slight rather than significant. One should also include in this listing the larger word group of five terms: οὐρανός (noun: **heaven**, 273x), οὐράνιος<sup>49</sup> (adjective: Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:512.

<sup>47</sup> “A new creation was expected in the last time. On the one hand this was simply to be a kind of transfiguration which would leave the substance of the old creation intact: ‘When heaven and earth and all their creatures will be renewed (to new life) like the powers of heaven and all the creatures of earth,’ Jub. 1:29; when ‘I shall transform heaven,’ En. 45:1. Tg. J., I on Dt. 32:1 specifically rejects any destruction of heaven, cf. also Lv. r., 29 (127c). On the other hand there is to be a new creation in the strict sense after complete destruction of the old world: ‘The first heaven will disappear and pass away, a new heaven will appear, and all the powers of heaven (= stars, Is. 30:26) will shine sevenfold for evermore,’ En. 91:16.<sup>103</sup>” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 512.]

<sup>48</sup> “The word occurs in the NT 284 times (94 plur.), 84 in Mt.<sup>104</sup> (plur. 58),<sup>105</sup> 37 in Lk. (plur. 5),<sup>106</sup> 26 in Ac. (plur. 2), 54 in Rev. (plur. 1),<sup>107</sup> 11 in Hb. (plur. 8), 6 in 2 Pt. (plur. 5), 10 in Paul (plur. 3, or 4 with 2 C. 12:2), thus comparatively rare, 9 in Eph. and Col. (plur. 8),<sup>108</sup> no instances in the Past., Phlm., 1,<sup>109</sup> 2 or 3 Jn., 19 in Jn., no plur.<sup>110</sup> The plur. is common in Mt., Eph., Col., Hb. and 2 Pt. Only in the sing. is the word used with ὑπό, ἔως, ἄχρι, almost always in the sing. with ἐκ (plur. Mt. 3:17 par.: 1 Th. 1:10), ἀπό (plur. Hb. 12:25) and εἰς (plur. Ac. 2:34), and only in the plur. with ἐπί and ὑπεράνω. In the Synoptists it is often combined with ἐν in the plur., and only in the plur. in the Epistles apart from 1 C. 8:5. The common occurrence in Mt. is due to two formulae, πατήρ μου (σου, ὑμῶν, ἡμῶν only 6:9) ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, 15 times<sup>111</sup> — twice in Mk.<sup>112</sup> — and ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν 32 times,<sup>113</sup> found only in Mt.,<sup>114</sup> → I, 581 f. In both cases the plur. is a Semitism.<sup>115</sup> Esp. to be understood in the plur. are the verses which stand under the linguistic and material influence of Jewish apocr. and Rabb. writings or Hellenistic Gnosis,<sup>116</sup> → 534. It is not necessary to appeal to the latter for an understanding of the Pauline use<sup>117</sup> apart from Eph. 1:10; 4:10; 6:9; Col. 1:16, 20. How far it may have influenced Hb. 4:14; 7:26; 9:23 is very doubtful. The formula ἐν (τῷ, τοῖς) οὐρανῷ (-οῖς) (ἄνω) καὶ ἐπὶ (τῆς) γῆς (κάτω)<sup>118</sup> is OT and corresponds to LXX usage.<sup>119</sup> In the Rabbis, too, it serves to indicate the world as a totality.<sup>120</sup>” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 513.]

<sup>49</sup> “The adj. οὐράνιος, *heavenly / pertaining to heaven.* deriv- ing from heaven\*, shares the above-mentioned nuances. In Luke 2:13 and Acts 26:19 it is intended to emphasize divine origin. It appears 7 times in Matthew (5:48; 6:14, 26, 32; 23:9; 15:13; 18:35). The formulaic expression ὁ πατήρ ὁ οὐράνιος corresponds to ὁ πατήρ μου / ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. The NT prefers, however, → ἐπουράνιος and similar alterations. Whether extrabiblical usage of οὐράνιος led to this remains an open question.” [Horst Robert Balz

heavenly, 9x), ἐπουράνιος<sup>50</sup> (adjective: heavenly, 19x),

and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 547.]

<sup>50</sup>1. Occurrences and meaning — 2. Special uses in the NT — a) of God, Christ, and the powers — b) Apocalyptic usage — c) “Proceeding from heaven” — d) Heavenly salvation

Lit.: BAGD s.v. — H. BIETENHARD, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (1951). — L. BRUN, “Jesus als Zeuge von irdischen und himmlischen Dingen. Joh 3, 12–13,” *SO* 8 (1929) 57–77. — R. BULTMANN, *John* (Eng. tr., 1971) 147–49. — B. GÄRTNER, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the NT* (1965) 88–99. — P. KATZ, *Philo’s Bible* (1950) 141–46. — F. FORM, “Der Pluralis οὐρανοί,” *ZNW* 33 (1934) 48–50. — H. TRAUB, *TDNT* V, 509–43.

1. This adj. appears from the time of Homer and is also found in Plato, Philo (Philo All. iii.168), Josephus (Josephus Ant. i.69), and 3 Macc 6:28; 7:6. In the NT (19 occurrences) it has a variety of nuances as a substitute for a Hebrew prep. combination. In general, heaven and earth are spatially separated from each other. Despite their outward separation various thought forms (analogies, correlations, correspondences) establish a combination of the two realms. The coming of the kingdom of heaven in history brings with it a new knowledge of the heavenly realms; yet all apocalyptic awaits a final opening of the heavenly world and the new creation of heaven and earth.

2. a) In a prophetic warning concluding a parable of Jesus, Matt 18:35 speaks of the “Father in heaven” (οὐράνιος, v.l. ἐπουράνιος). The adj. occurs in a liturgical context also in 1 Clem. 61:2 (voc. δέσποτα ἐπουράνιε). In the liturgical confessional statement in Eph 1:20; 2:6 Jesus Christ is said to be in heaven (pl. subst. ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανόις) after his exaltation. The powers and authorities in Phil 2:10; Eph 3:10; 6:12 are of a heavenly kind. However, they are involved in the battle between light and darkness partially as opposing powers, not as messengers. Heaven itself is divided into a variety of levels and realms; God’s messengers stand in opposition to those of Satan (cf. the related adj. → πνευματικός, Eph 6:12).

b) That which is withdrawn from human eyes but has been described in earlier texts of Scripture is apocalyptic (John 3:12; Heb 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; cf. Wis 9:16; 2 Esdr 4:1–21; Hippolytus Haer. v [a Naassene sermon]). 2 Tim 4:18 speaks in elevated language about the “heavenly kingdom,” Heb 12:22 of the “heavenly Jerusalem.”

c) A further level is present where the adj. takes on the meaning proceeding from heaven and thus speaks of origin (= ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). Paul’s placing the first and last man in correspondence in 1 Cor 15:45–49 belongs here (also used here is the adj. πνευματικός, v. 44). The Hellenistic relationship should not obscure the fact that a Hebrew basis is present: on the one hand the formation of mankind from the earth, and on the other hand the appearance of the Son of Man and the saints of the Most High (Dan 7:13–14; 7:18; Phil 3:21). With Easter the process of transformation begins; the Son of Man includes the transformation of the saints. Paul thinks in corporate terms (not mystically): As the earthly one was, so are those who are earthly, and as the heavenly one is, so are those who are heavenly (οἱ ἐπουράνιοι, v. 48). Thus heavenly is a quality that corresponds to the transformation. The train of thought is basically future-oriented (v. 49), but in correspondence to the Hebrew view of space and time it may include the present as well (T. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* [1960], 147f.). Those who are heavenly (v. 48) correspond to the “saints” (Dan 7:21, 25; 1 Enoch 48:4; 1QM 12:1–5). Thus Paul’s apocalyptic is based on a definite Hebrew foundation.

οὐρανόθεν<sup>51</sup> (adverb: from heaven, 2x), μεσουράνημα<sup>52</sup> (noun: midheaven, 3x) which generates a total of 306 uses. The basic Hebrew conceptualizations play a central role in the emerging ideas of heaven in the NT, along with other contemporary concepts.<sup>53</sup> The fluidity of con-

d) If the heavenly world is the place where God lives, into which the believer, according to the apocalyptic view, can be removed, the inheritance of the pious that has been preserved is to be regarded also as present because one is certain of living in the reality of God (H. W. Kuhn, *Enderwartung und gegenwärtiges Heil* [1966] 183f.). Eph 1:3 is characteristic: God has blessed us with every kind of spiritual blessing which is kept in heaven (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανόις). Reception of this blessing is probably associated with baptism. The phrase “partakers of a heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1) is to be connected with the baptismal act: the call comes from heaven, has the manner of heaven, and leads to life, which is determined by the apostolic instructions. [Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 46–47.]

<sup>51</sup>A locative adv. responding to the question ‘from where?’: Acts 14:17, of God’s heavenly acts of kindness toward the Gentiles (rain and fruitful seasons; → καρπός 6; οὐρανόθεν most likely refers here to God’s right to dispense his gifts as he will; cf. also Luke 4:25; Rev 11:6); 23:13, in the account of the call of Paul (a light shone on him from heaven; cf. ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 9:3; 22:6). H. Traub, *TDNT* V, 542f.; K. Stendahl, *BHH* 719f.; H. Bietenhard, *DNTT* II, 188, 193; → οὐρανός (3). [Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 543.]

<sup>52</sup>Lit., of the highest point reached by the sun in the sky, and on that basis more generally high above in heaven: of an eagle (Rev 8:13), an angel (14:6), birds (19:17), in all three instances with a partic. of πέτομαι, ‘fly’. [Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 412.]

<sup>53</sup>The use of οὐρανός in the NT is determined on the one side by the view of the world which dominates the whole of antiquity, though with variations in detail. According to this picture heaven is the strong, firm vault which secludes the flat earth. Orientals often thought of it as a tent, → 527; 533. The stars were fastened to it, → 534. On the other side, however, the use is also controlled by the idea, self-evident to Judaism, Hellenism and primitive Christianity, that God is above and comes down from thence. Heaven is so much God’s sphere that it can be regarded as a synonym for God, → 512; 521. There is hardly an οὐρανός reference to which both these dominant factors have not contributed, οὐρανός in relation to God involves the cosmic meaning, while conversely οὐρανός as a cosmic term involves the relation to God. In the NT, in continuity with OT usage, οὐρανός is the upper<sup>121</sup> and controlling<sup>122</sup> part of the universe, which is always<sup>123</sup> described as οὐρανός καὶ γῆ.<sup>124, 125</sup> This expression is not a term for the world not yet understood in cosmological unity. Indeed, the Gk. tt. κόσμος came into use only hesitantly under Hellenistic influence.<sup>126</sup> The integration of heaven and earth is not regarded as immanent; it is understood to be the work of the divine Creator. Heaven and earth, both in their relationship and also in the superiority of heaven over earth, are a symbolical representation of the relation of God as Lord and Creator to His lordship and creation. Thus at no point, not even when used in the sense of firmament and atmosphere, does the term οὐρανός lose this symbolical character (cf. Is. 55:9), which is very evident in its use for the ‘home of the divine.’<sup>127</sup> [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Page 18

ceptualizations continues to be expressed in the NT, although to a certain extent the singular form οὐρανός tends to refer to what we usually would call the sky, and the plural οὐρανοί in reference to the dwelling place of God. Patterns of NT usage can be reasonably grouped into the following categories:<sup>54</sup>

**1. Heaven and earth.** Heaven was created by God along with the earth.<sup>55</sup> Consequently heaven will ‘pass away’ along with the earth in the end time.<sup>56</sup> Both

Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:514.]

<sup>54</sup>In the following, I will summarize major points of the very lengthy but profoundly insightful article “οὐρανός, οὐράνιος, ἐπουράνιος, οὐρανόθεν” by Hellmut Traub in volume five of Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*: Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–). Heavy documentation in content footnotes will accompany the summary for the benefit of those desiring more details and explanation of the summations.

<sup>55</sup>“With the earth, heaven was created by God:<sup>128</sup> ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν, Ac. 4:24; cf. 14:15; 17:24; Rev. 14:7;<sup>129</sup> ὃς ἔκτισεν τὸν οὐρανὸν ... καὶ τὴν γῆν, Rev. 10:6;<sup>130</sup> cf. also Hb. 1:10 (= ψ 101:25).<sup>131</sup> A notable feature here is that we find the statement only as an OT quotation and only in Ac. and Rev. Thus Ac. 17:24: ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον ..., οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος. To the creation of heaven and earth corresponds, in fulfilment of prophetic promise (Is. 65:17; 66:22 → 509; 512) their eschatological new creation: οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινὴν, Rev. 21:1; καινοὺς δὲ οὐρανοὺς καὶ γῆν καινὴν, 2 Pt. 3:13, cf. Is. 65:17; 66:22. The word καινός (→ III, 449, 6 ff.) denotes an act of creation which excludes evolution. The addition in 2 Pt. 3:13: ἐν οἷς δικαιοσύνη κατοικεῖ, shows that the present temporal heaven has been essentially disrupted by the ἀδικία of man and has become old (= πρῶτος, Rev. 21:1), → 520, 4. This new creation is already achieved in God, i.e., in His saving purpose. The divine can say εἶδον, and to this corresponds κατὰ τὸ ἐπάγγελμα αὐτοῦ προσδοκῶμεν in 2 Pt. 3:13; cf. R. 8:21 ff.<sup>132</sup> The awaited eschatological consummation does not extend, then, to heaven alone. Along with heaven it includes earth as well.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:514–515.]

