

God as a Rock Producing Stones for God's Building

In the previous installment of "Glossa" we explored the divine epithet *Rock* ascribed to God. We showed how God and rock have a number of shared characteristics, including fluidity, solidity, and durability, indicating provision, protection, and presence. Rock is the source of stones, material for building. Stones can either be massive for the main structure and bulk of a building or precious for its adornment and beauty. In the Bible stones are symbols of transformed humanity as materials for God's building. Christ is presented as larger stones (the foundation stone, cornerstone, and topstone) for the bulk of God's building, and the believers in Christ are presented as precious stones for the adornment and beautification of the building. In this article we explore the revelation of these two kinds of stones in the Bible and their intrinsic significance in relation to God and His economy, particularly in the working out of God's full salvation to transform humanity into durable and precious materials suitable for God's building.

How Rocks Become Stones

Rocks are formed from the upwelling and cooling of molten, hot material in the mantle layer beneath the surface of the earth's crust (igneous rocks). Through the weathering process they can be broken into smaller portions (e.g., stones, gravel, sand, mud), which may be used for building or may be reconstituted under pressure into sedimentary rocks. Minerals in rocks may also be recrystallized to form gemstones during the formation of deep intrusive igneous (plutonic) rocks and metamorphic rocks. Precious stones form in veins, cavities (amygdules), or fissures in the earth's crust, as hydrothermal solutions containing minerals crystallize in them. Sometimes these hot solutions contain salts, which are able to dissolve the elements of the surrounding rock. To make rocks suitable for building they can be cut, shaped, and fashioned into stones, still retaining characteristics of the larger mass (e.g., durability and color).

A Spiritual Application of the Formation of Precious Stones—the Stages of God's Full Salvation

Precious stones are not created but are formed by the transformation of created elements. The experience of the formation of stones and their building together corresponds to the stages of God's full salvation.

The believers created of dust (Gen. 2:7) must first be regenerated then transformed "in their human nature by and with the divine nature through the working of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18) to become precious stones for God's eternal building (Matt. 16:18; John 1:42; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 21:18-20)" (Lee, Recovery Version, Exo. 28:17, note 1).

Human beings were created from the dust of the ground with the same chemical composition as the elements of the earth, as clay vessels with three parts—spirit, soul, and body (2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thes. 5:23). These parts are spaces or "cavities" prepared for the impartation of "hydrothermal solutions" from the "magma" source of divinity, from God as rock. Human beings in their fallen and backslidden state, especially in their heart, may become hardened—likened to rock or stone; for example, "they set their hearts like adamant so as not to hear the instruction and the words which Jehovah of hosts sent by His Spirit through the former prophets" (Zech. 7:12; cf. Ezek. 36:26; Exo. 7:13; Psa. 95:8; Ezek. 2:4; Matt. 19:8; Rom. 2:5). However, environmental circumstances and the operation of the Spirit (initial sanctification, 1 Pet. 1:2; Luke 15:8) can work to soften and cause the opening (repentance) of a fissure or crack in our being for the entrance of the compound Spirit as a "salty hydrothermal solution" with the bountiful supply of the elements of divinity, humanity, death, and resurrection (Phil. 1:19) to flow into the cavities, or parts, of our being. This solution is able to dissolve the older elements and impart new elements (renewing). These new elements "crystallize" layer by layer in the cavity over time (transformation). Eventually, the pneumatic Christ can be fully "crystallized" or formed in us (Gal. 4:19, conformation). However, the surrounding rock encasing the precious stone still needs to be weathered away (dealing with the flesh). Then the stone is smoothed and cut by further weathering, not to be an isolated stone but to be fit into the building for its eventual manifestation (building and glorification).¹ Watchman Nee describes this experience:

A precious stone has been formed from various kinds of elements, which have been composed together through chemical combination through countless years of heat and pressure in the earth...Precious stones do not signify something given directly by God, but something which the Holy Spirit has produced in man by much effort and

many years of burning. The work of the Holy Spirit on earth is to continually put us into trials so that we may have all kinds of experiences and become precious stones before Him. The precious stones, therefore, are the product of our being disciplined by Him.

