



"The Harlot Astride the Beast" by Lucas Cranach

The Sixth Vision

The Downfall of Babylon the Great and the Defeat of the Antichrist - Revelation 17:1 - 19:21

The Great Harlot (Revelation 17:1-18)

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." Then the angel carried me away

in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY - BABYLON THE GREAT - THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven



"The Harlot Upon the Beast" - Luther Bible Woodcut

and is going to his destruction. The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom but for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers.” Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leaving her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” - The judgment of the beast and his kingdom, Babylon the Great, was the subject of the three final scenes in the vision of the seven angels with the seven bowls. That topic is now expanded and explained in the new vision which follows. God’s people had longed and prayed for the day when the righteousness of God would be vindicated in the destruction of evil and now those prayers will finally be answered. Throughout the ages wickedness had maintained the pretense of victory, boastfully proclaiming its power. Now that pretense will be revealed once and for all. Revelation’s pattern of interlocking visions continues as the sixth vision is introduced by *“one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls.”* The linkage serves to emphasize the role of the sixth vision as an expansion of its predecessor. In the typical manner of apocalyptic literature the angel narrates the details of the scene and explains its symbolism (cf. Revelation 5:5; 7:13). The wording of the angel’s invitation to John - *“Come, I will show you”* is identical to that used by the angel in Revelation 21:9 to introduce *“the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* This is only the first in a series of parallels which clearly indicate the intended contrast between the true church - the bride - and the anti-church - the prostitute. The latter is a deliberate parody and perversion of the former - its opposite in every way. The prostitute is the counterpart and the opponent of the bride. The angel promises to show John *“the punishment of the great prostitute.”* The Greek noun used in this phrase is the legal term *“krima”* which refers both to the pronouncement of a verdict and the implementation of the sentence which results from that verdict, thus the NIV’s translation *“punishment.”* The object of this



"Harlot Babylon" by Albrecht Dürer



*“The Harlot - the Mother of Heresy”
17th Century Engraving*

punishment is identified as **“the great prostitute”** (Greek - *“tes pornes tes megalas”*). In Revelation 14:8, Babylon was accused of leading all the nations to imbibe **“the maddening wine of her adulteries.”** The Greek noun used in that instance was *“pornia”* which is a general term describing sexual sin of every sort and description. The word **“prostitute”** (Greek - *“pornes”*), one who offers sexual favors in return for payment, is drawn from the same root word. Cultic prostitution was a common feature of the fertility religions of the Biblical world. As previously noted (cf. pp. 314, 324) the Old Testament often used adultery and prostitution as a image for the spiritual unfaithfulness of idolatry. The prophet Isaiah lamented the unfaithfulness and idolatry of Jerusalem with these words: **“See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She was once**

full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her - but now murderers!” (Isaiah 1:20) Jeremiah used the same imagery to describe the Israelite worship of Baal and Asherah in the oak groves and the high places:

“Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, “I will not serve You!” Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute...You have lived as a prostitute with many lovers - would you now return to Me? Declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1)

The depiction of the pseudo-church as a prostitute serves to emphasize both her attractiveness and her corruption. The contrast between the image of the alluring



"The Harlot Upon the Beast" by Jean Duvet



"The Whore of Babylon" by Hans Holbein

prostitute and the pure modesty of the virgin bride which will represent the true church (cf. Revelation 19:7) could not be more striking. Beneath the deceptive veneer of her beauty lurks the ugly reality of falsehood and death. The anti-church looks genuine, but it is not. This harlot is further identified as *"the great prostitute"* to stress her connection to *"Babylon the Great."* John adds one more detail to strengthen the Babylon link still more - *"the great prostitute who sits on many waters."* The phrase is drawn from Jeremiah 51:13 where the prophet describes the people of Babylon as *"the people of Babylon, you who live by many waters and are rich in treasures."* Jeremiah's reference is to the River Euphrates and the complex system of canals and irrigation ditches which the Babylonians had constructed to draw the water of the river into their fields and city. The angel will later explain that the *"many waters"* in this scene are a symbol of the nations and peoples of the earth (cf. Revelation 17:15).

The Great Prostitute is yet another symbolic representation of the beast from the land in Revelation 13. Revelation 13 presents the Anti-Christ, and all the anti-Christ of this world from two perspectives. The first beast, the beast from the sea, represented the Anti-Christ and the anti-Christian powers brazenly and boastfully flaunting their strength to coerce the obedience and obeisance of mankind. The second beast, the beast from the land, revealed the more subtle, devious side of the Anti-Christ and his works. The creature with the outward appearance of a lamb but the voice of the dragon (Revelation 13:11) showed the devil at work not in overt persecution but in internal subversion within the church itself, always carefully concealed beneath a mask of piety. The beast from the land was not what he appeared to be. Behind the

false facade of the lamb lurked the deadly jaws of the dragon. Deception is the essence of his being. The masks behind which he conceals his menace are constantly changing in the imagery of Revelation. First he is the lamb/beast (Revelation 13;11-18); next he appears as the false prophet (Revelation 16:13); and now he is presented as the harlot of Babylon. The shifting disguises signal the deceptiveness of our foe.