<sup>56</sup>“Not earth alone passes away. With it and before it heaven also passes away: ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, Mk. 13:31 and par.;<sup>133</sup> cf. Rev. 21:1; Hb. 12:26 (= Hag. 2:6; cf. v. 21):<sup>134</sup> 1:11f. (= ψ 101:26 f.);<sup>135</sup> similarly 2 Pt. 3:10, 12.<sup>136</sup> Heaven and earth are kept for this destruction (2 Pt. 3:7), and both experience the eschatological terror of flight from God’s manifestation, Rev. 20:11.<sup>137</sup> Mt. 5:18 and par. shows how much this stock announcement, which is rooted in the OT (→ 509) and Jewish apocalyptic (→ 512), is taken for granted.<sup>138</sup> In the saying here the validity of the Law is linked with the existence of the πρῶτος οὐρανός and the πρώτη γῆ, while according to Mk. 13:31 only the words of Jesus cannot be affected by the passing away of heaven and earth.<sup>139</sup> Hence the existence of heaven and earth testifies to man that he cannot escape the demand of the νόμος. The passing away of heaven and earth shows that it too, being created,<sup>140</sup> is subject to the judgment of God as Lord. But what is said about the passing away of heaven and earth is not the true content of the NT kerygma. It

heaven and earth stand under the same lordship of God.<sup>57</sup> In the saving work of Christ heaven and earth take on a new relation to one another.<sup>58</sup>

is never more than the negative background for the true and positive proclamation of that which endures<sup>141</sup> and is unshakable (Hb. 12:27), i.e., of that which comes.<sup>142</sup>” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:515–516.]

<sup>57</sup>“With earth, heaven stands under the same lordship of God. Jesus calls on God as πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, Mt. 11:25 and par.<sup>143</sup>

Though the expression is uncommon in the OT,<sup>144</sup> Gn. 24:3 (J)145 shows that it is old and did not simply arise under Persian influence.<sup>146</sup> Esp. in connection with πατήρ,<sup>147</sup> as here, it refers primarily, not to God as Creator, but to the covenant God as the Lord of the world who brings salvation.<sup>148</sup> The emphasis is different in Ac. 17:24: ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος (cf. Is. 42:5). Here the statement about the Lord is bound up with, if not grounded in, that about the Creator. Col. 1:16 (→ n. 131) does not belong to this group; it is to be expounded along with Eph. 1:10; cf. also Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1 (→ 517, 5 f.).

With Is. 66:1, Mt. 5:34<sup>149</sup> and Ac. 7:49 describe heaven and earth as the absolute sphere of God’s dominion. His power is manifested at the coming of the Son of Man in the gathering of the elect ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ’ ἄκρου γῆς ἕως ἄκρου οὐρανοῦ, Mk. 13:27.

We have here a combination of three current phrases: ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων (Zech. 2:10); ἀπ’ ἄκρου τῆς γῆς (Dt. 13:8; 28:64; Is. 5:26 etc.); ἕως ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Dt.4:32; 30:4). As in the OT refs., also Mt. 24:31: ἀπ’ ἄκρων οὐρανῶν ἕως (τῶν) ἄκρων αὐτῶν, one would expect either earth both times or heaven both times. Since the paradox in Mk. is obviously intentional,<sup>150</sup> the phrase is simply an V 5, p 517 emphatic expression for a gathering which embraces the universe. The end of earth coincides with that of the world.<sup>151</sup>”

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:516–517.]

<sup>58</sup>“Through the saving event in Jesus Christ heaven and earth acquire a new relation to one another expressed in the formula ... ἐν (τῷ, τοῖς) οὐρανῷ (-οῖς)—ἐπὶ (τῆς) γῆς.<sup>152</sup> In the first instance this can serve to denote an embracing of heaven and earth, as in Eph. 1:10 and Col. 1:16, 20. . . .

“In these verses the τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς denotes the totality in Christ. The formula thus serves as a phrase for the σῶμα concept, cf. v. 18. “Everything in heaven and on earth” is the body of which Christ is the Head.<sup>158</sup> The same thoughts are similarly expressed in Eph. 1:10, where it is proclaimed as the mystery of the saving divine will that τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ. (AG ἐν) τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, are to be gathered together ἐν Χριστῷ as in a head. Everything that exists in the heavens (cf. the more concrete statement in v. 21) and on earth is integrated as a body whose head is Christ (cf. v. 22), so that here τὰ πάντα τὰ ἐπὶ κτλ. serves to denote the world of Christ. . . .

“Not only does the Mt. formula comprehend heaven and earth. It also implies a new interrelation of heaven and earth effected by God’s saving action. This is reflected in the expression γεννηθῆτω τὸ θελημα σου, ὡς<sup>163</sup> ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς<sup>164</sup> in Mt. 6:10.<sup>165</sup> Heaven is here described as ‘the creaturely sphere in which the will of

**2. God in Heaven.** Expressions located heaven as the dwelling place of God reflect the absolute dominion of God over the earth with total power and authority.<sup>59</sup>

God, which we pray should be done on earth, takes place already, and has always done so.<sup>166</sup> This doing in heaven is an example; it determines the doing on earth. The formula *ὡς ἐν—καὶ ἐπί* expresses herewith the new participation of heaven in earth which in the saving work of Jesus Christ has replaced the division of heaven and earth. This finds concrete shape in the idea of an eschatological taking up of earth into heaven, or descent of heaven to earth.<sup>167</sup> For all the participation, however, the superiority of heaven over earth is plainly expressed here. But this has a very different basis from the Stoic *ἡγεμονικόν* of heaven, → 499. It is grounded first in the fact that God's will is done in heaven, which is a par. to the idea of God's throne in heaven (→ 522); cf. on this Hb. 8:1: *ἀρχιερέα ... ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*, and 8:4: *εἰ μὲν οὖν ἦν ἐπὶ γῆς, οὐδ' ἂν ἦν ἱερεὺς* (→ 528; n. 246). It is also grounded in the fact that the superiority is designed to reflect God's relation to creation: *ὡς ... ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, οὕτως ... ἡ ὁδὸς μου ἀπὸ τῶν ὁδῶν ὑμῶν*, Is. 55:9. Only in appearance is this contradicted<sup>168</sup> by the promise: *ὁ ἐὰν δῆσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὁ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*, Mt. 16:19. According to this, acts performed on earth will have the power and right to have validity in heaven. Cf. Mt. 18:19: *... ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ... γενήσεται ... παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς*. The reference here is not to the influencing or control of God's will in heaven by the will on earth; it is to the agreement of the two wills. The division between heaven and earth has been set aside, the third petition is assumed to be granted,<sup>169</sup> and here in the community eschatological fulfilment rules, so that what is found is not power over heaven but right over against the Father through the community. Hence these promises apply to the eschatological saved community of the heavenly dominion, in which God's will is done as in heaven. It should be noted in this connection that the promises are made by Jesus with reference to His 'Father in heaven.' This means that within creation heaven maintains its prerogative over earth as the starting-point of the divine act of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:517–519.]

<sup>59</sup>“God is called *ὁ θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* (strikingly only in Rev. 11:13; 16:11).<sup>174</sup> According to this designation God, who dwells in heaven (Ps. 2:4 → 504), has a strong affinity to it, though heaven does not have a corresponding affinity to God, since it is God's work. The meaning of the expression is to be sought along the lines of the concept of heaven as the starting-point of the divine work of salvation.

Hence it does not just denote divine transcendence, God's lofty character high above everything earthly.<sup>175</sup> On the contrary, this expression of absolute world dominion<sup>176</sup> is used for cosmic rule over heaven and hence over all the powers which are opposed to God and hostile to man. God as the God of heaven, ruling over heaven, governs earth from heaven.

The same sense is borne substantially by the formula *πατήρ μου* (σου, ἡμῶν, ὑμῶν) *ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*,<sup>177</sup> Mt. 5:16, 45, 48 vl.; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19; 23:9 vl.; Mk. 11:25, 26 vl.; Lk. 11:2 vl. It is worth noting that in Lk. 11:13 we find *ἐξ* instead of *ἐν*, → 521. But the use of *πατήρ* for *θεός* emphasises more strongly God's approach to man. The thesis that the name of Father is 'a substitute for the name God'<sup>178</sup> does justice neither to the expression nor to the material adduced. In place of the gen. in

Heaven becomes a point of action by God upon the earth. Heaven can in the NT become a synonym for the name of God.<sup>60</sup> Additionally locating God in heaven is

the sense of 'over' we now have *ἐν*, and heaven is plur. as in Aram., → 510.<sup>179</sup> In two thirds of the instances the designation of God as Father — this shows its significance — carries with it a mention of heaven.<sup>180</sup> More than half of the other instances are statements of Jesus about His Father (Mt. 11:27; 20:23; 24:36 vl.; 25:34; 26:29, 39, 53), so that there is no need of the addition. The specific sense of 'in heaven' as applied to God, namely, to denote a complete lack of any earthly or spatial restriction,<sup>181</sup> may be seen in the Sermon on the Mount, which uses the formula particularly: 'Father who is in heaven,' 5:16, 45, 48 vl.; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21; the heavenly Father, 5:48; 6:14, 26, 32; 'Father who sees into what is concealed,' 6:4, 6, 18; 'Father who knows,' 6:8, 32. Now the statements obviously cannot be equated, but they agree that 'the heavenly Father is the God who, unhampered by earthly restrictions, knows all things, sees all things, can do all things, and is thus accessible to all.'<sup>182</sup> Hence one may say that what is concealed on earth may be seen from heaven, and that what man needs on earth is known from heaven. It is worth noting in this connection that there is no definition of the nature of heaven, but a clear definition of its function. Heaven is not defined as a place or state. It is a dynamic point of departure.

“In Solomon's prayer in the temple one may compare *מְשַׁמֵּי* לָא (1 K. 8:30, par. 2 Ch. 6:21 *מְשַׁמֵּי*), also *בְּשַׁמֵּי* (v. 32, 34, 36 etc., par. 2 Ch. 6:23, 25, 27 etc. *מְשַׁמֵּי*) with the LXX 3 Bas. 8:30: *ἐν οὐρανῷ*, v. 32; 2 Ch. 6:21, 23: *ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*, though the similarly constructed and closely related *מְשַׁמֵּי* is rendered by *ἐν τῷ τόπῳ*. This shows that what is said about God's activity in heaven could be understood as action from heaven. The change from *ἐν* in Mt. 7:11 to *ἐκ* in Lk. 11:13 is to be explained along the same lines”.

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:520–521.]

<sup>60</sup>“In Rabb. writings *שְׁמִים* (שמיא) became a substitute for *הוה* → I, 571; III, 93.

This use is commonly assumed<sup>183</sup> in Lk. 15:18, 21; Mk. 11:30 par.<sup>184</sup> The same supposedly applies also to Mt. 6:20 par.; 5:12 par., also Lk. 10:20. Hence *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* in Mk. is preferred to the literal *βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν* of Mt. But even in the oldest strata NT proclamation gives no hint whatever of any fear of pronouncing directly the name of God.<sup>185</sup> Again, *τῶν οὐρανῶν* adds a material definition which corresponds linguistically to the material context, → line 6. Though the missionary preaching of the NT can often use expressions from the surrounding world, it has still to be asked whether Mt.'s *τῶν οὐρανῶν* rather than *τοῦ θεοῦ* is of no significance in understanding the *βασιλεία*. This could be true only if *οὐρανός* were an arbitrary cipher. But the term not only has its own meaning; it has a meaning which is closely related in content to what it is seeking to state. This may be seen in the fact that heaven could later be distinguished from the wholly neutral *הַקַּיִן* (also *שָׁמַיָּה* → III, 93). This could not have happened if heaven had adequately screened the term God against misuse. It is said that heaven itself then became 'sacred' as a substitute. But logically the same should then have happened in the case of the new substitute *בְּרִיָּה*, and it did not. It has thus to be considered whether heaven did not always and necessarily, since there could be no concealment, relate to the concept of God in OT and Jewish proclamation. Surely, even before it was a substitute, when the name of God could be used freely, heaven helped to define the sovereignty of God, cf. Is. 63:15, 19; → 506.<sup>186</sup> It has to be remembered that 'what is referred to here is

taken in the NT to define heaven as the throne of God from which He exercises dominion over the earth.<sup>61</sup>

**3. Jesus Christ and Heaven.** Jesus Christ will descend from heaven in the decisive act of eternal salvation as the risen Lord.<sup>62</sup> The concept of Christ's

the lordship which comes down from heaven into this world' (better 'on to this earth').<sup>187</sup> Even if the gen. denotes the name of God, the reason for its use in this sense is palpable. God's kingdom breaks in from heaven. It sets heaven itself in motion: ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, Mt. 3:2 etc.

"Thus the use of 'heaven' in these verses is more than a substitute. It is a term for God's name which refers to God's dealings and action. God's work, which is sovereign and which brings sovereignty, is an active lordship coming down from heaven."

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:521–522.]