That life which God has imparted to us is the gold, while the life which God is constituting in us is the precious stone. Day after day, in all kinds of circumstances, He is making us in the image of Christ. This is the precious stone. God does not stop by just giving us a portion of Christ's life; He wants to have the life of Christ wrought into us. On one hand, we must realize that except for the Lord's life in us we are not any different than we were prior to our salvation. But on the other hand, after following the Lord for five or ten years and being disciplined and dealt with by Him, a portion of the life of Christ has been constituted in us by the Holy Spirit. There is something within us which has been formed by the Lord, and this is the precious stone. (*Glorious* 134-135)

The Development of the Revelation of Stones in the Bible

The main Hebrew word for stone is *'eben*, and it is used for a single stone, collections of stones, precious stones, and building materials. It is used in reference to God as the stone of Israel (Gen. 49:24) and in the name Ebenezer, "stone of help," in the context of Israel's battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:12; 4:1).

The main Greek word for stone is *lithos*. This word is mostly used for the translation of *'eben* in the Septuagint. It is also used for large stones, small stones, precious stones, and building stones.

Onyx Stones as the Seed of Stones for God's Building

The first occurrence of *'eben* is as a precious stone, onyx, found in the river Pishon flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:12). This is a seed of stones for God's building. Although there is no mention of building here, later occurrences of onyx stone are all related to God's dwelling place, or building. Two onyx stones were on the shoulder pieces of the breastplate (Exo. 28:9-12), one of the stones in the breastplate was onyx (v. 20), and one of the stones used in the building of the temple was onyx (1 Chron. 29:2). Onyx is not mentioned as one of the foundation stones of the wall of the New Jerusalem, although sardonyx (a mixture of sard and onyx) is (Rev. 21:20).

Jacob's Dream—a Pillar-Ladder for God's Building

The next significant stone mentioned is Jacob's pillow (Gen. 28:11). This is a natural stone, which Jacob used as a pillow, and after his dream he set it up as a pillar. This

stone is also related to God's building. After Jacob's dream of the ladder connecting earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it, he was inspired to set up his stone pillow as a pillar and anoint it with oil. He called the name of the place Bethel, meaning "the house of God." The fulfillment of this dream is seen in John 1:51, where the Lord presents Himself as the Son of Man who is the heavenly ladder with the angels of God ascending and descending upon Him for the building up of the church as the real house of God, or Bethel. The believers are also considered pillars in God's house (Rev. 3:12; Gal. 2:9).

Precious Stones and Priestly Garments

Precious stones were an important part of the priestly garments. Two onyx stones each inscribed with the names of six of the tribes of the children of Israel according to their birth were on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, signifying that the priest bore all of God's people on his shoulders into the presence of God (Exo. 28:9-12). In like manner, the priest wore a breastplate containing twelve transparent or translucent precious stones in four rows of three (sardius, topaz, emerald; carbuncle, sapphire, *yahalom* [diamond or jasper]; jacinth, agate, amethyst; chrysolite, onyx [or beryl], and jasper [or onyx] (vv. 17-20).² Each stone was engraved with one of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, indicating that the priest bore all of God's people also on his heart before God (v. 21, 29).³ These stones were mounted together in gold and were illuminated by a device called the Urim (from the same root as the Hebrew word for *light*), which may have contained oil (v. 30). The names of the twelve tribes inscribed on the stones contain eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph* through *zayin*, *yod* through *peh*, *resh* through *tav*). In order to make up the full number of Hebrew letters, the remaining four letters (*het*, *tet*, *tsade*, *qof*) were inscribed on an additional stone inserted into the breastplate. It was called the Thummim (from the same root as the Hebrew word for *to complete* or *to perfect*, v. 30). Through the Urim and the Thummim God was able to speak to the children of Israel using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Urim illuminated the stones continually. When the letters on the stones went dark, God spoke to His people, using the letters like a typewriter (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 28:6).⁴ The Urim and the Thummim were probably used to spell out to Moses the person who was responsible for Israel's failure at Ai (Josh. 7:16-18).

