

A JASPER STONE, CLEAR AS CRYSTAL.

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FOR centuries the description—given in Revelation xxi. 11—of the light of the Holy Jerusalem as “like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal,” has not only baffled all commentators, but robbed the Bible student of the transcendent splendour which St. John meant to convey, when he says in chap. iv. v. 3: “He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.”

In chapter xxi. the Apostle refers to the jasper stone as illustrative of the light of the Glory of God which illumined “that great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

While it is true that the jasper of Scripture always refers to the green variety, and like many other beautiful stones, it occurs in many varieties and colours, yet it is equally true that all jaspers, whether they be the jaspers of the ancients or the modern jaspers, could not possibly be described, with any truth, “clear as crystal.”

It is, therefore, quite wrong for every Bible commentary which the writer of this article has been able to consult, to say St. John did not refer to jasper at all but to a crystal-like stone or “a diamond” as suggested by Ebrard.

Here, then, is a matter which must interest at least such students who have not yet been convinced that the Scriptures may err.

The Apostle St. John used the word jasper to illustrate heavenly glory in three separate passages (Rev. iv. 3; xxi. 11; xxi. 19).

It is therefore a matter of real moment whether St. John knew the true nature, colour, etc., of jasper or whether modern writers who would correct the Apostle are more exact as to scientific facts.

To obtain a full and clear grasp of the point at issue it is necessary to consider the significance of the use of the word jasper in the order in which the Apostle used it in his Book of “The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto Him” (i.e., unto Jesus Christ), viz., a Revelation which Jesus Christ subsequently “sent and signified unto His servant John.”

The “jasper” stone is first mentioned by him in Chapter iv. v. 3: “And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.”

The vision is a scene of the exquisite glory of the enthroned Christ seated under the arched dome of a glorious rainbow shining in its seven-fold refulgent tints of the colours of the solar spectrum, with a perfection of beauty which is best understood by those who have seen a rainbow in the pure and rarefied air of Eastern lands.

In what sense, we ask, can it be said, “He that sat upon the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone”?

Let us read the comment as given by Bishop Ellicott's *New Testament Commentary* (Rev.): "In determining the significance of these emblems we must be guided partly by the analogy of Bible imagery elsewhere, and partly by our knowledge of precious stones. The sardian or sardine, is admitted to be a stone of a fiery red colour; the emerald, to which the bow round the throne is compared, is almost certainly a bright green; the hue of the jasper is the difficulty.

"The jasper—the last stone in the high priest's breastplate, and first of the twelve foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Exod. xxviii. 20; and Rev. xxi. 19)—is described by the best authorities as a dark opaque green. Such a colour is quite in harmony with the colours of the other stones in the breastplate, and particularly with the foundation stones, which seem to be arranged in shades of colour (cf. note—colours of the rainbow); but the dark opaque green would be an ill combination with the red sardius and the green emerald in the vision of the present chapter. Is there no further light? We have a jasper stone spoken of in chapter xxi. 11, with the descriptive phrase "clear as crystal"! Does not this point to a stone somewhat different in appearance from that spoken of simply as jasper? Such a clear crystal stone would be the most natural companion to the sardine, and the combination of the sparkling brightness and fiery red suits the union of brightness and flame which appears elsewhere in the Bible (comp. chapter i. 14; xi. 1; Ezek. i. 4; viii. 2; Dan. vii. 9) and is best understood of the holiness and righteousness of God."

Dean Alford, D.D., in his *Greek Testament*, comments on this passage, more critically. He quotes Epiphanius, fifth century A.D., in his treatise on the twelve stones in Aaron's breastplate, who says there are other kinds of this stone jasper which he describes as "like water," and further describes it as "precious," from which, Dean Alford says, "Ebrard argues that by jasper the diamond is meant."

The Dean says: "This kind appears to be that meant in our chapter xxi. 11," and so "thinks it must then represent a stone of watery crystalline brightness." Now it will be seen from the above that each commentator makes the definition of the jasper of Revelation iv. 3 depend upon the description of jasper given in Revelation xxi. 11, "clear as crystal."

A consideration of the Greek words, however, will show that the adjective "clear" has been wrongly introduced so as to mislead these commentators. The Greek is rendered by Dean Alford: "Like to a stone most precious as it were a jasper stone crystal clear," or as given in the *Authorised and Revised Versions*, "clear as crystal."

But, as every Greek student will see, there is nothing in the Greek to suggest the adjective clear. Our translators have wrongly assumed that the one characteristic of crystal is, that it is clear, whereas it is equally characteristic of crystal that it "shines" or glitters, which is undoubtedly the true rendering here.

In proof of this we submit the following passages (xxi. 18): "The city was pure gold like unto clear glass"—literally, pure gold like unto pure glass. Here again—the word clear has been wrongly introduced—pure gold, like glass, also shines or glitters, like crystal. Not

realising this, Dean Alford gives a fanciful interpretation to the words in *xxi. 18*: "A city of pure gold like unto clear glass." His comment is as follows: "Pure gold (i.e. ideal gold, transparent, such as no gold is here, but surpassing it in splendour)." Surely the true characteristic of pure gold is that it glitters or shines ("all is not gold that glitters").