<sup>61</sup>"In keeping is another idea taken from the fixed proclamation of the OT, namely, that heaven itself (Mt. 5:34; 23:22; Ac. 7:49 = Is. 66:1 LXX), or in heaven<sup>188</sup> (Hb. 8:1),<sup>189</sup> is the throne of God.<sup>190</sup>

But this is not par. to Babylonian, Egyptian or even Gk. ideas, which in various forms are familiar with a dwelling of God or the gods in heaven. Expression of the sovereign action of God always without exception underlies this persistent theme.<sup>191, 192</sup> The ref. is not to a 'being' of God in heaven. Throne means dominion, and implies that God's being in heaven is in the full sense His activity in heaven.<sup>193</sup> Heaven is His 'official seat.'<sup>194</sup> The obedient man will not separate God, His throne and heaven. In his perspective they go together, Mt. 23:22. This is confirmed by the fact that what the NT says about heaven as God's throne, or God's throne in heaven, has no independent significance. It is always used as a traditional way of proclaiming the inviolability and absoluteness of the divine lordship."

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:522.]

<sup>62</sup>"In the NT kerygma what is said about the sovereign saving action of God characterised by heaven takes on more concrete shape in statements concerning Christ and heaven. The oldest of these await Christ Jesus, the risen Lord, from heaven as the manifestation of the end: ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ (sc. θεοῦ) ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν ..., 1 Th. 1:10 (cf. 4:16; 2 Th. 1:7; Phil. 3:20).

"In stock apocalyptic images the coming of the Son of Man, which Jesus was believed to be, is also awaited from heaven μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, Mk. 14:62.<sup>195</sup> οὐρανός is not to be understood here as the atmosphere in which the clouds move.<sup>196</sup> νεφέλη (→ IV, 907; 909) is not a natural cloud, but stands for an event of transfiguration, theophany and apotheosis. Hence οὐρανός, too, is regarded as the absolute starting-point of the apocalyptic process.<sup>197</sup> The same is true of the σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ, Mt. 24:30.<sup>198</sup> Since the promise is that the Son of Man will come from heaven, His sign, which in mysterious fashion is identical with Him, will be visible in the heavens.<sup>199</sup> The absence of speculation as to whether this takes place after the heavenly catastrophe shows most significantly that, though it is still believed that the created heaven will pass away, heaven is very closely linked to the event of eschatological manifestation. Fulfilment of the prophecy in Da. is normative here.<sup>200</sup> In Mk. 14:62 and par., where Da. 7:13 is connected with ψ 109:1, ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως (LXX μου) is the *terminus a quo* of the ἔρχεσθαι. Since

ascension is a journey into heaven from earth.<sup>63</sup> This

the right hand of God<sup>201</sup> is identical with His throne, this confirms the idea that the Son of Man comes from heaven as in some sense a localising of the initiative of the divine sovereignty.

"In 1 Th. 1:10 — probably a community formula<sup>202</sup> — ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν corresponds to ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν. That is, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead corresponds to His coming from heaven for the resurrection of all the dead. This interconnection plainly underlies 1 C. 15. Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν (v. 20) involves both ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ in v. 47 and ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ in v. 23, where ἅπ' οὐρανοῦ is a self-evident presupposition (1 Th. 4:16; 2 Th. 1:7).<sup>203</sup> Nothing is said here about an ascension of Jesus. Christ's resurrection from the dead is the basis of the possibility of His parousia, which is awaited as a coming from heaven.<sup>204</sup> In keeping is the use of ἐκ, which as compared with the more spatial ἀπό emphasises the idea of origin, coming from, or breaking forth. When it is said in 1 Th. 4:16 that the Lord, i.e., the risen Lord, comes ἅπ' οὐρανοῦ, this again implies: καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται.<sup>205</sup> Similarly 2 Th. 1:7 says: ... ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἅπ' οὐρανοῦ ... Here the concept of being concealed in heaven lies behind that of being revealed. What is in heaven cannot be grasped.<sup>206</sup> Heaven conceals. Also in this concealment lies the πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ... ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτήρια ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, Phil. 3:20.<sup>207</sup> The coming of Jesus Christ, which means eschatological manifestation, is regarded in all these passages as a penetration or opening up of the heaven which conceals, → n. 261"

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 522–523.]

<sup>63</sup>"When later in the primitive kerygma the resurrection of Jesus was distinguished<sup>211</sup> from His exaltation and the immediate expectation of His coming from heaven, place was found for the proclamation of the ascension.<sup>212</sup> In Ac. the primitive kerygma is still to be seen in Peter's address at Pentecost: τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνέστησεν ὁ θεός, 2:32 = τῇ δεξιᾷ οὖν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑψωθεὶς, 2:33, with the elucidation immediately after in v. 34: ἀνέβη εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς = κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου (ψ 109:1). The equation of heaven, δεξιὰ τοῦ θεοῦ and the exaltation<sup>213</sup> is maintained, though the ἀνέβη εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς implies a slight disjunction of the resurrection and the exaltation. Already in Lk. 24:51 v.l.: καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν,<sup>214</sup> there is intimation of the external understanding found in the true ascension story in Ac. 1, where heaven itself is set in the foreground:<sup>215</sup> ἀτενίζοντες ... εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν ..., (ἐμ- ACKD) βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ... Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὄναλημφθεὶς ... εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν (not D) ..., πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, Ac. 1:10 f.<sup>216</sup> The disciples look up to where Jesus disappears, to heaven, which means in effect the sky. It is very hard to think that in the narrow context of two verses οὐρανός should have a fundamentally different sense the first two times as compared with the last two, esp. as it is always in the sing.<sup>217</sup> The sky, which is as far as the disciples can see Him, is the margin of the heaven which receives and conceals the ascended Lord. The author saw here no contradiction with Ac. 2:32 ff., and rightly so, since the same concept is in the background there too. The primary sense of heaven is that of the incommensurable created cosmos, and this includes as its limit the firmament, by means of which it discharges its function of concealment. Throughout, however, there is also a reference to the direct sphere of God's sovereignty. Witness to this is borne by the quoting of ψ 109:1, which is applied to Christ. This also shows that the heavenly dominion is not yet thought to be

enables the risen Christ to sit down at the right hand of God in heaven to share in the divine sovereignty over the earth.

A somewhat different perspective surfaces in Eph. 4:9-10 based on Psalm 67:18.<sup>64</sup> The concept of ascending and descending between heaven and earth carries some sense of passing through a series of heavens. In this ascent to the throne of God all of the powers of the sky are broken and disarmed.<sup>65</sup>

The coming down from heaven by Christ as the basis of His ascending to heaven in the Johannine literature asserts heaven as the proper place for the existence of the Son of Man.<sup>66</sup> Thus while on earth, heaven

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consummated. The rule of salvation has still to come down from heaven and be set up on earth (... ἕως ἄν θῶ) ..., Ac. 2:35, materially identical with ... ἄχρι χρόνων κτλ., 3:21). Since all speculative interest is set aside by the intense expectation of Christ, or the consummation of salvation history in Lk. and Ac., the determinative factor in the ascension story, too, is the understanding of οὐρανός sub specie dexteræ Dei, cf. 1 Pt. 3:22; Mk. 16:19.218" [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:524–525.]

<sup>64</sup>**Eph. 4:7-10.** 7 Ἐνὶ δὲ ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 8 διὸ λέγει·

ἀναβάς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

9 τὸ δὲ ἀνέβη τί ἐστίν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς; 10 ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα.

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said,

"When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

9 (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

<sup>65</sup>"The heavenly zones, originally the planetary spheres and regions of fixed stars, are thought to be dominated by powerful evil forces which determine destiny and bind man to the earth and to death. These hermetically seal off the earth from God and keep man captive in their prison. The journey to earth and the ascent through the heavens is a cosmic shattering of the isolation imposed by these evil powers. This is the work of the Redeemer Christ (Eph. 4:9), who thus mounts up high above the heavens.<sup>225</sup> By disarming these powers He can fulfil the whole (τὰ πάντα = τὰ ἐπὶ [ἐν] τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Eph. 1:10, → 517, 6 ff.). The ascension is here the triumphant procession of the exalted Christ through all the cosmic zones of heaven which He has subjugated.<sup>226</sup> The same line of thought—ἀναβήσεται-καταβήσεται—shapes the similar rhetorical question in R. 10:6 f.<sup>227</sup>" [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:525–526.]

<sup>66</sup>"In Jn. 3:13: καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, the idea of descending and ascending, which is hinted at in Eph. 4:9, finds radical formulation. Only he who has come down from heaven can mount up to heaven, which

remained opened to Christ for communication with the Heavenly Father. In His redeeming work, culminated in His ascension back to heaven, the coming of His Spirit establishes a line of communication exclusively between believers and Christ in heaven (John 14:15-31; 16:4-15). Thus heaven is opened up in limited ways for believers. In His eschatological return to the earth, heaven will be the starting point of this descent: Mk. 14:62 et als.<sup>67</sup>

**4. Heaven and the blessing of salvation.** With heaven being God's throne, the destination of the ascension and the point of departure of the returning Christ, οὐρανός is the foundation for the present and future blessing of salvation in the new age to come.<sup>68</sup>

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is barred off from earth, Jn. 3:31.<sup>228</sup> In Jn. οὐρανός does not belong to the 'κόσμος.' It is ἐπάνω πάντων, 3:31. Yet it belongs to creation (1:3?). In Jn. only the saving will of God and the saving action of the Son of Man characterise the heaven from which Jesus comes<sup>229</sup> and to which He ascends again.<sup>230</sup> Hence this divine will and plan are called → ἐπουράνια in 3:12. According to the Gnostic view the heavenly prototype (εἰκόν) of the redeemer remains in heaven even after the beginning of the earthly journey,<sup>231</sup> and he has to be reunited with it when he ascends again.<sup>232</sup> Similarly, the incarnation does not interrupt fellowship with the Father; heaven, which is normally closed, is open above the Son of Man, 1:51, → 530, 3.233 This opening of heaven, which denotes Christ's redemptive work, is seen by the disciples in the form of the ἀναβαίνειν and καταβαίνειν of angels, which reflects this work.<sup>234</sup>" [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:526.]

<sup>67</sup>**Mk. 14:61-62.** 61 ὁ δὲ ἐσιώπα καὶ οὐκ ἀπεκρίνατο οὐδέν. πάλιν ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς ἐπηρώτα αὐτὸν καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ; 62 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἐγώ εἰμι, καὶ

ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου

ἐκ δεξιῶν καθήμενον τῆς δυνάμεως

καὶ ἐρχόμενον μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

61 But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 Jesus said, "I am; and

'you will see the Son of Man

seated at the right hand of the Power,'

and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.' "

<sup>68</sup>"As God's throne, the destination of the ascension and the point of departure of the returning Christ, οὐρανός is an integrating focus for the present and future<sup>285</sup> blessings of salvation in the new aeon.<sup>286</sup> The strongly sublimated concept of its spatiality is a help in this connection.<sup>287</sup> The terms used for these blessings confirm this: → πολίτευμα in Phil. 3:20,<sup>288</sup> → οἰκοδομή, οἰκία, οἰκητήριον<sup>289</sup> in 2 C. 5:1 f., → κληρονομία in 1 Pt. 1:4,<sup>290</sup> → μισθός<sup>291</sup> in Mt. 5:12 and par., → θησαυρός in Mt. 6:20 and par.,<sup>292</sup> also such verbs as ἔχειν in 2 C. 5:1,<sup>293</sup> θησαυρίζειν in Mt. 6:20, τηρεῖν in 1 Pt. 1:4, ἀποκεῖσθαι in Col. 1:5,<sup>294</sup> ἐγγράφεσθαι, ἀπογράφεσθαι, in Lk. 10:20; Hb. 12:23.<sup>295</sup> These blessings are in heaven, which means with God or Christ,<sup>296</sup> but with the God or Christ with whom believers will also be, or already are in faith. Heaven here is like a place, but there can be no asking where it is situated, for such a question is opposed to the whole concept. Heaven means concealment, and this implies incomprehensibility.<sup>297</sup> The same heavenly

Everything God does in our behalf originates out of heaven and points believers to heaven.

**5. Heaven and the angels.** Heaven is home for a host of angels as the sphere of their existence (Mt. 18:10; Mk. 12:25; 13:32 and par.; Eph. 3:15; Rev. 12:7; 19:1 etc.). They travel to and from heaven either individually (Mt. 28:2 and par.; Lk. 22:43; Gal. 1:8) or as a host (Lk. 2:15). When heaven is opened John sees them there: Rev. 10:1; 18:1; 20:1; 19:14.<sup>69</sup>

But evil powers seem also to reside in the οὐρανός; 1 Cor. 8:5; Acts 7:42 etc.<sup>70</sup> In these and other references we are reminded that οὐρανός covers everything above the earth and even through the canopy above the earth.

God's will is carried out perfectly in heaven by both the angels and the host of martyrs who now reside in heaven.<sup>71</sup> They stand under the tent of God's protection

concealment and reality is assumed for the New Jerusalem which the divine sees coming down from heaven, Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10.<sup>298</sup> The same applies to the God who speaks from heaven, from Mt. Zion, and from the New Jerusalem, Hb. 12:25, 22.<sup>299</sup> Cf. the temple in heaven in Rev. 11:19.<sup>72</sup> [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:532–533.]

<sup>69</sup>“Their origin in heaven,<sup>301</sup> whose concealment and mystery they share, indicates their character as divine servants and their full authority as God's messengers.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 533.]

