

# SECTION SEVEN

CHAPTERS 20-22

## THE MILLENNIUM AND THE NEW EARTH



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# REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY



## THE THREE VIEWS OF THE MILLENNIUM

We now enter the most controversial part of the Book of Revelation. Probably some readers have even skipped ahead to read this chapter first. It is our opinion that Revelation 20 does not teach anything different or new from the rest of the Book. It is simply the seventh and final retelling of what the Church will encounter during the Gospel Age. It is given from a different viewpoint, and it agrees perfectly with the other visions when arranged in parallel with them.

As for the Millennium, disagreements between the different interpretation camps are really not as significant as many make them out to be. A literal and physical 1,000 year earthly reign of Christ that takes place after the Rapture of the Church and which makes a sort of prelude to heaven is a rather unimportant issue, for it really has no bearing on how one lives today and prepares for the future.

The more crucial issues are the tenets of Dispensationalism: that all Jews will someday be saved, and that Christ must honor His “unfulfilled” promises

to the nation of Israel and sit on the literal throne of David (see page 231). These have soteriological and eschatological implications that forces one to think differently about the reason for the Church and the purpose and scope of her earthly commission. That is a separate topic however, and we begin this section of study by stating that while we do emphatically believe that the Millennial reign is the present literal, physical, and spiritual reign of Christ in and over His Church, we do not think it of any pressing importance to argue with those who insist that there must be a future such reign as well.

There are three ways Chapter 20 has been interpreted by prophecy students: Pre-millennialism, Post-millennialism, and A-millennialism. Pre-millennialism is the Futurist view, while A-millennialism is the Historical view.

Post-millennialism enjoyed its primary popularity about 200 years ago. It believes that the preaching of the Gospel will eventually overspread the world so thoroughly that a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity will cause most of the world to believe in Christ, and the Church will expand to include all nations and tribes of the earth for a thousand years. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will deceive the people of the world into war against the saints, and Christ will return to destroy the wicked and the world. With the dramatic world wide decline in morality and Christianity during the last century it is no surprise that advocates of Post-millennialism have become increasingly scarce. Preterism is largely Post-millennial also, though on the rest of the Revelation they would be much closer to the Historical view.

Pre-millennialism is the most popular view held by evangelical Christianity at the present time. It sees a physical reign of Christ on the earth that begins immediately following His initial appearing in the clouds of heaven. Christ will literally and physically sit upon the throne of David in Jerusalem and rule the nations of the world for 1,000 years. The reign begins as a peaceful and beautiful kingdom made up of resurrected Christians and Jews, but it ends when a massive revolt threatens to wipe out the camp of the saints. Fire and complete destruction end the world at that point.

A-millennialism is the eschatology of older denominations like Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Anabaptists. It teaches that the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20 is not a new dispensation at all, but another symbolic representation of the age of the New Covenant in which we live, and stretches

from Christ's first coming until the end of the world at His return. A-millennialists see Christ reigning over His Kingdom now, seated at the right hand of God upon His heavenly Throne, ruling the nations of the world for the good of His Church, and welcoming those who die in faith to reign with Him in Paradise until the Age of Grace ends and the resurrection takes place. For the purpose of this section, we will refer to the A-millennialist view as the Historical view and the Pre-millennialist view as the Futurist view (page 12).

The key issue that will probably decide how you understand the Millennium is whether you believe Chapter 20 begins a new vision or continues chronologically after Chapter 19. Historicists believe the previous section ended at 19:21, and that Chapter 20 begins a new section—the seventh and last. Futurists believe that Chapter 20 continues the narration of Chapter 19, a plausible idea that we will now examine in depth before looking at the prophecy verse by verse.

There are no obvious textual clues in 20:1 indicating whether Chapter 20 begins a new section or simply continues the theme of Chapter 19. Verse 1 begins, *And I saw...* which is similar to the way most of the other six sections begin (8:2, 12:1, 15:1, 17:1). Actually, well over half of all verses in the Book of Revelation begin with the word *and*. Many of the newer translations have occasionally used *then* instead of *and*, but the Greek is always *kai*, meaning *and*. One would think that the common phrase *And after these things I saw...* would be a signal that a new section was beginning, but that is not the case except for 4:1, after the seven letters to the churches.

We do see that the symbols and theme of Chapter 20 are different from Chapter 19, and that is true in every instance of a new section's beginning. There are, however, similar symbol and theme changes within sections, and so we cannot prove conclusively that this symbol change means Chapter 20 begins a new section.

The best way to determine the divisions of the Book is by the content of the individual sections. Four of the seven sections stand out clearly—the seven candlesticks, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. Each of these sections naturally begins with the first symbol and ends with the revealing of the seventh. The other three sections are not broken into sevens, though the first of these sections comes between the trumpets and

bowls, making its beginning and ending unmistakable. The last two of these seven-less sections come back-to-back at the end of the Book (Chapters 17-22), making it possible to argue their endings.

Three points should be noted in regard to this argument. The first is the perfect agreement of all of the sections with each other, each ending with a description of the Second Coming. This holds true in our dividing of the Book at Chapter 20. Chapter 19 has presented the Second Coming clearly and thoroughly, making it natural that Chapter 20 should begin a new topic. Moreover, Chapter 20 describes again Christ's Second Coming and the judgment of the wicked, strongly suggesting that it parallels Chapter 19 and the other sections. The great end-time Battle of Armageddon appears in 16:16, 19:19, and 20:8, another example of the parallelism of the sections. Futurists do not interpret the Revelation in parallel and thus require two such battles, one at the end of the Age of Grace, and one at the end of the Millennium.

Perhaps the most convincing argument that Chapter 20 begins a new section can be found by studying the concluding verses of Chapter 19, which saw all evil cast into the *Lake of Fire*—a symbolic reference to the eternal abode of the wicked. Chapter 20 begins with a reference to the *bottomless pit* into which Satan is cast for 1,000 years. However, the *Lake of Fire* is not the *bottomless pit*. People are not cast into the *Lake of Fire* until after this world has come to an end (Mt 13:49-50, 25:41; Rev 14:10, 21:8). The *bottomless pit* is the present abode of the wicked angels, and it will be cast into the *Lake of Fire* at the end of the Age. That the *bottomless pit* begins Chapter 20 indicates that the time setting has been reset to that age in which the *bottomless pit* exists—the Church Age (see Chapter 9). Accordingly, the end of Chapter 20 shows all evil cast into the *Lake of Fire* (20:15). Again we see perfect harmony of this section with the others.

The second point is that no division between Chapters 19 and 20 would mean there are only six sections to the Book of Revelation instead of seven. This may seem to be a minor point, but bear in mind the careful use of numbers in this Book. The number seven is used to symbolize the sense of fullness, completion, and perfection in the plan of God. The number six is the number of man, incomplete and far from perfect. Six is used in connection with the Antichrist and the world. Seven sections in this highly structured Book are

what one would expect to find. It may be possible to divide the two sections at Chapter 21 and thus keep seven sections in the Book, but that creates some problems too, and no commentator that I have read has attempted to do so.

The third point is the lack of any other Scriptural passage supporting a future 1,000-year reign of Christ. This may come as a surprise to some, but the proof texts offered for Millennialism mention nothing about Christ reigning as King for 1,000 years. The most common passages given to support Millennialism are Psalms 2; Daniel 7:14; Isaiah 2-3, 11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; and Zechariah 14. These chapters do promote Christ as a coming King of a new and wonderful Kingdom, but Historicists maintain that the setting up of the spiritual Kingdom of God by the Messiah fulfills these prophecies admirably (see Luke 16:16, John 18:36). Futurism requires: 1) two resurrections of the righteous separated by 1000 years. 2) resurrected saints and rebellious men living together on the earth. 3) an era in which faith (?) does not require belief in an unseen Christ. 4) the Second Coming and the end of the world separated by 1,000 years. None of these statements is supported by other Scriptures; Revelation 20 is the only passage one might use to teach these things.

For these reasons we cannot agree with the teaching of Futurism concerning the Millennium. One of the rules of interpreting prophecy is that its meaning will not contradict other Scripture, nor create a new doctrine not taught elsewhere in the Bible (see page 18). Futurism creates a new religious era wherein the *everlasting Gospel* is not preached. Instead, Christ will be personally visible for worship. The Church of Christ during this period will no longer be a kingdom under the Cross, but a kingdom of glory ruling all nations and either subduing by force or converting all enemies of Christ.

To illustrate the difference in mind-set between Futurism and Historicism, we quote a popular Futurist: "There is more prophecy in the Bible about the Millennial reign than about any other time in history."<sup>1</sup> Historicists would say, "There is more prophecy in the Bible about the Church Age than about any other time in history." The point is that Futurists apply most OT prophecy to a future Millennium, but Historicists see them fulfilled in Christ's spiritual Kingdom of the Church. Most Futurists do not believe the

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1 Chuck Missler, The Book of Revelation on CD-ROM.

OT prophets spoke about the Church Age at all. They illustrate this by an analogy of two mountains, one being Christ's first coming and the other His Second Coming, with the wide valley between the mountains representing the Church Age. They say that the OT prophets saw only the two mountain-tops, not the valley between.

The reason for this great difference in understanding the Bible goes back to disagreement about a basic premise of Bible interpretation. Virtually all Futurists believe that the Bible must be taken at face value—literally and physically. Historicists believe one must read the Bible within the context and as explained by other Biblical writers. This means allowing the text to have figurative, symbolic, and spiritual meanings beyond the literal and physical. All Christians do this with some Scriptures, but Futurists do not allow prophecy to be interpreted spiritually or symbolically. Therefore, when Futurists read the OT prophets, who spoke in terms of Israel and the Messiah, they must find a new place for their fulfillments so that they can be taken literally. We caution those who insist on understanding every prophecy literally not to fall in the same trap that the Jews did when their Messiah came. They rejected Him because He did not fulfill their idea of what His literal coming would be like. Jesus foretold His death in figurative language, often spoke in highly symbolic parables, and used words that cannot be understood other than spiritually. He did not correct people when they misunderstood His intent! Remember Nicodemus' confusion about being *born again* (John 3). He was thinking literally; Jesus was talking spiritually.

“Use Scripture to interpret the Revelation” has been our first rule to understanding these prophecies (page 16). We do not craft a meaning by using human reasoning or facts. These may aid us, but *no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost* (II Peter 1:20). The Spirit should instruct us and be our teacher. Not by direct revelation, but through the written, inspired, Word of God. The first prophecy of the Bible was not only highly figurative, it was fulfilled primarily in the spiritual realm (see Gen 3:15). The bruising of Satan's head and Christ's heel refers to Satan's defeat by Christ's death and resurrection at Calvary. Many (if not most) later prophecies are similarly structured.



We believe Revelation 20 to be an excellent example of figurative prophecy. The chain cannot be a physical chain, nor can Satan be bound by a chain. Satan is a spiritual being, and cannot be confined physically—he has no body. The idea of a spirit being locked in a pit with a chain and key is beyond the limits of literal language. However, Satan can be and is bound in a figurative, spiritual sense, as we will explain shortly.

The views of the early Church concerning the Millennial reign have been used by both Futurist and Historical writers to support their positions. We have heard and read many contradictory statements about what this person believed or that church taught. Both sides need to remember the words of Justin Martyr, one of the earliest writers of the Church, who wrote these words only 50 years or so after John wrote the Revelation: “I and many others are of this opinion [that there will be a future Millennial kingdom], and believe that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 1, page 239). Clearly there was no universally accepted belief even in the early church.

It appears that until about A.D. 350, Futurism and Historicism were equally valid beliefs of the Church, and arguments between the two were not divisive. From 350-1850, Historicism was almost the universal position of Christian churches. Futurism began with the Great Awakening in the 1700’s, but did not really gain ground until the late 1800’s.

It is important to note that in contrast to contemporary Futurism, early Church Futurists did not believe God would again choose Israel. Called “chiliasts,” these early Millennarians agreed with Historicists that most of OT prophecy was fulfilled in Christ’s first coming and the Church Age. But they did take Revelation 20 to be a physical reign of Christ in a world similar to the Garden of Eden. The reason for this belief was that many early Christians expected Christ to return in the near future. Not knowing the full purpose of God, they could not imagine that the earth would continue for another thousand years. One writer made history analogous to a week: there were six millenniums of time until Christ, and the seventh, corresponding to the day of rest, would be the Millennium, which was expected to begin at any time.

Most Futurists today are Dispensationalists, meaning that they believe the Millennium will have a strong Jewish character. The temple will be rebuilt at Jerusalem, and priests will offer the OT sacrifices again. The nation of Israel will be the center of the world, and Jesus will sit on David's throne. All Jews will be saved and the Gentile nations of the world will keep the Jewish feasts at Jerusalem. These ideas cannot be found in Revelation 20, but with the belief that the Millennium is a future age comes the ability to assign all hard-to-understand prophecies of the OT to pertain to that era.

If one strictly follows a literal interpretation of Chapter 20 as a continuation of Chapter 19, here is how a future Millennial reign would unfold:

1. Christ returns to earth riding a white horse at the head of a great heavenly army. He casts every wicked person into the *Lake of Fire*.
2. Jesus binds Satan and casts him into a bottomless pit.
3. Those who had been martyred for the sake of Christ are resurrected and reign with Him for 1,000 years.
4. After the 1,000 years are over, Satan is released from his prison. He goes out and deceives the people of the world, making them rise up in rebellion against the peaceful rule of Christ.
5. Fire falls from heaven and destroys these wicked men. The Devil is cast into the *Lake of Fire* and the earth comes to a violent end.

This schedule does not agree with contemporary Futurist teaching at all, but it is the logical reading and interpretation of Revelation 20. Those who profess to follow a plain-and-literal-whenever-possible hermeneutic are at odds with the literal text here when they propose the Dispensational Millennial reign of Christ.

1. *And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.*
2. *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,*
3. *And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.*

## SATAN IS BOUND AND CAST INTO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

As we have progressed through the Book of Revelation you may have noticed that the individual sections are focusing more and more on the end-time of earth's history. The first sections foretold many things that would be fulfilled early in the Church Age, but the last three sections condense early history, and especially emphasize the events of the very end of the world and the ensuing states of heaven and hell. The real overall theme of section seven is heaven with Christ, as we will see in the beautiful portrait of Chapters 21-22. First though, we are given a brief picture of the Church in the world and how the earth comes to an end.

We approach Chapter 20 just as we did the rest of the Book, by first analyzing the overall picture, and then researching the symbols to understand the meaning more fully. We see an Angel descending from heaven and overpowering that ancient serpent, the Devil. The Angel seizes and binds him with a chain and then casts him into the *bottomless pit* where he is not allowed to deceive the nations for a period of 1,000 years. After the 1,000 years are fulfilled, he will be let loose for a little season and will go out deceiving the nations again until the end of the world terminates his earthly empire of wickedness and deception.

If the first part of this picture sounds familiar, you may be remembering Chapter 12, where Michael the Archangel fought against the Devil and cast him out of heaven, an event that took place at Jesus' resurrection and ascension to His heavenly Throne. That momentous act brought great rejoicing, as John *heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night* (12:10). We believe that both of these passages relate to the same theme: the defeat of Satan by Jesus at His death and resurrection. The picture of the Angel overpowering Satan and binding him is a figurative way of illustrating how Christ destroyed the authority of Satan.

There are several NT passages that explicitly state this important theme. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself*

*likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil* (Heb 2:14). Jesus foretold this victory to His disciples in figurative language on several occasions: *Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven* (John 12:31, 16:11; Luke 10:18). The Greek word for *cast out* (**ekballo**) in the Gospel accounts is the same root word used in 20:3, where Satan is said to be *cast* [**ballo**] *into the bottomless pit*, with the preposition **ek** (out of) being added to the first ones.

In Chapter 12 we explored this same idea, establishing the Scriptural foundation of what happened to Satan upon Jesus' victory over death. We take issue with those who argue against this extremely plain Bible doctrine. The death and resurrection of Christ was and remains the most momentous occasion in history, for the whole purpose of God in creating the world depends upon the unique work of Christ. It is the climax of His story and this present Age of Grace and the Second Coming is the denouement, the wrapping up of what has already been accomplished at Calvary. Futurists would better advance their cause by acknowledging this fact, and explaining their position by teaching that there will be another, future, limiting of Satan's power. Instead, they have made Christ's past victory over Satan the chief subject of their attack on Historicism's teaching that the Millennium is the Church Age.

You may have heard Futurism's arrogant remark, "If Satan is bound now, he's got way too much chain." This is actually a slap at the Bible, which clearly teaches that the power and authority of Satan was crushed at Calvary. It diminishes the triumph of Christ and robs the Christian of the power Christ has won for him. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph 6:12). What a change from the OT economy, which was much more a physical struggle against human enemies. The NT, however, expanded the Kingdom and redefined the enemy, as I John 2:8 says, *a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth*. The liberating power of Christ in the life of every believer is a constant reminder of Christ overcoming Satan.

After Jesus was accused of casting out demons by Beelzebub, He gave this parable foretelling His victory over Satan: *how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house* (Mt 12:29). Jesus' resurrection gave Him the authority to bind Satan, enter his domain, and deliver the souls of those Satan held captive in Hades (Eph 4:8-9). Then, *having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it* (Col 2:15). Jesus now holds authority over every part of Satan's kingdom. He has freed the *prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water... by the blood of Thy covenant* (Zec 9:11), and now He is *gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him* (I Peter 3:22). Because of His great victory, Christ is the King of the Universe. He has bound the strong man and spoiled his house. The word for *bind* (**deo**) in Matthew 12:29 is the same word used in Revelation 20:2. It does not mean that Satan cannot move or act, but that his realm of power has been restricted. Other uses of **deo** in a similar fashion are Acts 20:22, *I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem*, and Romans 7:2, *The woman... is bound by the Law to her husband*.

Yes, the binding of Satan's authority did take place—at the Cross—and every Christian who has ever lived owes his salvation and ability to live a victorious life to that event. Salvation was not effective before Christ's death ratified the Covenant. The Cross was the most important part of God's plan, and the defeat of Satan in this was anticipated long before it took place. Way back in the Garden of Eden, God promised that from the seed of woman (perfectly true, for Jesus had no earthly father) a Deliverer would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). When Moses lifted up the brazen serpent on a pole to heal the sin-stricken Israelites it was a prophecy by type of this event (Num 21; John 3:14). Brass is a symbol of judgment (see glossary), and the serpent represents Satan. Satan was judged and overthrown at the Cross of Calvary, his power and authority restricted so that he can do nothing on this earth without the permission of Christ.

The loosing of Satan for a little season at the end of the world is allowed by God in order to accomplish His purpose in ending the Age of Grace. He is loosed because of man's rebellion and wickedness, because man wants to serve self and sin rather than God.

There's a line that's been drawn through the ages,  
 On that line stands the old rugged cross.  
 On the cross a battle is raging,  
 For the gain of man's soul or his loss.

On one side march the forces of evil,  
 All the demons and devils of hell.  
 On the other the angels of glory,  
 And they meet on Golgotha's hill.

The earth shakes with the force of the conflict,  
 And the sun refuses to shine.  
 For there hangs God's Son in the balance,  
 And then, thru the darkness He cries:

"It is finished!" The battle is over,  
 "It is finished!" There'll be no more war;  
 "It is finished!" The end of the conflict.  
 It is finished, and Jesus is Lord.

*Author—William Gaither*

*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out (12:7-9). A mighty spiritual battle was fought when Jesus rose from the dead, and Satan was defeated, bound, and cast into the bottomless pit.*

## **SATAN'S BINDING MEANS THAT HE IS NO LONGER ABLE TO DECEIVE THE GENTILES**

The *key*, the *chain*, the *Angel*, and the *bottomless pit* cannot be understood in physical terms. They are part of a figurative picture describing a spiritual concept. Likewise, we cannot understand the binding of Satan in a strictly



physical sense. It is similar to Jude 1:6, where we read that God has kept the sinful demons of Satan *in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*. Nobody argues that the devils are now literally bound in darkness with chains. Just like Satan, they are able to roam the earth (Luke 8:30). Also like Satan, their bounds of power have been limited. Demons are not able to indwell a person without that person's permission—Christian or otherwise. In the time of Jesus however, demons were able to enter children (Mark 9:21), indicating that before Christ they may not have needed permission. Demonic power and activity was a much greater force before Christ's resurrection. The loosing of Satan will see an increase in the occult and in demon possession. Whether the current mania concerning UFO's and the spirit world is part of this we do not know.