The stones of the shoulder pieces and the breastplate with the names of the children of Israel inscribed on them indicate the transformation of God's people. The fact that they were transparent so that the light of the Urim could shine through indicates that we need to become transparent so that God as light can shine

through us. The breastplate also signifies God's building. As Witness Lee states,

The breastplate on the ephod signifies the church as the building together of God's redeemed people upon Christ. The twelve precious stones set in gold ([Exo. 28:17-20]) symbolize the saints as transformed precious stones built together in the divine nature of Christ to become one entity, the church as Christ's Body (1 Cor. 3:10-12a; Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, the breastplate is a miniature of the building up of God's people..., indicating that the believers in Christ are distinct individuals but are not divided (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). The entire ephod with its shoulder pieces and the breastplate are a marvelous portrait of Christ with the church. (Recovery Version, Exo. 28:15, note 1)

Nine of the twelve precious stones (sardius, topaz, *yahalom* [diamond or jasper], chrysolite, onyx [or beryl], jasper [or onyx], sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald) found on the breastplate were a covering for the prince of Tyre, who is a type of Lucifer, or Satan (Ezek. 28:13; cf. Exo. 28:17-20).⁵ These stones probably indicate that Lucifer functioned as a priest in the worship of God in the preadamite universe.

God's people being represented by stones and by the number twelve is a recurring theme in the Bible. Joshua took twelve stones out of the Jordan River and placed them on the west side of the Jordan River. Then he took twelve stones from the east side of the Jordan River and placed them in the midst of the river (Josh. 4). The twelve stones taken from and placed in the Jordan River signify the twelve tribes of Israel passing through death and resurrection. Elijah also took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel, to build an altar in the name of Jehovah in his controversy with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:31-32).

Massive Stones and Precious Stones in the Temple

The temple was built out of massive "finished stone, cut at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor ax nor any iron tool was heard in the house when it was being built" (6:7). In addition to massive stones, the temple also contained precious stones for beautification and adornment: "The king commanded, and they quarried great stones, costly stones, in order to lay the foundation of the house with hewn stone" (5:17). David prepared for the house of God "onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony

and variegated stones, and every kind of precious stone and marble stones in abundance" (1 Chron. 29:2). The stones of the temple were something for the Israelites to take pleasure in (Psa. 102:14).

During the time of the prophets there was a sense that the physical temple with its services came short of what was on God's heart for them. As Isaiah states,

Thus says Jehovah, / Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet. / Where then is the house that you will build for Me, / And where is the place of My rest? / For all these things My hand has made, / And so all these things have come into being, declares Jehovah. / But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word (66:1-2)

The New Testament writers recognized that the physical temple was only a picture, or type, of God's building which is spiritual in nature.

Due to God's displeasure with Israel, He allowed first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians to occupy her territory, exile her people, and eventually destroy the temple and the city of Jerusalem. However, Isaiah prophesied concerning the rebuilding of the city in the latter days that Jehovah Himself would lay down her stones in dark

mortar and her foundations with sapphires; He would also make her battlements of rubies, and her gates of carbuncles, and all her borders will be precious stones (54:11-12). Although this prophecy could refer to the city of Jerusalem being rebuilt after the return from exile, it more likely refers eschatologically and symbolically to the restored and glorious eternal state of God's people and may have inspired John in his account of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:18-21. The color of the three named stones has significance. The sapphire foundation stones are blue, indicating the heavenly nature of the foundation, and the ruby walls and carbuncle gates are red, indicating redemption.

Christ as the Fulfillment of Massive Stones and Precious Stones for God's Building

The New Testament writers in their reading of the prophets and the psalms also recognized that the physical temple was only a picture, or type, of God's building, which is spiritual in nature. In this building, Christ is the reality of a number of massive and bulky stones used in a building, such as the foundation stone, the cornerstone, and the topstone.