“With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” - Unlike the true church which must endure rejection and persecution, the false church achieves widespread consistent success. *“Until God’s judgment at the End, the pseudo-church, which appears to be beautiful and attractive (the harlot), will be accepted and honored by the world, for she flatters and encourages the lifestyles of the ungodly.”* (Brighton,



“John Is Shown Harlot Babylon” by Hans Burgkmair



“The Whore of Babylon” by Albert Birkle - 1945

p. 437) The language of the first phrase *“With her the kings of the earth committed adultery”* is similar to that of Isaiah 23:17 where the prophet says of the city of Tyre: *“At the end of the seventy years, the Lord will deal with Tyre. She will return to her trade as a prostitute and will commit adultery with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.”* Isaiah uses the imagery of prostitution and adultery to characterize the vast commercial empire of the great Phoenician trading city. John’s use of the same imagery here adds an economic connotation to the picture of immorality and idolatry already depicted. The second phrase - *“the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries”* is, once again an allusion to Revelation 14:8 -

“Babylon the Great which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” (Cf. Jeremiah 51:7) The prostitute is not only corrupt but corrupting. She spread her wickedness throughout the world, an intoxicating and immoral influence upon all of the powers and authorities of this world. The mindlessness of evil, which abandons common sense, reason, and decency in the desperate pursuit of selfish, sensual satisfaction is presented as the drunkenness of *“maddening wine.”*

“Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY - BABYLON THE GREAT - THE MOTHER OF

PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” - John reports that ***“The angel carried me away in the Spirit.”*** Revelation refers to the Spirit’s influence upon the revelator four times. In Revelation 1:10 and 4:2 he is said to be ***“in the Spirit;”*** and here in 17:3 and later in 21:10 he is ***“carried away by the Spirit.”*** These references may indicate that at times during the inspiration of this unique book the power of the Holy Spirit came upon John in such a way that he not only observed his visions but was enabled to enter and experience them. (Cf. Ezekiel 8:3; 11:24; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

The desert setting of the next scene recalls Isaiah’s vision of judgment upon Babylon - ***“An oracle concerning the desert by the sea: Like whirlwinds sweeping through the southland, an invader comes from the desert, from a land of terror.”*** (Isaiah 21:1) It also serves to place the harlot in the same environment as the woman who represents the true church in the earlier vision of the Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12). Grant Osbourne offers this summary of the significance of ***“the desert”*** in Scripture:

“In Scripture a ‘desert’ can be used positively as a place of comfort and revelation (Exodus 19; 1 Kings 19:4-6; Isaiah 40:3; Ezekiel 34:25; Mark 1:35,45; 6:31-35) or negatively as a place of testing and devastation (the forty years in the wilderness; Psalm 95:7-11; Isaiah 1:7; 35:25; Jeremiah 51:36; Matthew 4:1; Hebrews 3:8,17). In Revelation, the desert is positive in 12:6,14, where the woman finds a place of refuge from the dragon in the desert, and negatively here, where it is become the location of Babylon the Great, which will become ‘a home for demons’ (18:2; for deserts as the home of demons see Isaiah 13:21; Tob. 8:3; Matthew 12:43). (Osbourne, p. 610)

“There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast...” - The harlot who had been seated upon the many waters which represented the nations of men is now depicted astride ***“a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.”*** This is the first beast of Revelation 13, the beast from the sea. The description here provided is virtually identical to that of the sea beast (cf. Revelation 13:1-3) John provides one significant additional detail. The color of the beast is ***“scarlet,”*** the color of the dragon (cf. Revelation 12:3). Scarlet is the color of Rome, royalty and royal power. ***“Kokkinos,”*** the Greek word used here, also describes the royal robe which the soldiers mockingly placed upon Jesus during the torture which accompanied His trial (cf. Matthew 27:28). Scarlet further denotes luxury and extravagant wealth. The harlot is arrayed in ***“purple and scarlet”*** to



*“The Rise and Fall of the Harlot Upon the Beast”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

indicate her great wealth and power. In Revelation 18:12, the purchase of *“purple and scarlet cloth”* is cited to illustrate the rich prosperity of fallen Babylon. In the more general symbolism of Scripture scarlet is the color of sin and corruption (cf. Isaiah 1:18)

In the visions of the beasts from the sea and the land (Revelation 13) the beast from the land was presented as the servant of the beast from the sea. Now the roles are reversed. The beast from the land, in the guise of the harlot, sits astride the beast from the sea, suggesting mastery and control. This interchange of roles further reinforces the view that the two beasts are not separate and distinct creatures at all, but rather different dimensions of the same reality. The beasts represent the Antichrist and all the anti-Christian forces of this