The Bible does not contradict itself, and yet we have two opposing themes concerning Satan. He goes about the earth in great wrath knowing that he has only a short time (Rev 12:12), yet he is said to have been destroyed by Christ's death (Heb 2:14). Jesus pronounced him *judged* and *cast down* (John 16:11, 12:31), yet he wars against the Church (Rev 12:17). He goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8), yet he is said to be unable to deceive the nations during the thousand years. He is the enemy that sows tares among the wheat (Mt 13:39), yet he has been bound by Christ.

We have already discussed this issue back in Chapter 12, which is so closely related to Chapter 20 that the two passages should be studied together. Now we intend to resolve even more fully the paradox of Satan being bound and yet remaining a terrible enemy of the Christian. First, remember that Satan was no longer permitted in heaven after the great victory of Christ over death (Rev 12). He was judged and cast out, and the power he held in certificates of death against every believer were suddenly and unexpectedly paid in full by the precious blood of Christ, the one and only currency acceptable to pay our debt of sin (Col 2:14). God, however, in His deep and unfathomable plan of salvation for man, did not immediately carry out Satan's death sentence because a new and wonderful Covenant had been fore-ordained for this world: the Age of Grace, in which salvation was not limited to Jews only but to all the nations of the world.

Just because Satan is said to be bound does not mean he is powerless. Satan is still a formidable spiritual adversary of mankind, but new limits have been set to what he can and cannot do. A lion chained is still fully powerful within the limits of his chain, and Satan has been cast out of heaven and chained by the death and resurrection of Christ. If a man yields himself to Satan's authority, he will discover that Satan is indeed a roaring lion that will destroy his soul.

In verse 3, very specifically, we are told that the binding of Satan means *that he should deceive the nations no more*. This is the binding of Satan, not that he is powerless, but that his power has been restricted—no longer can he deceive the *nations*. The word for *nations* is *ethnos*, which is usually translated *Gentiles*, and stands in contrast to the Jewish nation. If one reads these verses with *Gentiles* in the place of *nations*, the meaning of the passage is exceptionally clear, and agrees with historical fact. This is not a twisting of the text, it is a correct translation of the word *ethnos*, (see Strong's Greek Dictionary). The word occurs 164 times in the Bible, and 93 of those times it is translated *Gentiles*. It is translated *nations* 63 times and *heathen* 5 times. Context and the opinions of the translators are the only criteria determining how the word is rendered. *Nations* imply governments, armies, and politics. *Gentiles* imply *people, kindreds, tribes, tongues, and nations*—the Revelation uses *ethnos* often in this context (see 5:9, 10:11, 7:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15).

The binding of Satan means that he cannot deceive the Gentiles anymore. His loosing means that sometime he will be able to do so again. The binding began with the institution of the Church of Christ and the extension of the people of God to include the Gentiles, who came into the Kingdom in huge numbers. The loosing of Satan begins when the Church, largely Gentile, will be deceived by the Beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit toward the end of the world.

At the time of Christ, only the Jews were God's people. Then came the death of Christ for the whole world, and God, *who in times past suffered all nations [ethnos] to walk in their own ways...now commandeth all men every where to repent* (Acts 14:16, 17:30). The expansion of Abraham's seed to include the Gentiles was foretold in the OT (Ps 2:8; Is 49:6; Gal 3:29), and was fulfilled on a grand scale. The message of the Gospel has gone out into



the whole world. In the entire history of the world there has not been a more powerful force than the Church of Christ. It has influenced the minds and actions of common man, intellectual thinker, and earthly ruler. Nothing could stop the conquering Church as it spread from Jerusalem to Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond. Satan was powerless to stop it—was not permitted to: it was decreed *that he should deceive the nations no more*. This is the meaning of the binding of Satan. Those Gentile nations whom he had been permitted to deceive during the age of the Jews were wrested from his control. It is now the *times of the Gentiles* (*ethnos, nations*), and Christ's Kingdom includes them all. Satan is not permitted to deceive the Gentiles any longer. It will be thus until the *times of the Gentiles are fulfilled* (Luke 21:24; Rom 11:25). During the Age of Grace, Christ will build His Church and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. The great commission of the Church to go and *teach all nations* (Mt 28:19) cannot be defeated by Satan and his devils until the thousand years are finished.

To correctly fulfill the requirements of Revelation 20 the binding and loosing of Satan must be something that the Devil once could do, but then was not permitted to do. It also must be something that he will again be able to do during the time of his *little season*. The deceiving of the Gentiles fulfills this exactly, and is supported by the Scriptures we cited above. It also agrees with the previous two Revelation prophecies concerning the end-time. The sixth bowl of the last plagues described how at the end of the world the evil trinity under Satan will deceive and gather the *whole world* to Armageddon—*the battle of that great day of God Almighty* (16:14). Then in Chapter 17 we saw how the Beast, Satan really, comes out of the bottomless pit to deceive the world and *make war with the Lamb* (17:14).

The *nations* of 20:3 are not the same as the Beast from the sea in Chapter 13. The Beast represents the governments, or kingdoms of the world. The Dragon has given his power to the Beast to war against the Church during the time that he is bound in the *bottomless pit*. The Beast forms the visible part of Satan's empire of darkness, which will grow immensely in power when the Devil is loosed from his prison. The real ruler of the nations is Jesus Christ, as seen in Revelation 12:5, *And she brought forth a Man-child, who was to rule all nations [ethnos] with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and*

*to His Throne.* The kings of the earth have almost always chosen to side with the Beast (Chapter 13). They are selfish, wicked, and rebellious, relentlessly persecuting the Church of Christ. Nevertheless, earthly kings can do nothing without the permission of Christ. The end-time era will see increasing persecution of the Church by the kings who have given themselves to the Beast. During this time of Satan's little season there will be a great apostasy of the Gentiles, the traditional stalwarts of the Church, as they allow themselves to be deceived by the eighth Beast. The *times of the Gentiles* concludes with this great end-time deception.

If the Gentile age ends, will the Jews experience a revival before the end of the world? It is unlikely, though this passage does not directly reject that hope. The NT is strikingly silent on what is in store for the Jewish people. When Jesus' disciples asked Him about Israel's future, His response was purposely vague: *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons* (Acts 1:7). There are no verses absolutely denying a Jewish revival, and we hope that they will recognize Jesus Christ as their Messiah before the end. Dispensationalists teach that the Jews will turn to God in large numbers after the Rapture of the Church, a belief based on OT prophecies that we believe are fulfilled in the expansion of the spiritual *Israel of God* to include the Gentiles as equally acceptable children of Abraham (Gal 3:7). (For more on this topic, read our comments on page 233.)

## THE SYMBOLIC DETAILS OF THE MILLENNIUM

*I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand* (v1). Can there be any doubt as to the identity of this Angel? It takes a stronger power than the Devil in order to vanquish the Devil, for he is the ultimate enemy of God. This Angel possesses the *key of bottomless pit*; Jesus has *the keys of hell [hades] and death* (1:18), and also the *key of David* (3:7). Contrast this with the fallen star of 9:1, which was *given the key of the bottomless pit*. The Greek word *given* (*didomi*) has the meaning that Satan was granted, or permitted to open the pit. Jesus possesses His keys by right of authority. The *bottomless pit* is the figurative abode of Satan and his wicked angels as they await the judgment day (see page 195). In II Peter

2:4 it is called *tartaroo*, which Vine's Dictionary defines similarly. Symbolically, the *bottomless pit* is the spiritual Capitol of the kingdom of darkness, the source of all wickedness, deception, and rebellion. (Read our thoughts concerning Jesus being represented by an angel at pages 150 and 222.)

Though Satan is confined in the *bottomless pit* for the entire length of the Church Age, he is let loose at the end-time. What does this mean? It means that his evil empire will be advancing, rapidly gaining more converts who antagonize the Kingdom of Christ (20:8-9). The missionary zeal of the Church will stagnate as the world grows increasingly hardened to the Gospel message. Many of those within the Church will actually be part of Babylon, *and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold* (Mt 24:12). The call of the Holy Spirit is still there, but the people of the nations will reject it wholesale.

You don't have to be a great historian to realize that this is playing out before our very eyes. Just 300 years ago, Christianity was spreading so rapidly that many believed the whole world would soon be evangelized. Religion was considered the highest subject of study in universities, and churches overflowed with the wealthy and the poor. A tide of dedicated missionaries spread the Gospel into Africa, India, China, the South Sea Islands, and the Americas. These missionaries came from Europe, the historical heart of Christianity for over a thousand years.

How things have changed! Europe now is an appalling example of extreme apostasy. The most important region of Christian history is now a Christian wasteland. These are people who know about God, the Bible, and moral accountability, but have knowingly rejected Him. They are angry at Christianity and ridicule the idea of a Creator-God. They have knowingly joined forces with the Beast, besieging the camp of the saints with the purpose of abolishing God from their vocabulary.

We may wonder why God allows this to happen. Why doesn't He return and stop the carnage and wickedness? Probably the few righteous Jews, like Simeon, were asking the same question before His first coming. The Jewish leaders were corrupt and wicked men, and Jesus condemned them in the strongest language. One of the last things He said to them before giving Himself up to be crucified was, *Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers*

(Mt 23:32). The conditions are the same today, but the Gentiles' cup of iniquity is not yet full. When it is, Christ will return to judge their wicked ways.

Satan is bound for a *thousand years*. Is this a literal thousand years or a symbolic number? The arguments are strong for a figurative interpretation. We have already noted that the other details of this passage must be taken figuratively, and there is no reason to insist on a change here. The Revelation is filled with symbolic numbers, and *thousand* is often used symbolically (5:11, 7:4, 9:16, 14:1). Our own rule of interpretation is that we only allow symbolic meanings to those terms that have been used symbolically elsewhere in Scripture. In the case of *a thousand*, two such examples are II Peter 3:8, *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*, and Psalms 50:10, *the cattle upon a thousand hills [are Mine]*. (See also Deut 7:9; Ps 84:10, 90:4, 91:7; Is 30:17.) The most compelling argument to take the *thousand years* symbolically is the fact that the time of Christ's return is not known by anyone but God (Mark 13:32). There is no way to set even an approximate date from Scripture, though many have tried and failed with disastrous results. An exact number of years would compromise that mystery and negatively influence the course of history.

The thousand years is equivalent to the symbolic broken seven (3 ½ times, 42 months, 1,260 days) which we encountered in sections 3-4 (see page 250), but with one important distinction. The broken seven has an earthly fulfillment, meaning that it applies to those living on this side of the grave and connotes pilgrimage, toil, and persecution. The thousand years is a heavenly fulfilled number, applying to those beyond the grave. This we will see as we study the next few verses.

4. *And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*
5. *But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*

6. *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*

## THE REIGN OF THE SAINTS

John sees the *souls* of those who have overcome the Beasts in this life and have died victorious in Christ. These righteous souls live and reign with Christ for *a thousand years*. This is called the *first resurrection*. Those that die without Christ do not live again until the thousand years are over, and then they will die a *second death*.

The natural meaning of this picture is that it describes what happens to those who die during the Age of Grace. Where do the souls of the saved dead go after physical death? What are they doing, and are they at all connected with the Kingdom on earth? These questions hold special meaning to those who have been called to give their lives for the sake of Christ, and while Scripture does not give us details, this passage does give us some answers.

Christ is reigning as King of the Universe on His heavenly Throne right now, as we have already shown from the Scriptures (Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3). He reigns over heaven and earth, ruling His Kingdom on both sides of the grave: *For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living* (Rom 14:9). Those who die in Christ will live and reign with Him in Paradise until the *mystery of the Gospel* is finished and the world comes to an end. That is what we are told here in Revelation 20. Jesus made the same point to the Sadducees in Mark 12:25-27 and John 8:56-58, saying that *Abraham rejoiced to see [His] day; and he saw it and was glad*. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were long dead, but Jesus used the present tense (*I am the God of Abraham*) to show that their souls were still alive, and that God is still their God after death.

We are not given to know what the experience of those who die in Christ will be like, but a *reign* implies authority and usefulness. Furthermore, *judgment was given to them*, implying that some may be involved as jurists, perhaps over the unseen spirit world. Paul says *that the saints shall judge the world, and that we shall judge angels* (I Cor 6:2-3). Jesus told His twelve Apostles that

in His Kingdom they would sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30). This will have an eternal fulfillment in glory (Dan 7:9f), but does it not begin in a limited sense in the heavenly realm before the end of the world?

These saints *shall be priests of God and of Christ* (v6). The Church on earth is a *royal priesthood* (I Peter 2:9), and Christ *hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father* (1:6). Physical death does not change or nullify this promise. The righteous and undefiled will reign with Christ *without fault before the Throne of God* (14:5) over the earth until the Age of Grace is completed (5:10). The picture of verse 4 describes this heavenly scene of the saints at rest in Christ, dwelling and reigning with Him in peace and comfort while they await the day that their mortal bodies will be resurrected and united with their souls.

This has been the comfort and hope of the saints down through the ages. None of the writers of the epistles looked forward to a day that they would reign on the earth with Christ for a thousand years. They looked for the Day of the Lord in which *this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality* (I Cor 15:53). We believe this to be the most enduring theme for the children of God in the Revelation. From beginning to end the scenes of the redeemed in heaven show them now praising the Lamb and worshipping Him. The revelation of Christ—His unveiling—is a revealing of what His work has accomplished for all those who trust in Him. *That in the ages to come He might show us the exceeding riches of grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2:7). And especially for us who live in this age of marvelous grace, for now the death of a believer is simply a change of state. The body dies, but the spirit and soul go to be with Christ, living on as victors over the Beast and his image.

John saw *thrones, and they sat upon them* (v4). *They* is rather ambiguous, and the word implies that we have already been told about these heavenly thrones and the people that sit upon them. And indeed we have. Beginning with 4:4, the picture of 24 elders seated upon thrones round about the Throne of God is described throughout the Revelation (Chapters 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19). In the KJV these elders are said to sit upon *seats* (4:4), but the Greek word is the same as the *throne* in 19:4 (*thronos*). The elders are sitting *clothed in white*



*raiment*, and wearing *crowns of gold*. They are in constant worship before the Throne of God, praising Him for their salvation (5:9), and serving Him as messengers (7:13, 22:8-9). These are those who have neither worshipped the Beast or his image, nor received his mark on their foreheads or hands (20:4). They are not “soul sleeping” until Christ returns as some maintain, but live and reign with Christ in the spirit until the day of the *restitution of all things* arrives (Acts 3:21).

## THE FIRST RESURRECTION

There are two terms that must be defined before we can really understand the reign of the saints. They are the *first resurrection* and the *second death*. There is no mention of a “first death” or a “second resurrection” but both are implied.

The *second death* is defined as eternal Hell in verse 14. It is the final separation of the resurrected wicked from God. Existing without hope forever in the *Lake of Fire*, these are *twice dead...to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever* (Jude 1:12-13). Physical death is the separation of the soul from the human body; spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. Physical death does not separate the righteous soul from God, and this is key to understanding what is signified by the *first resurrection* and the *second death*.

Like the *second death*, the “first death” is a spiritual condition. Every person dies spiritually when sin seduces and kills him: *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died...For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me* (Rom 7:9-11, see also James 1:15). All have sinned, and the wages of sin is death, not bodily death, but spiritual death—separation from God. Adam’s offence allowed sin into the world, and spiritual death reigned until Christ (Rom 5:14). There was no remission of sins under the OT sacrificial system (Heb 10:4), only a covering of sins until Christ. In Jesus we now obtain the *gift of righteousness* wherein we *shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ* (Rom 5:17). Jesus *abolished death* (II Tim 1:10), promising that those who keep His words *shall never see death* (John 8:51). Spiritual death is the subject in both of these verses.

This brings us to the *first resurrection*. The spiritual death of every man is remedied only in Christ: *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die* (John 11:25-26). This must be understood spiritually, in the new birth experience, for it is only in that sense that one can *never die*. Likewise, the “first death” cannot be physical death, for some will not die physically but will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye into glorified bodies at the last trump (I Cor 15:51). Moreover, these are *souls* (v4), and souls never die physically.

The first death is spiritual death on account of sin, but when a man appropriates the gift of Christ in forgiving his sins, he is made alive spiritually. For though *we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened [made alive] us together with Christ* (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). This *first resurrection* begins when we enter the spiritual Kingdom of Christ: *He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life* (John 5:24; I John 3:14). Therefore we present ourselves to God *as those that are alive from the dead* (Rom 6:13), having spiritually *risen with Christ* (Col 3:1; Eph 5:14), who truly *hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2:6). These and many other passages liken the new birth experience to a new life, a spiritual resurrection of a dead soul (Rom 6:4).

As a side note, it is interesting that though the soul is often said to be made alive in the new birth experience, the body is never quickened on this earth. Just the opposite is true. *If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness* (Rom 8:10). Only the figurative meaning makes sense here: the body is figuratively dead, meaning that we should consider our bodies as dead. We are to mortify the deeds of the body and deny the flesh its sinful desires. Those under the leadership of Christ who triumph in this cause will be found worthy when Jesus comes again, and then *He shall also quicken [their] mortal bodies by His Spirit* (Rom 8:11). Here we arrive again at the “second” resurrection.

The *first resurrection* begins with salvation and ends with the bodily resurrection of every believer at the coming of Christ. This is consistent with the previous verses which show that entrance into the Kingdom begins with the



new birth and is unchanged at physical death. For the believer, physical death is not separation from God or His Kingdom, for *the Kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21) and continues beyond the grave. Death is simply a passing from the human existence to the spiritual, and though we have no idea what that really entails, the Apostle Paul looked forward to the event: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better* (Php 1:21-23). Evidently the death of the body allows the soul more freedom and a greater understanding of the spiritual, but it is not until the glorification of the body that full knowledge will be given, and we will know even as we are known (I Cor 13:12).

The progression is as follows: the first death overtakes every man when he sins and becomes guilty before God. The first resurrection takes place when some of these spiritually dead people come to Christ and are *born again...of the Spirit* (John 3:3-5). Only these are entitled to the second resurrection of eternal life with Christ. All others must die the never-ending *second death*.

Each of these terms must be understood in the spiritual sense to be consistent with the Scriptures, for the symbolism of two resurrections agrees with man's redemption as taught in the Bible. Redemption is presented as a two-fold experience. We are redeemed upon confessing Christ as our Saviour, but at that time we only *receive the promise of eternal inheritance* (Heb 9:15). Full redemption must wait until the coming of Christ (Rom 8:23; Luke 21:28).

The souls of the *first resurrection* are defined as those *that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands* (20:4). This is the same group John saw waiting for the final glorification of their bodies in 6:9, *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held*. All those who have overcome the Beast qualify for the *first resurrection*, not just those who have been beheaded. It is interesting that John would use beheading (Gk—*pelekizo*) as a symbol for martyrdom because the Romans were not that fond of the axe as a means of execution. Most early Christian martyrs died by crucifixion, wild animals and burning, but two of the most important figures in the NT, John the Baptist and the

Apostle Paul, were beheaded. The forerunner and the after-runner died the same manner of death.

While all those who die in Christ are part of the *first resurrection*, verse 4 seems to make a subtle distinction between those who are seated on their heavenly thrones and the subsequent general saints who have overcome the Beast. Philip Mauro proposes that the *first resurrection* is a special benefit given only to a select few who have shown themselves especially worthy, and who then reign with Christ during the Gospel Age while the souls of the common Christian must wait for the general resurrection<sup>2</sup>. We disagree. This idea would leave many saved souls in limbo until Judgment Day, for the text says that only those who participate in the *first resurrection* need not fear the *second death* (v6). Moreover, we have already shown that the *first resurrection* is a spiritual event, initiated upon receiving a forgiven and cleansed soul by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Every spiritually resurrected soul continues beyond the veil of physical death, and lives on with Christ in Paradise. These souls do not fear the Judgment or the second death, for they are already with Christ.

We do agree with Mauro that there will be varying heavenly rewards given based on earthly faith and service (Luke 19:12-26; Mt 25:14-26). Not all will sit on equal thrones and enjoy equal privileges. We must suffer with Him if we want to reign with Him (II Tim 2:12). There will be no jealousy or pride in heaven, and differing rewards will be so judiciously given that all will appreciate them. The 24 elders on their 24 thrones represent the group of saints who have been faithful with much and have received a proportionate heavenly reward. The greater group of overcomers is represented by the 144,000 who live and reign with Christ over the earth (14:1-5). Both groups can be seen together in 5:8-14, 7:9-17 and 14:1-6. In 14:3 the 144,000 redeemed from the earth sing a *new song* before the Throne and the 24 elders, who are also said to be redeemed from the earth (5:9). The only explanation is that the elders are a group of saints who receive greater reward and responsibility in heaven because of their greater faithfulness on earth (see page 97).

