

# Get In The Game

## Drills For Disciples: Part 3

### Bible Study Methods

Written By

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**O**f the numerous drills we did when I played baseball in High School, one, in particular, was my least favorite. After a hard, intense 2 ½ hour practice, Coach Middleton would, at times, place a man on home and another on second. When he blew his whistle, the object was to catch the man in front of you. Once you tagged that man, you could go in to the showers and then head home. He had to stay out there until he tagged someone. Want to talk about a physically demanding drill? This was it. You prayed the coach put someone in front of you who wouldn't be hard to catch. If not, you could be out there for a good deal of time.

One of my best friends, Billy Cartwright, just happened to be the biggest and strongest man on the team. At 6'5" and about 265 pounds, this imposing left-handed pitcher was no speed machine. I've seen him on second when the whistle blew move as fast as he could to third, only to have a faster runner catch him as he rounded the bag. If anyone hated that dreaded drill, it was Billy, but we all benefitted from it because it kept us in optimal shape.

Spiritually speaking, we are talking about another unique drill designed to keep us in tip top shape. It's called personal Bible Study. How does this drill work? As we've seen, it's really quite simple. It involves three methodical steps of any passage you are studying, and they must be done in this order:

- *Step One:* Observation. It asks, "What do I see in the verses before me?"

- *Step Two: Interpretation.* It asks, “What questions do I need to ask in light of what I’ve observed?”
- *Step Three: Application.* It asks, “What does God want me to do in light of what I’ve studied.”

If you want to fine-tune your Bible Study skills, another book I’d heartily recommend is *Methodical Bible Study* by Robert A. Traina. I cut my hermeneutical teeth on this book, so I know you can greatly benefit from it as well. As a sidelight, I hope you have taken my challenge to pick a Bible book to analyze with this important drill. I place my observations, interpretations, and applications on multiple sheets of paper containing the texts in question, but you need to do what works for you. The point is clear: develop your own method for studying the Bible so you can feed yourself great spiritual meals. While you do this you’ll not only hear from God in a profound, mind-stretching fashion, you’ll also mature in the faith as you apply the principles you encounter. So, I challenge you to Get **In The Game** of spiritual maturation by personally committing yourself to the following premise:

## Develop The Drill Of Bible Study

For our purposes, we are teaching you how this drill pragmatically operates by focusing our sights on Revelation chapter four. We performed the drill on the first two verses, but we need to finish out the rest of the chapter before we head into the locker room. As we do this, realize this is not a sermon, per se. A sermon would present you with a main idea from the context, coupled with several contextual points which validate said idea. Our purposes today are not this. We, however, will move through the verses in question applying the three-fold drill, making numerous observations, interpretations, and applications ... just like you will do when you study.

From my analysis of this amazing, moving chapter, I have isolated a three-fold structure to build our structure on. If I were preaching or teaching this passage, I would take this statements and personalize them to make them more practical. Since this is not my purpose, I will leave them at a more abstract level.

### The Directive (Revelation 4:1)

We’ve already studied how God commanded John, an exile for his faith on the isle called Patmos, to come up into heaven to see what would transpire after the end of Church Age (Revelation 2-3) and the commencement of the seven year Tribulation.

### The Description (Revelation 4:2-8)

Beginning with verse two, John recounts how the Holy Spirit transported him instantly through a heavenly door into the very throne room of God. A throne of judgment was set up and God seated Himself in preparation for finally ridding the world of evil and instituting His kingdom of righteousness.

With verse three, John gives us the jaw-dropping details of what he saw while standing in God’s special throne room. We will systematically move through these verses by employing our hermeneutical method.

<sup>3</sup> And He who was sitting *was* like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

Observation

- 4:3 The coordinating conjunction “and” (καί) appears at the beginning of the sentence here and also in verses 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.
- 4:3 Simile is used to describe the appearance of God as two beautiful, costly stones: jasper and sardius.
- 4:3 By means of simile, we learn something like a green rainbow goes around God’s throne.