<sup>70</sup>“But evil powers also seem to live in heaven,<sup>302</sup> e.g., 1 C. 8:5; Ac. 7:42;<sup>303</sup> cf. → ἐπουράνιος, Eph. 3:10; 6:12; (2:2). Heaven here is to be understood as the atmosphere (Eph. 2:2 ἀήρ)<sup>304</sup> or firmament, cf. Asc. Is. 7:9. A pt. to be considered is whether this also applies to Satan, who fell from heaven (Lk. 10:18).<sup>305</sup> If so, the figure of speech is connected with the vision in Rev. 12:7 ff.<sup>306</sup> where there is ref. to war ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, whose outcome is materially similar to the content of the saying of Jesus, since an unexpressed ἐξ οὐρανοῦ (cf. v. 12 κατέβη) corresponds to the ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν of v. 9f., 13. The idea of Satan in heaven is present already in later strata of the NT (→ II, 73, 36 ff.),<sup>307</sup> though, even if he had a τόπος ἐν οὐρανῷ (Rev. 12:8), there is no stress anywhere on his heavenly origin. His fall from heaven<sup>308</sup> — along with the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven — means that he can no longer stand ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (Rev. 12:10), so that here ‘in heaven’ means ‘in God's presence’.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:533.]

<sup>71</sup>“The exemplary significance of the fact that God's will is done in heaven (→ 518, 34 f.) finds expression in the summons to the οὐρανοί to rejoice, Rev. 12:12 = Is. 49:13 LXX; cf. Rev. 18:20 (sing.), similarly Dt. 32:43; Is. 44:23. Here we have, not hypostatization, but objectification in hymnic style. Strictly οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες (Rev. 12:12) are addressed, not angels, but those made perfect, esp. the martyrs.<sup>309</sup> For these are they who mount up into heaven (11:12) and over whom God sets His tent (7:15; cf. 21:3); the equation of tent and heaven is to be noted.<sup>310</sup> Here heaven, like the New Jerusalem, is defined in terms of the perfect service of God rendered by those who are perfected.” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictio-*

and care, while praising God.

**6. Heaven as the firmament.** Jesus and people lift up their eyes to this heaven: Mk. 6:41 w. par.; 7:34; Jn. 17:1; Lk. 18:13; Acts 1:11; 7:55. That is, they look up to the sky which both conceals God's throne and affirms its presence.<sup>72</sup>

**7. Heaven in the plural.** The use of the plural form οὐρανοί seems to be motivated by various reasons inside the NT. Out of the 284 instances of οὐρανός inside the NT some 94 are plural in the following pattern.

Mt. 58 plural forms out of 84 uses; Lk. 5 plural forms out of 37 uses; Acts 2 plurals out of 26 uses; Rev. 1 plural out of 54 uses; Heb. 8 plurals out of 11 uses; 2 Pet. 5 plurals out of 6 uses; in Paul's core letters 3 or 4 plurals out of 10 uses, but 8 plurals out of 9 uses in Eph. and Col. no uses in either the Pastorals or Philm. Distinctive plural uses in Matthew's gospel are πατήρ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, *our Father who is in heaven* (15x) and βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, *kingdom of heaven* (32x).

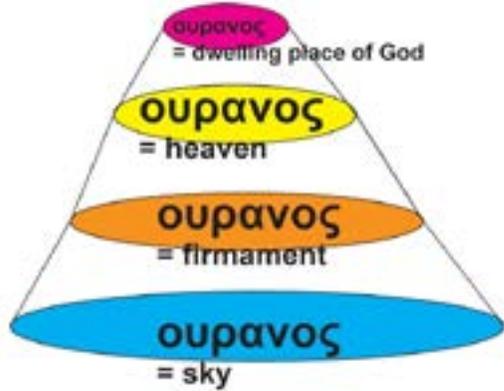
Many of the plural forms go back to the plural Hebrew word מַגְּשׁ or the Aramaic ܡܓܫܘܬ, designating the dwelling place of God. But where qualifying modifies are added such as 2 Cor. 12:2-4 and Eph. 4:8-10, the plural specifies multiple heavens where the highest heaven is either the dwelling place of God or else is located close to it. In Hebrews, a unique perspective is introduced where the heavenly temple is located above

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*nary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:533.]

<sup>72</sup>“Jesus and men lift up their eyes to this heaven, Mk. 6:41 and par.; 7:34 and Jn. 17:1; Lk. 18:13; Ac. 1:11; 7:55. They look up to the sky. This οὐρανός conceals God's throne and yet therewith it is also a sign of God's ruling presence above men. This is why the publican does not look upwards.<sup>311</sup> The gesture of him who swears corresponds to that of the man who prays toward heaven as toward God, Rev. 10:5. To be man and to live on earth is to be ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, Ac. 2:5; 4:12; Col. 1:23.<sup>312</sup> The common pagan expression takes on in Christian preaching the character of man's direction by God. Heaven is a sign of great height, Mt. 11:23; Rev. 18:5. There is also the thought of God's nearness.<sup>313</sup> As the atmosphere it becomes red, Mt. 16:2. The hypocrite does not discern that its face (πρόσωπον, Lk. 12:56) is a sign. There fly in it τὰ πετεινά τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. Mt. 6:26; 8:20 and par.; Mk. 4:32 and par.; Lk. 8:5; Ac. 10:12; 11:6.<sup>314</sup> On the other hand, νεφέλη in connection with οὐρανός is already a tt. for the halo, → IV, 905, 22; 909, 20).<sup>315</sup> The innumerable ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ are affixed to heaven as the firmament, Hb. 11:12.<sup>316</sup> Their falling from heaven is an apocalyptic sign, the breaking up of the firmament,<sup>317</sup> Mk. 13:25; Mt. 24:29; 318 Rev. 6:13; 8:10; 9:1; 12:4. The final catastrophe, through it leaves the earth and men remarkably untouched,<sup>319</sup> is described as a collapse of the vault of heaven, which is awaited as the complete shattering of the δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν, Mt. 24:29; αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, Mk. 13:25.<sup>320</sup>” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:534.]

## Layers of meaning for οὐρανός



the highest heaven: cf. 7:26; 8:1; 9:23-25 et als.<sup>73</sup>

In Revelation only 12:12<sup>74</sup> contains the plural form, while the remainder of the 50 instances use the singular form. In the singular uses the meaning of οὐρανός easily glides across the full range of definitions from the

<sup>73</sup>An independent variant of the “ascension” theme is found in Hebrews, which creates a new basic tenet of faith by making Good Friday and Ascension Day coincide (O. Michel, Heb7 [KEK] 292f.). The affirmation that Christ was exalted to the right hand of God ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (8:1) is limited by the conviction that he passed through the heavens. As a result, he attained to the temple beyond, above all the heavens (7:26). In 9:23ff., the author elevates this true heaven above the created and therefore also transitory heaven (cf. 1:10–12; 12:26). It is the dwelling, temple, and throne of God (cf. Rev 4:1; 11:19; 14:17; 15:5; 16:17; 19:11), even though it is referred to simply as σκηνή (9:10ff.). In it one stands in all clarity before the face of God. “In Hb., then, God is high above the heavens, and yet He is in the heavens” (Traub 528). On the basis of an OT-oriented, sacrificial theology spatial conceptualization is combined with theological content. Hebrews knows no ontological dualism. The historic way of the believer is consistently described as the way of hope (3:7ff.). For “in heaven” the promised inheritance awaits (9:15), the righteous are inscribed (12:23), and the “enduring city” stands prepared (13:14). In the confession of Jesus, the author and perfecter of this way, one finds the criterion for distinguishing specialized theological language about οὐρανός from ideological speculation. Heaven is wherever Jesus finds a follower and gathers him or her into the grace of the righteous God. Christology therefore provides the critique of religious language and calls forth praxis that reflects the unity of heaven and earth. [Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 547.]

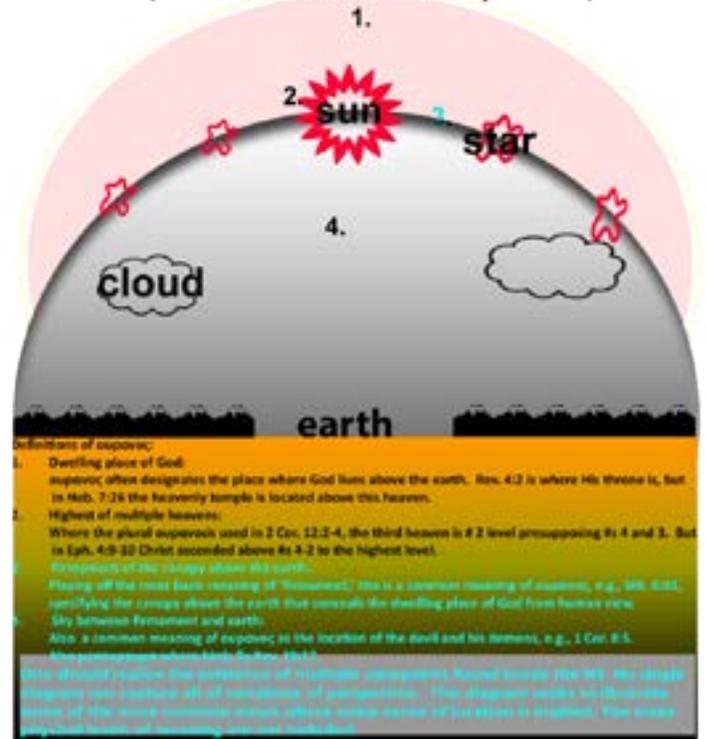
<sup>74</sup>Rev. 12:12.

διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε, [οἱ] οὐρανοὶ  
καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες.  
οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν,  
ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς  
ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν,  
εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει.

Rejoice then, you *heavens*  
and those who dwell in them!

But woe to the earth and the sea,  
for the devil has come down to you  
with great wrath,  
because he knows that his time is short!

## Conceptualizations of heaven with spatial emphasis



dwelling place of God to sky and what is between. Both the spatial and the metaphysical meanings are found where οὐρανός is a place and/or a designation of God’s power and authority. Each passage must be examined separately in its context to determine which element of meaning dominates the individual usage. Also, one should remember that these various meanings are not necessarily exclusive and separate from one another. In the Hebrew mindset they tend to function more in terms of the image of concentric circles, as illustrated in the above chart on the left.

When John looked up in his vision of heaven, the first thing he saw was a throne: καὶ ἰδοὺ θρόνου ἐκεῖτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, and indeed a throne was setting in heaven. Of the 62 uses of θρόνος in the NT, some 47 of them are found in Revelation. Both the singular and plural are found in 37 verses. In the ancient world the idea of royalty sitting on a throne has its origin not in the Greco-Roman world but in the near east. The Greeks more often pictured a throne for the gods than for human rulers.<sup>75</sup> Within Revelation the central emphasis is upon

<sup>75</sup>“The royal throne was not originally a Greek institution. It ‘comes from the orient, where the absolute ruler sat on a magnificently decorated throne, which usually stood on a base with several steps, and which thus expressed the power of the ruler over his subjects.’<sup>78</sup> The divine throne, to which there are many references in Greek poetry and superstition, is often a prerogative of Zeus. But plastic art also portrays a double throne for two deities, especially Zeus and Hera. A model for depicting a god on its throne was the throne of Zeus in Olympia fashioned by Pheidias. Worth noting is the influence of the Asiatic ‘custom of representing the throne of an invisible deity without the image of the god.’<sup>79</sup> Reference may

God's throne, but there are also 24 thrones for the 'elders' (4:4; 11:16) and a throne for the beast (16:10). Throughout Revelation God's throne is picture as being in heaven, while in Act 7:49 heaven is itself God's throne. Clearly the point of the throne is the image of authority and power. This throne located in heaven represents the ultimate authority and power of God over all His creation.<sup>76</sup>

The second thing that John sees is καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, and upon the throne one sitting.<sup>77</sup> All through the references to God's throne in Revelation, not once is any description of God presented. Human qualities are rarely mentioned, e.g., God's right hand (5:1, 7), a face (6:16), a voice (16:17; 19:5; 21:3). God is simply presented as sitting on His throne.<sup>78</sup>

also be made to the use of thrones in the cult of the dead.<sup>107</sup> [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:161.]

<sup>76</sup>“The throne of God, a symbol of sovereignty, is the central feature of OT, Jewish, and early Christian conceptions of heaven, and is modeled after the throne rooms of earthly kings. The term θρόνος occurs forty-seven times in Revelation, and all but seven instances refer to the heavenly throne of God (or Christ, in 3:21). Here κεῖμαι appears to function as a verbal copula, similar to εἶμι and γίνομαι, so that the prepositional phrase ‘in heaven’ is used as predicate with κεῖμαι (see 21:6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 284.]

<sup>77</sup>“Here the phrase ὁ καθήμενος, ‘the seated one,’ corresponds to the Hebrew appellative עֲשֵׂיב, ‘the enthroned one,’ as a designation for God (Ps 22:4).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 285.]

<sup>78</sup>“This is the first occurrence of the formula καθήμεν- ἐπί, ‘seated upon,’ which occurs twenty-seven times in Revelation (here καθήμενος is the anarthrous subject of a clause). As a circumlocution for the name of God, the formula occurs twelve times in five different grammatical forms: (1) [ὁ] καθήμενος ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον (4:2; 20:11), (2) τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (4:9; 5:13; 7:10; 19:4), (3) τοῦ καθήμενου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (4:10; 5:1, 7; 6:16), (4) \*καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρονῳ (21:5), and (5) \*ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (7:15). Aside from the two asterisked exceptions, the case of ὁ θρόνος after ἐπί is determined by the case of ὁ καθήμενος. These occurrences of the formula all function as circumlocutions for the name of God since no other names for God are placed in syntactical connection with any of these passages, with the exception of 7:10; 19:4. There are at least two instances in which the term ‘throne’ itself appears to function as a circumlocution for the name of God (4:10; 8:3). The phrase ‘throne of God,’ in which the divine name is specifically mentioned, is relatively uncommon in Revelation (7:15; 22:1, 3; cf. 12:5). A figure like a son of man is also described as seated on a cloud (14:14, 15, 16), and a messianic figure is described as seated on a (white) horse (19:11, 19, 21). In Greco-Jewish literature, God is rarely referred to as ‘the one seated upon the throne,’ and rarely is the phrase used as a circumlocution for the divine name (Sir 1:8, but cf. Adam and Eve 37:4, where the phrase ‘the Father of all who sits upon his throne’ occurs). In the LXX the phrase ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χειρῶν, ‘the



Polished carnelian/sard pebbles. Scale is in millimeters.