It is said of the heavenly group that *they lived and reigned with Christ* (v4). The Greek construction of the verb indicates a continuing state of being: *they*

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2 Things which must shortly come to pass, by Philip Mauro.

*did live and reign with Christ* [Young's Literal]; *they were living and ruling with Christ* (BBE). However, the NIV and the NASB translate it: *they came to life and reigned with Christ*. Superficially, the difference does not appear great, but the first translations correctly describe the eternal state of the human soul while the NIV and NASB translations add ambiguity. John sees *souls* beyond death, and souls cannot literally die or come to life. However, souls do die spiritually when lust brings forth sin, which brings forth death (James 1:15). After physical death the souls of the righteous live on in the *first resurrection*. Another term for this is *firstfruits*, which we discussed in 14:4.

*The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished* (v5). The Greek does not contain the word *again* in this verse. The souls of those who die in their sins go to Hades, where they remain until the resurrection at the end of the Age. Their spiritually dead souls remain in that condition until the *great white Throne* Judgment, when the wicked dead will be resurrected and will stand before God to give account of their sins. The sentence for all sinners is *the second death*—a hopeless existence in the *Lake of Fire*.

## A CRITIQUE OF FUTURISM

Futurists are critical of the new birth being the *first resurrection*, and base their objection on the argument that the new birth is not a “resurrection.” When presented with any of the above verses they will respond that the common Greek word for resurrection (*anastasis*) does not occur in any of these passages. To us this is a less than weak argument. Jesus said, *The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live* (John 5:25). Clearly this is teaching that the spiritually dead are spiritually resurrected by the authority of Christ at the new birth experience. He continues: *Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation* (John 5:28-29). Here we have both the first and second resurrections presented in one passage. The first began at Jesus' first coming (*the hour is coming, and now is*); the second will happen at His return, when the graves shall open at the sound of His voice and both good and bad must come forth

unto either the resurrection of life or damnation. The first resurrection begins with the quickening of the human soul—a spiritual resurrection of a soul that had been killed by sin. We cannot say it more clearly than this.

The reason that Futurists reject the new birth as the *first resurrection* is because they believe that the reign of the saints has an earthly fulfillment instead of a heavenly one. While the passage does not absolutely say where the reign takes place, a careful reading of the text makes it clear that the setting is beyond earthly boundaries and in the realm of the spiritual. First, we have already noted the many symbols that necessitate spiritual meanings (i.e. angels, bottomless pit, binding the Devil with key and chain), and these place the setting in the spiritual realm. Second, the *thrones* are a common sight in the Revelation, occurring about 50 times, and they always appear in a spiritual setting. Not once are they used to describe earthly thrones. Third, it is impossible to see *souls*, yet that is what John saw. Souls are spiritual entities, unknowable to human minds. It does no good to postulate that *souls* here are actually humans, as is true in some cases (Acts 27:37). There it is possible to substitute “men” or “humans” for souls, but here it is not—these are people who have physically died and now live on as *souls*. Fourth, verse 4 says the saints will reign *with Christ*, as opposed to Christ reigning with the saints. The picture is showing that we will go to be with Christ, not that Christ will be coming to be with us. Fifth, if the *first resurrection* is a bodily resurrection from the grave, it is redundant to say *that on such the second death has no power* (v6). Having already received glorified bodies, the resurrected obviously would not fear Hell. But if the *first resurrection* involves the soul, the statement has meaning: those who have been spiritually reborn will not fear Hell, even during that period after physical death but before the Final Judgment resurrection. Sixth and finally, the picture of the departed saints dwelling with Christ in Paradise is consistent with the rest of Scripture, and is what one would expect to find taught in the Revelation. The Apostles spoke often of going to be with the Lord, and of the wonders and joys of life beyond the grave.

Really, the only component that allows all the speculation on this passage is the *thousand years*, for it alone could be applied physically. Remove that phrase and Millennialism would never have happened. Taking the phrase

figuratively in this greatest of figurative books brings into harmony the other details of the passage.

Let's consider further the idea of a personal, earthly reign of Christ and some of the accompanying implications. Beyond the questions as to how life would be in the Millennium, what happens to the soul and body when a person living in the Millennium dies? Where does the soul go? Since Christ is on earth, the soul would go away from Christ—but where? Actually, the very idea of death in the Millennium is a serious problem, for the people of the Millennium are resurrected men and women! If a resurrected person dies, then there must be an undoing of the previous resurrection of the just, which requires that this soul must then undergo another resurrection at the end of the Millennium. Are these people at risk of losing their salvation in their reincarnated state?

It doesn't get any better if one proposes that there will be no death in the Millennium. First, one of Futurism's primary passages says that there will be death, although a man that dies being 100 years old will be thought to not have lived very long (Is 65:20). Second, there needs to be a lot of good people dying before the end of the Millennial reign, because if they don't it means they will have joined the huge army of Satan that has surrounded the small camp of the few saints still faithful to Christ at the end of the world (20:7-10). We know that with God all things are possible, and that we do not always understand His full plan from our limited understanding, but these questions and problems go beyond explanation and require new, special, extra-Biblical teachings that apply only to that age. This does not follow a logical and normal exegesis of the Bible.

Futurists may be comfortable with their beliefs in spite of these questions, and that's fine. There are, however, some side issues put forth by some Millennial teachers and commentators that we cannot be so generous with. These teachings are thankfully not heard often over the pulpit, but they are widely and confidently taught by many so-called prophecy experts past and present. We would like to expose these false doctrines and the reasons that they are wrong.

The first incorrect teaching is that "Christ is in exile." They say He is our Saviour now, but not our King. At the least this is splitting Biblical hairs,

at its worst it demeans the triumph of Christ over death—that is to bring Christ down from above (Rom 10:6). Christ has overcome Satan, sin, and the world, and has taken the heavenly Throne (3:21). His perfect life, death, and resurrection crowned Him, as Ephesians 1:21f says: *when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things.* When Jesus came into Jerusalem, Matthew says He fulfilled what the prophets had foretold: *tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass* (Mt 21:5). If Jesus is not our King now, He will not be our King in Heaven either, for He is now *the [Ruler] of the kings of the earth... and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father* (Rev 1:6). Actually, Jesus was offered the opportunity to be a king on this earth, but He refused it (John 6:15). He came for a much more noble cause.

The second incorrect teaching is that Jesus did not initially come to die on the cross, but to set up an earthly kingdom over the Jews. However, they rejected Him and nailed Him to a tree. This rejection is proposed as the major reason for the Millennium, when the Jews, given a second opportunity, will accept their Messiah. Sometimes called “the postponement theory,” this teaching says that the Jewish rejection of Christ required that the OT prophecies concerning Israel had to be put off until a later date. This is false doctrine and dangerous to the extreme. How is it different from the teaching of Antichrist, who *denies that Jesus is the Christ* (I John 2:22)? The entire theme and purpose of the Bible centers around a single, preeminent event—the reconciliation of God and Man accomplished by the death of Christ for the sins of the world. Jesus completely fulfilled all that He came to do and verified this by crying out, *it is finished!* The Greek word is *teleo*, which is also translated *fulfilled, completed, paid, done*. It was fore-ordained that Christ would come to this earth to give His life as a sacrifice for all; it was not an accident. He was not killed, He *gave* His life. *No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father* (John 10:18). He was doing exactly



what the Father had asked Him to do, and what the prophets foretold that Messiah would do.

The last incorrect teaching is that prophecies concerning the Church do not appear in the Old Testament. This is a corollary of the postponement theory's notion that Jesus' first plan was to set up an earthly reign over the Jews. The thinking is that the Age of Grace was not in the original plan of God, but had to be quickly implemented when the Jews rejected their Messiah. In other words, God's purpose was thwarted by man, and He had to improvise at the last minute. If this is true, why do we even discuss these prophecies, for they too may be fouled up by some unexpected turn of events. Let God be true and every man a liar. His Word will not return unto Him *void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it* (Is 55:11). The prophets did speak about the redemptive work of Christ, as well as His coming spiritual Kingdom of human hearts. However, the language of the prophets is not in New Testament terms, for they would not have been understood or even formed at that time. Instead, the prophecies are found in terms involving the land of Israel, the temple, the law, and the animal sacrifices. Paul says that he preached *nothing other than those things which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles* (Acts 26:22-23).

It can be very hard to reject extra-Biblical theories when they come from well-meaning and often sincere men of God. But both views cannot be right. There are many equally sincere men of God who are convinced that Christ's only Kingdom is a spiritual one, and that we reign with Him now on this earth and will continue to do so after death in the heavenlies (Rev 1:6, 5:10).

7. *And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,*
8. *And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*

9. *And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.*

10. *And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

## THE LAST BATTLE

We have said that the reign of the saints takes place in the spiritual realm of Christ in Paradise (v1-6). This figurative 1,000-year heavenly period parallels the symbolic 3 ½ years that the Church continues on earth (11:3). Verses 7-10 give a brief wrap-up of earthly history and then the two groups of heavenly saints and earthly faithful meet at Christ's return and journey together into eternity as the chapter closes.

The overall picture shows Satan loosed *for a little season* (v3) upon the earth after the thousand years have been fulfilled (v7). He leads the kings of the earth against *the camp of the saints*, and they surround the small band of faithful Christians living at the end-time. It is an all-out attempt by Satan-controlled *Babylon* to completely destroy the power of Christianity, and by all outward appearances the attack is succeeding. Just when things seem utterly hopeless for the living righteous, supernatural help arrives. Fire falls from heaven and devours the wicked army of the Devil, who is cast into the *Lake of Fire* where he will be tormented forever. Verses 11-15 continue by describing how every soul will be resurrected and compelled to stand before the *great white Throne* and give an account for the deeds done in the body. Death and Hades will come to an end along with natural heaven and earth, and every rebellious being, angelic or human, will be cast into the endless *Lake of Fire*.

The parallels of this great end-time battle with the Battle of Armageddon in Chapters 16 and 19 are too great to be coincidence—they must be describing the same event. We believe that this is another warning picture of what the world will be like just before Christ's return. The figurative language is written as if describing a battle, and that is just what it is: a battle of spiritual consequences that will not be decided in any physical war. The lines have



already been drawn. It is Satan and the world against Christ and His Church. It has been this way ever since Christ defeated Satan at the cross, but until the *little season*, Satan has been forced to fight from the *bottomless pit*. That is why he gave his authority and power to the two Beasts in Chapter 13. Together the Beasts persecuted the saints of God, trying to overthrow the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. At the end of the world, however, Satan himself will attack the Church, for he will come out of the pit and fight against Kingdom saints.

How Satan plans to attack we are not directly told, but drawing from several end-time passages it appears that his tactics will be different and far more devious than the previous beasts. Satan has probably learned from history that direct physical attack is often counter-productive. It is just too obvious, for Christians know exactly who the enemy is and what his motives are. Physical persecution forces even the weakest Christian to make a decision: give up his faith, or die for Christ. It is a simple black and white issue, and would seem to be in the Devil's favor. Nevertheless, persecution has almost always caused expansion of the Church. Instead of wiping out the Church, more and more people of the world are inspired by the testimonies of the martyrs to also step forward in faith and even to take their own places at the stake and guillotine.

According to our understanding of the prophecies of the NT, the last battle will not be direct physical persecution. Instead, Satan will *deceive the nations* [*ethnos*] *of the world*. Deceived people don't realize that they are wrong—they think that they are the ones who are right. *In the last days perilous times shall come...evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived* (II Tim 3:1, 13). The warning is extremely important for the people of Christ: *be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap* (Gal 6:7). There are many verses that warn us that the end-time of the world will see deception on a scale never seen since the world began. That is what is meant by Satan being loosed from his prison, for he is the greatest deceiver of all time—he is the father of lies (John 8:44). Jesus said, *Take heed that no man deceive you...for there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect* (Mt 24:4, 24).

Under the command of Satan, deception comes in so many forms it would be impossible to catalog each one. Variety is in his favor, and he has developed temptations of every description. The sins of the flesh have plagued man since the Garden of Eden, but never have they been so numerous or easy to fall into. The philosophy of our culture today is built around self and doing whatever self enjoys. These are called “rights,” and are practically being forced upon those who abhor them.

Many false teachers posing as church leaders are outspoken allies of this lawless behavior. To them, the Bible is no longer the Word of God. They have set up in its place a god of their own making, one that fits the contemporary cultural scene, is politically correct, and is as powerless as OT Baal. This is what Satan loosed from his prison means. These people—by the millions—have been deceived into believing a lie of their own making.

One of the biggest advocates of humanism and atheism is the liberal media. News organizations and Hollywood champion the spread of evolution, atheistic psychology, rebellion, and living for self. University professors, while saying they are searching for higher intelligence, disallow the concept of an all-powerful and moral God from their discussions. The whole infrastructure of human culture either scoffs at those who believe in God or refuses to acknowledge His Word as Truth. The world has been deceived into believing a lie; they have been *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin* (Heb 3:13).

It would be impossible to fully list all the attacks that worldly wisdom and intellect have brought against the Word of God in just our own lifetime. Scholarly books and works of fiction are constantly being written that undermine the Bible and question the existence of a God who is knowable by man. Radio and television portray Christian ministers as either Bible-thumping, wild-eyed doomsayers or sinful hypocrites even more wicked than non-Christians. As never before, the world establishment is bent on erasing the moral requirements of the Bible from our culture. They want to remove God from their consciences so that they are not pricked by sin, and that is why they want to eliminate Christianity from the earth.

The most shocking evidences of Satan loosed and deceiving the Gentiles today can best be seen by looking within the churches of the world. One does not even need to give up church-going today, no matter what he chooses to

believe because the grossest sins are allowed in memberships and even behind pulpits. There is a steady march of humanism—yes, even atheism—upon every side within the nominal church, gradually discounting each and every truth and moral teaching of God. One by one the pillars fall, beginning in once religious Europe and spreading throughout the world. In every land we see the Word of God coming under attack, and often by its own teachers and leaders. The inerrancy of the Bible is believed by fewer churches every year. The missionary efforts of the Church cannot sustain its losses, and each year more people quit going to church as the power of the Gospel continues to deteriorate. The Church is dying.

Yes, there are bright spots in the world. China has seen great numbers of Christians added to the Church, and yet the enemy is at work there too, for recent news indicates that many are falling away, led into various cults and error. Missionary efforts in Russia and Africa have found fertile soil also, and for these we thank God. It is not our intention to discourage Christian workers; rather, we wish to alert the Church to the great needs around us and to inspire men and women to stand up for Christ.

Just 200 years ago the Church was optimistic. Great numbers of people were being added as evangelism spread throughout Europe and America. Missionaries poured into foreign lands, and Church organizations flourished. What happened? Iniquity began to abound, and the love of many waxed cold (Mt 24:12). The cycle changed, and as lawlessness rose, the power of the Spirit could not work in its previous measure. At some point in time God will decide it is enough, and He will allow Satan to be loosed.

Satan will deceive the people of the world into rebellion against God. Notice that they are deceived. That means they don't know that they are in rebellion—but they are. Many will be mistakenly thinking they are Christians doing the Lord's will when He returns. They will be saying, *Lord, Lord*, but their works will betray them.

The Church's waning emphasis on prayer contributes to the loosing of Satan. Prayer is the weapon of the Christian in his fight against Satan, sin, and the world. Prayer can change the natural flow of events; the very laws of nature can be stopped in their courses. The Devil, however, has found a way to neutralize the power of prayer, and that is to fill up men's time with such a

vast array of diversions and pursuits that the Church finds time to pray only on Sunday. And little by little Satan is given more chain, loosed to roam farther into the lives and hearts of men who have given him the right to be there, by their own choice. *Neither give place to the Devil* (Eph 4:27)—don't allow him that ground. Fight with the prayer of faith and the sword of the Spirit and the Word against that wicked one and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

Just because we see Christianity in steep decline and atheism and humanism climbing rapidly does not necessarily mean that the end of the world will be in our own lifetime. God alone knows how many are His, and at what point He will decide that the salt has lost its savor. Maybe the cycle will change, and revival will turn people back to God as it did in the early 1800's. It would take a miracle, such as serious judgments by the hand of God in natural disasters and war. That has happened in the past and could happen again. We should learn from those in the past who have so earnestly believed that the Lord was going to return on a certain date that they sold everything they had and went out into a field to wait for His coming. *Occupy till I come*, is His command. As Christians, we should be trying to save the lost until the very end. We must be available for God to work through us in order to gather in those who are willing to trust in Him. It is irresponsible and wrong to hide our witness under a bushel just because people are not interested in the Gospel anymore, or because we believe that the end of the world is near at hand. Live and work for Christ so that in the end we will be found faithful—that is what we must do.

In Chapter 11 we saw the two witnesses, symbolizing the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. For 3½ years these witnesses were powerful in the history of the world, but *when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them* (11:7). During the little season of Satan, the power of the Word and the Spirit in the life of the believers will be so weak it is called a *corpse*. The Church is not completely dead, for there will be righteous ones living when Christ returns. The Church's missionary zeal and life of power, however, will be greatly reduced because of sin and unbelief. The two witnesses suddenly came to life and ascended up to heaven in a cloud before their enemies (11:12), and so too the surrounded camp of saints is delivered

by a heavenly source. The answer to Satan's little season is the return of Christ in judgment upon the wicked world.

The time of the Church is decreed to last 1,000 years, during which time Christ is reigning in heaven and earth with His saints. The thousand years is a symbolic number—only God knows the exact time. Satan's little season comes after the 1,000 years of the Church's witness has been fulfilled. This does not mean that Christ is no longer reigning in heaven, but that the allotted time for the Age of the Gentiles has expired, and that the time in which Satan is permitted to deceive the peoples of the world once again has come. Christ's reign lasts forever and ever (11:15, 22:5), but the times of the Gentiles will end when revival attempts are no longer effective. Are we in those days now? It is surely a warning that the twentieth century was the first in many not to witness a revival. Christians should never stop working in the Kingdom of Christ, revival or no revival. But in these perilous days it becomes an effort just to keep our own families and friends from the clutches and wiles of Satan.

## GOG AND MAGOG

Satan will deceive the nations (*ethnos*) of the entire world into gathering against Christianity. *Gog and Magog*, from *the four quarters of the earth*, are specifically mentioned. They are in number *as the sand of the sea*—a very great multitude indeed—and they spread out *over the breadth of the earth*, engulfing the camp of the saints by their great number. Virtually everyone agrees that this is to be fulfilled at the very end of the world.

*Gog and Magog* is the subject of a lengthy prophecy in Ezekiel 38-39, which for reasons given below is widely believed to be the most difficult prophecy of the OT to understand. Some contemporary prophecy teachers have attempted to associate *Gog and Magog* with individual nations in existence today, and apply Ezekiel's prophecy to the end of the world. These attempts are entirely guesswork and are always conveniently found to support the "correct" interpretation of the passage.

The fact is that *Gog and Magog* are such obscure names that it is impossible to positively identify them with any one nation, past or present. *Gog* is

found in the Bible only in Revelation 20 and Ezekiel 38-39<sup>3</sup>. In Ezekiel, *Gog is the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, the land of Magog*. However, neither Biblical nor secular histories clearly identify the wicked ruler *Gog*. This is not unusual for OT prophecy, for rarely is a future king identified by name before he is born (Cyrus, king of Babylon, is a rare exception). One possibility is that *Gog* describes a line of kings (like Pharaoh and Caesar) who were known in those days. The Syrian dynasty of Antiochus is the most likely choice for *Gog*, and the most notable king of that line was Antiochus Epiphanes, whose terrible plots against the Jews can be read in the works of Josephus. The Maccabees led the severely outnumbered Jewish forces to victory after victory over the Syrians during these last years of Judaism (about 150 B.C.). Epiphanes himself endured a slow and gruesome death, being eaten alive by worms. He acknowledged that his death had come because of his wicked deeds against the Israelites. Some of Daniel's prophecies also describe the wickedness of Epiphanes.