Interpretation

- 4:3 Why is “and” employed at the beginning of so many sentences? The figure of speech called asyndeton, or the use of “no ands” causes the reader to move quickly over the content and head toward some thematic climax. With the use of “many ands,” the reader is called to stop and consider the import of each point which is being made. Put differently, this particular figure of speech detains our thinking, forcing us to really contemplate the content in question. John logically employed it as he discussed what he saw in God’s throne room.
- Of all the stones available, why were these two stones used to describe God’s magnificent appearance? Following chapters 2 through 3, where John saw Christ as the great High Priest of the Church, it is logical to conclude these particular stones may point us back to the breastplate the High Priest wore in the Old Testament. According to Exodus 28:21, twelve precious stones had the names of the twelve tribes inscribed on them, and they were, then, affixed to this unique breastplate. There is some debate as to which stone came first, reading from right to left in Hebrew, but it is quite possible the names were laid out in the following fashion:

Levi #3	Simeon #2	Reuben #1
Zebulon #6	Issachar #5	Judah #4
Gad #9	Naphtali #8	Dan #7
Benjamin #12	Joseph #11	Asher #10

If this layout is correct, then the jasper and sardius stones, when matched with their Hebrew counterparts, represent first and last stones, respectively. Ostensibly, this means that the whole nation of Israel was/is represented by the very radiance of God, the Father. And our world is arraying themselves against God’s chosen people? What a mistake.

- Why these particular stones? If the ancient version of jasper was, in fact, clear like a diamond, it would serve to powerfully emit the shekinah glory of God while also showcasing his pristine holiness (Exodus 3:5; Psalm 99:3; Isaiah 54:5). Sardius, a blood-red color, could readily represent and be a

harbinger of the wrath of God against the sin of the Devil and mankind (Isaiah 59:18; 63:3-6; Nahum 1:2; Zechariah 8:2, 14).

- Why is the rainbow green and not an array of colors like we see? For one, green is supposedly the easiest color to look at; therefore, it may be situated around God to enable us to really enjoy looking in His spectacular direction. For another, green is the color of fertility. Could it be that the color speaks of cosmic productivity which will come after the seven year tribulation runs its course? We surely see fertility with the implementation of the messianic kingdom: (1) A kingdom of righteousness as opposed to unrighteousness (Isaiah 26:2; 46:13; 51:5); (2) Spiritual obedience ... for a change (Jeremiah 31:33-34); (3) Fullness of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29); (4) Joy (Isaiah 9:3-4; 12:3-6; 14:7-8); (5) Comfort (Isaiah 12:1-2; 61:3-7; Zephaniah 3:18-20); (6) Full knowledge (Isaiah 11:1-9; 41:19-20); (7) Universal healing (Isaiah 29:17-19; 35:3-6; 61:1-2) ... to name a few.

#### Application

- Pray differently this week by focusing on the colors of God and what they represent.

<sup>4</sup> Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

#### Observation

- 4:4 Twenty-four separate, different thrones surround God's throne. The same Greek word is used for God's throne and these thrones (θρόνος).
- 4:4 Twenty-four elders sit on these thrones. The Greek for elder is *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος).
- 4:4 The Greek word for elder is employed in the New Testament to denote spiritual leaders in the local church (Acts 16:4; 1 Timothy 5:1, 17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14). It was used in the Old Testament to denote the leaders of the people (Exodus 3:16-18; 24:1, 9; Deuteronomy 5:23).
- 4:4 The elders wear white clothes and each one has a golden crown.
- 4:4 The crown is not that of a king (*diadem*, used of Jesus in Revelation 19:12) but a victor (*stephanos*, 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:19).