Isaiah prophesied that Jehovah would "lay a stone in Zion as a foundation... / firmly established" to uphold God's

building (28:16). This stone is Christ. Christ (or the revelation of Christ) is both the rock upon which the building of the church takes place and the foundation stone for the building of the church as His house (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:10-14). Christ as the unique foundation stone contains the element of rock and stone, signifying divinity mingled with transformed humanity. The believers need to take heed how they build upon this foundation, using precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stone (i.e., the Father's divine nature, the redeeming Christ, and the Spirit's transformation work), rather than wood, grass, and stubble (the natural and lifeless materials of their fallen human nature). The foundation of the church is also the foundation of the apostles and prophets, because the mystery of Christ was revealed to them and because they were the first to experience God's transforming work to produce precious stones for His building (Eph. 2:20; 3:5-6).

In relation to the foundation stone, Christ is also a tested stone and a precious cornerstone as a foundation firmly established (Isa. 28:16). He is the cornerstone joining Jewish and Gentile believers (Eph. 2:20). The Lord abolished the wall of partition, the law of commandments in ordinances that separated them, so that they could be built together in Himself into one new man (vv. 13-15). When the Jewish builders rejected Christ, they rejected Him as the cornerstone, the One who would join the Gentiles to them for the building of God's house (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). Since the Jewish leaders rejected Christ, He is also considered a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Rom. 9:33; Isa. 8:14; 1 Cor. 1:23).

Christ is also portrayed as the topstone, or head stone (Zech. 4:7). Christ as the topstone consummates God's building. Christ as the stone that the builders rejected has become the head of the corner, or chief cornerstone (Psa. 118:22; Matt. 21:42). To consummate God's building, Christ is typified by Zerubbabel, who completed the rebuilding of the temple and who was set before Joshua as an engraved stone with seven eyes (Zech. 3:9). Christ was engraved, or cut, on the cross to remove the iniquity of the land in one day (v. 9; 1 Pet. 2:24; John 1:29). The number seven indicates completion in God's move. "The seven eyes of the stone (Christ) are the seven eyes of Jehovah and the seven eyes of the Lamb, Christ, which are the seven Spirits of God, the sevenfold intensified Spirit (4:10; Rev. 5:6)" (Lee, Recovery Version, Zech. 3:9, note 2). The fact that the stone has seven eyes connects it to the sevenfold intensification of the Spirit to counter the degradation of the church and to consummate God's building.

Living and Growing Stones

For the growth and enlargement of God's building, Christ is also portrayed as a living stone who makes the believers

living stones for the building up of God's spiritual house. Both Paul and Peter mix the metaphors of the growth of organic matter with that of materials for building. Paul refers to the believers and the church as plants on God's farm and as precious stones built upon Christ as the unique foundation of God's building (1 Cor. 3:9, 12). Peter speaks of the believers' regeneration by incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23), then of their coming to Christ as a living stone to become living stones like Christ through transformation, and finally, of their being built up into a spiritual house by the growth of the seed (2:4-5). Peter was particularly impressed with this in his personal experience when the Lord changed his name from Simon to Cephas, or Peter, the Aramaic and anglicized Greek words for *stone*, respectively (Matt. 16:18; John 1:42).

Christ is also portrayed as a smiting stone "cut out without hands" that crushes the great human image, symbolizing human government, that grows to become a mountain that fills the earth (Dan. 2:34-35, 45).

Through His crucifixion Christ was cut by God by being put to death (Zech. 3:9; Acts 2:23), and in His resurrection (Acts 2:24) He was cut out to be a stone in three aspects: the foundation stone and the cornerstone for the building up of the church (Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42), the stumbling stone to the unbelieving Jews (Isa. 8:14; Matt. 21:44a; Rom. 9:33), and the crushing stone to destroy the totality of human government (Matt. 21:44b).