The Apostle's words are perfectly natural. Why put an unnatural meaning upon them?—"A city of pure gold, glittering like unto pure glass."

This use of the adjective "clear" is again misleading in the A.V. in chapter *xxii. 1*: "A pure river of water of life clear as crystal." The Greek word rendered "clear" is *lamprin*.

The R.V. reads: "Bright as crystal"; the context shows that the word "shining" (as a light from a lamp) would here be more correct. The characteristic of a river of water, flowing under the light of celestial glory, would not be "clearness" as in crystal—but "shining" or "glittering," as crystal glitters under the light. Moreover, "glittering or sparkling" best befits the phrase "water of life." Sparkling water betokens water with life in it, in contrast to still water; hence the true rendering of this verse would be "A pure river of water of life (glittering or sparkling) like crystal." This is true to nature and consistent with each of the previous references. We therefore see that the adjective "clear" has been wrongly introduced into each of the passages discussed, and in certain texts applied to the jasper stone, with the result that commentators have been misled to suppose that when the Apostle illustrates the beauty of jasper most precious he speaks of a stone which is transparently clear and therefore different from the jasper mentioned in *Revelation xxi. 19*; *Exodus xxviii*; and elsewhere.

There is no evidence whatever that the clear crystal was ever counted among the jaspers, nor does St. John infer such was the case; much less can it be said that the diamond was referred to, since there was no knowledge how to cut or polish a diamond until the fourteenth century A.D.

We are now in a better position to ascertain the true interpretation of the Apostle's words: "He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne in sight like unto an emerald."

First as to the nature of the Bible jasper.

Dr. Ellicott is quite wrong in assuming that the jasper of the high priest's breastplate and the first foundation stone (*xxi. 19*) were opaque stones. True, the modern (green) jasper is an opaque stone, but that this is not the stone referred to in *Exodus xxviii.* and *Revelation xxi. 18*, I think, made sufficiently clear in my book on "The Precious Stones of the Bible."¹

From the descriptions given by Theophrastus, third century B.C., Pliny the elder, St. John's contemporary, and Epiphanius, fifth century A.D., it is clear that the Bible jasper is our modern plasma,

¹ Published by H. R. Allenson, 7 Racquet Court, Fleet Street, E.C.4, at 2s. 6d.

a translucent, bright green stone, and with this Mr. C. W. King and the mineralogists of South Kensington and Jermyn Street Museums agree.

In passing I would point out that Dr. Ellicott is also wrong in his description of the sardine as a stone "of sparkling brightness and fiery red." The Bible sardine or sardius is undoubtedly the modern blood-red carnelian (chalcedony), which is neither clear nor sparkling.

If it is asked in what sense can "jasper most precious like unto a crystal" illustrate a brilliantly lighted city (xxi. 11), the answer is by its shining, i.e. its lustrous polish, for the Bible jasper, the modern plasma, takes a high polish and was one of the stones most easily polished by the ancients; also, it is highly probable that the epithet "most precious" refers to this lustrous character of polished jasper; for unlike gem stones in general, jasper is a rock and in the rough is neither precious nor rare. It is the "shining" or "glittering" when polished, that is in point; hence it is literally true and fully in harmony with the text to interpret the words of St. John thus: "Jasper stone (shining or glittering) like crystal."

In other words, the face of the Divine Being in Revelation iv. 3 was seen to be shining like a [green] jasper and a [red] sardine stone."

If it be asked what led the Apostle to so describe the appearance of the Divine Being, the answer may be found in the context in the significant words: "There was a rainbow round about the throne like unto an emerald to look upon" (R.V.). Who can fail to see that this statement reveals that what the Apostle saw in the vision was a wondrous colour effect, viz. the reflection of the green and red colours—the two prominent tints manifest in every rainbow, which were reflected and glowing in the face of Him who sat upon the throne, in such a manner as to suggest to the Apostle's mind the likeness of a jasper and sardine stone.

This wonderful phenomena of the predominance of the colours of green and red in every natural rainbow may be seen by any observer in the natural spectrum which commonly appears around the inside edge of the natural shell of the pearl oyster, called mother-of-pearl.

For evenness, richness of colour and delicacy of tints on this shell there is no more perfect illustration. The seven colours are regularly superimposed one upon the other, in so wonderful a way that the two colours green and red predominate in such a marked degree that it would be most natural to describe the glowing face of the occupant of the throne glittering with the radiant colours of the rainbow which was round about the throne as here appearing a lovely green tint, and there a glorious red. Truly and naturally, as the Apostle says, "He that sat was to look upon like a green jasper and a red sardine stone."

The explanation of the phrase in chapter iv. v. 3, "a rainbow in sight like unto an emerald," probably is, that just as the Apostle had described the face of our Lord—as reflecting the green and red colours of the rainbow—under the names of the precious jasper and sardine stone, so here he describes the rainbow itself—i.e., its dominant green tint—under the name of another precious green stone, viz. the emerald.

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