#### Interpretation

- Why 24 elders? Twenty-four was the number of the priestly course divisions in Israel (1 Chronicles 24:1-19). The twenty-four heads of the priestly families represented the entire priesthood. These individuals, then, could be the representatives of all saints who are priests of the Lord (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6)
- Who are the 24 elders? Several views:
  - View #1: Angels

- The text does not call the elders believers. Since angels are clearly pictured worshipping before God's throne in verse 6, it seems logical to classify these as angels too. Objection: There are other ways to denote saints.
  - In Revelation 19:4-7, the elders are distinguished from the Lamb's wife which is the Church. Objection: They are merely representatives.
  - In Revelation 7:14, an elder is called "lord." Since angels are called by this title (Zechariah 1:9; 4:5, 13; 6:4), they must be in view here. Objection: Men are also called "lord" (Genesis 23:6; 31:35).
  - In Revelation 7:14, the elder interprets as angels do in the Bible (Daniel 7:15; 8:15). Objection: Men also interpret divine messages (Daniel 2:19-22).
  - White clothing is the garb of angels (John 20:12; Matthew 28:3). Objection: This is also true of believers (Revelation 3:4, 5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14; 19:14).
  - Angles are called thrones in Colossians 1:6. Objection: Jesus promised believers would reign on thrones (Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:6).
- View #2: They are saints from Old and New Testament periods.
    - This would account for the twelve leaders over the twelve tribes, coupled with the twelve disciples over the Church (Luke 22:30).
    - The foundation of the heavenly city has twelve foundations representing the twelve apostles, and the names of the twelve tribes are written on the gates (Revelation 21:12-14). Objection: These classifications do not necessarily have any bearing on the people sitting on the twelve thrones. It just suggests God thought in realms of twelve as He built His city. Whether this applies to the throne level is another question altogether.
  - View #3 They represent the leaders of the Church.
    - Elders are nowhere designated as angelic beings.
    - Elders are men who govern (cf. 1 Timothy. 3:1-7; 1 Chronicles 24:).
    - In Revelation 5:11 and 7:11, the angels are clearly distinct from the twenty-four elders.
    - White clothing in Revelation always refers to the redeemed (Revelation 3:4, 5, 18).
    - In Revelation 5:9-10, the elders state in a song devoted to God that He redeemed them and made them a kingdom of priests. Surely, this applies only to believers. No angel has ever been, nor will they ever be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

- Angels never occupy thrones. On the other hand, they stand in God's presence and are prepared to do His bidding (1 Kings. 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Luke 11:19; Revelation 8:2).
  - The crowns the elders wear are called in Greek, "stephanos," which denotes the crown of a victor. "Stephanos," is used in the NT regarding believers (2 Timothy. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter. 5:4; Revelation. 2:10; 3:11). Believers must then be in view here for believers are certainly victors over the world, death, and sin because of the redeeming work of Christ.
  - The priesthood in the OT was a representative group of twenty-four priests. When these priests met they represented the entire priesthood, as well as the nation of Israel. Similarly, God uses twenty-four elders to represent the Church.
  - Elders were representatives of the people in the local church as well as leaders (Acts 20:17, 28; James 5:14). Summation: Of these three views, I think there is viable evidence for the second and third ones. It would be like God to have representatives for both periods of redemptive time, viz., the Old and New Testaments.
- What crowns will believers possibly be given by Jesus based on their obedience, loyalty and productivity?
    - Crown of life ... Given to those who are faithful in persecution (James 1:12).
    - Crown which is incorruptible ... Given to those who are spiritually disciplined and victorious in this life (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).
    - Crown of rejoicing ... Given to those who excel in discipleship and sharing their faith in the Messiah, Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Philippians 4:1).
    - Crown of glory ... Given to those who are godly leaders in the Church (1 Peter 5:1-4).
    - Crown of righteousness (Given to those who are ready for Christ's return (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

#### Application

- Jesus will fulfill His word and permit us to rule and reign alongside Him. Those who use justice in a perverted fashion today should take note that one day the tables will be turned and they shall be on the receiving end of true, holy judgment. Have hope.
- God will, as He promised, take all those who've come to Him on His revelatory terms into His kingdom. No one will be overlooked. No one will be disappointed. Have hope.
- What crown or crowns will Jesus give you?