When Christ comes as the crushing stone, He will not come alone; rather, He will come with His overcomers, His bride, His increase, as His army (John 3:29-30; Rev. 17:14; 19:7-8, 11, 14). (Lee, Recovery Version, Dan. 2:34, note 1)

The great mountain signifies the eternal kingdom of God, which will fill the whole earth forever, making the whole earth God's kingdom (v. 44; 7:13-14; Rev. 11:15). The increase of the stone into a great mountain signifies the increase of Christ (cf. John 3:29-30), which consummates in the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21:10).

Christ and the Believers as Precious Stones Consummating in the New Jerusalem

In Revelation God in Christ is portrayed as One sitting on the throne, like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance, and there is a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance (4:2-3; cf. 21:11). Jasper, which is dark green, signifies God's communicable glory in His rich life (John 17:22, 2); sardius, which is red, signifies redemption; and a rainbow like an emerald, which is grass-green, signifies God faithfully preserving life on earth. According to Daniel 10:6, Christ's body has the appearance of beryl, a bluish-green or yellow precious stone,

“signifying that Christ in His embodiment is divine (yellow), full of life (green), and heavenly (blue)” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 5, note 1). It also signifies Christ in His move, since the appearance of the wheels and their workmanship in the vision that Ezekiel saw were like the sight of beryl (Ezek. 1:16). According to verse 26, the throne itself has the appearance of a sapphire stone, which is heavenly blue (10:1; Exo. 24:10).

In addition, the overcoming believers in the church in Pergamos are to be given (i.e., be transformed into) a precious white stone, and upon the stone a new name is written (Rev. 2:17). The color white indicates that these stones will be justified and approved by the Lord.

The four stones associated with Christ are reproduced in the consummation of God’s building, the New Jerusalem, among the twelve precious stones that constitute the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem. The wall itself is constituted of jasper, which is also the precious stone of the first foundation. Eight to ten of the twelve precious stones on the breastplate constitute the foundations of the New Jerusalem, but the order is different.⁶ On the twelve foundation stones are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:14). Just as the New Jerusalem is adorned as a bride for her husband (v. 2), so also the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone (v. 19).

There is quite much debate concerning the actual identity and color of a number of the precious stones mentioned in the Bible. Adding to the confusion is that sometimes the ancient name of a stone does not correspond to the modern name, even though the modern name may be derived from the ancient name etymologically. Most of the precious stones have the same basic chemical composition. They are all oxides, and the majority are silicates, oxides of the element silicon (e.g., silicon dioxide). The exceptions are two aluminum oxides, sardius and sapphire (without the element of silicon). The stones all have a similar hardness (between 7 and 9 on the Mohs hardness scale).⁷ The stones are not too hard, so that they could not be inscribed upon, but also not too soft, so that the inscribing would weaken the stone to cause it to break up or disintegrate. The colors of the stones vary, usually due to some additional chemical elements (so-called impurities) derived from the surrounding environment during the crystallization process.

Jasper (Heb. *yashpeh*) is the first foundation stone in the wall (from the bottom to the top) of the New Jerusalem and the twelfth precious stone on the breastplate. It is also the main stone that constitutes the bulk of the wall of a hundred forty four cubits or about two hundred fifty feet (the height of about a twenty-five story building). Jasper is composed of silicon dioxide; it can be a transparent or translucent stone but is usually opaque and can be of various colors but is often considered to be a green stone. In Revelation 4:3 God is said to have the appearance of jasper. So the wall of the New Jerusalem is constituted with and has the appearance of God in His communicable glory.

Sapphire (Heb. *sappir*) is the second foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the fifth precious stone on the breastplate. Sapphire is an aluminum oxide.

Many scholars consider that it is equivalent today to lapis lazuli. It is a transparent or translucent stone, sky-blue in color. The throne of God in Ezekiel 1:26-28 appears like a sapphire surrounded by a rainbow.

Chalcedony (Gk. *chalkedon*) is the third foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem, but it does not appear on the breastplate. The chemical composition of chalcedony is silicon dioxide. It is a translucent stone, soft blue in color, and sometimes layered.