The *Gog* of Revelation 20 is obviously taken from Ezekiel's prophecy. He seems to represent the rulers of the Gentile nations gathered against Christianity. Antiochus Epiphanes was literally satanic in his torment of the Jews. He desecrated the temple and offered pig's flesh on the brazen altar. A virtual OT Hitler, he was obsessed with wiping out all Jews from the land of Israel. But God protected His people in those perilous days, and the nation of Israel continued until the coming of the Messiah gave birth to a new nation of God. *Gog and Magog* will come upon the Church of Christ in the latter days with plans to snuff out her power and witness, but the coming of Christ will bring a sudden and utter end to their devices. Alternatively, the *Gog* of Rev 20 could be another name for Satan. *Gog* means "covered," and Satan was once the *covering cherub* (Eze 28:16).

Ezekiel's *land of Magog* appears to signify the OT land of Syria. But as with *Gog*, *Magog* is hard to find in histories outside of the Bible. Respected Bible commentator Adam Clarke finds in the writings of the ancient historian Pliny a phrase that does seem to identify *Magog* as the land of Syria

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3 I Chronicles 5:4 mentions a Gog as being in the lineage of Reuben, but this is not the same Gog. The Gog of I Chronicles 5:4 is an Israelite, the Gog of Ezekiel is a Gentile ruler of the land of Magog.



(see Adam Clarke for Eze 38:2). Besides being found in Revelation 20 and Ezekiel 38-39, *Magog* is also mentioned in the table of nations (Gen 10; I Chr 1), a listing of the divisions of the sons of Noah into their various tribes and languages after the Tower of Babel. Many scholars believe that these nations originated the basic 70 or so languages of the world. *Magog* was a son of Japheth, whose descendants populated the northern parts of the world: *Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth... The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations* (Gen 10:1-5). Japheth was the father of the Gentiles, and this is the first mention of Gentiles in the Bible. Notice that Ezekiel's *Meshech*, *Tubal*, *Gomer*, *Togarmah*, and *Tarshish* are also sons of Japheth listed in Genesis 10. For some of these, it is the only other place in the Bible that they are found.

John's selection of *Gog and Magog* as symbols of rulers and nations of the world is in harmony with Ezekiel's prophecy, and is also consistent with the rest of Revelation's pictures of the end-time. *Gog and Magog* are Gentiles, and the end of the world will see Satan released from his prison deceiving the Gentiles against God's people—the Church of Christ. The world ends when *the times of the Gentiles [are] fulfilled* (Luke 21:24), and the measure of their iniquity has reached the brim of the cup. Judgment and destruction falls when the sins of man require a just recompense by a righteous God.

Ezekiel's prophecy foretells how *Gog and Magog* would come upon the land of Israel in war. A huge army of different tribes lead by *Gog* is assembled against peaceful Israel. God intervenes in this wicked endeavor, and the enemy of Israel is routed, their dead bodies strewn throughout the land of Israel in such great numbers that it takes the people seven months to bury them. Their bodies are thrown into a huge ravine called the *valley of Hamon-gog*, and the people of the world realize that it was God who wrought this great victory. For seven years the Israelites burn the weapons of the enemy for fuel, not saving them to be used in war. There are a number of other OT passages foretelling a great gathering of the nations to battle—Joel 3, Zephaniah 3,

and Zechariah 12 are just a few. Though all these had fulfillments during the times of the Jewish nation, there are allusions in them to the New Covenant and conditions of the world at the end of time.

Back in Chapter 16 we drew attention to the remarkable parallel of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt to the deliverance of the saints at the end of the world (see pages 368-380). Pharaoh is strikingly similar to the Beast, for Pharaoh was the human arm which afflicted and hindered the people of God living as pilgrims in Egypt. God says this about Pharaoh: *for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth* (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17). Compare this language with Ezekiel's Gog, who *in the latter days* God would *bring against the land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes* (Eze 38:16).

The ten plagues of Egypt parallel the seven last plagues of Revelation 16. They are scourges that punish the kingdom of the Beast. The last plague of Egypt was death, an exceptionally devastating plague that temporarily softened Pharaoh's heart, and he relaxed his iron grip on the Jews, allowing them to go and worship their God. The next day he changed his mind and pursued the Jews with his entire army. Enraged beyond measure, he planned to wipe God's people off the face of the earth. Pharaoh caught up with Israel at the Red Sea, and there appeared to be no escape for the camp of the saints. That was the signal for God to intervene and deliver His people from the hand of Pharaoh. Pharaoh and his entire army were killed, *there remained not so much as one of them* (Ex 14:28). The Israelites rejoiced at their deliverance, and sang the song of Moses and the Lamb after passing through the Red Sea.

This picture agrees with Zechariah 14, which shows the end coming with a great battle against the saints. The avenue of escape in Zechariah 14:5 is a divinely created valley between two mountain ranges that protects the saints and allows them an avenue by which they flee to safety.

The many Scriptural parallels to the end of the world are cause for speculation on how it will happen and when. While there is no harm in some healthy discussion, too much has a tendency to cloud the most important point—*be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh* (Mt 24:44). One speculation we will give here is the similarity of Egypt's



plague of death with the two great world wars of the twentieth century, which claimed the lives of about 100 million people. This plague arrested the swift slide of the Church for a brief time, but now the spread of militant anti-Christianism is back in full swing, even much worse than it was before the war. Is this a true sign of the nearness of Christ's return, one of the *seven last plagues*? Or is it only a warning trumpet?

## THE FALL OF BABYLON

The scene upon the loosing of Satan is one of increasing deception and wickedness. The nations of the world are united in their opposition to the Kingdom of Christ. Using the words of Isaiah: *the world languisheth and fadeth away...the earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant* (Is 24:4-5). At the end of the world, true followers of Christ will become fewer and fewer. Ungodliness and wickedness will increase and overflow all previous barriers. The Devil will have deceived the world so completely that many people do not even believe in the existence of an Almighty God. Such is the condition of the world as the age of the Gentiles comes to an end.

The fall of this world will be shocking, unexpected, and thoroughly complete. It will come at a time when men are saying, *Peace and safety!* Make merry, pursue life, health, and happiness any way you desire; live for yourself. These philosophies war against the sober truth of the Gospel, and in the end-time, all warnings of judgment will be scoffed at. The world will think they do not need God, and they will not listen to what He has said in His Word.

*Gog and Magog* will go up on the breadth of the earth and surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city (v9). The picture describes a high-walled City, besieged by a powerful force and in desperate need of help. Outside the City, the enemy is seen everywhere one looks. There is safety within the walls, but outside the weapons of darkness are arrayed on every hand, swiftly catching the weak and unwary. Watchmen on the walls are sounding the alarm, warning those wavering in unbelief and lifting up the hearts of the feeble-minded. Faith is faltering. The Lord has tarried so long—*where is the promise of His coming?* Many are saying the time has come to surrender, or at least

strike a treaty with some of the less vicious members of the enemy. The siege is most severe within the City, and yet how easy life must be outside! Every day more and more are leaving to find a new life outside the beloved City. Almost never do they return. Even within the City all is no longer peace. Fighting and bickering break out, and more souls decide to leave. Suddenly a cry is heard within the gates: Look up! The Bridegroom is returning! Deliverance, redemption draws nigh! Make yourself ready and go out to meet Him!

On the outside the sight is just the opposite as men and women look up into the sky. Terror and fear strike the hearts of the miscreants. Fire pours out of heaven and thunders through the armies of the Devil. Without encountering a fight, the fire devours the enemies of Christ. The Devil is cast into the *Lake of Fire*, where he will be imprisoned forever with the Beast and False Prophet. There they *shall be tormented day and night forever and ever*. This is the final end of the trinity of evil: never again will they corrupt the creation of God, or antagonize the people of the Lamb.

Some have found fault with the interpretation of the Beast and False Prophet as corporate entities rather than individual ones, citing the apparent difficulty of casting governments and false religions into the *Lake of Fire*. Our response is this: if the two spiritual realities of death and Hades can be cast into the *Lake of Fire* (v14), it is certainly possible for these entities to experience an equal fate. The overall intent of the picture should not be missed. On this final day, all corruption will be cast into eternity. Satan and every evil device he has concocted to corrupt the creation of God must be cleansed from His presence, confined in the pit of darkness forever. Deception, lying, death, the list goes on—no evil will ever exist again outside of Hell.

Verse 10 says that the Devil will be cast into the *Lake of Fire* where the Beast and False Prophet are. This does not necessarily mean that the Beast and False Prophet precede the Devil into Hell, but that all three will experience the same fate. The word *are* is not found in the original, so the time element is missing from the passage. We saw in 19:20 the simultaneous confinement of these three into the *Lake of Fire*. The theme of Chapter 20 is focused on the judgment of Satan, and thus we are told his future fate will be shared with the Beast and False Prophet.

Jerusalem is *the beloved city* of verse nine—but not physical Jerusalem in the land of Israel. There are two Jerusalems: one *is in bondage with her children...but Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all* (Gal 4:25-26). This is *Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem* (Heb 12:22) of the Church, which John saw *coming down from God out of heaven* (21:2). The New Jerusalem is the Kingdom of Christ as the city set on a hill for all the world to see. Safety is within her walls, and every day we pray for her peace. The New Jerusalem is a picture that carries beyond the earthly Kingdom. Revelation 21 is a figurative portrayal of a city of beauty and glory beyond comprehension, a glimpse of the future, permanent City of God.

Futurists declare that physical Jerusalem is intended by the prophecy of verse 9, and that the passage must be fulfilled literally. We cannot agree with this idea for the following reasons. First, God's people do not take up the sword in His Kingdom of human hearts. The battle is not a physical one against flesh and blood, but against principalities and *the rulers of the darkness of this world* (Eph 6:12). The battle is very real, but the battleground is a spiritual one. Second, a literal gathering of the vast nations from the four quarters of the globe against and surrounding the city of Jerusalem is impossible. There is neither space for these people nor reason for them. If Jerusalem were to be attacked by a ruthless army, it would be with air power and nuclear weapons. The picture is clearly intended to be a vivid, figurative description of the struggle of the Church in a hostile world. Third, if this prophecy must be literally fulfilled, then the Lord cannot return until it has taken place and the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ is therefore ruined. We believe that all required prophecy has been fulfilled, and that nothing remains unfinished to prevent Christ's Second Coming. At any moment the trumpet could sound, and the heavens open up to reveal the Rider on the white horse.

*11. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.*

*12. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the*

*book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

13. *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*

14. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*

15. *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

## THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

Armageddon is over, the world has ended, and Satan has been cast into the *Lake of Fire*. What about those men who have devoted their earthly lives to his wicked service? The last verses of Chapter 20 answer this question and here is perhaps the most sobering picture of the entire Book of Revelation, because this judgment scene is very personal. Put yourself in the shoes of the next in line to stand before the Judge of the Universe. The *book of life* is opened and a search is made for your name on its pages. Is it there? Is it clearly written on the page? Or has it been crossed out, with a reference to check the entry in Book 212, Volume 27, page 675, which contains a detailed, sordid history of unforgiven sins and rebellious acts. There are no secrets, no alibis, no getting off on a technicality. Every word, every deed, every thought will be replayed. Every broken vow, every opportunity squandered will be remembered. There are no acceptable excuses; the evidence is so clear and unmistakable that the guilty will be utterly speechless before the Judge.

The verdict is given: *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire* (v15). The finality and hopelessness of this sentence is the most stunning of all. There is no second chance, no possibility of getting out, no parole, no time outs—this is for life. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

Eternity has already begun as the scene before us unfolds. The bodily resurrection of the wicked has taken place, and earth and heaven have fled away

on this great day of judgment. Anger and justice are shown in the face of Him that sits upon the white Throne. The earth is gone, the elements burned with fervent heat; they cannot be found anymore at all (v11). At this gathering stands every soul of man who has ever lived. Not one will be missing. Small and great, each must stand before Almighty God to give account of his deeds done in the body, good or bad (II Cor 5:10).

He sits upon a *great white Throne*. *White* symbolizes purity; the *Throne* speaks of authority; and that it is *great* indicates its massive importance. The *great white Throne* is an awesome and sobering picture of omniscience and omnipotence which Jesus spoke of as well: *When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another* (Mt 25:31).

*The books were opened* (v12). These are the books recording the works of man on earth—and *they were judged every man according to their works* (v13). Does this make works important? You be the judge, but you had better be right—this game is for keeps. That we will be judged by our works is taught throughout the New Testament (Mt 16:27; Gal 6:7; Rom 2:6; Col 3:25; Rev 22:12). All mankind will be resurrected: *they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation* (John 5:29). Evil-doers go to Hell, the righteous go to Heaven. How can it be more clear? And yet how maligned and derided are those who insist on obeying not just the letter but the spirit of the law of Christ.

The faith versus works argument is another deceit of the Devil in this modern age. He is happy to see deceived on both sides fall into their respective ditch. Faith and works must go hand in hand, for *faith without works is dead* (James 2:26). Faith is a prerequisite of works, and both are essential to eternal life in Christ. *Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone* (James 2:17). Obviously, no man can be saved by works alone either, for all have sinned, and just one sin is too many.

What are these works? More than just deeds, they include the fruits of the Spirit, attitudes, thoughts, and motives. In the most basic of definitions works are the decisions that we make in this life. Every action, thought, or attitude involves a decision, and our decisions determine what manner our

work will be, whether gold, silver, wood, hay, or stubble (I Cor 3:12). Our decisions will either glorify God or dishonor Him, and we will answer for them all someday. Of course, nobody has lived a sinless life, and that is why Christ's mercy and forgiveness are so essential. Without the grace of Christ, salvation is utterly impossible.

Even those whose names are found in the *book of life* will be held accountable for their works, for works will be the means of determining heavenly rewards. It seems that quality of service, rather than quantity, is the criterion of measure, though both are surely important. Compare the parable of the pounds in Luke 19 with the parable of the penny in Matthew 20. Some of those held in first regard on earth will be found to be last in heaven, and some in low earthly regard will be found to rank among the first in heaven (Luke 13:30). There will be people present who were saved on their deathbeds, and others who have lived their entire lives for Christ. Both of these receive the reward of being with Christ.

On the other side are those whose names are not found in the *book of life*. Again works are the criteria that determine punishment: the greater the offense, the greater the torments of Hell (Luke 12:47-48). Works are decisions, and each wrong decision leads to greater punishment. The state of those who once knew Christ and then turned away is the worst. The Bible says it would be better for them to have never known Him (II Peter 2:20-21). Those to whom much has been entrusted, much is required. The lowest parts of Hell will be filled with backslidden Christians, those who knew their Master's will but did not do it.

*The book of life.* This all-important book is a list of those who have been found worthy to live in the New Jerusalem of heaven. It is mentioned seven times in the Revelation, and Moses referred to this book in Exodus 32:32, when he asked God to blot out his name from the book instead of the rebellious Jews. God replied that He would only blot out the names of those who sin against Him. The *book of life* records only the names of those who are Christ's. It is comforting to realize that Christ knows those that belong to Him, those to whom He has extended His mercy and forgiveness and will share in His inheritance. How unfathomable the thought!



Every wicked person is resurrected to stand before the *great white Throne*. *The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them* (v13). *Hades* is the place that the souls of the wicked dead wait for the final judgment day to arrive. *Death* (Gk—*thánatos*), may refer to the wicked who are still alive when the Lord returns. These are definitely spiritually dead and will also die bodily in the great conflagration that burns up the world and its elements. *The sea* is also given as a place of the wicked dead. Beyond simply supplying an illustration of every soul being resurrected, the *sea* may have a symbolic meaning. The *sea* is often used to represent the heathen nations of the world (see glossary). One of the last seven plagues to strike the earth was the death of every living soul in the sea (16:3). This we interpreted as great spiritual famine and death in the non-Christian nations of the world. These too must stand before the Throne on the last day.

Finally, *death and [hades] were cast into the Lake of Fire* (v14). The final solution for death and hades is eternity—the *second death*. The casting of these into hell pictures in a figurative way how that they will cease to exist. Death and hades belong in hell with the Devil who originated their purpose. *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death* (I Cor 15:26). So ends the *mystery of Christ*. The day of salvation is past, and time is no longer. *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire* (v15). Such is the final word concerning the wicked. We can only guess what their torments will be like.

# REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



## THE LAST VISION

Chapter 20 pictured the end of the world and the eternal destiny of the wicked. The great and inevitable Throne Judgment was described, and the awfulness of men burning eternally in the *Lake of Fire* was a sobering sermon of God's justice and His anger against sin and rebellion. Important though that theme is, it would be discouraging to have the Revelation of Jesus Christ end on such a note. Chapters 21-22 are just the sort of ending—not only for the Revelation but for the entire Bible—that the earth-bound pilgrim needs. These last two chapters of the Bible paint a picture of heaven, and the promises and comforts are more glorious than any others in the Scriptures.

The scene is inspiring and motivating and draws our affections above (Col 3:2). For saints of all ages it is a call to lift up our eyes beyond the conflicts of this life and gaze upon the *Sabbath rest* (Heb 4:9) that Christ has prepared for them that have overcome the Beasts of Satan. The Bible ends with a calming and delightful prophetic vision of Eden regained, but with even better amenities.

Its transcendent and mysterious beauties move us with anticipation to say, *Even so, come, Lord Jesus* (22:20).

In time, Chapter 21 continues where Chapter 20 left off, but now the scene shifts to describe the eternal destiny of the redeemed. This is the longest and most detailed passage concerning the heavenly state in the Bible. As with the previous visions of the Revelation, most of the figurative language is quoted from the writings of the prophets and Apostles, and is especially based on the symbolism of *the Bride of Christ* and *the holy city of New Jerusalem*.

Though virtually all commentators, whether Historical or Futurist, would agree that Chapter 20 describes heaven, there is an unmistakable parallel to the ideal earthly Church as well. The true and pure Bride of Christ on earth should look and behave like the beautiful city we will see in this vision. Too many times it does not, as the ugliness of sin and unbelief mars her features. From the beginning it was not designed to be that way, and in heaven all earthly corruption and defilements will be gone, and only the perfect and pure Church will remain. The great purging of God's people at the end means that many within the walls of the Church are not worthy of Christ's choice, and they will not be allowed entrance into the heavenly city.

The single greatest theme of Chapter 21 is the perfect happiness, peace, and joy of living with Christ in eternity. Every evil and corrupted thing will be gone forever and the overcomers *shall inherit all things* (v7). The first eight verses give a general view of the heavenly scene, including those who will be there and what their emotional state will be like. The rest of the passage describes in rich, symbolic detail *the Lamb's wife* (v9), including the special blessings she will experience. Redeemed by her Husband and brought into mansions most magnificent, she will remember the sorrows and pain of the former years no more at all.

1. *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*
2. *And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

## NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

John's first statement concerning heaven is its setting, and after this one sentence he turns his attention solely upon the beauty of the Bride and the emotional joys of living in the celestial city. The location of heaven is not nearly as important as who will be there, for situation means nothing to happiness. Who is there means everything. In heaven, the full love of Christ will shine in approval and welcome as He shows His Bride the beautiful city of Light that He has prepared for her. Heaven is the mystical union of Christ and His purchased possession, the Church, a marriage with no end.

Heaven is set in a *new* world; not a renovated one, but a different, brand-new *heaven and earth*. Here the Greek word for *new* is *kainos*, which means that the very essence of the old world has been changed, it is completely different. John would have used *neos* if he had wanted to show newness in the sense of regeneration or age. Vine's Dictionary says *neos* "may be a reproduction of the old in quality and character," while *kainos* is "of different quality, of different nature from what is contrasted as old." The *New Testament* is *kainos*, it is entirely different from the Old. The context of the *new man* (*kainos*) in Ephesians 2:15 shows that he is new in that his character has been changed, while the *new man* (*neos*) in Colossians 3:10 stresses the believer's new experience, recently begun and still proceeding (See Vine's Dictionary, page 431). Heaven is a new and different world, specially created by God to be experienced by resurrected bodies that are also new and different.

Into this perfect world descends a beautiful city out of heaven: *the holy city, New Jerusalem*, she is called. Almost the entire subject of this chapter and the first five verses of Chapter 22 concerns *New Jerusalem*, and defining its meaning is therefore key to correctly understanding the passage. This is not a difficult task, for the symbol is interpreted for us within the chapter; she is *the Bride, the Lamb's wife* (v9-10), clearly indicating that *New Jerusalem* represents the redeemed Church of Christ in heaven. It is important to keep this in mind as we read the details of the chapter. *New Jerusalem* is not so much heaven the place as it is heaven the people.