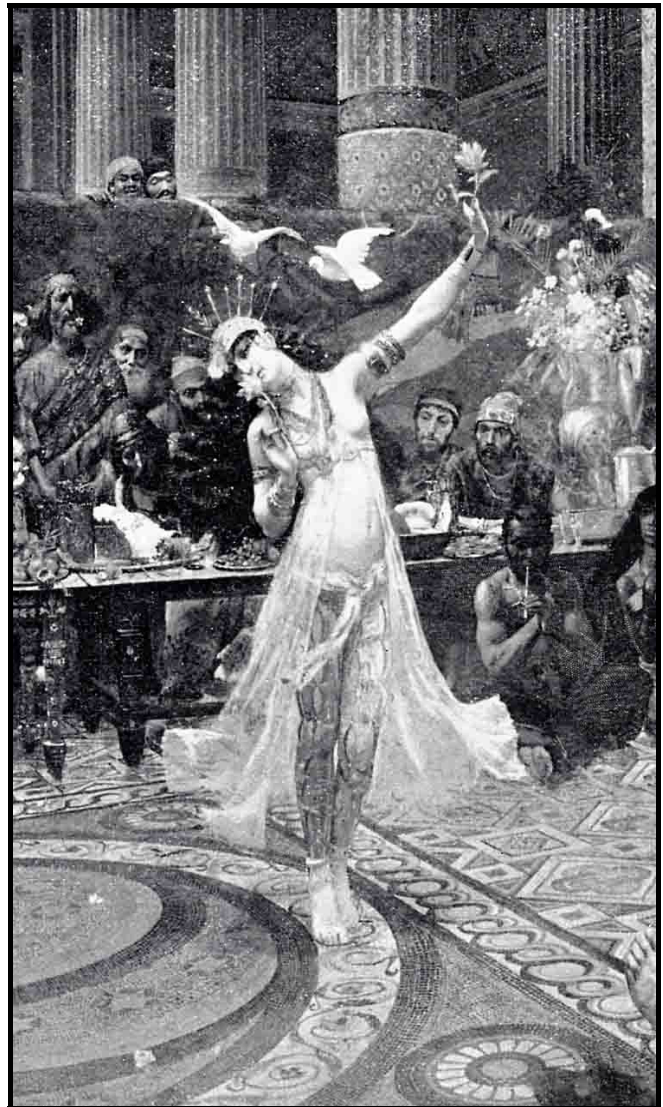
world. The beast from the sea presents the cultural and political aspect of the anti-Christian attack while the beast from the land stresses the Anti-Christ’s assault within religion and the church. Our foes are relentless in their opposition to the true Christ and His Church. But while their opposition is constant their tactics are ever changing to meet the needs of the moment. The goal is always the same, but the means used to achieve that goal - political, military, social, economic, theological or ecclesiastical - are adjusted as necessary to accomplish that which the dragon above all else - the

destruction and damnation of mankind.

The scarlet beast is “*covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.*” In his earlier appearance, the beast’s blasphemous names were limited to his seven heads (cf. Revelation 13:1); they now cover his entire body. The expansion serves to intensify the message that blasphemy is the characteristic activity of the beast. The beast’s seven heads signify his perfect craftiness and cleverness while his ten horns represent governmental and political power (cf. p. 270). Many commentators also view the combination of seven and ten in this context as an allusion to Rome, the city built upon seven hills, and to the ten original imperial provinces of the Roman Empire.

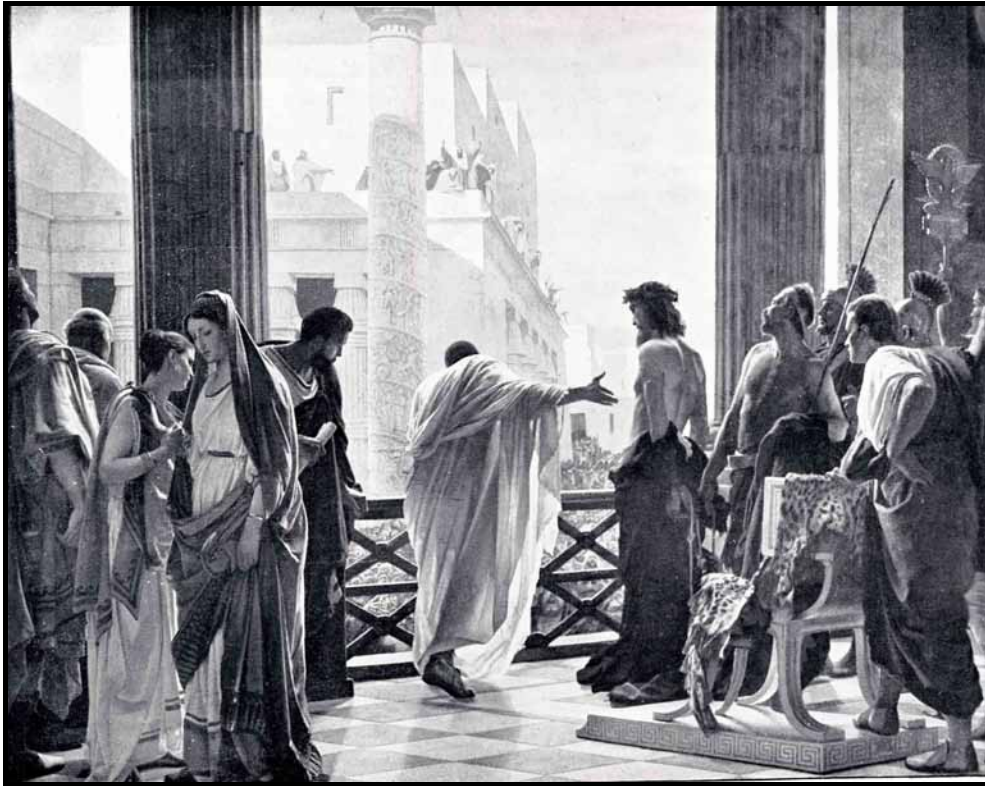
“The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.” -