Emerald (Heb. *bareqet*, Gk. *smaragdus*) is the fourth foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the third precious stone on the breastplate. Emerald is an aluminum beryllium silicate. It is a transparent or translucent stone, dark green in color. In Revelation 4:3 the rainbow around the throne of God has the appearance of emerald.

Sardonyx (Gk. *sardonix*) is the fifth stone in the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem and the eleventh stone in the breastplate. The chemical composition of sardonyx is silicon dioxide. It is a layered white and brown or red translucent stone.

Sardius or carnelian (Heb. *'odem*) is the sixth foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the first precious stone on the breastplate. Sardius is an aluminum oxide. It is a translucent stone, red in color, and is sometimes considered to be a ruby, which is also red in color, but harder.

Chrysolite (Heb. *tarshish*) is the seventh foundation

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stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the tenth precious stone on the breastplate. Chrysolite is a magnesium iron silicate. It is a layered or banded stone, of yellow or olive-green color. Its name in Greek means “gold stone.” Its modern name may be peridot.

Beryl (Gk. *berullos*) is the eighth foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem. It does not occur on the breastplate. It is an aluminum beryllium silicate just like, and from the same family as, emerald. It is transparent golden yellow or bluish green in color. Christ’s body in Daniel 10:6 has the appearance of beryl.

Topaz (Heb. *pitdah*) is the ninth foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the second precious stone on the breastplate. Topaz is an aluminum silicate fluoride hydroxide. It is a transparent stone, golden yellow in color.

Chrysoptase (Gk. *chrysoprastos*) is the tenth foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem. It is not present in the breastplate. Its formula is silicon dioxide. *Chrysoptase* means “gold foliage” or “leek.” It is a translucent stone with an apple-green color.

Jacinth or Zircon (Heb. *leshem*) is the eleventh foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the seventh precious stone on the breastplate. Jacinth is a compound of zircon and a silicate. It is now called zircon. It is a transparent or translucent stone, yellow-red to brown or purple in color.

Amethyst (Heb. *'ahlamah*) is the twelfth foundation stone in the wall of the New Jerusalem and the ninth precious stone on the breastplate. Amethyst belongs to the quartz group, composed of silicon dioxide. It is a transparent stone of purple color.

There are two or possibly four stones that occur on the breastplate that are absent in the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem. The fourth precious stone on the breastplate, carbuncle (Heb. *nophek*, Gk. *anthrax*), is a magnesium aluminum beryllium compound (without the element oxygen). It is a transparent or translucent stone, of a deep glowing red color. The eighth precious stone on the breastplate, agate (Heb. *shebo/shebu*), is composed of silicon dioxide. It is a layered or banded stone, of various colors, but especially shades of brown or red and white.

Two other stones may or may not occur in the foundation stones of the wall (depending on how they are translated and understood). Onyx (Heb. *shoham*, Gk. *berullos*) is the eleventh precious stone on the breastplate. It is also the first precious stone mentioned in the Bible. The chemical composition of onyx is silicon dioxide. It may be a layered translucent stone (*onyx* comes from the Greek word for

finger nail), of black or brown and white color. Two onyx stones were worn (one on each shoulder) on the garments of the high priest, and each were engraved with six names—one from each of the tribes of the children of Israel, respectively. Onyx is also related to sardonyx, which is the fifth foundation stone in the New Jerusalem. If understood to be beryl, as the Septuagint translators did, then onyx is the ninth stone of the foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem.

The stone with the Hebrew name *yahalom* is the sixth stone on the breastplate. This has the most uncertain identity. Some consider it as an onyx, others as a jasper stone, and others consider that this stone is a diamond. However, it is inscribed upon with the name of one of the tribes of the children of Israel, and since diamond is by far the hardest stone, it is probably too hard to inscribe upon. Diamond also has a completely different chemical composition than the other stones, and it is the only gem consisting of a single element, carbon.