What John saw on the throne he cannot describe in direct literal language. Instead he reaches out to analogous language for description: καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ὁμοίως ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, and the One sitting is comparable to the eye to jasper and carnelian stones.<sup>79</sup> The outward appearance of God emanating (ὁράσει) from the heavenly throne is compared to two precious stones, a jasper and a carnelian<sup>80</sup> stone. In trying to one seated upon [or ‘over’] the cherubim,’ is found in Pss 79:2; 98:1; cf. LXX Dan 3:55, ‘Blessed is the one who sees the abyss seated on the cherubim’ (the source of a phrase used in magical formulas; see A. M. H. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae* [1904, repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1967] no. 241, lines 25–26; PGM VII.264, 633; PGM 21.5). However, the formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου is used to refer to Adam or Abel several times in T. Abr. [Rec. A] 11:4, 6; 12:11; 13:2; [Rec. B] 8:7. In contrast, the formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ as a divine epithet occurs with great frequency in Greco-Roman magical formulas in the magical papyri and inscribed on magical gems, lamellae, and defixiones (see L. Robert, “Amulettes grecques,” *Journal des Savants* [1981] 10–12); e.g., PGM IV. 1012–13, 1110, 2768–69; VII.633; XXIIb.10–13; XXXV.1–12; XXXVI.4, 77; p 285 Delatte-Derchain, *Les initiales magique*, no. 460. On a silver lamella from Beirut now in the Louvre, each of seven daimones is invoked with the formula ἐπικαλοῦμαι, ‘I invoke,’ followed by the substantival accusative participle τὸν καθήμενον followed by ἐπί, with the case governed by ἐπί being variously the genitive (the first five invocations), the accusative (the sixth invocation), and the dative (the seventh invocation), without any apparent distinction in meaning (Robert, *Journal des Savants* [1981] 10–11; Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, 101–2; cf. Preisendanz 2:160, notes on PGM XXXV).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 284–285.]

<sup>79</sup>The question naturally arises regarding exactly what John saw and what he depicts in terms of conventional apocalyptic language found in many other existing sources of his day. Although an exact answer to such a question is impossible to give with certainty, a hint comes in statements like this one where John obviously makes no attempt to explain literally what he saw. Instead, he reaches out to existing concepts in his world for points of comparison. This is his only means of communicating to his audience in terms that make any sense at all. Very likely the analogous language usage by John goes well beyond such comparisons, but it is clear that it does include such declarations as here in 4:3.

<sup>80</sup>“Carnelian (also spelled cornelian) is a brownish-red mineral  
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determine precisely what these two stone were in the ancient world -- in comparison to modern understandings -- is a translator's deep nightmare. The problem is compounded in Revelation when these two words show up elsewhere in contexts that seem to make a modern understanding of the terms utterly impossible. This is our challenge here.



The Greek word ἴασπις,<sup>81</sup> usually translated as 'jasper,'<sup>82</sup> Brecciated red jasper tum- occurs four times in the NT, all bled smooth, 1 in (2.5 cm) of which are in Revelation:

**4:3.** ὁ καθήμενος ὁμοιος ὁράσει λίθω ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, *And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian,*

**21:11.** ἔχουσιν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς ὁμοιος λίθω τιμιωτάτῳ ὡς λίθω ἰάσπιδι κρυσταλλίζοντι. *it has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.*

**21:18.** καὶ ἡ ἐνδύμησις τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς ἰάσπις καὶ ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὁμοιον ὑάλῳ καθαρῷ. *The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass.*

which is commonly used as a semi-precious gemstone. Similar to carnelian is sard, which is generally harder and darker (the difference is not rigidly defined, and the two names are often used interchangeably). Both carnelian and sard are varieties of the silica mineral chalcedony colored by impurities of iron oxide. The color can vary greatly, ranging from pale orange to an intense almost-black coloration. It is most commonly found in Brazil, India, Siberia, and Germany.” [“Carnelian,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>81</sup>ἴασπις, ἰδος, ἡ (Pla. et al.; SIG2 587, 87f [IV B.C.]; PGM 12, 203 ἴασπιν; LXX; TestSol; Jos., Bell. 5, 234, Ant. 3, 168. Occasionally also masc., e.g., Petosiris, Fgm. 29) *jasper*, a precious stone found in various colors, mostly reddish, somet. green (Cyrinides p. 23, 22 λίθος χλωρός), brown, blue, yellow, and white. In antiquity the name was not limited to the variety of quartz now called jasper, but could designate any opaque precious stone. **Rv 21:18f.** W. λίθος 4:3 (TestSol C 11:8). λίθος ἴασπις κρυσταλλίζων a stone of crystal-clear jasper 21:11 (cp. Is 54:12); perh. the opal is meant here; acc. to some, the diamond. S. on ἀμέθυστος.—DELG. M-M. [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 465.]

<sup>82</sup>“Jasper, a form of chalcedony,<sup>[1]</sup> is an opaque,<sup>[2]</sup> impure variety of silica, usually red, yellow, brown or green in color; and rarely blue. The common red color is due to iron (III) inclusions in what is basically a chert. The mineral breaks with a smooth surface, and is used for ornamentation or as a gemstone. It can be highly polished and is used for vases, seals, and snuff boxes. The specific gravity of jasper is typically 2.5 to 2.9.<sup>[3]</sup> Along with Heliotrope (bloodstone), jasper is one of the traditional birthstones for March. Jaspilite is a banded iron formation rock that often has distinctive bands of jasper.” [“Jasper,” wikipedia.org]

**21:19.** οἱ θεμέλιοι τοῦ τείχους τῆς πόλεως παντὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ κεκοσμημένοι· ὁ θεμέλιος ὁ *πρῶτος ἴασπις*, ὁ δεύτερος σάπφειρος, ὁ τρίτος χαλκηδών, ὁ τέταρτος σμάρραδος, *The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,*

The Greek word σάρδιον, translated as ‘carnelian,’ only shows up twice in the NT, both of which are in Revelation:

**4.3.** καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ὁμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι καὶ σαρδίῳ, *And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian,*

**21:20.** ὁ πέμπτος σαρδόνυξ, ὁ ἕκτος σάρδιον, ὁ ἕβδομος χρυσόλιθος, ὁ ὄγδοος βήρυλλος, ὁ ἕνατος τοπάζιον, ὁ δέκατος χρυσόπρασος, ὁ ἐνδέκατος ὑάκινθος, ὁ δωδέκατος ἀμέθυστος, *the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprass, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.*

Just a quick comparison of these references shows some real problems for translators. Mostly with the ‘jasper,’ what John alludes to is a precious stone that is either κρυσταλλίζοντι, *clear as crystal* (21:11) or ὁμοιον ὑάλῳ, *clear as glass* (21:18). The fluidity of meaning for ἴασπις makes using the English term ‘jasper’ somewhat questionable.

What is most interesting, however, is how these two precious stones are used in Revelation. In chapter four, their glow or appearance somehow defines God’s appearance while sitting on His throne. But in chapter twenty-one, these stones serve an entirely different purpose. The 75 yard plus high (21:17) city wall of the new Jerusalem is made of nothing but ἴασπις (21:18). And this wall surrounds a city that is 1,500 miles long on each of the four sides (21:16). Now some kind of foundation would have to be underneath such a giant wall as that. And in 21:19-20, this wall has twelve layers of foundation with the first layer being ἴασπις and the sixth layer is made of σάρδιον. But the jasper city wall gives off a radiance κρυσταλλίζοντι, *clear as crystal* (21:11) and ὁμοιον ὑάλῳ καθαρῷ, *like pure glass* (21:18). These two comparisons strongly suggest that John is thinking about something very different than a jasper stone in the modern sense of the word.

The next question must then be regarding the background of associating precious stones with the throne of God especially in heavenly settings. An examination of such visionary texts both inside the OT and in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition turns up some interesting perspectives.

First, in the Jewish apocalyptic literature precious stones virtually never surface in depictions of heavenly scenes. But in Ezekiel (chapter one) and Daniel (chapter ten) precious stones are used as part of the

depiction of heavenly scenes of God's dwelling place, although usually not the same stones as in Revelation and for different purposes.<sup>83</sup> The labeling of the jasper, ὡς λίθῳ ἰάσπιδι) stone as ὁμοίος λίθῳ τιμιωτάτῳ, a very precious stone, in 21:11 suggests intended meaning behind such depictions. Combine this with the imagery of God's throne in Ezekiel and Exodus where precious stones help define God's majesty, and the meaning is rather obvious.<sup>84</sup> The greatness of the sovereign God of the universe gives off a radiance comparable to the glow of these stones. The role of the jasper, ἰάσπις, in this sense is further emphasized with the linking of this stone to τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, the glory of God, in 21:11. The radiance of the divine *Shekhinah* can be compared to the radiance of the jasper stone.

Thus in understandable human experienced based terminology we can begin to comprehend something of the greatness of God. When John then looked at the one sitting on the throne what he saw was a brilliant radiance reflecting off the personage of God, too bright

<sup>83</sup>“Throne scenes in Jewish apocalyptic literature do not usually use precious stones as metaphors for describing the throne of God (L. L. Thompson, *Revelation*, 86). However, the throne vision in Ezek 1 mentions several precious stones and metals (v 16, chrysolite; v 26, sapphire; v 27, gleaming bronze), and T. Abr. (Rec. A) 12:4–6 (tr. Sanders in Charlesworth, OTP 1:889) says:

And between the two gates there stood a terrifying throne with the appearance of terrifying crystal, flashing like fire. And upon it sat a wondrous man, bright as the sun, like unto a son of God. Before him stood a table like crystal, all of gold and byssus.

“In some angelic epiphanies, precious stones can be used in the description (e.g., Dan 10:5–6, where gold, beryl, and burnished bronze are used to describe the girdle, body, and legs of the angel). To a certain extent John uses the precious stones drawn from the description of the heavenly Jerusalem in describing God and his throne. Three precious stones are used in the throne scene and in the description of the New Jerusalem: jasper (4:3; 21:11, 18, 19), carnelian (4:3; 21:10), and crystal (4:6; 22:1; cf. Ezek 1:22). Sapphire, mentioned in the description of the throne in Ezek 1:26, occurs in Revelation only in 21:19.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 285.]

<sup>84</sup>“References from Ezek. 1:26, 28 and from Ezek. 9:2 (LXX); 10:1 (LXX); and 28:13 have been combined, although reflections of Exod. 24:10 and especially Exod. 28:17–20 are also included. Ezekiel 9, 10, and 28 and Exodus have been thought of in relation to Ezek. 1:26 because they are all associated with a theophany scene and mention a sapphire in association with the theophany. Among the most prominent of these influences combined with Ezekiel 1 here are those of Ezekiel 28 and Exodus 28 since all three stones mentioned in Rev. 4:3 are also mentioned in those chapters. Individual meanings are not to be assigned to each of the stones; collectively they represent God's sovereign majesty and glory since they appear in OT theophany scenes in which divine glory is manifested and because they are directly linked to God's glory in Rev. 21:10–11, 18–23.33” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 320.]

## Concentric Circle Arrangement of Heaven signaled by the adverb κυκλοθεν



for him to see God Himself. In trying to explain this to his readers John reached out to references to stones that could convey concrete meaning to his readers and the background heritage of Exodus and Ezekiel provided the clue to use precious gemstones to communicate this radiance.

But what John also saw as he looked at the throne of God in his vision was a bright rainbow: καὶ ἴρις κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου ὁμοίος ὀράσει σμαραγδίνῳ, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Here John's dependence on Ezekiel 1:27–28 is more evident.<sup>85</sup> The radiance of the ἴρις, rainbow, resembles

<sup>85</sup>“The rainbow is based on an allusion to the throne vision in Ezek 1:27–28, just as the description of the heavenly throne in 4Q405 20–22 i 10–11, also dependent on Ezek 1, speaks of ‘a radiant substance with glorious colors, wondrously hued’ (Newsom, *Songs*, 306; see Rowland, *JSS* 10 [1980] 143 n. 14). However, the Hebrew term נשק *qeset*, literally the ‘bow’ of the warrior, is also used of the ‘rainbow’ in Gen 9:13; Ezek 1:28. When accompanied by the phrase בענן *be-ānān*, ‘in the cloud’ (the widespread view suggested by Gunkel that Yahweh hung up his warrior's ‘bow’ on the clouds, causing the ‘arrows’ of rain to cease, is problematic; see Westermann, *Genesis* 1:473), נשק was consistently translated τόξον in the LXX (including Ezek 1:28) and *arcus* in the Vulgate (which means both bow as weapon and bow as rainbow, and so occurs in some Latin MSS as an alternate to the Greek loanword *iris*). Vergil speaks of the *nubibus arcus*, the ‘bow of the clouds’ (*Aeneid* 5.88). By using ἴρις in 4:3, the author has chosen a pagan term for ‘rainbow’ (Brown, *BZ* 37 [1993] 35; K. H. Rengstorff, TD-NT 3:341), presumably for the sake of clarity, for Josephus must explain to his readers that the terms τόξεία and τόξον mean ἴρις (*Ant.* 1.103). The *choliambic* poet Aeschrio compared the rainbow to the warrior's bow: ἴρις δ' ἔλαμψε, καλὸν οὐρανοῦ τόξον, ‘The rainbow gleamed, the beautiful bow of the sky’ (E. Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, 3rd ed. [Leipzig: Teubner, 1954] fasc. 3, p. 121). From the Greek side, the famous prayer of Sappho to Aphrodite (Dionysius of Hal. *De comp. verb.* 24) addresses the goddess as ποικιλόθρον ἄθάνατ', ‘many-color-throned immortal one.’ The author emphasizes that the throne of God is the focus of a series of

that of an σμαράγδινος, an emerald. The green tones of the radiance of this unusual rainbow must have created quite a sense of divine majesty coming from the divine throne.