At the *great white Throne* Judgment of the previous chapter John wrote that the earth and the heaven vanished before the angry countenance of God

(20:11). This agrees with numerous other passages affirming that the earth and its heaven will someday come to an end. For *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up* (II Peter 3:10). The Greek verbs clearly indicate a complete destruction is in store; even the elements will be burned up and dissolved. Jesus said *heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away* (Mark 13:31; see also Is 51:6; Rev 6:12-17).

However, there are several Scriptures that seem to indicate the earth and heaven will exist eternally. *[God] laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever* (Ps 104:5). *He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which He hath established for ever* (Ps 78:69). These verses sound as if the earth will never be destroyed, and Psalms 89:36-37 even says the sun and moon will remain: *[David's] seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.* (See also Ecc 1:4; Dan 12:3; Ps 89:29, 148:1-6.) By contrast, the Psalmist also wrote: *Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed* (Ps 102:25-26; see also Job 14:12; Heb 1:11; Is 51:6).

How can we harmonize these apparently contradicting verses? Perhaps the answer is in Isaiah 66:22, *For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain.* Apparently God will make a new universe after this old one has been destroyed. The *new heavens and the new earth* will not be under the curse of sin, and Satan's corrupting influence will be gone. It will be the heavenly home of Christ and the redeemed, and will *remain before Me* forever. The new universe will be entirely different from the old one and will be made special for the glorified bodies of the saints. Maybe this is the final fulfillment of Jesus' words, *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth* (Mt 5:5).

There are simply too many Scriptures that unmistakably teach that the sin-corrupted earth will be utterly destroyed at the end of the world to believe otherwise (especially II Peter 3:3-14). The verses cited in favor of a "renovated" earth cannot stand against the strong statements of a *kainos* (brand-new, of

a different kind) earth, at least in our opinion. It is certainly a unique problem (for all schools of interpretation) that the Scriptures seem to say the earth will exist forever in some passages, but that it will be destroyed in others. The Scriptures do not contradict; there is an answer that resolves the issue.

Our view is that the handful of verses intimating that the earth and heavens are *established forever* (Ps 78:69, for example), are either to be understood within the context of the existing space-time-matter universe, or in the sense of spiritually transferring the old heavens and earth to the *new heavens and new earth* of the eternal heavenly state. Under the first idea, the existing earth and heavens are *established forever* until the end of world, and would contrast with almost all the rest of God's creation, which have a limited life-span. A word study of *forever* (Heb—*owlam*) reveals that it is often used in this manner. (See Vine's Dictionary for the many meanings of the Hebrew *owlam*.)

Peter draws a comparison between the destruction of the old world by the flood and the coming destruction of the present world by fire. *By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men* (II Peter 3:5-7). The death of the ancient world came by the word of God, and the coming death of the present world will also begin by the word of God. The fire's heat will cause the elements to *melt*, the heavens to be *dissolved*, and the earth to be *burned up*. *Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness* (II Peter 3:9-12).

There are two possibilities concerning what will happen to the earth and where our heavenly home with Christ will be:

1. The earth will be totally destroyed at the return of Christ and will never exist again. The saints will dwell with Christ in a completely different spiritual universe specially designed for the resurrected bodies of the saints.
2. The earth and heaven will be recreated or renovated after the return of Christ. The new heavens and earth will be the home of Christ and His people forever, and will resemble the Garden of Eden, entirely sinless and perfect throughout.



Literalists may insist upon a physical fulfillment to the promise of new heavens and earth, but we believe the better interpretation requires at least a partial fulfillment in the spiritual realm, and therefore we favor option one. We will have to explore several passages to get a complete and balanced understanding of what the Scripture says about heaven. God has not chosen to reveal much about eternity, only that it will be a much better place and life than this present earth.

The first passage to consider is Romans 8:19-23: *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for [our] adoption as sons, the redemption of our body* (NASB). When Satan brought sin into the world by Adam, corruption and death spread through the entire creation of God. The perfect world God had made for man was altered. God subjected it to *futility*, which seems to refer to the fact that the world is running down, becoming more chaotic, and is slowly wearing out. Just as our human bodies wait eagerly for their redemption, so the whole creation waits to be delivered from the laws of decay and mutation.

The same line of reasoning can be seen in comparing the changing of the mortal body as described in I Corinthians 15 with that of the earth and heavens given in Hebrews 1. The Greek word for *change* (*allaso*) is the same in both passages, and is used in only two other verses of the entire Bible. It implies a transformation or metamorphosis, which could be illustrated in how the death of an unattractive caterpillar produces a beautiful, winged butterfly. Compare the two passages:

(I Cor 15:50-52) *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the*

*twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

(Heb 1:10-12) *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed.*

Both the earth and man will experience a resurrection. The resurrection of man will be a reuniting of the body with the soul and spirit. At the resurrection, Christ will give man a new *spiritual body* (I Cor 15:35-50), and He *shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body* (Php 3:21). Glorified bodies will probably not look just like earthly ones, for invalids, babies, and the deformed will be there, but surely not as the cripples they were on earth. Glorified bodies will not be entirely similar to each other either; they will vary in glory and honor. Earthly bodies are sown in death as *bare grain*, and in the resurrection God gives them bodies *as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body* (I Cor 15:37-38). The spiritual nature of the glorified body is a mystery that we cannot understand, but it is clearly taught in Scripture. Jesus said that the saints of the resurrection will be *as the angels of God in heaven* (Mt 22:30). Angels are without visible bodily form, and do not exist within the confines of time and matter—they are outside of the physical universe.

It appears that the same is true for the earth and the heavens. The curse of sin holds the universe in bondage from which it will only be delivered after its own death. In a way, the earth parallels the experience of humans, who all die spiritually once. Those who are saved will be delivered, after physical death, from the curse of sin and will be resurrected as glorified bodies forever. So also the earth died once because of sin at the Flood, when *the world [kosmos] that then was, being overflowed with water, perished (apollumi)* (II Peter 3:6). The whole creation now groans under its curse and waits for its deliverance, which can only come after its destruction. This deliverance of the earth from the curse of sin is not simply a “renovation” or cleansing of the existing earth.

The human body decays into dust, and the earth too will be utterly consumed by fire. It will be created new and different after its destruction. A part of man never dies; the soul exists forever. Maybe some of the laws of the universe will never die either.

The phrase *new heaven and new earth* is a figurative term developed in Isaiah 65-66. The context of that passage begins with a prophecy of how the coming Messiah would extend blessings to the Gentiles and how the Jews would experience sword and slaughter because they were not listening to God (65:12). The time was ready for the prophesied New Covenant: *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy* (Is 65:17-18). The new heavens and new earth figuratively describe the better conditions of the NT Kingdom of Christ, an age of grace, mercy, and new revelation.

Futurists would agree with our interpretation of Isaiah 65 down to verse 16, but then they jump over the Gospel Era and apply verses 17-25 to the Millennial age. We are not trying to detail our differences here, but a point on which we agree. For both interpretations require the *new heavens and a new earth* in Isaiah 65:17 to be a symbolic term. Historicists believe it applies to the Age of Grace; Futurists believe it applies to the Millennial Kingdom. Futurists do not take this phrase literally any more than Historicists do, for they do not teach that the earth and heaven will be newly built before the Millennial age. Rather, sin, death, and the universal laws of futility will still be in effect during the theorized Millennial kingdom, and though the world will be more fruitful and pleasant, it will still be the same earth and heavens.

Isaiah continues his Messianic prophecy in Chapter 66, describing the New Covenant with figures of peace and blessing. He predicts how at the end of the age *the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many* (Is 66:15-16). The last few verses of Isaiah describe eternity: *For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain* (Is 66:22). Isaiah's *new*

*heavens and new earth* represent the Kingdom of Christ as it continues into the world to come, when the saints will reign with Christ in glory.

Peter also speaks of the future new heaven and earth: *Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness* (II Peter 3:13). The *promise* he refers to must be that of Isaiah we just read. The Kingdom of Christ does not end with the destruction of the world. It continues on beyond the grave and time, occupying eternity forever.

Heaven is foreshadowed in the perfect ideals of the Church, where love, joy, peace, security, holiness, purity, and all that is good should be found. The effects of Satan and selfish human desires have, since the time of the Apostles, kept the Church from fully achieving the ideals God has set forth in His Word. The day in which He makes all things new will reveal a perfect, spotless, and beautiful heavenly Church (Heb 12:23). She will appear *as a bride adorned for her husband* (v2). We studied this imagery back in 19:7, at the *marriage of the Lamb*. The Bride of Christ is a pure and chaste virgin, and her garments are a gift from her groom (see page 451). The Bride and Groom will live together forever in a perfect home that He has prepared for her. The Bride is the city of New Jerusalem, *beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King* (Ps 48:2), and she dwells with Christ forever in the new heaven and earth.

There will be no sea in the *new earth* (v1). The sea as a symbol represents the heathen people groups of the world (see glossary), and obviously they will not be in heaven. Is this the only significance of *no sea* in the *new earth*, or is there a better meaning? No literal sea would mean no rain, storms, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, etc. It would probably result in a climate somewhat similar to that of the pre-flood world. The sea as an emblem of rebellion against God can be seen in verses like Jude 1:11-13, where the writer likens the wicked to *raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame*. The sea is an uncontrollable and often wild power of nature that obeys only the command of God (Mt 8:26). It is also a place of beauty and great diversity of life, and many lovers of God's creation would miss the sea if heaven were a place similar to the physical earth and sea in which we live. The statements that heaven will not have a sun, moon, or sea must be taken in a symbolic sense.

## EDEN AND HEAVEN

The first and last few chapters of the Bible are linked together in a way only God could design. The first words of the Bible are: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Gen 1:1), and the last prophetic scene of the Revelation begins: *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth* (Rev 21:1). Into the new earth comes God, dwelling with man in a perfect garden with no sin, no sorrow, and no death. A marriage takes place, bringing even greater happiness and fulfillment. The Tree of Life nourishes man, and a pure river flows through the land. God and man walk together with not one sin to mar their relationship. Are we describing Eden or heaven? Both.

The heavenly home described in Revelation 21 is a figurative return to the Garden of Eden, and the comparison develops themes of heaven based on man, God, and Eden in Genesis. There was no immense city in Eden, but in some ways, Eden and New Jerusalem are the same. Eden was a beautiful garden God planted on the newly created earth for man to live in and to maintain. New Jerusalem is a beautiful city God has prepared on a new earth for man to live in and serve Him. Both Eden and New Jerusalem are places of perfect peace and harmony. The precious stones in the New Jerusalem were evidently in Eden as well (Eze 28:13), and though Eden had only one gate, both walls and gate were so impregnable that man was unable to break into the Garden for the duration of the 1,600 years that it existed. As we progress through this section the parallels between Eden and New Jerusalem will be evident.

Heaven will not be a literal return to Eden, for there are notable differences between Eden and New Jerusalem. There will be no sea on the new earth, and there will be no night there (22:5). There may be no sun or moon there either (21:23).

We do not know at all what heaven will be like. Even our imagination falls short of its reality. Will it be a place similar to our own earth? Or will it be an entirely new world? It matters not at all. Heaven will be the most wonderful experience that man can possibly have. God created man with the ability of emotion, and He designed the human experience to encounter those emotions, but His creative genius will be at its highest in the spiritual reality

which He has designed for those who choose to love Him. The reality is definitely beyond the limits of our physical minds, and the figurative comparison of Eden to heaven is meant to open our spiritual eyes and help us glimpse just how wonderful heaven will be.

Another link between the first and last chapters of the Bible can be seen in the designed contrasts of the events surrounding Adam's sin with the state of the *new earth* in Revelation 21. Satan was allowed on the earth in Genesis, but in Revelation 21 he will be cast into the *Lake of Fire*. God's creation was corrupted by the curse of sin in Genesis, but in the new heaven and earth there will be no more curse (22:3). The right to the Tree of Life was taken away after Adam's sin, but in the new garden the Tree of Life will be free for all (22:2). Most importantly, man was not permitted to enter the Garden of Eden after man's sinful fall, but in the day that God makes all things new He will invite man back to the Garden of Delights, which is the literal rendering of the Hebrew word "Eden."

Another notable difference between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem is the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, which is not seen in New Jerusalem. That tree was the cause for the great division between God and man. It was part of God's inscrutable will, that the *mystery of the Gospel* might be revealed. In some way that rift was purposely allowed by God because He knew that it would make the reconciled relationship even better and more complete than the original Edenic relationship. How? By giving man the ability to choose whether to please God or to reject Him. Before the fall, man's knowledge was limited. Though he could reason and make choices, man did not understand good and evil. He was not yet a moral creature. Immediately after Adam and Eve's sin, *the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil* (Gen 3:7, 22). It is prideful and selfish on the part of man to think that God would create man for man's sake. God created man for Himself, a creature unlike any other part of God's creation, uniquely designed for fellowship and with the capacity for reason, emotion, and understanding. The fiery trial of life will reveal those worthy to partake in this heavenly fellowship with God, those He chooses to realize the delights of New Jerusalem and become the *Lamb's wife*. The absence of *the tree of the knowledge of*



*good and evil* from heaven does not mean that man is no longer a moral being (once he became a moral being there is no possibility to return to Eden), but that he will no longer be presented with the choice to sin.

## THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

According to the angel, the *holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God* is *the Bride, the Lamb's wife* (v10, 9). The word *Jerusalem* occurs only three times in the Revelation, and all three times it is *New Jerusalem*. The first occurrence was in a special promise from Christ to the good Philadelphians: *him that overcometh will I make a pillar...and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God* (3:12). New Jerusalem is described as a celestial city, splendid beyond belief and *eternal in the heavens* (II Cor 5:1). This is not a literal description of heaven, but a picture that human minds can understand about a place we have not been permitted to know in detail. Jerusalem was long regarded by the Prophets as the peculiar dwelling-place of God, and it is the appropriate symbol for the eternal abode of the saints.

Jerusalem is referred to as *the holy city* (11:2), *the beloved city* (20:9), and *the great city* (11:8) in the Revelation. The word that John uses for Jerusalem in the Revelation is always the Hebrew *Hierousaleem*, and contrasts with his Gospel where he uses the Greek *Hierosoluma*. Jerusalem, as *the city of the living God* (Heb 12:22), represents the Kingdom of Christ and stands in contrast to earthly *Babylon*—the city of the world.

The OT prophets are filled with examples of Jerusalem as a type of the Church, the spiritual city of God. Isaiah 52-53 is one of the most vivid prophecies of the coming of the Messiah in the Bible, and it begins with a description of spiritual Jerusalem: *Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean* (Is 52:1). We saw the Kingdom of Christ going out on a white horse, conquering and to conquer, at the beginning of the Gospel Age. The saints of the Kingdom *reign in life by one, Jesus Christ* (Rom 5:17) and after death live on and reign with Him in the heavenlies forever and ever (Rev 20:4). The Kingdom spans time

and eternity and belongs to *Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named* (Eph 3:15). *Heavenly Jerusalem* is a type of the Church (Heb 12:22), but *New Jerusalem* goes beyond the time of the earthly Kingdom and is the city of the eternal Sabbath rest of the righteous.

The city of God is here called by its new title: *New Jerusalem*. The fact that it is *new* points to a fulfillment after earth and time. There is a *new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem*. God has made *all things new* (v5). The heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 had this country in mind as they lived on this earth: *wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city...For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come* (Heb 11:16, 13:14). A city connotes stability, population, wealth, prestige, and comfort. New Jerusalem will have these and much more in their purest form. (See also Isaiah 4.)

As we progress through this section (21:1-22:6) the overall picture should not be clouded by over-emphasizing the details. The passage is describing the *Lamb's wife* (v9), so the marriage supper has already taken place (see Chapter 19). Details describe the glories of heaven, and these must be taken in the figurative sense from which they were previously used in God's Word. A literal interpretation of these details is utterly impossible if one is committed to remaining within the bounds of the rest of the Bible. God's Word contains both figurative and literal language, and we must be able to determine which is being used in a particular passage to understand the true intent of the Spirit-breathed Word. Henry Morris' attempt to literally explain this chapter is an example of the difficulties and illogical ideas that approach must propose<sup>4</sup>.

We cannot agree with those that insist that the best way to interpret the Bible is to take it "literally whenever possible." We have given many examples of Jesus, Paul, Peter, and the OT prophets writing in symbolic, figurative

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4 The Revelation Record, by Henry Morris. We have great respect for Dr. Morris and his writings, though we disagree on the method of interpreting prophecy. For those interested in studying the Futurist view of the Revelation, there is no better commentary than The Revelation Record. Morris is not afraid to disagree with the standard Futurist position when it is at odds with the text. For instance, he interprets the rider on the white horse in 6:2 as being Christ, while most Futurists say the rider is Antichrist. Morris' goal has been to get Christians to take Genesis as a literal, historical account of the Creation rather than a metaphorical story as many liberal scholars claim. We emphatically agree with Morris that Genesis is a literal account—but Genesis is not prophecy. Prophetic texts are written in highly figurative language, and are easily distinguishable from historical accounts.

language that often confused their listeners. Prophecy, more than any other topic, is especially couched in hidden language. Jesus even gave us the reason why that is so (see Mt 13:13-15). The correct approach to interpret the Bible is to first see if the passage is explained elsewhere; in other words, to understand it in the context and intent of the rest of Scripture, for although men wrote the Bible, God is the author. If we find a passage expounded somewhere else in Scripture, we should use that as the correct interpretation, regardless of how the people of that time understood it. For example, Jesus told the Pharisees, in the presence of His disciples, *destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (John 2:19). It was not until after His death that the disciples understood that the temple He spoke of was His body (John 2:22). Clear Scripture must be used to explain the obscure.

The literal versus figurative argument is especially relevant to understanding Chapter 21. We have thus far interpreted the Revelation to apply to the Church of Christ living in this present Gospel Age. Futurists apply the same chapters to a dispensation after the Age of Grace has passed. At Chapter 21, however, all schools of interpretation meet and agree on the setting of this passage: the heavenly state of the saints. We believe that since the details of the *New Jerusalem* are obviously taken from other parts of the Bible, we must search and study those contexts to understand this prophecy. As with all prophecies, we will not understand it completely until its fulfillment, and unlike many of the rest of Revelation's visions, that means we must wait until we experience heaven ourselves.

3. *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*
4. *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*
5. *And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

## GOD AND MAN RECONCILED

*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God* (v3). Here is the culmination, the purpose and end of the great and wonderful plan of God. From the beginning He desired a people who of their own volition would choose to love and follow Him. His entire plan of salvation is structured to find those people. The blessings and rewards for these are beyond comprehension. How is it that the great and mighty incomprehensible God would want to be associated with insignificant, less than powerless man? Even more, that He would *dwell with them*, fellowship with them, personally *be their God*? Yet that is exactly what He will do. *Joint-heirs with Christ* (Rom 8:17), how can it be? It is only because of His immeasurable mercy and forgiveness. When we consider trying to attain salvation by bridging such an infinite chasm we so clearly see how impossible it is for man to enter this scene by his own works. It is not only impossible, it is preposterous. It is a greater gulf than that of the complexity between man and amoeba. Salvation is by Christ alone, and He chooses those who have trusted in Him.

God will not only dwell with His people, He will set His *tabernacle* in their midst (v3). This is an allusion to the children of Israel following *the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness* (Acts 7:44), the most personal appearing of God with people in all history. *The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle* (Ex 40:34) and visibly appeared unto all the people throughout their forty-year journey (Lev 9:23; Num 16:42). A cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night guided them on their way at all times. The Lord met with Moses in the tabernacle and talked with him there *face to face* (Ex 25:22, 33:11; Deut 34:10). Signs and wonders were commonplace during those years, and the tabernacle as a symbol of the presence of God continued for centuries even after it was replaced by the temple (Ps 15:1, 27:5, 76:2; Eze 37:27; Heb 8:2, 9:11). Only the priests were permitted in the OT tabernacle, for God was such an awesome and terrible sight that when the Israelites saw His glory they begged God to talk through Moses instead. By contrast, the heavenly tabernacle is open to all, and God's presence there will generate the opposite response—they will want to be with God and to be His people.

In verse 3, the word for *dwelt* (**skene**) is the verb form of *tabernacle* (**skenoo**) used earlier in the verse. In the Bible, only John makes use of this construction, and the word is literally translated “tabernacled.” The Scriptures record that once before God tabernacled with man: *And the Word was made flesh, and [tabernacled] among us* (John 1:14). The theme being developed is the personal, visible, approachable relationship man will have with God in heaven. Now *we walk by faith, not by sight*, hereafter we will behold with open faces the glory of the Lord, being changed into His own image (II Cor 3:18). There will be no need for a temple to shield His power and glory from corruptible man who even at his best cannot stand in the presence of God. God is the temple thereof (21:22).