The harlot is clearly a figure who celebrates her wealth and power. She flaunts her riches before the world in an extravagant and profligate lifestyle which only serves to arouse the admiration and envy of the powerful. From the colors of her clothing to the richness of her elaborate jewelry everything in the appearance of this figure sends the message of self-indulgence and success. “*Purple*” cloth was associated with royalty in the ancient world and remains so today. Purple material was extremely expensive, its dye marketed exclusively by the city of Tyre produced from two species of shellfish which lived along the Phoenician coast. “*Scarlet*” cloth was also synonymous with luxury and wealth, its deep red color derived from the juice of the rare Kermas berry (thus



“Salome Dancing Before the King in the Garb of a Temple Prostitute” by George Rochegrosse

the Greek term - “*kokkinon*” - “*scarlet*”). The Greek text emphasizes the tasteless excessiveness of the harlot’s jewelry by the double repetition of the word gold in the original text - literally - “*and was made gold with gold*” (Greek - “*kechrysomene chrysiō*”). Add to all this the extravagance of an abundance of precious stones and the picture of a prostitute plying her trade is complete. Jeremiah’s tragic image of Israel as the *devastated one*? ***Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain, your lovers despise you; they seek your life.***” (Jeremiah 4:30) In stark contrast, the pure bride of the Lamb is simply dressed in “*fine linen, bright and clean.*” (Revelation 19:8)



“Ecce Homo” - Pilate Presents Christ Before the Mob With the Crown of Thorns and the Purple Robe by Ciseri

“She held a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.” - The seductive nature of this temptress is effectively represented by the golden goblet she holds in her hand. As previously noted, the image is drawn from Jeremiah 51:7 - ***“Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord’s hand: she made the whole world drunk. The nations drank her wine, therefore they have now gone mad.”*** Like everything else about the harlot, the golden goblet is a lie. Its outward

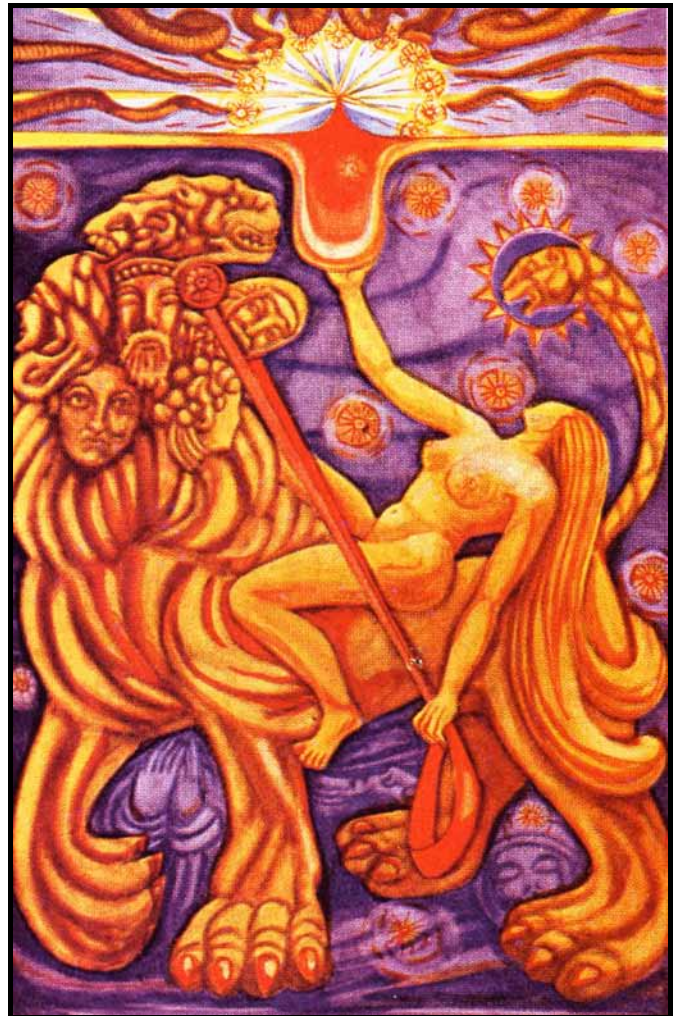
appearance seems to enhance her royal regalia, the image of her wealth and power. But within the golden cup there is only corruption, contamination and filth.