Cut emeralds

This initial picture painted by John sets forth an image of God and His sovereignty reflected in His throne that is quite impressive. Tones of power and authority far above that of any human ruler are reflected in this image. But John is only getting started with his paint brush!



### C. Other thrones, v. 4

4 Καὶ κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρας πρεσβυτέρους καθημένους περιβεβλημένους ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς.

**4 Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads.**

In the second ring encircling the heavenly throne are twenty four more thrones. Here stands twenty-four

concentric circles made up of first a rainbow, then a circle of the four cherubim (v 6b, καὶ κύκλω τοῦ θρόνου), then a circle of the twenty-four thrones upon which the twenty-four elders sit (v 4, καὶ κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες). According to 5:11 (and again in 7:11), a great host of angels also encircled the throne (κύκλω τοῦ θρόνου). The adverb κυκλόθεν occurs three times in Revelation (4:3, 4, 8), and the form κύκλω occurs three times (4:6; 5:11; 7:11). The notion that heaven is arranged in concentric circles around the throne of God is found in 1 Enoch 71:6–8 and in a more elaborate way in 3 Enoch 33:1–34:2 (for other parallels in Merkavah texts, see P. Alexander in Charlesworth, OTP 1:287 n. 34c). In biblical tradition, the rainbow is primarily associated with the flood narrative, in which it is a divine sign that guarantees that a flood of this magnitude will never again occur (Gen 9:13–16).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 285–286.]

expressions of leadership roles whose authority comes from the central throne with God sitting in it. No independent authority is possessed by these leaders.

Those sitting in these θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες, **24 thrones**, are πρεσβυτέρους, **elders**. While John has heavily used images from both the OT and the Jewish apocalyptic tradition to depict the throne of God, here he describes something not found in other apocalyptic descriptions of heaven. The presence of 24 πρεσβύτεροι with each seated on a throne in a circle around the divine throne is unique. Only two OT passages can possibly stand in the background here: Isa. 24:23 and Exod. 24:9-10, and this at best as only an allusion.<sup>86</sup> Clearly as πρεσβύτερος is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *זָקֵן* (*zāqēn*), these terms for ‘elders’ are frequent in the OT for leaders of various groups of people.<sup>87</sup> Early Christianity continued to use

<sup>86</sup>**Isa. 24:23.** καὶ τακῆσεται ἡ πλίνθος, καὶ πεσεῖται τὸ τεῖχος, ὅτι βασιλεύσει κύριος ἐν Σιών καὶ ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν πρεσβυτέρων δοξασθήσεται.†

Then the moon will be abashed, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before **his elders** he will manifest his glory.

**Exod. 24:9-10.** 9 Καὶ ἀνέβη Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ααρων καὶ Ναδαβ καὶ Αβιουδ καὶ **ἐβδομήκοντα τῆς γερουσίας Ἰσραηλ**† 10 καὶ εἶδον τὸν τόπον, οὗ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραηλ· καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔργον πλίνθου σαπφείρου καὶ ὡσερ εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῇ καθαριότητι.†

9 Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and **seventy of the elders of Israel** went up, 10 and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.

<sup>87</sup>“In ancient Israel, as in the rest of the Near East (with the exception of Egypt), the term ‘elder’ was used as a designation for authority and leadership in various social groupings, including families, clans, tribes (Judg 11:5–11), and cities (Judg 8:14; 11:3; Ruth 4:1–4); see McKenzie, *Bib* 40 [1959] 522–40; Conrad, *TDOT* 4:122–31. The term is also used of a leadership position with national importance as in the phrases ‘the elders of Israel’ or the ‘elders of the people’ (Exod 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21; 18:12; Num 11:14–17; Josh 7:6; 8:10). In some instances there were assemblies of the ‘elders of Israel’ for particular purposes (1 Kgs 8:1–3; 2 Kgs 23:1–2).

“In the Qumran Community, elders were accorded a place of honor after the priests (1QS 6:8; CD 9:4). The term was retained in early Judaism for various types of religious and political authorities (1 Macc 1:26; 7:33; 11:23; 12:35; 2 Macc 13:13; 14:37; 1 Esdr 6:5, 8, 11, 27; 7:2; 3 Macc 1:8; Bar 1:4; Jdt 6:16; Mark 7:3, 5 [= Matt 15:2]; 8:31 [= Matt 16:21; Luke 9:22]; 11:27 [= Matt 21:23; Luke 20:1]; 14:43 [= Matt 26:47]; 53 [= Matt 26:57]; 15:1 [= Matt 27:1]; Matt 26:3; 27:3, 12, 20, 41; 28:12; Luke 7:3; 22:52; Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12).

“In early Jewish synagogue organization, the πρεσβύτεροι were members of the γερουσία, ‘council,’ of local Jewish communities (CIJ 378, 650c, 650d, 653b, 663, 731, 732, 800, 803, 829, 931, 1277, 1404), though the earliest dated evidence for the use of πρεσβύτερος as a title is found in the mid-third century A.D. (Schürer, *History* 3:1, 102 n. 56).

“In early Christianity the term πρεσβύτερος is frequently used

the term as one of several to specify leaders in the early Christian communities.

But the mysterious puzzle here is who are these 24 elders?

Literally libraries full of books have been produced in attempted answers to this question over the interpretive history of the biblical text.<sup>88</sup> Thus little likelihood that we will decisively settle the issue exists. But some exploration of legitimate parameters for determining a possible answer can and needs to be put on the table. Then a tentative conclusion will be drawn.

What do we know about these 24 elders from the book of Revelation itself? Any conclusions drawn about the identity of these individuals must fit the text information and not go beyond its boundaries. R.H. Charles accurately summarizes the biblical data:<sup>89</sup>

- i. They sit on twenty-four thrones round the throne of God, 4:4, 11:16.
- ii. They wear crowns of gold, and are clothed in white garments, 4:4,
- iii. They are called *πρεσβύτεροι* (דִּינְיָרִי).
- iv. They are four and twenty in number.
- v. They occupy these thrones not at the Final Judgment or the consummation of the world, but in the present and apparently in the past (since the creation ?).
- vi. The Seer addresses one of them, 7:13, as *κύριε*.
- vii. They act as *angeli interpretes*, 7:13.
- viii. They discharge a priestly function in presenting the prayers of the faithful to God in golden bowls, 5:8.
- ix. They encourage the Seer when in the spirit he beholds the inhabitants of heaven, 5:5.
- x. They discharge the office of praising God by singing and playing on-the harp, 5:8, 14, 11:16, 19:4.<sup>90</sup>

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for a leadership role (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 5:1, 17, 19; 1 Pet 5:1, 5; Jas 5:14; 2 Clem 17:3, 5; Ign. Magn. 2:1; 3:1; 6:1; 7:1; Trall 3:1; 7:1; Hermas Vis. 2.4.2, 3). In Ignatius, the college of elders is often called a *πρεσβυτήριον*, ‘presbytery’ (e.g., Eph. 2:2; 4:1; 20:2; Magn. 2:2), a term that was also used for the Jewish Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66; Acts 22:5).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 287.]

<sup>88</sup>For a survey of interpretations through 1920, see R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*. International Critical Commentary. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 128-133. For a survey of more recent interpretive trends, see David F. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*. Vol. 52A. Word Biblical Commentary. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 287-312. Aune also provides a substantial bibliography covering the interpretive history even more extensively.

<sup>89</sup>R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 128–129.

<sup>90</sup>Aune, *WBC*, p. 288, offers these points:

(1) They wear white robes and gold crowns (4:4b). (2) They prostrate themselves before God in worship (4:10a; 5:14b; 11:16;

In summarizing the interpretive history through 1920, Charles (in the ICC) speaks of four categories of identification: glorified men, a college of angels, angelic representations of the 24 priestly orders, and angelic representatives of the entire body of believers. David Aune in his “Excursus 4A: The Twenty-Four Elders” (in the WBC) lists with considerable detail and evaluation seven categories of interpretation only somewhat similar to those of Charles in carrying forward to 1998 the history of interpretation.<sup>91</sup>

One important interpretive mark that is often over-

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19:4) and offer him their golden crowns (4:10b) as part of a heavenly liturgy (4:8–11; 5:11–14; 7:11–12; 19:1–8) to which they may respond with “Hallelujah” and “Amen” (19:4b). (3) They sing hymns of praise to God (4:11; 5:9–10; 11:17–18). (4) They have harps and censers full of incense that are said to represent the prayers of Christians (5:8). (5) Individual elders make comments to John (5:5; 7:13), and on one occasion an elder acts as a *senior interpretes*, i.e., an “interpreting elder” (7:14–17), a functional equivalent to the stock apocalyptic figure of the *angelus interpretes*, “interpreting angel” (found in Revelation only in 17:1–18). (6) If the enigmatic statement in 20:4 (“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed”) refers to the twenty-four elders (and this is far from certain), then they also have an explicitly judicial function. (7) While the twenty-four elders play a central role in Rev 4–5 (where they are mentioned seven times), they are peripheral in the throne scenes in the rest of the book (7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4), perhaps suggesting that they have been exported to these other text units from Rev 4.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 288.]

<sup>91</sup>(1) The heavenly counterparts of the leaders of the twenty-four priestly courses of the second temple period described in 1 Chr 23:6; 24:7–18 (Völter, 5–6; Charles, 1:131–32; Beasley-Murray, 114; Mounce, 135–36). . . .

(2) The twenty-four divisions of musicians, descendants of Levi, who prophesied with lyres, harps, and cymbals (1 Chr 25:1–31; cf. 35:15; Ezra 2:41; 3:10; Neh 7:44; Jos., Ant. 7.367; see Schürer, History 2:250–56). . . .

(3) Heavenly representatives of Israel and the Church, i.e., twenty-four as the sum of the twelve sons of Israel and the Twelve Apostles, an old view found in Victorinus Comm. in Apoc. IV. 3 (ed. Haussleiter, Victorinus, 50); cf. Charles, 1:132–33. . . .

(4) Individual Christians who had sealed their faith through martyrdom, now glorified and participating in an exalted heavenly life (Eichhorn, 1:160–61 [who thinks that the number is based on the twenty-four priestly courses]; Stuart, 2:110; Feuillet, RB 65 [1958] 5–32; Kraft, 97). . . .

(5) The saints of the OT (Michl, Ältesten, 92–116; Swete, 118; Harrington, Apocalypse, 109). . . .

(6) Angelic members of the heavenly court (סֵדֵר אֱלֹהִים *sōd .ēlōhīm*), or an angelic order, which surround the throne of God (Beckwith, 498–99; Kiddle, 76–84; Roloff, 67–68). . . .

(7) Figures from astral mythology, such as the twenty-four Babylonian star-gods of the zodiac, grouped around the polar star and divided over the north and south as judges of the living and the dead (Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos, 302–8; Boll, Offenbarung, 36). . . .

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 288-291.]

looked in this history is the wide range of symbolical value for the number 24: a) symbol of the completeness of a day as well as of time in some Jewish apocalyptic sources; b) the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible written by 24 authors who now reside in heaven, a view found in both Jewish sources and early church fathers; 3) symbols of the entire cosmos; 4) the 24 licitors (bodyguards) of emperor Domitian now worshiping God in Christ. Interestingly, in Jewish apocalyptic tradition twelve elders representing each of the 12 tribes are understood to sit with God in judging the nations, but in early Judaism 36 elders (12+12+12) usually sat in judgment over the affairs of Jews.

With such ambiguity of data, one can only come to a very tentative conclusion. I agree with Aune's conclusion that more can be said in behalf of the view that these 24 elders represent the 24 courses of priests in the Jerusalem temple during the second temple period.<sup>92</sup> As such the image becomes that of the true covenant Isarel (ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς, in white robes) worshiping God in His heavenly temple in the manner established in the earthly temple in Jerusalem, through

<sup>92</sup>“While the Chronicler traced the twenty-four priestly divisions to the time of David, they probably originated in the late fourth century B.C.. In the organization of the priesthood that prevailed throughout the second temple period, and continued to the third or fourth century A.D. (see the third- or fourth-century A.D. inscription from Caesarea described by M. Avi-Yonah, IJE [1962] 137–42; id., “Caesarea,” NEAEHL 1:279), the priesthood was divided into twenty-four “courses” (Hebrew משמרות *mišmērōt*; Greek ἐφημερίδες), each of which served twice in the temple in Jerusalem for one week at a time, from sabbath to sabbath (Jos., Ant. 7.365–66; Life 2; in Ag. Ap. 2.108 [extant only in Latin], Josephus mentions four priestly ‘families’ [tribus], probably referring to the four משמרות *mišmērōt* that returned from exile; Ezra 2:36; Neh 7:39; y. Ta’an 68a; t. Ta’an 2.1–2; b. Arak 12b; m. Ta’an. 4:2; Luke 1:5, 8; see Jeremias, Jerusalem, 198–207; CRINT 1/2, 587–96; Schürer, History 2:245–50; Str-B 2:55–68).