The idea of God setting His tabernacle among men comes from the OT promises of the Prophets. *My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (Eze 37:27; Zec 2:10, 8:8; Lev 26:11-12). The earnest of the Holy Spirit in the NT believer partially fulfilled this verse, but the full realization will come when we meet our Saviour face-to-face in heaven, when He sets His tabernacle among man and makes all things new. Jesus said, *If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him* (John 14:23). Christ will never leave the soul that trusts in Him—from earthly pilgrimage to heavenly bliss He lives forever in the hearts of His people.

In heaven, all things will be made *new* (**kainos**) (v5). Imagination is the limit as to what this verse implies. Even John wondered what it means: *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear [has not yet been made known] what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is* (I John 3:2). John is again using a NT expression of the Church to describe eternity. Compare verses 4-5 with II Cor 5:17, *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*. Fulfilled now in the NT believer and completed in heaven, this is especially true in regard to sadness, disappointment, and all emotional distress. *Death, sorrow, and even crying* will be gone forever because the *former things are passed away*, which is speaking of this sin-corrupted world—for *the fashion of this world passeth away* (I Cor 7:31, I John 2:17).

Back in Chapter 7 there is a closely related description of heaven. There John saw a white-robed multitude rejoicing before the Throne of God and serving Him *day and night*. The Lamb was their shepherd, feeding them and leading them to *living fountains of water*. They will hunger and thirst no more, and *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes* (7:15-17). Within the NT Church we have these same promises given (see Is 25:8; 35:10; 61:3; 65:19), forming only a foretaste of the future.

To confirm that everything he has seen will unerringly take place, John is told to write: *these words are true and faithful* (v5). Centuries of time have passed and many have given up hope, but the promise remains sure—they will come to pass. It seems beyond incredible that the Almighty God of the infinite universe would set His dwelling place among the habitations of men as a visible, accessible God, but *these words are faithful and true*: heaven is a coming reality.

6. *And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*
7. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*
8. *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

## THE OVERCOMERS INHERIT ALL THINGS

God announces, *It is done*. The mystery of the Gospel is finished and the plan of God has come to its fore-ordained culmination. As in the similar phrase in 16:17, the Greek is: *it has come*—the day has arrived. *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and in English, we could paraphrase the sentence, “I am A to Z: from beginning to end, I am.” Nobody can disrupt the purpose of God, and nothing can stop His plans from being carried out exactly as He has designed them. He is the entire library



from A to Z. *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?* (Jer 23:24). Existing outside of time, God plans and knows the end from the beginning. He is immutable. There is no possibility of error or even partial failure in the fulfilling of His will. He takes counsel from no man and learns nothing new, for He has always been the all-knowing, all-wise, Incomparable One (Is 40:14-18).

As the years of time roll on and Christ continues to tarry, many will lose faith and begin to scoff at the promise of His coming. The simple statement of God in verse 6 is a reminder to us that what He has said in His Word will come to pass, and He affirms its inerrancy by the greatest pledge possible—Himself.

The thirsty seekers of the Kingdom will receive *the fountain of the water of life freely*—without price. How good it is to take a drink of cold, clear water after a hard day's work on a hot summer day. Those who thirst for a closer relationship with Christ and a deeper understanding of God will someday realize in full the riches of His goodness and grace. The *fountain* symbolizes spiritual life (see glossary), a perpetual well-spring that is free to all (see also 22:1-2). The imagery is drawn from Isaiah 55:1, *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Salvation is open and free to all, both rich and poor, young and old. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation* (Is 12:3).

Though one cannot buy it, salvation will cost a person everything. Jesus told the parable of a man finding a priceless pearl in a field that was not his. The man immediately sold everything he owned and bought the field so that the pearl would be his. Are God's people today this desperate to gain the Promised Land? It is found in Christ, the source of the never-ending fountain. *Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto Me, and drink* (John 7:37).

Those who overcome the Beasts in this life *shall inherit all things* (v7). This is given by right of being a son of God through the *adoption of sons...and if a son, then an heir through Christ* (Gal 4:5-7; Eph 1:5; Rom 8:15). What does it mean? We cannot know or fathom it at all. Paul uses the fact that all things belong to the son of God to motivate the believers to live accordingly

(I Cor 3:21-23). An heir does not inherit his grantor's will until death, but in that the heir stands to gain, he "owns" the possessions of the will. So too a Christian, as a son of God, even in this life "owns" *all things* (I Cor 3:21).

Inheriting all things is so captivating we must not let it cloud the fact that not everyone will attain thereto. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things.* Overcoming is man's part of attaining everlasting life, and as the word implies, it is not an easy task. One of the most important and time-consuming duties of the Apostles and early Church ministers was to travel from place to place *confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22). This is no less true today, and as we see the day approaching we should double our efforts, exhorting one another, lifting up the heads of the faint-hearted and encouraging the wavering ones. The Greek word for *overcome* is **nikao**, which means to prevail, conquer, get the victory. It is a strong word, a battleground word, and this is the way the Christian must live.

Revelation 21:7 is the eighth and last time that **nikao** is found in the Book as it relates to the work of the Christian. Each of the seven letters to the churches ends with a special promise to *him that overcometh*. The seven promises are distinctly prophetic of heaven, and each can be found repeated in these last two chapters of the Bible. The list below references the initial occurrence in the section of the seven churches, and its companion verse of this section.

The Ephesians are promised: *to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God* (2:7, 22:2).

To those in Smyrna He says: *he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death* (2:11, 21:8).

Those in Pergamos are told: *him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it* (2:17, 21:5, 22:4).

The faithful in Thyatira are promised: *he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations...And I will give him the Morning Star* (2:26-28, 21:24, 22:5).

The church in Sardis: *he that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels* (3:5, 21:2, 27).

The Philadelphians: *him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name* (3:12, 21:2, 22:4).

The Laodiceans: *to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His Throne* (3:21, 22:5).

The final invitation of the Revelation: *he that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son* (21:7).

## A WARNING FOR THE WEAK

Many will not be found worthy to join that happy crowd in New Jerusalem. These *shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death* (v8). We have seen that it is essential to *overcome* in this life if we are to partake of the good in the next. The *victory that overcometh the world is our faith* (I John 5:4)—not just believing in God, for the *devils also believe, and tremble* (James 2:19). Saving faith is the whole Bible package, a living faith of power, offering our bodies as a *living sacrifice* to God (Rom 12:1) because He has forgiven our sins, even those listed in 21:8. Unforgiven sin is the only thing that will keep one out of heaven.

A sad list of those who will be sent to Hell along with the Devil and his demons is given: *the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars* (v8). Heading the list is a rather surprising group of people: *the fearful* (***deilos***). The word literally means timid, and by extension, faithless. The other two occurrences of this word in the Bible contrast it directly with faith. *And [Jesus] saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm* (Mt 8:26; Mark 4:40). Trusting in Christ to sustain and strengthen us in times of weakness and trial is an essential character trait of the Christian.

Many have been called to give up possessions and even their own lives to gain the one pearl of great price. It is faith in Christ that overcomes fear and empowers martyrs to stand strong in the face of death, and this faith does not go unrewarded (Mt 19:29). In easy America it is often stunning to see how little it takes to bring fearfulness—anti-faith—into the heart of a Christian. When a storm comes and the sea gets rough, it is easy to forget to trust in the One who controls the storm. He may calm the storm with a single word, or He may ask us to demonstrate our faith through the storm. Only a few of the martyrs were miraculously delivered from death, should we expect any different today?

*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind* (II Tim 1:7). What a powerful, cheering verse. We are not helplessly alone; God has given us His Spirit as an anchor of the soul, abolishing fear by faith in Him. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear* (I John 4:18). God has given us the tools to overcome, prevail, and conquer the world and its Beasts. *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:8). The answer is: very little.

The *unbelieving*. These are those who refuse to believe in God and His Word even when all evidence points to its absolute truthfulness. Most atheists have made a rational decision to reject the Bible, not because science has disproved it, but because they do not want to believe what it says about their lives, that they are sinners and must repent and allow the blood of Christ to cleanse them.

The *unbelieving* category also includes those who reject a portion of God's Word. These people do not like something that the Bible says about them or their lifestyle. Rather than change, they will explain it away. It is easy today to find a church who will accept all manner of these "unbelievers." You don't have to travel to a heathen land, or go into the inner city neighborhoods. They are all around us, sitting in church pews across America. This sounds harsh, but we believe it to be true.

*The abominable (bdelusso).* The Greek word comes from *bdeo*, which means to stink. It signifies the disgusting, the detestable, and the abhorrent. It probably refers to those of *reprobate mind* described in Romans 1, doing *things which are not convenient* [improper, shameful, indecent]. *Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them* (Rom 1:28-32). These people have given themselves totally to selfish desires, and are completely polluted by sin. Their thinking has been so corrupted that they hate those who are morally good, whether they profess Christianity or not. Upper society and developed nations are increasingly filled with such militant anti-God people.

*And murderers.* Killers are justly excluded from heaven. This includes those who take the lives of children just before they are born, and those who do not actually carry out murder, but order it done. Some of the worst killers, like Lenin and Hitler, did little killing personally, but at their command millions lost their lives. Abortion is a rising practice among industrialized nations, and the blood of these innocent children cries out to God. It is abhorrent to see human reason stand in the place of God and declare that an innocent baby that is unable to yet choose for itself, must die. Even more repulsive are the doctors and nurses who carry out these murders in spite of the medical professions' Hippocratic Oath, which states that a physician's job is to heal the sick and specifically forbids the practice of abortion. Someday God will hold those who are responsible for these murders accountable for their actions.

*And whoremongers.* The Greek word is  ***pornos***, the masculine equivalent of the *whore* (***porne***) we read about in Chapter 17. It includes adulterers, prostitutes, and all manner of sexual sins. The English word pornography comes from this word, and the Devil has certainly used modern inventions to maximize his wicked attempts to corrupt man with immoral thoughts and acts. (Other verses that have  ***pornos*** include I Cor 6:9; Eph 5:5; and I Tim 1:10.)

*Sorcerers.* The primary meaning of this word ( ***pharmakeus***) is witchcraft, and it is so translated in another notable list of sins: *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like* (Gal 5:19-21). The occult, fortune-telling, communicating with the dead, Satanism, and all other methods that depraved humans use to try to gain supernatural power from evil spirits is included under sorcery. The literal meaning of the word is drugs and poisons, because magicians in those days made great use of powders and smoke-producing chemicals to pretend to have produced a supernatural occurrence for their audience.  ***Pharmakeus*** therefore came to be used figuratively to mean sorcerers. Interestingly, the literal meaning holds special significance for our own times. Mind-altering drugs have become an assistant to every one of the sins listed in Galatians 5. Drug addicts are deep in Satan's control, and most will never escape.

*Idolaters.* These are idol-worshippers and include any kind of worship or reverence to something other than God. The paganism of John's time had a great number of idols and images for worship, and the Roman Catholic Church continued the practice of idol worship, renaming pagan images after Godly saints who had passed away. Shrines and images of all sorts are scattered throughout the world and have greatly polluted the true worship of God. Protestants have erected their own figurative idols that are just as distasteful to God. Materialism, intellectualism, status and fame, sports and amusements, and a host of other idols are worshipped on every day of the week, including Sunday. God is a jealous God, and He will not allow His glory to be given to another, nor His praise to graven images (Ex 34:14; Is 42:8). Anything that we give more time, energy, and devotion than God is



an idol, and idolaters...*shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.*

*And all liars.* Now the axe hits even closer to the heart of the tree. Lying is probably the most universal sin of all, certainly the first recorded in the Bible, when the serpent lied to Eve. And yet the lie was only half untrue. Speaking half-truths with the intention to deceive is also a lie. The Greek word is *pseudes*, and means *false*. Hypocrites—those who are living a lie—would fit well into this definition. Concealed sin will never remain hidden forever. At the worst possible time it will be revealed to the entire world, and will be the evidence that leads to the sentence of *the second death*.

The wicked are given their *part (meros)*, meaning their share or portion, in the *Lake of Fire* and brimstone. From this second death there is no return or hope of recovery. The pictures given in verses 7-8 are starkly drawn. Those on the one hand *inherit all things*; those on the other find their portion in the ever-burning pit of hell. Just one short life on earth will decide which of these pictures you will be an eternal part of.

9. *And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.*

10. *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,*

11. *Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;*

## THE GLORIFIED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The first eight verses of this chapter have given an overview of the remainder of the Book, and John now returns to the primary subject, *New Jerusalem*, the *Lamb's wife*, introduced in verse 2. Verse 9 begins almost word for word like 17:1, *And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment*

*of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.* The contrast is noteworthy. Two visions, one of the great Harlot and the other of the spotless Bride; both are women, both represent the Church. The first is an imposter, an apostate, immoral, and bloodthirsty ally of the Beast. The second is the true Bride, *discreet, chaste, and obedient* (Titus 2:5) and *adorned for her Husband* (v2). They exist together on the earth, both trying to gain human converts for their spiritual masters, but after this life they will be forever separated, the Bride to everlasting mansions of delight and the Harlot to eternal damnation in the *Lake of Fire*. Both are described with symbols of *gold* and *precious stones*, but the Harlot's clothing is earthly and corruptible and cannot keep her from destruction. In contrast, the glorious *holy Jerusalem* is everlasting, and her people *shall reign forever and ever* (Rev 22:5).

John was carried away *in the spirit into the wilderness* to view the Harlot (17:3), but to see the Bride he is carried away *in the spirit to a great and high mountain* (21:10). Many notable spiritual visions took place on high mountains (see Ex 19; Mt 4:8, 17:1), and in a Messianic passage of Isaiah, God calls for Jerusalem to get up on a high mountain and behold their God (Is 40:9). Ezekiel was also taken in the spirit to a high mountain, where he was given a vision of the rebuilt temple. Ezekiel watched as an angel measured Jerusalem and the temple, including its gates, foundations, and walls. John's vision bears only a basic resemblance to Ezekiel's, and the two evidently do not share a similar subject of fulfillment. Jerusalem had been sacked and destroyed by the Babylonians in Ezekiel's day, and he was carried in the spirit from his captivity in Babylon to see a rebuilt city and temple. Years later the vision he saw inspired the returning Jews under Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild and seek their God. Ezekiel's vision had spiritual aspects that were not fulfilled until Christ and His new Covenant of grace extended the Gospel to all people and nations. Though the two have different fulfillments, Ezekiel's vision forms a sort of template for John's vision of Revelation 21.

John is taken to see *the Bride*, but sees instead a *city*; earlier he had been told to behold the *Lion of Judah*, and saw instead a *Lamb as if it had been slain* (Rev 5:5-6). Both are examples of the deep symbolism of this Book. The sight is not contradictory but complementary, symbols representing different aspects of the same subject. John watches as the Bride—pictured as

a beautiful city—descends from heaven, a work of unspeakable beauty and perfection. The Bride represents the purified and glorified Church of Christ. She has been cleansed and perfected by Christ Himself, dressed in beautiful robes of salvation and prepared in minute detail for her marriage to Him. All manner of earthly defects have been taken away, for Christ will *present [her] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that [she] should be holy and without blemish* (Eph 5:27). The redeemed of Christ lift this praise to God: *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels* (Is 61:10).

The woman as a type of the Church appears in the Holy Scriptures long before she is called the *Bride of Christ*. The comparison begins with Eve in the Garden of Eden. God formed the *first Adam* from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. Eve was *taken from Adam's side* to be his perfect companion and bride. They lived together in sweetest harmony in the Garden, with no sin, disappointment, or need of any kind. For some reason Eve left her place at his side, if only for a moment, and in that short time Satan beguiled her, tempted her, deceived her, and slew her spiritually. When Adam knew what she had done, he chose a most noble route. Because he loved her, he ate of the forbidden fruit, and died too. The Scripture says Adam was not deceived, but ate it knowing that he would die (I Tim 2:14). How closely this typifies the relationship of Christ and His Bride! He gave His life willingly to gain her back for Himself. Even in her sin He loved her enough to bear her sins Himself and die. Someday, the two will once again be united in perfect harmony in a Garden far better than Eden. They will walk together in unsurpassable love, oneness of spirit, and knowledge. How incredible that we can be part of that unspeakable experience! That Christ, the Son of God, should want to know me and love me is the ultimate love story of a noble-born prince and a lowly-born maiden.

Of course, Adam was really a man, not God, and he does not represent Christ in every detail. Certain highlights, however, show a form—a shadow of Christ the reality. The pierced side, bearing the penalty for sin undeservedly, the perfect relationship ruined and yet to be regained, these foretell

the Church in the first two chapters of Genesis. Appropriately, their perfect fulfillment is given in the last few chapters of the Revelation, detailing the marriage of Christ to His purchased Bride in heaven. The challenge for us today is to live so as to please Christ, so that He rejoices to love us and take us to heaven to be with Him forevermore.

The *last Adam* died on the cross some four thousand years after Eden, but the analogy is so close it must have been purposeful. Eve was taken from Adam's side as he slept in a *deep sleep*. As Christ's dead body hung on the cross, a soldier pierced His *side*, and there came out *blood and water*. Blood is to be expected in the body cavity, but not water. The medical community has been at a loss to explain water coming from pierced side of Christ. John was the one who saw and recorded the event, and he seems to acknowledge its singularity in that he goes on to reaffirm that *his record is true*, that he really saw what he said he saw, *that ye might believe* (John 19:35). The water is a type of the Word, which, dissembled by the Holy Spirit, has flowed throughout the whole world from Christ until now. *Rivers of living water* give life to a dying, sin-cursed creation.

The Bride (though the symbolism is now *holy Jerusalem*) is descending out of heaven from God (v10), the author and perfecter of her most glorious beauty. She is pictured as filled with His glory and glowing with a most exquisite light (v11). It is not sunlight, which is often harsh and hot; neither is it moonlight, which is too dim. Here the Greek word for light is *phoster*, which is used for luminaries like the sun and moon. The light is likened to that of precious gems emitting a soft, shadowless glow that even imagination falls short of describing. John compares it to the beauty of a *jasper stone, clear as crystal*. The jasper stone was found in various colors like red, green, yellow, and brown. The color of this jasper is not stated, only that it is translucent and beautiful.

There is no distinct symbolism to a jasper stone, though it was one of the twelve gems on the High Priest's ephod (Ex 28:20) and is used in the description of God (4:3). God created Satan in perfection, covering him with precious stones, one of which was the jasper (Eze 28:13). In the next few verses various precious gems are used to describe the heavenly city of New Jerusalem. The chief significance of the many precious stones is to show the

city's transcendent beauty and extreme value; the city will be a showcase of the creativity of God. The beautiful gems also go along with the figure of the Bride adorned for her Husband (see Is 61:10 quoted above).

The passage is highly figurative, and its complete fulfillment is not possible to determine or even understand in this life. The overall picture invokes images of tremendous beauty and costliness as it describes the redeemed and glorified Church of Christ. The walls, foundations, gates, precious stones, and angelic measurements should be understood as contributing to that divine meaning.

Though we cannot truly comprehend the glorified Church in heaven, we will see that the Apostles and Prophets spoke of the earth-bound Church in similar language. The Church is God's *chosen generation*, His *holy nation* (I Peter 2:9), and she is represented typologically by *holy Jerusalem*, *Mount Zion* (21:2). Literalists usually deny this assertion, but the Scriptural facts are overwhelming. The *chief corner stone* laid in *Sion* (I Peter 2:6) was Christ, and His building, *Sion*, is not literal Jerusalem but the Church. *Sion* is an endearing name for Jerusalem used many times by David and the OT prophets. Hebrews 12:22 says that the Christian has *come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*. And in Galatians 4:26 it is the *Jerusalem* above that is the *mother*, or Church, of both Covenants (see 11:1).

Understanding Jerusalem as a type of the Church gives meaning and continuing inspiration to many OT passages like Psalms 48, which pictures God lovingly protecting and blessing *Mount Zion*. The Church is actually made up of three Covenants: the New Covenant of this present age, the Old Covenant of the Mosaic law, and the ancient dispensation of oral commandment (Acts 7:38).