In summary, the colors of the twelve precious stones of the foundations are as follows: the first is green, the second and third are blue, the fourth is green, the fifth is red and white, the sixth is red, the seventh is yellow, the eighth is bluish-green, the ninth is yellow, the tenth is apple-green, the eleventh and twelfth are purple. These colors combined give the appearance of a rainbow, signifying that the New Jerusalem is built upon and secured by God’s faithfulness in keeping His covenant (Gen. 9:8-17). Although the order of the colors of the stones does not exactly correspond to a rainbow, the primary colors of a rainbow—red, yellow, and blue—along with green and purple are all present in the colors of the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem.

Another consideration of the arrangement of the colors is to look at the stones from the perspective of the ministry of the apostles, as worked out in the stages of church history up to the present day:

Although the entire wall is jasper, the twelve foundations are different stones with various colors. Each layer is different from the others. The reason for this is that the apostles had different ministries. Paul’s ministry was different from Peter’s, and Peter’s was different from John’s. However, these twelve foundations are not laid side by side; rather, they are laid one on top of another. The top layer, the layer that met the bottom of the wall, was jasper, the same color as the wall. Thus, all the work of the apostles issued in the same appearance, jasper. All twelve layers lead to and support the unique testimony in the unique expression...

If you examine the ministries of the apostles in the New Testament, you will see that each ministry was upon the

top of another, not side by side...Peter, a fisherman, brought in the fish, the material. Paul, a tent maker, built up the tent with the materials brought in by Peter. Eventually, after the tent had been torn, the apostle John came in to mend it. (Lee, *Revelation* 715-716)

The colors and their order are significant. The first group has four stones of green and blue colors. The church began in a desirable state, and although it degraded, there continued to be revelations and experiences that were heavenly (blue) and living (green) in nature. The second group has two stones that are red and white, and red. This signifies that after the church had degraded to its lowest state in the Dark Ages, there was a need of recovery, even back to basic matters such as the redemption of Christ (red) and justification by faith (white). The third group has four stones that are yellow and bluish-green, signifying a recovery of the revelation and experiences of the divine nature and the divine life through the inner-life movement in church history. The fourth group has two stones that are purple, signifying royalty. This signifies the stage in church history of the recovery of the church for the building up of the Body of Christ to bring in the kingdom and consummate in the New Jerusalem.⁸

Conclusion

Stones have rock as their source. Building stones for the bulk of the building are produced by the cutting and shaping of massive rocks through the natural process of weathering and by human hands. Precious stones for the adornment of the building are produced by the recrystallization of minerals in the formation of rock. Christ is the reality of both the massive stones (foundation stone, cornerstone, and topstone) for building and the precious stones (especially jasper, sardius, and beryl) for adornment. Coming to Christ as the living stone enables the believers to become living precious stones through the stages of God's full salvation, beginning from initial sanctification and repentance. Christ imparts Himself into the believers as the compound Spirit as a "flowing hydrothermal solution" and brings them through the stages of regeneration, renewing, transformation, conformation, building, and glorification. They become the adornment and beauty of the New Jerusalem as Christ's bride and the consummation of God's building work for eternity.

As stones, we begin from the combination of God's breath

(oxygen) and the elements of the earth (e.g., silicon, aluminum, and magnesium). By the impartation of the Spirit (hydrothermal solutions) in our environmental circumstances (heat and pressure) combined with our created and redeemed human elements, we are transformed into precious stones. These distinct experiences produce different colors. When we are built together, the different colors testify to God's faithfulness to preserve mankind as signified by the rainbow. The colors may also testify to the stages that God has taken the church through in church history to produce the New Jerusalem as the consummation of His building work throughout the ages.

by Roger Good

Notes

Christ is the reality
of the foundation stone,
cornerstone, and topstone
for building and the
precious stones for adornment.

¹I am indebted to research given to me by a brother for the association of the process of the formation of gemstones with the stages of God's full salvation.

²The alternate names indicated for the stones are mostly taken from the Septuagint translation. The Greek names match more closely the names of the stones in the foundations of the New Jerusalem. See Garber and Funk, who tabulate the names of the stones according to their Hebrew and Greek names in their order on the breastplate and as the foundation stones of the wall of the New Jerusalem (903).