<sup>5</sup> Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

#### Observation

- 4:5: “Proceed” is an intensive word in Greek since a preposition is wedded to a verb (ἐκπορεύονται). It is a present tense verb denoting ongoing activity in relation to the lighting and thunder coming from God’s throne area.
- 4:5 Lightning is typically associated with divine wrath in Revelation (8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning is also tied to the appearances of God (Exodus 19:16; 20:18; Deuteronomy 33:2; Ezekiel 1:13-14). It is also tied to Christ’s Second Coming (Matthew 24:27).
- 4:5 Thunder is associated with God’s judgment (Exodus 9:23, 28, 29, 33, 34). In the seventh Egyptian plague it is associated with divine judgment (Exodus 9:23, 28, 29, 33, 34).
- 4:5 Seven burning lamps stand before God’s throne.

#### Interpretation

- 4:5 Why is lighting and thunder present around the throne of God here? Based on its usage in the Old and New Testaments, is it probably a harbinger of the wrath of God which will break out upon mankind during the tribulational period.
- Who or what are these seven burning lamps? Why are they likened unto the seven spirits of God? Who or what is this? The Greek word for spirit (πνεύματος) can denote angels (Hebrews 1:7, 14), or the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15; John 14:26). It is probably a reference to the seven-fold perfection of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Holy Trinity. Isaiah 11:2-3 details the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit, and Revelation 5:6 actually says that the seven spirits are part of Jesus. Since the Trinity is the same in essence (viz., divine) but different in function (viz., the Father, the Son, the Spirit), it is not illogical to see the Spirit as part of Christ. They are intrinsically and mysteriously one in their complexity.

#### Application

- Every time I see lightning or hear thunder I should stop and thank God that these cosmic events are but a gentle reminder that His judgment is coming in due time. This should give me hope, and it should motivate me to share my faith with the lost.

<sup>6</sup> and before the throne *there was something* like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

Observation

- A glassy, crystal-like sea is underneath the throne of God. This is no pond. A sea is larger and massive.
- Four living creatures surround the throne of God.
- The four living creatures have multiple eyes in front of and behind them.

Interpretation

- What is the glassy sea? Hard to know. True, it does cause us to think of the laver of water in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:18-21) and the “molten” sea in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:23-37); however, this one is a solid, clear substance, which is different from these other divinely ordained “seas” related to worship of Him. In Ezekiel chapter 1, verse 22, we learn that God’s mighty throne sits atop a sapphire in color floor. To read the rest of the text is to see it bears a strong resemblance to what John saw: Ezekiel 1:26-28 <sup>26</sup> *Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man.* <sup>27</sup> *Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something alike glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him.* <sup>28</sup> *As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.* The presence of this clear, crystal-like floor would add to the radiance of God’s great glory. What a sight this must be to see.
- Who/what are the four living creatures? The presence of multiple eyes causes the interpreter to reflect back to Ezekiel’s image of angelic beings, cherubim (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4, 7, 9, 14) who appeared to the prophet prior to God’s departure from the holy Temple in Jerusalem. Concerning their unique description, Ezekiel writes: <sup>15</sup> *Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for each of the four of them.* <sup>16</sup> *The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship being as if one wheel were within another.* <sup>17</sup> *Whenever they moved, they moved in any of their four directions without turning as they moved.* <sup>18</sup> *As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about.* <sup>19</sup> *Whenever the living beings moved, the wheels moved with them. And whenever the living beings arose from the earth, the wheels rose also.* <sup>20</sup> *Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels” (Ezekiel 1).* According to Ezekiel 1:15-18, each cherub has two wheels, which are connected at right angles allowing them to move in any direction without turning. The presence of numerous eyes gives them, also, the ability to see in all directions as they move and to be the ultimate guards of God. After the exile, the Jews called this, and rightfully so, the chariot of God (1 Chronicles 28:18). They are, therefore, located beneath the throne carrying God around the known cosmos to accomplish His perfect will.



Application

- A timely prayer: God, please, enlarge and deepen my understanding of the greatness of your person and presence. Forgive me for having a small, diminished view of who you are.

<sup>7</sup> The first creature *was* like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature *was* like a flying eagle.