*12. And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:*

*13. On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.*

*14. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

15. *And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.*
16. *And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.*
17. *And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.*
18. *And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.*
19. *And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;*
20. *The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.*
21. *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*

## THE CITY STRUCTURE

Three parts of the city are especially noted: the wall, the foundations, and the gates. All of them are made from a variety of *precious stones*, and each has its own purpose and meaning. The most outstanding features of the city, however, are its size and the extreme costliness of her construction. The city represents the Bride in her eternal home with Christ (v9-10). It is not describing heaven but the Bride, though certain details of heaven are consequently revealed in the vision. John sees her descending from God out of heaven, where she has been perfected and prepared for eternity with Christ. Her glory has been given to her by God, and every part of her has been immaculately



designed and formed. The building materials He has used are the most expensive that human minds can understand. Every detail is lavishly planned and not one element is defective or lacking. Like the spotless white garments of the Bride (19:8), the heavenly city of God is perfect.

No description is given of the palaces and mansions of the city, nor of any part of the immense structure behind the walls, other than that she and her streets are made of pure gold (v18). We see only the foundations, walls, and gates of the city. Literalism here is entirely inadequate, for the features are too few and disconnected to form anything but a mental picture. I had intended to include a drawing of the *Holy Jerusalem* descending from heaven, but finally gave it up when the difficulties of detail and scale were too great to overcome. We can visualize only the dim outline, and that is evidently the way God intended it to be.

Our heavenly future is a mystery while we live in this earthly house of clay. When Paul was caught up into the third heaven, he heard *unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (II Cor 12:4). John sees things here which are not possible for man to comprehend. We understand the form partially; the full knowledge comes only by experiencing heaven ourselves with the glorified Church of Christ.

Consider first the size of the city—over half that of the continental United States but soaring 1,350 miles into the sky. It is so tall that even with the aid of binoculars one could not possibly see the top of it. Moreover, the wall is by comparison so tiny that it would be invisible if one stood back far enough to view the height of the city. Obviously, the walls, gates, and foundations are symbols, not literal protections for a literal city. Moreover, the Bride needs no protection on the newly made heaven and earth. *For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her* (Zec 2:5). If this is true of God's protection of His people on earth, how much more shall He remain faithful in eternity, when Satan and his angels no longer roam the universe?

A 1,800,000 square mile city is mind-boggling, but if we divide its height into 20-foot stories, we get a total floor area of 650 billion square miles, which is 1,200 times larger than the landmass of the earth! Imagine this entire city made of purest gold. The foundations alone are constructed of twelve

different gemstones. The pearls are so big that whole gates are made from a single pearl. The streets of the city are made of gold so purified that it looks like clear glass (v18). What are we to understand from these particulars? Beyond the immediate connotations of priceless value, beauty, purity, and durability, we will see that a common basis can be seen in many Scriptures describing the earth-bound Church.

We will study this passage topically, looking individually at the walls, foundations, and gates of the *holy Jerusalem*. First, we should note the building materials of the city, which are given special attention in this vision. Precious stones and pure gold are the construction materials of choice, and their quantity and diversity are prodigious.

*Precious stones.* Individuals on earth come to Christ *as unto a living Stone... chosen of God, and precious. Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house... acceptable to God by Jesus Christ* (I Peter 2:4-5). In this life we are like individual bricks making up the great building of the Church, *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit* (Eph 2:20-22). But in the glorified life we become purified, *precious stones* building up the city of God to make a beautiful dwelling place for God. *New Jerusalem* is the final manifestation of the Church.

*We are God's building* (I Cor 3:9), and with us He is constructing a structure of unimaginable beauty and wealth. God promises His people: *I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy [walls] of pleasant stones* (Is 54:11-12). While this is figuratively true in His spiritual city today, it will be overwhelmingly fulfilled in spiritual fullness in heaven beyond, *in the day when [the Lord of hosts makes] up His jewels* (Mal 3:17).

*Gold.* Jewels, gems, and precious stones are clearly tokens of value the Apostles and prophets used in speaking about God's people. Gold is also a common symbol, but with a different meaning. Notice that the gold in Chapter 21 is said to be *pure gold*, refined and purified to perfection. Gold has several unique characteristics. It needs to be purified by heating it until it melts. Then the impurities, called dross, float to the surface where they can be

purged off. The longer it is heated and refined, the purer it becomes. Gold is extremely malleable—able to be beaten, molded, and shaped. Pure gold can be stretched so thin that it becomes transparent, and therefore it is used in one-way windows and special reflective surfaces. It is durable to the point of being virtually indestructible, and it will never tarnish, fade, or corrode. Gold often symbolizes the attribute of God's divinity in the Scriptures, especially in the OT tabernacle and temple. In the human experience, gold is often used as an analogy of spiritual purity through trial. *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ* (I Peter 1:7 see also Job 23:10; Lam 4:1-2; Zec 13:9; Mal 3:3; Rev 3:18). The 24 elders had *crowns of gold on their heads* (4:4), a sign of their victory over the world.

The significance of precious stones and gold as building materials in the figurative picture of the glorified Bride of Christ is that they are the best earthly symbols available to represent the perfection and eternity of the Church in heaven. It begins on earth as Christians build up the spiritual temple, and it will continue forever. Paul uses the same analogy of a building to stimulate his followers to build with the best of their abilities: *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is* (I Cor 3:12-13). On that day the overcomers of the Kingdom will become a completely perfect and beautiful *crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God* (Is 62:3).

## THE WALLS

The walls are the first feature of the city about which John comments. It is *great and high*, constructed entirely of rare and beautiful gems (v18), yet when the angel measures them they are found to be only 144 cubits high (about 215 feet) *according to the measure of a man* (v17). By comparison, Herodotus says the walls of ancient Babylon were 350 feet high, though that may have been an exaggerated estimate. *Holy Jerusalem* itself rises 12,000 furlongs high

(about 7 million feet), and therefore towers some 1,350 miles above the wall surrounding it. Consequently, some scholars believe the 144 cubit measurement applies to the width of the wall rather than to its height. Given the fact that width is not mentioned here and height is, this interpretation probably stretches the text too far.

More likely the height of the walls finds its chief significance in the symbolic meaning of 144 as a number. Twice previously in the Revelation we have encountered this number, though both of those times it appeared as 144 *thousand*. The sealed of the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4) and the redeemed standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion (14:1-3) both totaled 144 *thousand*.  $12 \times 12 \times 1000$  equals 144,000. Twelve is the number of God's elect, His chosen people that serve Him on earth and will dwell with Him in heaven. It is the number of justified mankind, much like seven is the number of perfection in God and the purpose of His will. The fact that the wall is *great and high* refers to its importance and nobility, and the Greek words (*megas, hupselos*) are used in this sense elsewhere in the Bible (Luke 16:15; Rom 12:16).

The number twelve appears often in the different features of the city. In fact, no vision of the Revelation bears more frequent use of a single number than this passage describing the city of God. There are *twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve tribes, twelve foundations, twelve apostles of the Lamb, twelve pearls, twelve fruits*, and twelve different precious stones. Additionally, the length of the city is *twelve thousand furlongs*, as are also its *breadth and height*. The walls are the one and only part of the city that a number other than twelve is used in the description, and even then it is directly implied. Twelve times twelve equals 144, the height of the city wall.

In symbolism, multiplying a number by itself seems to be a way of accentuating its significance or greatness. For instance, when John wanted to impress upon his readers the greatness of the multitude of angels he was viewing, he said their number was *ten thousand times ten thousand* (5:11; Dan 7:10). Jesus used an increased multiple to illustrate how often we are to forgive our brother's sins—not seven times seven but *seventy times seven* (Mt 18:22).

References to the number twelve occur exactly twelve times in this passage, if one counts the *length, breadth, and height* as three separate occur-

rences, and includes the 144 cubit height of the wall. The repetition of the number twelve is to emphasize that those in heaven are the chosen of God, the elect of all ages. But why are the city walls not twelve thousand cubits, or maybe 12 furlongs high instead of 144 cubits? The answer to this question we do not pretend to know as absolute truth, but the implications of a low wall in comparison to the immensity of the city should at least be considered. City walls are for the protection and safety of the inhabitants; but the new earth will be a place entirely cleansed from sin and wickedness. Satan and all evil will have been cast into the *Lake of Fire*, and the redeemed will not need to worry about the enemy anymore. The gates of the city will never be shut and only a single angel stands guard at each gate. Walls in heaven thus will have a different purpose than those on earth.

The heavenly wall is a thing of priceless beauty and intricate design, built out of jasper stones, which in ancient time was one of the most precious of gems. Its purpose seems to be a memorial, a reminder of those earth days when God stood as a wall round about His people, protecting them and sheltering them. Isaiah 60 is a beautiful prophecy of the beginning of the New Covenant, when God would bless Zion. The people would praise Jerusalem and would *call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise...In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks* (Is 60:18, 26:1). Walls are used as a symbol of salvation, protection, and safety (Is 54:11, 56:5, 62:6; Jer 1:18; Eze 13:10). Walls about Jerusalem are instruments of protection for those within, while keeping out that which *defileth and worketh abomination* (v27). Walls stop the weak from wandering out into the world where *dogs and murderers* (22:15) lie in wait to trap them. King David said this about Jerusalem: *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem...Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces* (Ps 122). Literal Jerusalem has had no peace, spiritual or physical, since the time of Christ. *Heavenly Jerusalem* is the Christian's home and place of citizenship, being called *The Lord our righteousness* (Jer 33:16).

## THE FOUNDATIONS

The walls of salvation are firmly built upon a spectacular foundation, twelve in all and containing *the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. Each foundation is constructed of a single type of precious gemstone. A wall is only as good as its foundation, and this foundation is sound. *The household of God is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone* (Eph 2:19-20). Jesus' parable of the wise man and the foolish man uses the foundations of a house to illustrate their importance. The wise man built his house on a *rock*, but the foolish man built his on the *sand*. When the winds and rain came, the foundations of the foolish man's house began to wash away, and soon the whole structure collapsed. The leaning tower of Pisa is another example of an inadequate foundation. The weight of this 185' tower is too great for its foundation, and over time it has sunk into the ground 24' and leans 17' to one side. Various steps have been taken to keep the 800-year-old landmark from falling over, and it continues to stand as a monument to ill-planning and miscalculation.

The foundation is the necessary beginning to any building, but it often receives little attention after the building is completed. The craftsmanship and artwork of the roof, walls, and floor is what really draws attention. I Kings 5-7 describes the building of Solomon's temple, and how beautiful each detail was made, but there is only a brief mention of the foundation thereof: *and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house* (I Kings 5:17).

The spiritual foundations upon which *God's building* is being built are no less essential. The testimony and eyewitness reports of the *apostles of the Lamb* substantiate the truth of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection. Without these events being true and believably attested to, Christianity would not exist. Of all the so-called religions of the world, only Christianity is based on facts, events that either did or did not take place. If one believes that Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead to life, made the winds and sea calm with a spoken word, and all the other things written about Him by the Apostles, then he must also accept Christianity as the way to God. Christianity is the only religion that asks its followers to believe events instead of simply the



words of some highly respected man. The events of Jesus' life recorded in the Scripture should build our faith and trust in Him, that He was exactly who He said He was—the Son of God. We also believe and follow His teachings, but without His works to prove who He was, Jesus would be no different than Buddha. But Jesus, and only Jesus, backed up His words with works that only God has the power to do. *These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name* (John 20:31).

Men of high intelligence and renown have studied the Bible, trying to disprove its assertions and trying to find evidence that the resurrection story was invented by the Apostles. All such attempts have failed spectacularly and often lead the sincere skeptic instead to believe its message! Lew Wallace, a skeptic who wrote Ben-Hur after a Christian friend challenged him to disprove the events of Jesus' life, became a believer because of his research. Lee Strobel, a skeptic with a Christian wife, changed his thinking after carefully examining the witnesses of the Bible. His book The Case for Christ, is well-worth reading.

*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (I Cor 3:11). How simply it is said, and yet how profound. On the opposite side, *if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?* (Ps 11:3). The foundation is critical to the construction and longevity of organizations and buildings, and the twelve jewel-garnished foundations of the *apostles of the Lamb* represent the foundational message of Christ as preached by the apostles, missionaries, and ministers of the Word. The word for *apostles* is the standard Greek word used elsewhere for *apostles* (***apostolos***), and means “an ambassador, one sent out.”

The twelve Apostles were men who had seen the Lord and who were chosen by Him to be witnesses of His glory to the world. There are only twelve Apostles, and there will never be any more. Some church groups have instituted a higher order of ministers called apostles in their authority structure. This is a dangerous addition to the Bible method of bishops, elders, and ministers. The Apostles were a selected group of men for a one-time purpose, and though we should be little apostles in that we are ambassadors for Christ, it is wrong to elevate a man to the position of Apostle after the order of Peter, James and

John—men who saw the Lord, lived with Him, and spoke with Him face to face. It should be instructive that the roughly 80 occurrences of *apostolos* in the Scriptures all refer to the twelve Apostles of Christ. A couple occurrences do use the word in a different sense, and those have not been translated *apostle* in most translations (see Heb 3:1; Php 2:25; II Cor 8:23). The Apostle Paul did not live with Christ as the others did, but he did see Him on the Damascus road. In his own words: *And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God* (I Cor 15:8-9). Nevertheless, Paul was called to be an apostle, and was one of the twelve.

The twelve different types of precious stones do not appear to have individual meaning, but taken as a whole they illustrate the preciousness and value that the witness of the Word contributes to the salvation message. The plan of salvation revealed in the NT and preached by the Apostles of the Lamb resembles a foundation upon which man builds with gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, or stubble (I Cor 3:12). It appears that about eight of the precious stones match the 12 gems on the High Priest's ephod.

Abraham *looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Heb 11:10). The *Holy Jerusalem* is that city.

## THE GATES

There are three gates in each of the four walls of the city, making a total of twelve gates. An angel stands by each gate, and inscribed on each gate is one of the names of the tribes of Israel, though they are not listed here as they are in Chapter 7. The gates are made out of pearls, and it appears that the gates on each side are made out of one gigantic pearl (v21). The largest pearl ever found weighs only about three ounces, so a pearl the size of a gate would be impossibly large in nature.

Gates and walls are companions; you can't have a gate without a wall, and the purpose of a gate (or door) is to allow restricted access into a walled place. In ancient times, cities had walls and gates to protect their citizens. The gate of the city was heavily guarded, as it was usually the easiest place for an enemy to break through. It was shut at dusk, and watchmen stood throughout the

night to warn of any approaching enemies. Many battles were fought at the gate, which became representative of the city itself (Gen 22:17; Ex 20:10; Deut 28:52). He who possessed the gate possessed the city. The gates of the city were also a place for people to sit and visit, and to watch travelers entering and leaving the city (Ruth 4:1; II Sam 15:2).

Not everyone, of course, was allowed to enter. Jesus used this figure in His parable of the two gates (Mt 7:13). *Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are* (Luke 13:24-25). Entering the city takes effort, and one must be known within before he is permitted entrance. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on each gate seems to be an allusion to this truth.

Only those who belong in *holy Jerusalem* may enter it: *Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the city* (22:14). They come from the four corners of the world, *from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God* (Luke 13:29). Israel camped by tribes around the tabernacle during the wilderness journey, three tribes on each side. The same picture is given in Ezekiel's vision, where each tribe even had its own gate (Eze 48:31). As in Revelation 7, the tribes of Israel must be understood as symbols representing the full and complete sealed number of the *Israel of God* (Gal 6:16) in heaven.

The gate represents the way or entrance into the Kingdom of heaven, and Jesus is that way. On earth, man can only enter the sheepfold through one gate: Jesus, who said, *I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved* (see John 10:1-15). Noah's Ark of safety had only one door, as did the OT tabernacle and Solomon's temple. However, there are three gates in each wall of the *holy Jerusalem*, which is the heavenly reality illustrated in the earthly *figures of the true* (Heb 9:24). The twelve gates provide unlimited freedom and yet still hint of safety and protection. Figurative usage of gates and doors is especially common in the OT and some other examples can be found in Psalms 24:7, 87:2, 100:4, 118:19; Isaiah 54:12, 60:11,18; 62:10 and Ezekiel 38:11.

Jesus is the *door of the sheep*, the *good Shepherd* that gives His life for the sheep. He knows His sheep and they know His voice (John 10). Jesus is also the *pearl of great price* for which a man gives up everything in order to gain (Mt 13:46). The choice of a *pearl* for the gates is interesting in that it goes deeper than simply being used figuratively in Jesus' parable. Pearls are not natural stones, but are formed inside a clam living in the ocean. The clam develops a pearl as a defense against some foreign object that has found a way inside the clam's body. Pearl farmers have discovered a way to insert a seed pearl inside the clam which then grows larger as the clam ages. Pearls are formed because of a blemish or abnormality that has entered the clam, and are an example of how God can *give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified* (Is 61:3). Jesus was our example in suffering, who has by resurrection now attained the crown and reigns forever in the heavens. Tribulation and toil develop pearls as treasures in heaven.

*Every several gate was of one pearl* (21:21). Does this mean each gate was made of a single pearl, as most new versions translate, or does it mean that the three gates of each side are made from a single pearl, as the KJV indicates? The latter is preferable, for the literal translation is "each one severally was of one pearl." The "severally" is entirely unnecessary if the intention was to say every individual gate was made of one pearl. Some have faulted John's grammar here, but we know that he knew how to use these words correctly because he did so just a few verses later, saying that the Tree of Life *yielded her fruit every [heis hekastos] month* (22:2). Compare this with *every several [ana heis hekastos] gate was of one pearl* (21:21). The little word *ana* is not a common one in the NT, and must have been intentionally added.

The picture of three gates made of one pearl is surely an allusion to the trinity, the mystical 3-in-1 format that cannot be fully understood or described in words. It is an appropriate analogy, seeing that the gate is a symbol for Christ. And now that we have studied in depth the foundations, walls, and gates of the city, we realize that even these are an allusion to the Trinity. The gates, foundations, and walls of the city are deeply rooted in the work

of the Godhead. The gate especially represents the work of God the Son, the wall symbolizes the protection and safety found in God the Spirit, and the foundation represents the stability and wisdom of God the Father.

## THE MEASUREMENTS OF THE CITY

An angel measures the city with a *golden reed*. Remember that back in Chapter 11 John measured the temple and its altar, but was told not to measure the outer court. That figure represented the earth-bound Jerusalem Church, which was not entirely pure. Many of its constituents were unholy Gentiles, sitting in her pews but living as Babylonians at home. By contrast, the *holy Jerusalem* is entirely measured, and she is thoroughly holy, perfect, and beautiful.

In size, there has never been a city as big as this—*twelve thousand furlongs* translates to 1,350 miles wide, 1,350 miles long, and 1,350 miles high. Impressive as this may be, the real significance is with the number twelve, an essential component of the *Bride of Christ*. Twelve is the number of God's election, those who are known of Him and chosen because of their love and obedience to the Divine Word. The twelve thousand furlongs in three dimensions means that the saints of all time are included. A similar analogy was given in Chapter 7, when twelve thousand were sealed from each tribe of Israel.

The city is a perfect cube; *the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal* (v16). Among the many and carefully detailed tabernacles and worship items of the Jewish system there is only one object in the Bible with a similar characteristic, and it is the most sacred and hallowed place of all Scripture—the Holy of Holies within the temple, which measured twenty cubits in all three dimensions (I Kings 6:20). Only the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, and then just once a year. There the presence of God hovered between the wings of the cherubim over the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. A unique figure is here presented: the *Bride of Christ* is linked with the Holy of Holies. Perfected, purified, and glorified she is in the presence of God Almighty, worshipping Him, communing with Him,

and knowing Him. The twelve gates allow free and welcome access into His glorious presence. No longer viewing only a manifestation of His glory, the glorified Church will be able to actually see God and live, being then *able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height* of God's love, mercy, and grace to us (Eph 3:18).

22. *And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*

23. *And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

## NO TEMPLE IN THE CITY OF GOD

There is no temple in *holy Jerusalem*. How does this harmonize with a dozen other verses in the Revelation describing a Temple in heaven? The heavenly Temple is intricately associated with God and His Throne, and we often read how the redeemed will *serve Him day and night in His Temple* (7:15), but John sees no temple in the city of *New Jerusalem*.

Two points must be realized to understand the statement that there is *no temple therein*. First, the picture continues to present the *Bride of Christ*—not heaven—and the Bride is not a temple but a servant and worshipper in the temple. Second, the analogy is to Jerusalem the city, and physical Jerusalem is most notable for Solomon's temple. By contrast, *holy Jerusalem* has *no temple therein* because Jehovah God and Christ the Lamb *are the temple of it* (v22). They are the direct and visible objects of adoration that the earthly temple could only typologically point men to spiritually see and worship. The *true tabernacle is not made with hands* (Heb 8:2, 9:11), and exists in heaven as described elsewhere in the Revelation, whether as a literal building or a spiritual reality we will not know until we arrive there.