“A “golden cup” invites and entices to drink, for who would offer anything but the most precious drink in a golden cup? Indeed, in such a cup the antichristian seduction is served, and the earth’s dwellers drink to drunkenness. There is the gold of exquisite poetry and prose in the whore’s literature; the chased gold of her seductive science; the exquisite cup of her philosophy; the brilliance of her music and entertainment. Extend the list yourself. Yet within “abominations,” “the unclean things of the great whore’s whoring.” (Lenski, p. 495)

The golden goblet contains a hellish brew of idolatry and blasphemy. The language of the text is most emphatic. **“Abominable things”** are those things which are detestable, absolutely intolerable to the holiness and righteousness of God. The term is characteristically used in the Old

Testament in reference to the worship of demons and idols (i.e. Deuteronomy 18:9; 29:17; 32:16; 1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:2; 23:24; Ezekiel 8:6,9,13,16,17; 11:18; 14:6; 16:2; 20:7,8). **“The unclean things of her fornications”** reiterates the point. This is also language that applies to cultic prostitution and idolatry.

“This title was written on her forehead...” - The prostitutes of Rome identified themselves to their prospective clients by wearing their names on their foreheads. In the same way the Great Harlot of John’s vision reveals her true identity and nature by the inscription which she bears. The inscription begins with the word **“MYSTERY.”** This term refers to that which is secret or concealed, a truth which can only be known by revelation from God. Its use here indicates the need for divine



“The Woman Upon the Beast” by Modern Occultist Aleister Crowley -1944

assistance in deciphering the symbolism of the Harlot - Babylon the Great. It suggests once again the deceptiveness which is to be expected in all that pertains to the Anti-Christ and his realm. St. Paul uses the same word in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, where he warned that the Anti-Christ's "*mystery of iniquity*" was already secretly at work in the first generation of the church. The word recurs later in the chapter when John's angel guide applies the symbolism of the harlot - "*I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides.*" (Revelation 17:7). Everything about this figure is false and misleading. The truth can only be known only by



*"The Harlot Offers Her Poisoned Chalice"
15th Century Bible Illumination*

looking beneath or behind that which appears to be. The harlot's name is "**BABYLON THE GREAT.**" There are six (the number of the Anti-Christ) references to Babylon in Revelation (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21). The symbolic significance of the ancient city of Babylon, which destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, as the epitome of the worldly powers which oppose and persecute the people of God has been previously discussed (cf. pp. 324, 375). The representative nature of the title "**BABYLON THE GREAT**" is further indicated by its linkage to the term "**MYSTERY**" in this passage. Babylon the Great is not one city; it is every city. The harlot is further identified as "**THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**" The language reflects the disgusting contents of the harlot's golden goblet. To be

"THE MOTHER OF" indicates the dual significance of both origin and superlativeness. As a mother is the source of her children, so Babylon the Great is the source of all the wickedness and corruption of this world (cf. Hosea 2:2-13; Jeremiah 50:12). "*Not content with her own evil vice, she spawns her harlotry and corrupt practices throughout the world.*" (Mounce, p. 310) She is "*the Supreme*

Antichristian Seductress of the World, all of whose daughters are whores.” (Lenski, p. 496) Robert L. Thomas aptly identifies her as *“the pro-genitress of everything anti-Christian.”* (Thomas, p. 290) At the same time, to be **“THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”** is to be the most depraved and corrupt of all, the absolute epitome of these perversions. The Roman historian Tacitus described his own city in this sense when he reported that Rome had become a place *“where all the horrible and shameful things in the world congregate and find a home.”* (Tacitus, *The Annals*, xv, 44).

“I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints...” - John depicts the woman, Babylon the Great, in a drunken stupor. But it is not wine that has brought about her drunkenness. The harlot is also a murderess - **“drunk with the blood of the saints.”** Evil cannot tolerate the good. Those who will not yield and conform must be destroyed. Throughout history Babylon the Great will persecute, oppress, and murder the saints of God. The theme of becoming drunk on blood as a metaphor for slaughter and violent destruction is drawn from the Old Testament. *“Among the ancients, being drunk with blood spoke of a lust for violence, vastness of slaughter,*



“The Harlot Upon the Beast” - Luther Bible Woodcut

and their maddening effect on one who was inclined to initiate savagery.” (Smith, p. 290) Scavengers and birds of prey are summoned to the battlefield, by the prophet Ezekiel, to feast upon the slaughtered hosts of Gog with these gruesome words:

“Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice that I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls - all of them fattened animals from Bashan. At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat until you are gluttoned and drink blood until you are drunk.” (Ezekiel 39:17-19)