Observation

- 4:7 Each angelic being has four faces: a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle. These are presented by means of simile, stressing it may not, in fact, be a one to one correspondence with what we might think on earth.
- 4:7 The Greek text is full of the figure of speech called assonance. This is where words have similar vowel endings to create a smooth, pleasant flow as you consider their meaning. Beautiful words describe beautiful beings. I've highlighted the similar endings: καὶ τὸ ζῶον τὸ πρῶτον ὅμοιον λέοντι καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ζῶον ὅμοιον μόσχῳ καὶ τὸ τρίτον ζῶον ἔχων τὸ πρόσωπον ὡς ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ζῶον ὅμοιον ἀετῷ πετομένῳ

Interpretation

- Why do the cherubim class of angels have this unique appearance? Their faces may serve to reflect Jesus. As Jesus is portrayed in the gospels, we encounter the same motif. In Matthew He is pictured as the Lion from the Tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:2-3; 2:6), the proper pedigreed Messiah. In Mark, He is showcased as the Servant of all servants. In Luke, He is pictured as the Son of Man (Luke 6:5; 7:12; 9:22; 12:10; 17:24; 18:8). In John, He is presented to the Gentile/Greek mind as the Logos, the truly divine God (John 1).

Application

- Does my presence, my personage reflect Jesus to others? Do they see through my life that He is the King of Kings? Do I live like a servant, as he desires? Do I show others who don't know Him just how perfect He was in His humanity wedded to His deity? Do my words tell my world that there is no other God but Jesus?

<sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

Observation

- 4:8 The four living creatures have six wings.
- 4:8 We are told again they have multiple eyes.
- 4:8 From our time perspective they never cease ascribing holiness to God.
- 4:8 The speech of this cherub class of angels is similar to that of the seraphim class in Isaiah 6:1-4.
- 4:8 They say “holy” three times.
- 4:8 They have, basically, three names they use in their worship of God.
- “Almighty,” in Greek, speaks of God’s absolute, complete power. It is used eight times in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 6:7; 19:6; 21:22).
- 4:8 The last name of God speaks of His eternal nature. “Who is” is from the present tense verb “to be” and it grammatically points to His ongoing existence. This phrase appears five times in Revelation with God as the subject (Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5).

Interpretation

- Why does this class of cherubim angels have six wings and the ones listed in Ezekiel chapter 1 have four wings? It is probably related to the fact that the closer you are to God, the more coverage you need to show humility and subservience.
- Why do they say “Holy” three times? Probably to worship the entire Trinity. It also serves as a point of emphasis. God’s character is a perfect balance between all of his communicable and non-communicable attributes; however, at His core rests His utter, unchanging holiness. That holiness, coupled with His jealousy, will move Him one day to bring the tribulation to pass so sin will be thoroughly defeated.
- Why is God’s name as “Almighty” significant? In relation to the theme of Revelation, nothing the Devil can or will do can thwart the advancement of His kingdom of righteousness and victory over the forces of evil and sin.

Application

- 2 Corinthians 6:18 equates God as Almighty in relation to sin which may plague us as saints. He, and He alone, has the power to break the sway and hold of sin over us as we humble ourselves before Him. Is there a sin weighing you down, tripping you up? You have the all-powerful God at your disposal who is more than capable of freeing you.

Because our time is limited, I want to close by pointing out an interesting structural arrangement between verses 2 through 8. What we have here is cause and effect. Put differently, the description of the heavenly action around God’s glorious throne has an impact on the leaders of the Church, and us, by proxy. Any revelation of God, any new understanding of what His presence is like should humble and inspire us to fulfilling our natural duty.

## The Duty (Revelation 4:9-11)

What is our duty? We are called to give God our passionate, articulate worship. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

<sup>9</sup> And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

Please. Observe the progression of the worship of the saints after that of the angels. Structurally, we could also say this serves as the climax of the chapter:

- They fall down, or bow down to worship before God.
- They cast their crowns before Him for they are His anyway.
- They adore the person and character of God with precise wording.

Will you worship God this week? Will you do it privately? Will you do it with others as we see here? Will you tell Jesus that whatever rewards He has for you are really His? Will you specifically worship Him based on character traits you are cognizant of? Will you stop spending so much time with your prayer needs and start giving ample time into worshipping the character of the living God?

Let's join the angels:

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