“The priesthood of the Qumran community was divided into twenty-six courses (probably the result of their special calendar); according to IQM 2:2, ‘the twenty-six chiefs of the classes [ראוי המשמרות *r. wgy hmšmrwt*] shall serve together with their classes’ (though 4QMishmarot is not yet published, it is discussed briefly in Schürer, History 2:248); see Winter, VT 6 (1956) 215–17.

“In 2 Kgs 19:2; Jer 19:1, a group of people called the ‘elder priests’ or ‘senior priests’ (Hebrew זקני הכהנים *zqny hkhn.ym*; Greek οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τῶν ἱερέων) are mentioned but with no further explanation (TDOT 4:128). The leaders of each of the twenty-four courses of priests could be called שרים *šrym*, ‘princes’ (Ezra 8:24, 29; 20:5; 2 Chr 36:14), ראשים *r.šym*, ‘heads’ (1 Chr 24:4; IQM 2:2), or זקנים *zqnym*, ‘elders’ (perhaps 2 Kgs 19:2; Jer 19:1). In the Mishna the phrases זקני כהנים *zqny khnym*, ‘elders of the priests’ (m. Yoma 1:5), and זקני בית אב *zqny byt. b.*, ‘elders of the father’s house’ (m. Tamid 1:1; m. Mid 1:8) occur (the latter constitute divisions within each of the משמרות *mišmērōt* or ‘courses’; see y. Ta’an 68a, quoted in Schürer, History 2:245).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 289.]

their priests. This may very well extend to include the people of God in Christ as well through the 12 apostles, although one can't be dogmatic here. One important point in the Revelation narrative: the role of these 24 elders in the heavenly court recedes well into the background after chapters four and five. Their ἱματίοις λευκοῖς, white robes, reflect their genuine devotion to God and their στεφάνους χρυσοῦς, golden crowns, reflect their leadership role in representing the people of God to the Almighty, which they surrender to God in worshipful acknowledgment of His ultimate authority (v. 10).<sup>93</sup>

#### D. The Central Throne, vv. 5–6a

5 Καὶ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐκπορεύονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ, καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, 6 καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑάλινη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ.

5 And from the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven lampstands with burning flames. They are the seven spirits of God. 6 In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

In this final scene John returns to the central throne with new insights, describing both what comes out of the throne and what stands in front of the throne.

Coming out of the throne are ἐκπορεύονται ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ, coming out are lightning flashes and rumblings and peals of thunder. Interestingly but virtually unnoticed by the translations is a shift of verb tense by John with this statement running through verse 6a. Past time verbs were used have dominated from verb one but in the sentence in verses 5–6a a present tense verb, ἐκπορεύονται, is used to highlight the continuous nature of the lightening and thunder as well as the seven burning torches.

<sup>93</sup>In the background most likely stands an interesting irony against Greco-Roman customs of the late first century that would have been particularly meaningful to the initial readers:

Suetonius Dom. 4.4 depicts Domitian wearing a gold crown (corona aurea) with images of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva on it and surrounded by the priest of Jupiter and members of the college of Flaviales (established by Domitian for the cult of the deified Flavian emperors), each wearing a gold crown with an image of Domitian on it. Priests of the imperial cult in Asia Minor customarily wore gold crowns displaying busts of the emperor(s) and family members, a custom largely limited to Asia Minor (this phenomenon is discussed in J. Inan and E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum, Römische und frühbyzantinische Porträtplastik aus der Türkei: Neue Funde, 2 vol(s). [Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1979] 38–47; for examples, see nos. 135, 137, 186, 225, 230, 264, 311, 326 with discussions and plates; further examples are found in J. Inan and E. Rosenbaum, Roman and Early Byzantine Portrait Sculpture in Asia Minor [London: Oxford UP 1966] nos. 111, 143, 151, 169, 174, 190, etc.).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 293.]

The phraseology for the lightning and thunder reflect stock Jewish apocalyptic language.<sup>94</sup> Clearly the atmospheric and seismic phenomena are first used in Exodus for the theophanic appearance of God on Mt. Sinai and become the model for most every such appearance of God subsequently. This then extends to apocalyptic depictions of heavenly manifestations of God, and usually with more and more dramatic details. What is also interesting are the four such theophanic scenes in Revelation -- 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18 -- where each scene is depicted somewhat differently from the others.<sup>95</sup> The visual and audio impact of such a depiction is to stress beyond human power. One only has to experience a really powerful thunder storm with lots of lightening in order to form a mental image of this pic-

<sup>94</sup>“In the OT the Hebrew word קול *qôl*, ‘sound, voice,’ is often used in the plural form קולות *qôlôt* to mean ‘thunder’ and is frequently translated in the LXX with the Greek term φωναί as in the following passages: Exod 9:23, 28, 29, 33, 34; 19:16; 1 Sam 12:17, 18. In the context of storm phenomena associated primarily with the Sinai theophany (Exod 19:16–19; Jeremias, Theophanie, 100–111), which served as the model for later theophanic scenes (Isa 29:6; Pss 18:6–16[LXX 17]; 77:18[LXX 76:19]), it is clear that φωναί should be translated not ‘voices’ (AV, RSV) but rather ‘rumblings’ (NIV, NRSV), a term synonymous with βρονταί; the NEB avoids the problem by including just two atmospheric elements, ‘flashes of lightning and peals of thunder.’ [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 294.]

<sup>95</sup>“Several observations can be made about these lists (on the earthquake, see Comment on 8:5; on the large hail, see Comment on 11:19c): (1) The most frequently occurring pattern is ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί (4:5; 11:19; 16:18), with a slight reordering in the remaining passage (8:5, βρονταί καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραοαί). This list of storm phenomena clearly forms the core of all four lists. A very similar list occurs in Jub. 2:2, which refers to the creation of ἄγγελοι φωνῶν, βροντῶν, ἀστραπῶν, ‘angels of the sounds, thunders, and lightnings’ (Greek text of Epiphanius in Denis, *Fragmenta*, 71; on the corruption of the Ethiopic text, see VanderKam, *Jubilees 2:8*; Hebrew text of 4Q216=4QJuba has only הוֹרוֹת *haqqôlôt*, ‘voices’ or ‘thunders’; see VanderKam and Milik, *JBL* 110 [1911] 257–60). Very similar also is Apoc. Abr. 30:8, where the last in a series of ten plagues is described as ‘thunder, voices, and destroying earthquakes’ (tr. Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:704). (2) The two lists in 11:19 and 16:18–21 are virtually identical, though the σεισμός in 11:19 is qualified as μέγας, and the lengthy description of the magnitude and extent of the earthquake in 16:19–20 interrupts the mention of χάλαζα μεγάλη, the effects of which are also described at some length. (3) The theophanic use of storm phenomena, such as lightning, rumblings, and thunder, grew out of the narrative of the Sinai theophany in Exod 19:16–18, where five phenomena are mentioned, thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, a loud trumpet blast, and an earthquake (essentially repeated in Tg. Onq. Exod 19:16 and Tg. Ps.-J. Exod 19:16), initially repeated in Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 11:4, and then enormously expanded primarily through the use of seismic disturbances in Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 11:5 (tr. Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:318).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 294–295.]

ture.

Next two separate items are described that are located in front of the divine throne, rather than encircling it as with the previous references.



First in front of the throne is καὶ ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καιόμεναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, and seven burning torches before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. The combination of λαμπάς πυρὸς καιόμεναι signals a burning torch rather than a lamp with a wick and filled with oil, as is possible with λαμπάς without these qualifiers (cf. Mt. 25:1). The relative clause modifier has its antecedent in 1:4 with τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, from the seven spirits which are before His throne. These are different from αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ, the seven lampstands in 1:20. It is possible that the image is drawn from Zech. 4:2.<sup>96</sup> But the seven branched burning torches more likely represent the menorah that stood before the ark in the tabernacle: Exod 25:31–40; 27:20–21; Lev 24:1–4; Zech 4:2; cf. 2 Chr 4:7.<sup>97</sup> The intended

<sup>96</sup>**Zech. 4:1-2.** 4 ἸΚαὶ ἐπέστρεψεν ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐξήγειρέν με ὄν τρόπον ὅταν ἐξεγερεθῇ ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ὕπνου αὐτοῦ.† 2 καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς με τί σὺ βλέπεις; καὶ εἶπα Ἐώρακα καὶ ἰδοὺ λυχνία χρυσοῦ ὅλη, καὶ τὸ λαμπαδεῖον ἐπάνω αὐτῆς, καὶ ἑπτὰ λύχνοι ἐπάνω αὐτῆς, καὶ ἑπτὰ ἐπαρυστριδες τοῖς λύχνοις τοῖς ἐπάνω αὐτῆς.†

4.1 The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. 2 He said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.

**4:10** διότι τίς ἐξουδένωσεν εἰς ἡμέρας μικράς; καὶ χαροῦνται καὶ ὄψονται τὸν λίθον τὸν κασσιτέρινον ἐν χειρὶ Ζοροβαβελ. ἑπτὰ οὗτοι ὀφθαλμοὶ κυρίου εἰσὶν οἱ ἐπιβλέποντες ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν.†

For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.”

<sup>97</sup>“This maybe an allusion to Zech 4:2 (see Comment on 5:6). Since the view is frequently found in early Judaism that angels are made of fire, it is possible that seven angelic beings are referred to

meaning of this seven fold burning torch modeled by the menorah in the ancient tabernacle is somewhat signaled by the relative clause ἃ εἰσὶν τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ, *which are the seven spirits of God*. Further amplification of this is proved in 5:6 with the declaration

Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζῶων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ **ὄφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ οἳ εἰσὶν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν.**

Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and **seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.**

Indeed the seven spirits of God are the seven eyes of the slaughtered Lamb that cover the entire earth providing complete awareness to God through the Lamb of what is taking place on the earth. Out of the background of Zechariah 4 (esp. vv. 2, 10) comes direct confirmation of John's intended meaning here of these seven torches as the seven spirits of God.

The final object noted by John in this beginning depiction of the throne of God is καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνῃ ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ, and before the

here (as the allegorical interpretation in v 5c makes clear), or that the seven blazing torches represent the menorah. 2 Apoc. Bar. 21:6 mentions countless beings constituted of flame and fire who stand around the throne of God, and 4 Ezra 8:21–22 speaks of the hosts of angels who stand before God's throne and at his command are changed to wind and fire. The seven burning torches would most naturally appear to represent the seven-branched menorah before the ark in the tabernacle (Exod 25:31–40; 27:20–21; Lev 24:1–4; Zech 4:2; cf. 2 Chr 4:7).

“The custom of carrying sacred fire (πῦρ) before emperors was an integral feature of imperial ceremonial by the mid-third century A.D. when Herodian wrote his history of Rome (1.8.4; 1.16.4; 2.3.2; 2.8.6; 7.9.1; 7.6.2), and probably much earlier (it is mentioned by Cassius Dio 72.35.5, where the term φῶς is used). Taylor (*Roman Emperor*, 195–96) suggested that the custom of carrying sacred fire before the emperor began when Augustus entered Alexandria on 1 August 30 B.C.. Cumont suggests that the custom of carrying sacred fire before the Roman emperors symbolized the perpetuity of their power and can be traced back through Alexander and his successors to Persian traditions (*Oriental Religions*, 137). The possible historical relationship between the supposed custom of torch bearers preceding the triumphator in the Roman triumphal processions is tenuous because torches are mentioned in connection with triumphs in only a very few problematic texts (e.g., Suetonius Div. Iul. 37.2), and Versnel (*Triumphus*, 118–19) casts doubt on the correctness of this reconstruction. The history and significance of this imperial symbol are discussed in detail by Alföldi (MDAIRA 49 [1934] 111–18), who observes that ‘in the first century of the imperial period accompanying the emperor with torches in the daytime had already come into use’ (116). See also Ps 50:3, “Our God comes, he does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire [LXX 49:3, πῦρ ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ καθήσεται].”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 295–296.]