Isaiah foretells the violent self-destruction of the enemies of Israel - ***“I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood as with wine.”*** (Isaiah 49:26). Jeremiah promises the downfall of Egypt using the same



“A Faithful Martyr for Christ” by Waldemar Irninger

imagery - ***“But that day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty - a day for vengeance on His foes. The sword will devour until it is satisfied, til it has quenched its thirst with blood.”*** (Jeremiah 46:10). In this instance, the victims of the carnage are identified as ***“the saints - those who bore testimony to Jesus.”*** The second phrase defines and explains the first. The designation of Babylon’s victims explains why they had to die. The harlot cannot tolerate God’s people because they are ***“saints”*** - literally ***“holy ones”*** (Greek ***“ton hagioi”***). They have refused to be corrupted by the harlot’s iniquity and are pure - cleansed in the blood of Christ. In the face of the lies and the falsehood of Babylon the Great they have offered the good confession as faithful witnesses (Greek - ***“martyron”***) to the truth of Jesus Christ. That is why the harlot lusts for their death and destruction. ***“Yea, bloodthirsty is this whore.”*** (Lenski, p. 497)

Verses 7-8

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.



“The Beast With the Appearance of a Lamb Preaching” by Matthias Gerung

“When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.” - St. John’s response to this incredible sight is readily understandable. The Greek text is most emphatic. The term ***“thauma”*** (***“a marvel”***) occurs twice in the phrase with the addition of the adjective

“great” (Greek - “mega”) - literally - “*I marveled a great marvel.*” The word also carries the connotation of perplexity or confusion. The English phrase - “*I was overcome with complete astonishment and confusion*” might convey the same intensity. The specific cause of John’s astonishment/confusion is not cited, which may prompt the angel’s question: “***Why are you astonished?***” The interchange becomes the opportunity for the angel to expound the mystery of the harlot astride the scarlet beast - “***I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and beast she rides which has seven heads and ten horns.***” That which was hidden in the symbolism of the vision will now be set forth as the angel explains the scene.



“The Kings of the Earth Worship the Harlot” - Luther Bible Woodcut

“The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.” - The majority of the angel’s exposition pertains not to the harlot herself but to the beast which she rides. The two are inextricably bound to one another, contrasting dimensions of the same reality - the Antichrist and all the anti-Christian forces of this world. The angel’s description of the beast ridicules his pretensions of divinity. The threefold formula for the eternity of God appears frequently in Revelation - “***I am the Alpha and the Omega,***” says the Lord God, “***who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.***” (Revelation 1:8; cf. also 4:8;



"The Whore of Babylon Astride the Beast Upon the Many Waters" by Georg Rochegrosse

11:16). Variations of the same formula assert the divinity of Christ - ***“These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”*** (Revelation 2:8; cf. also 1:18). The angel applies the same formula to the beast to mock his arrogant blasphemy and reveal him as nothing more than a pathetic parody of the only true God. In the original beast visions (Revelation 13), the beast’s ability to recover from a fatal wound to one of his seven heads arouses the admiration and



“The Descendant of the Woman Will Crush the Serpent’s Head” by Rudolf Schäfer

awe of humanity (Revelation 13:3,12-14). The angel now alludes to the beast’s pseudo-resurrection as he adjusts the language of the formula to convey his mockery - ***“once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.”*** As previously noted (cf. pp. 272-273) the decisive moment in the age old battle between God and Satan, Christ and Anti-Christ, was the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus. At that time the ancient prophecy that the Descendant of the Woman would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15) was fulfilled and the devil’s power was broken. It is around that critical moment that the tenses of these three verbs (past - present - future) turn. The rebellion of Satan and the onslaught of his minions has vexed mankind since the beginning (***“once was”***). The devil’s power to condemn and destroy was shattered at Calvary (***“now is not”***). Nonetheless, he rose

up from the depths of Hell once more and his foredoomed attempts to frustrate God’s plan of salvation continue with the appearance of great power and success (***“and will come up out of the Abyss”***). However, unlike the Christ whom he seeks to replace (cf. Revelation 1:18), Satan and his Anti-Christ do not rise up in triumph to live and reign throughout eternity. Instead their destiny is certain destruction and damnation

(***“and go to his destruction”***). G.K Beale summarizes the intent of the parody in this way:

*“The application of the formula for divine eternity to the beast is intended to ridicule the beast’s vain efforts to defeat the true eternal being and his forces. The application also suggests that the beast’s existence extends from the beginning of history to its end, but the close of the formula shows a clear contrast with God’s existence; the beast’s apparently sovereign existence throughout history will cease...The beast’s imitation of Christ will be shown as a sham in the end. Whereas Christ’s resurrection results in His being **“alive forever”** (1:18), the beast’s resurrection results in his destruction.”* (Beale, pp. 864,865)

“The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life...” - The world loves a winner and that is exactly what the beast appears to be. His seeming ability to overcome God and His Christ, and to recover from the fatal wound inflicted upon him will astonish and impress all those who lack the spiritual discernment to see things as they truly are. Power, wealth, size and success will always be on the side of the devil until the Lord comes again in judgment. Until then, the true church will always be a small remnant, scorned and persecuted by the world while the false church of the Antichrist glories in its magnitude and majesty.