³The Bible does not indicate the order of the names of the tribes engraved on the stones. Various commentators order the names according to birth order, and some, according to their mother, according to birth order. Others order the names according to the order they set out from the camp (Num. 2; 10).

⁴See Baron, ch. 18, and Robertson, who mentions communication by "the use of letters of the alphabet" and "by the flashing of gems on the breastplate" (71, 73). However, most scholars consider that the Urim and the Thummim functioned as a kind of lot oracle, for example, two stones, one light and the other dark, were used to indicate positive and negative responses to requests from the high priest (see Van Dam, who favors the former interpretation over the latter with a nuanced combination of both (230-232)). However, if the letters inscribed on the stones were significant and necessary as a means of communication, then the Urim and the Thummim along with the breastplate correspond to God's way of communicating with His New Testament believers, that is, through the indwelling Spirit (like the shining within as the Urim) and the Word (containing the utterances of God as the Thummim and the breastplate). See Ryken, who makes this comparison (884-885).

⁵In the Hebrew text, the order of the nine stones in Ezekiel 28 is different from the order of the twelve stones in Exodus 28. However, the Septuagint of Ezekiel 28 lists twelve stones, all in the same order as the twelve stones on the breastplate in the Septuagint of Exodus 28, adding ligure, agate, and amethyst to the nine stones.

⁶Ten of the stones are the same if we take the Greek names of the stones from the Septuagint translation. There is some symmetry between the stones on the breastplate and the foundation stones if we divide the two sets of twelve stones into two groups of six (just as the twelve tribes were divided into two groups of six on the two onyx stones on the shoulders of the high priest). From the first group of six, one stone is changed (carbuncle to chalcidony), and from the second group, one stone is changed (agate to chrysolite). One stone is switched from the first group to the second group (topaz switches with onyx). In addition to this, the order within both groups of six stones is changed. In the first six stones the order is reversed completely: the breastplate begins with sardius and ends with jasper, whereas the foundation stones begin with jasper and end with sardius. In the second group of six stones, the last three stones (beginning with chrysolite) become the first three, and the first three stones (ending with amethyst) become the last three, but the order among them is rearranged slightly.

⁷For the chemical composition of the precious stones, see Rouw and the International Gem Society's list of gemstones. The chemical composition of these precious stones as oxides (combining the element oxygen with elements such as silicon, aluminum, beryllium, iron, or magnesium, elements contained in the earth) is suggestive of God's creation of mankind in Genesis 2. God formed man from the dust of the ground (elements of the earth) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, oxygen (v. 7). This points to the mingling of God and man, of the heavens and the earth. Oxides with the chemical compo-

nent of oxygen indicate the air (the heavens), and the other minerals that combine with oxygen, such as silicon or aluminum, indicate the earth. I am thankful to a brother for this observation.

⁸I am also indebted to research given to me by a brother for this consideration of grouping the stones according to colors and relating them to the stages of church history.

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Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"And the twelve gates were twelve **pearls**; each one of the gates was, respectively, of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass" (Rev. 21:21).

pearls: The New Jerusalem is built of three kinds of precious materials, signifying that she is built with the Triune God. First, the city proper, with its street, is of pure gold (vv. 18, 21). Gold, the symbol of the divine nature of God, signifies the Father as the source, from whom the element for the substantial existence of the city is produced. Second, the twelve gates of the city are pearls, which signify the Son's overcoming death and life-imparting resurrection, through which entrance to the city is gained. Third, the wall of the city and its foundation are built of precious stones, signifying the Spirit's work of transforming the redeemed and regenerated saints into precious stones for the building of God's eternal habitation that they may express God corporately in His all-permeating glory. In the garden of Eden these three kinds of treasures merely existed as materials (Gen. 2:11-12), whereas in the city of New Jerusalem these precious materials become a builded city for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, which is to have a corporate expression.