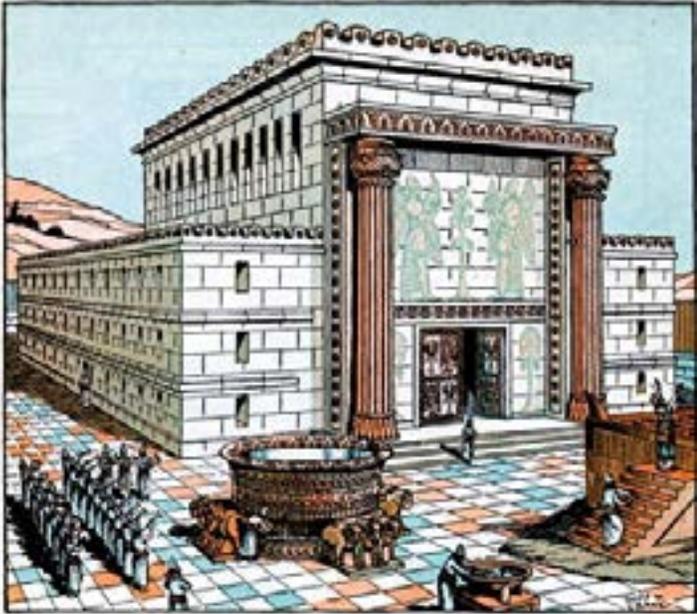
*throne is something like a sea of glass comparable to crystal* (v. 6a). Again John struggles to find some earthly analogy suitable for comparison to what he saw standing in front of the heavenly throne. Notice his double comparison using both ὡς and ὁμοία.<sup>98</sup>

What he saw was something with the impact that looking at a sea of glass would create. And to be more clear, this was clear glass rather than colored glass. Imagine the impact upon a viewer. With flashes of lightening shooting out from the throne and penetrating the emerald tone rainbow encircling the throne and all this coming through a sea of crystal like glass, the sight must have been overwhelming to John. Added to the lightening flashes was the radiance like jasper and carnelian hues flowing out from the One seated on the throne through this sea of crystal like substance.

The image of a sea of crystal like glass somehow connected to the heavenly throne is rather common both in the Jewish religious heritage and beyond.<sup>99</sup> Ad-

<sup>98</sup>In a grammar pattern frequently used by John, he makes a comparison without specifying the heavenly object being compared to earthly objects. Thus English translations of necessity from rules of English grammar have to insert an object for comparison. More common is the use of the English word “something.” One possible reason is his reverence for the divine references focusing on God in a traditional Jewish manner. Of course, another possibility is simply that no vocabulary word existed to begin to specify the heavenly object without distortion. Greek grammar gave him freedom to simply omit inserting a reference, which he did.

<sup>99</sup>“This is probably based on an allusion to Ezek 1:22, where the prophet sees ‘the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal,’ spread out over the heads of the living creatures (Tg. Ezek. 1:22 compares the firmament to a great ice field). One of the features of the temple of Solomon was an enormous bronze basin of water mounted on twelve bronze oxen, three facing each of the cardinal directions (1 Kgs 7:23–26; Jos., Ant. 8.79–80; according to 2 Kgs 16:17, Ahaz later removed the base and substituted one made of stone). This basin was called הַיָּם *hayyām*, ‘the sea’ (1 Kgs 7:24; 2 Kgs 16:17), הַיָּם מוֹצֵק *hayyām mōsq*, ‘the molten sea’ (1 Kgs 7:23; 2 Chr 4:2), or יַם הַנְּחֹשֶׁת *yām hannēhōšet*, ‘the bronze sea’ (2 Kgs 25:13; Jer 52:17; 1 Chr 18:8). W. F. Albright and others have emphasized the cosmic significance of this basin and its relationship to smaller portable lavers (*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 4th ed. [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1956] 148–50), though de Vaux is more cautious (*Ancient Israel*, 328–29). The Babylonian term *apsū* referred both to the subterranean freshwater ocean upon which all life is based and to the basin of holy water in the temple (Albright, *Archaeology*, 148–49). Gen 1:7 (cf. Jub. 2:4) speaks of the waters above the firmament and the waters below the firmament; i.e., the primeval world ocean is divided into two halves. There are several references in the OT and early Jewish literature to a heavenly ocean above the solid vault of heaven (Pss 29:10 [‘Yahweh sits enthroned on the heavenly ocean מַבּוּל *mabbūl*’]; 104:3; 148:4; 1 Enoch 54:7; 2 Enoch [Rec. J] 3:3; [Rec. A] 4:2; T. Abr. [Rec. B] 8:3; T. Adam 1:5; T. Levi 2:7; Gen. Rab. 1:6; Apoc. Paul; 21), which is the source of rain (Gen 7:11; 8:2; Ps 104:13; Amos 9:6). In ancient Egyptian mythology, Nun, ‘the father of the gods,’ is the personified primeval ocean, identical with the Lake of Dawn, from which the sun rises and which is the primary obstacle



ditional insight comes from the link between 4:6a and 15:2-4.<sup>100</sup> The earthly background for this most likely is the laver in Solomon's temple underscoring God's holy separateness and splendor in heaven, and perhaps also connected to the Red Sea crossing of the Israelites.<sup>101</sup> The sense of cleansing plus the separate-

separating the dead person from the sun (Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 167-69). Exod 24:10 contains an old tradition of the pavement of sapphire (the firmament) under the feet of God (Tg. Onq. Exod 24:10 avoids this anthropomorphism by substituting 'the throne of his glory'), which was clear like the heaven. In 15:2 a 'sea of glass mingled with fire' combines the motifs of a celestial sea above which the throne of God is set and the river (or rivers) of fire that flows from his throne (see Comment on 15:2). According to b. Hag. 14b, the pure alabaster pavement before the throne of God had the appearance of water. Several texts mention a celestial fiver (T. Abr. [Rec. B] 8:3; 2 Apoc. Bar. [Gk.] 2:1; Apoc. Paul 22). [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 296-297.]

<sup>100</sup>Rev. 15:2-4. 2 Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ. 3 καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες· μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοί σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· 4 τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; ὅτι μόνος ὄσιος, ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

2 And I saw *what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire*, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: "Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! 4 Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed."

<sup>101</sup>"The appearance of something 'like a sea of glass like crystal' (ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ) 'before the throne'

may reflect (1) the laver in Solomon's temple, (2) God's holy separateness and splendor in heaven, or especially (3) the heavenly analogue to the Red Sea. These are not incompatible options. That it is the laver in the heavenly temple court is supported from the obvious temple imagery of chs. 4-5 and subsequent chapters developing the imagery of this scene.<sup>58</sup> Allusion to the Red Sea finds support in 15:2-4, which has the nearly identical phrase ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίην ('like a sea of glass') and where the sea is integrally linked with 'fire,' as in 4:5-6.<sup>59</sup> The two passages are also linked by the fact that in both the notion of 'overcoming' is applied to people who 'stand' either on or by the 'sea' (see further on 15:2). The sea in 15:2 is also identified with the Red Sea of the new exodus and the new song of Moses. In this regard, strikingly similar to Rev. 4:6 is Mekilta Rabbi Ishmael (Beshallah 5.13-15, on Exod. 14:16), which says, probably on the basis of Exod. 15:8 ('the deeps were congealed'), that one of the miracles at the Red Sea episode was that the sea became congealed and became like glass vessels<sup>60</sup> (for a sea in heaven cf. Test. Levi 2:7 [a]; 2 En. 3:3).

"That the most prominent background for the image of the sea is Ezek. 1:22 is confirmed by the wording 'as the firmament, as the appearance of crystal' and by the preceding Ezekiel 1 allusions observed above. The wording both in Ezekiel and here refers to the sea as like 'crystal' or 'ice' that forms the floor for God's heavenly throne (see further below).

"The 'sea' is also associated with the idea of evil. Caird has argued that here it connotes cosmic evil, since it often has such a nuance in the OT and sometimes elsewhere in Revelation (see Rev. 13:1; 21:1; and especially 15:2, as well as 'abyss' in 11:7).<sup>61</sup> This speculation receives support from the modeling of these chapters on Daniel 7, since the sea as a picture of the beasts' origin is a significant feature in Daniel 7, and the scenes of Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1 have integral literary links, the former usually seen as dependent on the latter.<sup>62</sup> The portrayal of the Red Sea in the OT as the abode of the evil sea monster confirms that this setting is also included in John's thought (cf. Isa. 51:9-11; Ps. 74:12-15; Ezek. 32:2).

"In view of the Daniel and Exodus imagery, there is then a hint that John sees the chaotic powers of the sea as calmed by divine sovereignty. Rev. 5:5ff. reveals that Christ's overcoming through his death and resurrection is what defeated the power of evil and so calmed Satan's watery, tumultuous abode. 4:6 gives a picture of the stilling of the hellish waters from the heavenly perspective, though the devil displays his wrath even more furiously on earth because he has been decisively defeated in heaven (see further on 5:6b; 12:12; 13:3). This is the calm brought about by the cosmic 'D-Day,' wherein the saints' redemption from the devil was accomplished, but his final, complete defeat awaits mopping up operations by the saints and Christ's final coming in judgment at the end of history. The lamb's 'overcoming' has also paved the way for the saint's 'overcoming' of the beast at the same sea, as pictured in 15:2-4. When John later says that 'there is no longer any sea' (21:1), he means that all evil on the earth will be not only defeated but also eradicated when Christ's kingdom is established consummately on earth. In fact, the 'sea of glass like crystal before the throne' in 4:6 may be an intentional contrast with 'a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne' in 22:1. The sea as the source of satanic evil opposing God's throne has been eliminated and replaced by the river of redemption, which has its source in the throne.

"Later Jewish writings compared the blue color of the 'sea' to the floor of God's heavenly throne and to the throne itself, citing Exod. 24:10 and Ezek. 1:26 in support (b. Sotah 17a; b. Hullin 89a;

ness of God as the Exalted One is communicated with dramatic imagery.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

Wow! How do we make sense of all these images presented to us by John? Clearly John sought to communicate to his initial readers what he was privileged to see in this vision by using terminology drawn from both every day life experience and his Jewish religious heritage. Grasping the meaning of these dramatic images was much easier for them, but is not impossible for us in the post-modern world.

A fundamental principle of biblical interpretation in working with pictorial language in a genre such as the apocalyptic pattern that controls the text expressions here is rather simple.

First, by using every clue contextually and historically to the time of the writing, one must carefully draw out not only the details of the image but also its most likely meaning to the first readers. Pictorial language intends to communicate a message just as prose or narrative texts do. One must thoroughly examine similar and related images in the literature of John's world not just for clues to those John is using but for the images in the related literature. This work is often tedious and very painstaking because it requires a huge knowledge of the world that John wrote in. Not many Bible scholars possess either the linguistic training or the historical knowledge of John's apocalyptic world.<sup>102</sup>

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b. Menahoth 43b). Likewise, the blue sea was compared both to the heavenly throne and God's appearance itself, citing in support Ezek. 1:28 (Midr. Ps. 24.12; Sifre Num. §115; similarly Midr. Ps. 89.18; Midr. Rab. Num. 4.13). In the Koran, Sura 27.44–45, the floor of the reception hall apparently before Solomon's throne is described as a 'spreading water ... smoothed of crystal.'<sup>63</sup>

"Ezek. 1:22 is a reflection of Gen. 1:8 ('God called the firmament heaven'), which Midr. Rab. Gen. 4.7 elaborates in the following way: '[God's] handiwork [heaven] was liquid and on the second day it congealed.'

"Psalm 28 (LXX 29) refers to God in his glory dwelling 'on many waters' in direct connection with 'his holy court' (vv 2–3); the Psalm concludes with an eschatological reference using the same imagery in direct connection to God's glory in the temple: "the LORD will dwell on the flood; and the LORD will sit a king forever" (vv 9–10). If this psalm is in mind here in Revelation, it supports both an identification of the sea as the laver in the heavenly temple and the sea as the place of satanic evil.<sup>64</sup>"

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 327–328.]

<sup>102</sup>This is a major reason for my heavy dependence on both David Aune and G.K. Beale, since these two evangelical writers are among the most knowledgeable scholars in this field alive today. Just a superficial comparison of their commentaries with a host of others -- almost 50 others in my digital library -- dramatically underscores their vastly superior understanding of John's world. I

Second, once directions for establishing the probable religious meaning of the images surfaces, then the task is to draw conclusions about timeless religious truth emerging from these meanings. Here is where the relevancy of the text comes to the surface. Most of the time absolute certainty regarding the precise, and exclusive, meaning for a particular image is not legitimately possible. But generally high levels of confidence can be concluded. And these can serve as a solid foundation for applications to our world.

What comes out of 4:1-6a? If nothing else emerges, my prayer is that you begin to catch a glimpse of the absolute sovereignty and power of Almighty God. His base of operations in heaven represents the control room of the universe. For John that control room was located on the other side of the canopy we call sky based on his limited world view. We operate out of a much different world view today due to space exploration but this doesn't diminish one iota the reality of heaven as God's base of operations over His creation. Prior to death, the only way to catch a glimpse into this center of universal power and authority is through the visionary experience of biblical writers such as God to whom God chose to reveal portions of this place. Those visions are preserved for us within the framework of the writer's ancient world view, which we must take into account in interpreting what they wrote.

What John allows us to see in heaven is the throne of God. Ancient images of lightning and thunder, brilliant radiance flow out of the throne comparable to the effect of light shining through jasper, carnelian, emeralds, and crystal signal to us a divine presence so overwhelming that human language stumbles miserably in trying to capture its essence in description. Burning torches remind us of the absolute awareness of God regarding every detail of occurrence on earth. But in the developing picture we are reminded of the presence of people in heaven acceptable to God and sharing in benefits of His power and authority.

In spite of God's total 'otherness' from us humans, He is not disconnected from us. That part of the picture will continue to emerge in the unfolding picture in the remainder of chapter four and in chapter five. And in this aspect of the picture lies both hope and warning. Such an awesomely holy God cannot and will not tolerate impurity in His presence. But in the slaughtered Lamb provision has been made for access. And also unbelievable accountability for our actions is coming to the forefront in the developing picture.

### **Wow! What a marvelous God we serve!**

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may not always agree with their interpretive conclusions regarding the text of Revelation, but I deeply trust their profound knowledge of the literature in John's world.