“The Lamb’s Book of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.” - The ***“wisdom”*** (Greek - *“sophia”*) called for here is the

spiritual discernment to see through the deceptions of the harlot and beast and recognize true reality. The angel's explanation of the vision now grows more complex and the spiritual wisdom of the believer whose name has *"been written in the book of life from the creation of the world"* is called for to follow and understand the meaning of the text.



"1st Century Roman Coin of the Emperor Vespasian Depicting the Goddess Roma Seated upon the Seven Hills"

"The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." - In his great epic the *"Aeneid,"* the Roman poet Virgil describes Rome as a *"city of seven hills."* (Virgil, 6, 782-83). Thus Rome came to be known throughout antiquity as the city built upon seven hills. A Roman coin, minted in A.D. 71, during the reign of Vespasian, actually depicts the goddess Roma seated upon seven hills alongside the legendary she-wolf who was said to have raised Romulus and Remus, the founders of the city. The angel's identification of the seven heads of the beast as *"seven hills upon which the woman sits"* is thus clearly an allusion to the city of Rome. The harlot astride the beast is linked in a unique sense to the imperial city of Rome.

However, there is more to the symbolism of the seven hills than a mere allusion to Rome. The angel continues - *"They are also seven kings."* The use of hills or mountains as a figurative symbol for kings or kingdoms is common in the Old



“The Imperial Roman Forum”

Testament. (On the interchangeability of kings and kingdoms in prophetic language cf. Daniel 7:17,23) Isaiah describes the prominence of the Messianic kingdom over all the nations of the earth with these inspire words: ***“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills and all the nations will stream to it.”*** (Isaiah 2:2). Jeremiah uses the same mountain imagery to predict the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom: ***“I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth,” declares the Lord. “I will stretch out My hand against you and roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned out mountain.”*** (Jeremiah 51:25; cf. also Ezekiel 35:3; Daniel 2:35,45; Zechariah 4:7). Accordingly, John’s linkage of the heads with both hills and kings would be a natural one for his original audience. The fact that there are ***“seven”*** heads/hills/kings signals that these are not literal historical kings or kingdoms but a symbolic picture of all of the oppressive governments of this world that lend their coercive power to the cause of the Antichrist and false religion. The number seven occurs some 45 times in Revelation outside of this section. In every instance its use is clearly figurative. Seven is the most powerful numerological symbol in the book. It is always the perfect number, signifying totality and



“John’s Vision of Harlot Babylon” - 15th Century Belgian Apocalypse

completion. Dr. Brighton rightly concludes: *“The number seven is symbolic and represents all earthly powers and rulers who claim spiritual authority by which they justify and sanction their despotic dominion over their subjects, in particular as it is used in opposition to the church of Christ.”* (Brighton, p.449)

“Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come he must remain for a little while.” - John proceeds to reintroduce the ironic threefold past/present/future formula which he had used earlier to mock the divine pretensions of the beast (cf. vs. 8, p. 392 f.). The endless variety of attempts to identify the *“five,”* the *“one”* and the *“other”* with specific kings or kingdoms is futile and basically misunderstands the symbolic nature of the language. The past/present/future formula serves to emphasize the continuous rise and fall of the rulers and kingdoms of this earth. This will remain the case throughout time and history (past/ present/future) as the devil uses and casts aside his instruments of destruction. Emperors and tyrants come and go; great empires arise and conquer only to fall and disappear into the dust of history; but the nefarious work Satan and his Antichrist continue subverting the powers of this world to work their hellish will. Franzmann suggests that the five, one and one division of the seven kings is designed to emphasize the unique role of the great Antichrist. The five fallen kingdoms of the

past, plus the one ruler of the present still only total six, the devil's number, short of the perfect seven. The other who is still to come is the great Antichrist himself, who blasphemously presumes to present himself within the very heart of the church as the substitute for the perfect one, our Lord Christ. He will arise from the chaos of Rome's downfall to combine the powers of church and state in a manner unprecedented in history. *"The seventh is the very incarnation of the power of Antichrist, clothed in pseudo-Christian awe, and he is, apparently, a horrible contradiction of the law of the divine control of history."* (Franzmann, p. 118) John hastens to assure his readers that even this most dangerous adversary of the faith will not prevail. God remains in absolute control. Even the time of the seventh is limited - *"But when he does come he must remain for a little while."*

"The beast, who once was and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." - Any remaining doubt about the symbolic nature of these numbers and images should be dispelled by the addition of the beast itself to the other seven rulers. The facile manner in which John shifts and adjusts the images precludes the possibility of a coherent literal interpretation. Each of the beast's seven heads is a king and now the entire beast becomes yet another king. The mocking threefold formula is cited once again - *"who once was and now is not...and is going to his destruction"* - as the beast is declared to be an eighth king. This is not yet another monarch in a sequence of rulers. The beast is the summary and epitome of the other seven - *"He belongs to the seven"* literally - *"He is of the seven."* Earthly rulers, new tyrannies and