The two names of the Godhead used in verse 22 are especially familiar to the people of the two Covenants, *Lord God Almighty* (Jehovah) to those of the Old Covenant, and *the Lamb* to those of the New Covenant. The institution of the New Covenant and abolishing of the Old Covenant saw the physical



OT sacrifices, rituals, and sacred objects for worship fulfilled spiritually in the truths of the New Covenant Church. The Passover, Pentecost, burnt offerings for sin, and many other particulars of the Old Covenant were spiritually fulfilled in Christ, who also became the spiritual High Priest of a mystical temple of believers (I Cor 3:16-17). In eternity, all heaven is a temple in honor and praise of God Almighty.

The city has *no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it* (v23). In deference to other Scripture it is probably best to understand this figuratively (see page 526). One of the chief functions for which the sun and moon were created was to mark *seasons, days* and *years* (Gen 1:14). These are no longer needed in eternity, for there is no time there. We have already quoted from Isaiah 60 to develop the figurative meanings of the walls, gates, and foundations. Revelation 21:23 also comes from Isaiah 60: *The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended* (Is 60:19-20). The subject of Isaiah's prophecy was the coming of Messiah, and the blessings He would bring for His people. John uses many of the same figures of speech in his description of *holy Jerusalem*. Isaiah's prophecies were not physically fulfilled; neither should we expect that John's will either. The picture should be taken as a whole first, and then the details understood to develop the picture.

Jesus is *the true Light of the world* (John 1:12, 8:12). *God is light* (I John 1:5). *The glory of God* lightens the city, *and the Lamb is the light thereof* (21:23). The meaning is more than simply having light in order to see. God is the spiritual sustenance of His people on earth, and in heaven He will continue to uphold all things by the word of His power. He will provide His people with all that they need. He will be their God. Physically, the Sun is the source and sustainer of all life. Without it, the Earth would be desolate and utterly devoid of any form of life. So also God is the source and sustainer of life and hope in *holy Jerusalem*. He will nourish and care for her throughout eternity. The word for *light* in this instance is *luchnos*, translated *candle* in 22:5.

24. *And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.*
25. *And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.*
26. *And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.*
27. *And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

## THE PURITY OF THOSE WITHIN

*The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of [the city], and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.* There has been a lot of wrangling over how to understand this verse, but if one continues to keep in mind that this is not a description of heaven but of the *Bride of Christ* in heaven, the difficulty vanishes. The *nations* (*ethnos*) and *kings of the earth* should not be taken as an unnatural association. The saved of the glorified Church of Christ in heaven include righteous, God-fearing men of authority, and they will walk within the light of the Gospel Church.

Gentiles (*ethnos*) and kings are commonly used by the OT prophets as beneficiaries of the Kingdom of Christ, though always in connection with His first coming. Isaiah 60 has two more verses on this subject: *And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising* (Is 60:3). A similar verse even uses the picture of the continuously open gate in verse 25: *Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought* (Is 60:11). The figurative language as used here conveys the greatness of this city. Many, many are the saved therein—believing Jews and converted Gentiles together making up the *general assembly and Church of the firstborn* (Heb 12:23). Many other OT passages refer to the *nations* or *Gentiles*

(same Hebrew word) entering the Kingdom, and include Psalms 72; Isaiah 2:2; 66; and Zechariah 2:11.

The statement that the honor and glory of nations and kings will enter the city should not be thought to refer to an unholy, selfish, and earthly honor. Verse 27 is clear that nothing of that sort will be permitted within. No defiling attitudes, hypocrisy, or abomination of any kind are allowed inside the city. All honor and glory will be in their originally pure and righteous form, as they were before Satan corrupted them. The Kingdom spans a broad cross-section of humanity: kings will be there, and servants too; ministers and babes in Christ. It is especially inspiring to see a man of great authority and power acknowledge his humanity and insignificance before God and recognize that his earthly power is a responsibility—not a privilege—from God Himself. In *holy Jerusalem* the earthly arrangements may often be reversed, and the man of low estate may be elevated beyond the once honorable earthly individual.

The imagery of the continuously open gates is two-fold. First, it gives a sense of safety. There is no enemy to fear, no inside or outside threats to be concerned about. There are no watchmen on the walls, and only a single angel stands guard at each gate, more as a welcoming figure than as a man of war. Second, the open gate conveys the idea of freedom for the inhabitants of the city. Free to come in and go out (Mic 4:2), to do whatever one desires to do, for there will be no temptation in heaven, no impurity of attitude, no sin of any kind. Those devilish inventions will have been entirely purged from the soul and spirit, and there is no possibility that they could return.

The *book of life* is a popular symbol in the Revelation, and appears exactly seven times in the Book (3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15, 21:27, 22:19). It is sobering and appropriate that within this wonderful passage of eternity with Christ a warning is also given. Not all will be allowed inside the city, only those whose names are recorded in that all-important *book of life*. All others will have their part in the eternal *Lake of Fire*. There is no possibility of one more chance or a last-minute commitment. Those who die estranged from Christ *shall in no wise enter therein* (v27). As the tree falls, so shall it lie—forever.

# REVELATION CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



Chapter 22 concludes the last section of the Revelation (20:1-22:5) and then provides some final words and warnings from the Angel of the Lord. The last verse of the Bible ends like an epistle: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen.* A fitting end to one of the most evangelistic books of the Bible, for the message and purpose of the Revelation is far more than foretelling the future. The visions present in beautiful pictorial detail the two gates, the two ways, and the two destinations. *The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come, enter our gate, travel our way, and arrive in heaven at life’s end.”* The call goes out into all the earth—the Church of Christ will overcome the world by the power of the Spirit.

1. *And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*
2. *In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and*

*yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

3. *And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:*
4. *And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.*
5. *And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.*

## SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR ETERNITY

The heavenly theme continues, but the imagery of *holy Jerusalem* is ending, and now we see a little about how things will be on *the new earth*, the eternal dwelling place of the saints in light. The primary subject is still the glorified Church, but more about her heavenly experience is revealed. We are not at liberty to insist that the details presented here must exist physically in heaven exactly as described. They may, and we would no doubt be happy with them, but we are more inclined to believe that these details should be understood spiritually.

Spiritual fulfillments are very common in figurative, prophetic language. For example, the throne of David was prophesied to last forever, but David's physical lineage died out over a thousand years ago. However, Jesus took the throne of David and reigns forever in heaven, spiritually fulfilling the prophecies (I Kings 2:45; Is 9:7; Ps 132:11; Luke 1:32; Acts 2:29f). The prophecy that Abraham would be a father of many nations was fulfilled physically, but it was only his spiritual seed that inherited the promises. Many of the OT sacrificial details were fulfilled in the spiritual accomplishments of Christ, things that were misunderstood until He revealed them to the Apostles after His death and resurrection. One of the last recorded statements of Jesus confirms this: *And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me* (Luke 24:44).

We therefore believe that the prophecy of the *New Jerusalem* will be fulfilled in the spiritual realm, which we cannot understand presently. The pictures of heaven as a physical place help us understand how wonderful it will be.

The translators disagree on how to translate verses 1-2. There are two differences—one concerning the location of the Tree of Life, and one concerning its fruit. Compare the two options:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the Throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month (NIV).*

*And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out of the throne of God. In the middle of the street, and also on both sides of the river, was planted the tree of life, which yielded twelve different fruits every month (modified KJV).*

The KJV has the *Tree of Life* planted down the middle of the street, while the NIV, NASB, etc has the *river* flowing down the middle of the street. Additionally, the KJV has the Tree of Life bearing 12 different fruits every month, while the other versions imply that the tree bears the same kind of fruit, but twelve times a year. Regardless of which version one reads, the overall picture is unchanged. There is, however, a foundational passage from which the symbolism of this passage has been taken, and studying it will help form a clearer meaning.

We have already referred to Ezekiel's last vision of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem and the temple. Within that vision, Ezekiel sees a river of water flowing out from under the threshold of the temple door. The water begins as a trickle, but as it flows out into the country the water deepens, first ankle-deep, then knee-deep, waist-deep, and finally too deep for wading—swimming waters. The waters produce abundant life and health—fish are plentiful and everywhere the waters go the land is healed, even the *sea is healed*. On either side



of this river grow trees of every description that bear their fruit every month. They provide so much fruit that it cannot all be eaten. The leaves never fade and even have medicinal use (see Ezekiel 47:1-12).

The apparent meaning of Ezekiel's vision concerns the first coming of Christ and His saving word of grace. The water of life flows out through the world, beginning with a trickle at first, and growing until the whole world has been affected by its message. There are still *miry places* and *marshes* that *shall not be healed* (Eze 47:11), but all those who live by its banks are spiritually blessed beyond all expectations (Eph 3:20). Men and women grow into spiritual giants, bearing the fruits of the Spirit and healing the lost that respond in faith. The conquering Kingdom of Christ is the obvious fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision, riding out on white horses with its message of victory.

Revelation 22 is the culmination of Ezekiel's vision, the result and final fulfillment of the earth-bound Church's victory. John provides the beautiful ending to this long story of love, blessing, and healing. There are subtle differences in the two visions. The trees in the heavenly vision, growing in profusion on both sides of the river, are all of one kind—*the Tree of Life*, while the trees along Ezekiel's river of God are of many different kinds. Moreover, the river that once trickled out of the earthly sanctuary now flows out of the Throne in heaven, and the waters do not grow deeper as they flow outward. However, the fruit is still produced monthly, and the leaves still heal the *nations* (*ethnos*).

A river, or fountain, is often symbolic of spiritual life and nourishment from God (see glossary). The heavenly river is in the purest and clearest form ever known. Everywhere it flows it gives life—spiritual life. *For the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters* (7:17). It is a beautiful river, *clear as crystal* (Gk—bright). It does not originate from the earth, as the Edenic river once did, but from the Throne of God, a figure which speaks of the special presence of God in heaven. David wrote: *There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved* (Ps 46:4-5). A river as a symbol of God's sustaining grace and salvation can also be seen in passages like Zechariah

14:8, Joel 3:18, and Jeremiah 17:13. Jesus gives *living water* to those who ask Him, and He is the source of that spiritual life (John 4:10-15).

The trees along the river are called *the Tree of Life*, a specific tree mentioned only in a couple other passages of the Bible. The *Tree of Life* grew in the Garden of Eden, and Adam ate its fruit until the time that sin entered the world and man died spiritually. After sin, God did not allow Adam to eat from the *Tree of Life* because it gave perpetual spiritual life to all who ate its fruit (Gen 2-3). Eternity will see the *Tree of Life* restored and forever accessible to the resurrected saints of the Kingdom. It will be found throughout the city, down the middle of its streets and on both sides of its river, and the saints may freely eat of its fruit. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God* (Rev 2:7).

Trees are often used as symbols of righteous men (Ezekiel 47 is one example). The *Tree of Life*, however, is a specific tree with its own symbolic meaning. The *Tree of Life* in Eden points to the Cross, the only mechanism by which one can attain to spiritual life. The remedy for sin—*the healing of the nations*—is found in Christ, *who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed* (I Peter 2:24). The *Tree of Life* in Paradise is a touching reminder of the great sacrifice of Christ in purchasing His Bride, and the abundance and variety of its fruit speaks of the marvelous and bountiful blessings He will give to all those who have overcome the world.

## NO CURSE THERE

*And there shall be no more curse* (v3). The Fall of Man resulted in The Curse (Gen 3:17), and all creation now labors under the curse of sin until the end, when it will be purged by fire. God will then reverse the Devil's curse, and He has already begun the work within us: *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree* (Gal 3:13). *No more curse* is a simple statement with the amazing implication that the most universal of all laws, the law of entropy, will be reversed. Death will be stopped, the rule of order to chaos undone,

and time, in effect, will stand still forever. The question has been asked if time literally ceases to exist in eternity, or if time is simply rendered irrelevant by the fact that nothing will ever die or age. The answer is not found in the Scriptures. Notice that the Tree of Life gives its fruit every month, a timely interval. Man cannot comprehend an existence without time, but God lives outside of time.

No *curse* leads to a whole lot of other no's in heaven. No *hunger*, no *thirst*, no *heat*, no *death*, no *need of the sun*, no *night*, no *sorrow*, no *crying*, no *pain*, no *tears*. It has been said that heaven is noted as much for what will not be there as for what will. The earthly pains and struggles brought by sin will *be no more*.

The *Throne of God and of the Lamb* is in *holy Jerusalem* (v3). Here is a figure of oneness unparalleled: the Lamb of God and the Bride of Christ in perfect fellowship and love. His servants *shall see His face* and *serve Him*, and His name of ownership shall be in their *foreheads* (v4). Those who belong to Satan were also marked on the forehead (13:16), so there are only two marks that show your eternal destiny (2:17; 3:12; 7:3 14:1,9; 20:4). The name of Christ on His servants' foreheads illustrates that He knows His sheep. He will not forget so much as a single lamb when the day of ingathering arrives.

*The Lord God giveth them light* (v5). This verse is a companion to 21:23. Light was the first thing that God created, and is essential for human life. The structure and makeup of light remains a mystery to scientists. God also created darkness, and dwells therein (I Kings 8:12; Ps 18:11; Is 45:7). Darkness is therefore not an evil of itself, though it is often used representatively of wicked deeds. Light reveals the sinful deeds done in secret (I Cor 4:5).

*And they shall reign forever and ever* (v5). So ends the vision of the *New Jerusalem* began in 21:1.

6. *And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.*

7. *Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*

8. *And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.*
9. *Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.*

## THE ANGEL ENDS THE VISION

As the vision before John's eyes fades away, the angel showing him these heavenly wonders gives some final warnings and affirmations to the beloved Apostle. First, he affirms that what John saw is *faithful and true*—it is trustworthy and genuine. The plan of God is sure, and it will *shortly be done*. The same Greek is translated *shortly come to pass* in 1:1 (*tachos ginomai*). The angel's attestation applies to the whole Book, and not just this final vision, for the last verses of the Revelation form an appropriate ending to the Bible.

*Behold I come quickly.* The straightforward meaning is that Christ is returning soon. Two thousand years have passed since John recorded the words of the angel. Many have given up hope, and others scoff at the promise of His coming. But if *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years*, then *quickly* could be 5,000 years (II Peter 3:8). This is the first of three times in the next 13 verses that Christ warns that He will *come quickly*, and the phrase could be translated, *Behold I come suddenly* (see pages 32 and 80).

A blessing is promised to those that *keep the sayings of the prophecy of this Book*, and a curse will fall on those who don't (v19). To *keep the sayings* is to read and obey the commandments of Christ—not just those in the Revelation, but in all the Scriptures.

The prophecy ends much as it began, with a last look at the exalted Christ, reigning all-supreme in heaven and coming soon for those who He has purchased with His own blood. As John realizes that the powerful Revelation is over, he prostrates himself at the feet of the angel. "Don't worship me," the angel quickly says, "Worship God."

The angel may be a member of the symbolic group of 24 elders, and therefore a *fellowservant* of John. The same thing happened back in 19:10. There

it seemed that John was simply overcome with excitement at what he was seeing—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here he is overwhelmed by the power and scope of the great vision that he has been granted to see and record. Did John mistake the angel for Christ? Surely not, but why else would he fall in worship before him? Whatever the reason, the lesson for us is that we are called to worship God. Angel worship is no less than idol worship.

*10. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.*

*11. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*

*12. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

*13. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.*

*14. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

*15. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*

## THE PROPHECY IS FOR NOW

The angel instructs John to leave the book unsealed. This is evidently meant to contrast to Daniel's vision, which was to be sealed up because it applied to a time distant to him (Dan 12:4-9). John's vision is for immediate usage, *for the time is at hand* (see 1:3). The Kingdom of Christ still rides the white horse, but the red, black, and pale horses are growing in power. Soon the end will come, but when? It could be in our own lifetime, or it may not be for another thousand years. Prophecy tells us only that He *comes quickly*, and that *the time is at hand*. The conditions of the world are certainly ripe for

judgment, and whether it will be final judgment is not the important issue. Being ready to go out and meet the Bridegroom is what we must do, and we know not if He will come *at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning* (Mark 13:35).

*He that is unjust let him be unjust [adikeo] still* (or, *even more*). The same word is translated *hurt* in 7:2, 9:10, 9:19, and 11:5. It means to wrong someone physically or emotionally. The *filthy* are the morally *filthy*, who have not kept their garments clean. Both the *unjust* and the *righteous* will remain so in character after His coming. Their states are fixed forever; *in the place that the tree falleth, there shall it be* (Ecc 11:3). *Let him be unjust still* is not a command but a statement of fact (Eze 3:27). The verse clearly describes the unchangeable nature of man's soul once physical death overtakes him. It also depicts in general the earthly continuance of the good man and the evil. The evil man usually grows more evil and calloused to his wickedness, *but the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day* (Pro 4:18). Sometimes the wicked man repents of his evil ways, and sometimes the righteous man *that was washed [returns to] wallowing in the mire* (II Peter 2:22). *No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God* (Luke 9:62).

The eternal states of the righteous and wicked are further delineated in verses 14-15. Those who *keep His commandments* are given the right to eat of *the Tree of Life* within the city. *Without*, in the regions of hellish torment, are the *dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers*, etc (see 21:8). *Dogs (kuon)* are used figuratively for wicked men elsewhere in the Bible (see Mt 7:6; Php 3:2). The Jews called all men who were uncircumcised, *dogs*, because the dog was an unclean animal to them.

*Behold I come quickly*. The second of three times we read the phrase in this passage. While it holds ominous warning for the *unjust* and *filthy*, it is a wonderful promise for the *righteous* and *holy*. The seventh and last beatitude of the Revelation is in verse 14: *Blessed are they which do His commandments*. The riches of the city will be given them; where, as David said, *in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore* (Ps 16:11). This is one blessing nobody wants to miss. It inspires the inner will to put away the old man, to throw aside the weight of sin, and to fight the good



fight of faith so that in the end we might be found worthy to see Him who is all-worthy of our devotion.

*I am Alpha and Omega.* Refer to 21:6.

*16. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.*

*17. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

*18. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:*

*19. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

## THE UPWARD CALL OF THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

Jesus is the author and originator of the Revelation. He has sent His angel to reveal things that the Church should expect to happen during the time between His earthly appearances. She was told to expect persecution, affliction, and hatred from the outside, and that has certainly been the case. Someone has said that the Church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.

The Church was also told to expect—from within—false prophets, deception, lying wonders, and apostasy. She was reminded often to look heavenward, to keep the eternal goal ever in mind. Babylon, under Satan's control, offers to the Church the kingdoms of the world if only she will bow down and worship wickedness.

The Church has not been left in the dark for the last 2,000 years. Christ has sent His angel, and she knows what to expect while the King is away. There is no excuse to fall captive to Babylon, or to follow the deceits of the False Prophet, or to admire the hedonism of the Beast. The Church has been

warned ahead that these things would take place so that she would be ready for their attacks. Christ has given this warning to her in love, to encourage the saints of the Kingdom to stand true to Him through good times and evil. It is sad that many churches today have robbed the Revelation of this purpose, which we believe to be so clearly evident. Dispensationalism claims that Chapters 4-19 are not for the Church, but for Israel. Sixteen chapters are thus declared off-limits for any application for the Christian: sixteen chapters containing the very Church-subjects we have listed above. Surely verse 16 applies to the whole of Revelation when it says, *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.*

*I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star* (v16). Salvation is of the Jews. After Jesus overcame the world and Satan in this life, He ascended to God and took the throne of David (in the spiritual sense) and rules thereon now in the heavens. Acts 2:29-36 explains this taking of the Davidic throne by Christ, and this *Throne of the Son... is for ever and ever* (Heb 1:8). (See page 110 for the significance and symbolism of Christ being the root of David.)

Verse 17 is a commentary on the covenant relationship between God and man effecting salvation. God calls to man, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.”

Man replies, “Yes, God, I want that rest. Come, come into my heart and soul.”

Salvation is a reconciliation of two estranged parties—God and man. Full and true reconciliation requires commitment from both sides in deed and action, not a meaningless vow in word only.

A most solemn warning is given to those who would *add* to the word of God, or *take away* from it (v16-17). The warning is applicable not only to the Revelation, but to the entire Bible.

*20. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly.  
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

*21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*