"The Kings of the Earth Worship the Harlot Upon the Beast" - Luther Bible Woodcut

forms of government, false Christ's and anti-Christ's come and go, but behind and through them all the anti-trinity does its work. The beast's claim to fame in Revelation 13 was its miraculous recovery from a mortal wound, a parody of the resurrection of Christ (Revelation 13:3,14). In the numerology of the early Christian Church eight was the resurrection number. Christ died on the sixth day of the week. He rested in the grave on the Sabbath, the seventh day. He rose from the dead on Sunday, the eighth day. To label the beast as "***an eighth king***" ridicules his mimicry of the resurrection of Christ. Once again, the text clearly asserts the total defeat and destruction of the beast and his kingdom - "***He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.***"



"Daniel's Vision of the Four Kings" by E.M. Lilien

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers." -

Having interpreted the beast's heads the angel turns to the interpretation of the horns. Once again the image is drawn from Daniel 7:4-8 by way of Revelation 13. Ten is the ordinal number upon which our numerical system is based. It is the symbol for the power and

authority of government and the law. The horn itself represents power, as the horns which comprised the altars of the ancient Middle East. Accordingly a configuration of ten horns represents the coercive power of governmental authority. The angel

explains: ***“The ten horns you saw are ten kings.”*** This image of governmental power is directed toward the future for these are kings ***“who have not yet received a kingdom.”*** As throughout this vision, the language is figurative. The reference is not literally or exclusively to monarchy as a particular form of government but to all governmental authority no matter what form it may take. The emphasis on the ten horns constituting a distinct threat in the future seems to suggest that the anti-Christian use of perverted governmental power will intensify as the end times draw to their tumultuous conclusion and judgment approaches. The rise in the modern era of totalitarian states of both left (Communist) and right (Fascist) which have wreaked unprecedented havoc within the community of nations is consistent with this emphasis. The phrase ***“but who for one hour will receive authority along with the beast”*** emphasizes the sovereign control of God and the brevity of the sway of these evil governments and the satanic force which manipulates them. ***“For one hour”*** is a Biblical idiom for a very short period of time. The time constraint applies to both the kings and the beast itself. The text is careful to note that even within the brief time span allotted, whatever ***“authority”*** the beast and his proxies in government are able to exercise is not their own but has been given to them by the sovereign God - ***“will receive authority.”*** While the image of the ten horns stresses the multiplicity of the governmental powers that serve the cause of the Antichrist, they remain completely united in the allegiance and ultimate goal - ***“They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.”*** The devil does not enlist allies -



“The Beast With Ten Horns”
Detail from an Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer



Lutheran Pastors Give the Nazi Salute After a Service in Berlin - 1934

he makes slaves. To be sure, most of the enslaved do not recognize their status, but they remain slaves nonetheless. The sole purpose of the anti-Trinity is the destruction of the Church and the damnation of humanity. To that end the powers ***“make war against the Lamb.”*** The military metaphor is drawn from Daniel 7:21 where the anti-Christian ***“little horn”*** ***“was waging war against the saints and defeating them.”*** John significantly alters the language in that it is now the Lamb, not the Antichrist who overcomes.

“But the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings.” - Earthly kings, rulers and lords may conspire, rage and defy but in the end their warfare is doomed to defeat for there is One whose power and authority far surpasses theirs. In striking contrast the Lamb, the image of meekness and vulnerability is hailed as the ***“Lord of lords and King of kings.”*** These titles apply directly to the context of the ten kings. They are also used in Revelation 19:11-16 to identify the victorious Son of Man who will come again in power and glory as the Judge of humanity (cf. also Deuteronomy 10:17; Daniel 2:47; 4:17; 1 Timothy 6:15).

This conflict has raged across the ages and will not cease until the judgment trumpet sounds. In a sense, this phrase provides the conclusive answer to the crucial question posed in Revelation 13:4 - ***“Who is able to make war with the beast?”*** Only ***“the Lamb”*** is capable of successfully waging war against the beast and decisively defeating it. But by grace the Lamb’s victory is not His alone. He graciously chooses to share that victory with all who are His own - ***“and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers.”*** The language strongly emphasizes the monergistic nature of salvation. God’s people are the elect, those who He has called and chosen.

“Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” -

When the harlot was first introduced the angel had described her as ***“the great prostitute who sits on many waters.”*** (Revelation 17:1) Now the angel returns to that grim title and explains the symbolic significance of the ***“many waters.”*** The waters represent ***“peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.”*** The use of the earth number, four, signifies the universal dominion of the harlot over unregenerate mankind, in a manner typical of the Revelation (cf. Revelation 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). However, the universal domination will not preserve her from the judgment of God.



“The Beast With Ten Horns”
Detail from an Engraving by Jean Duvet



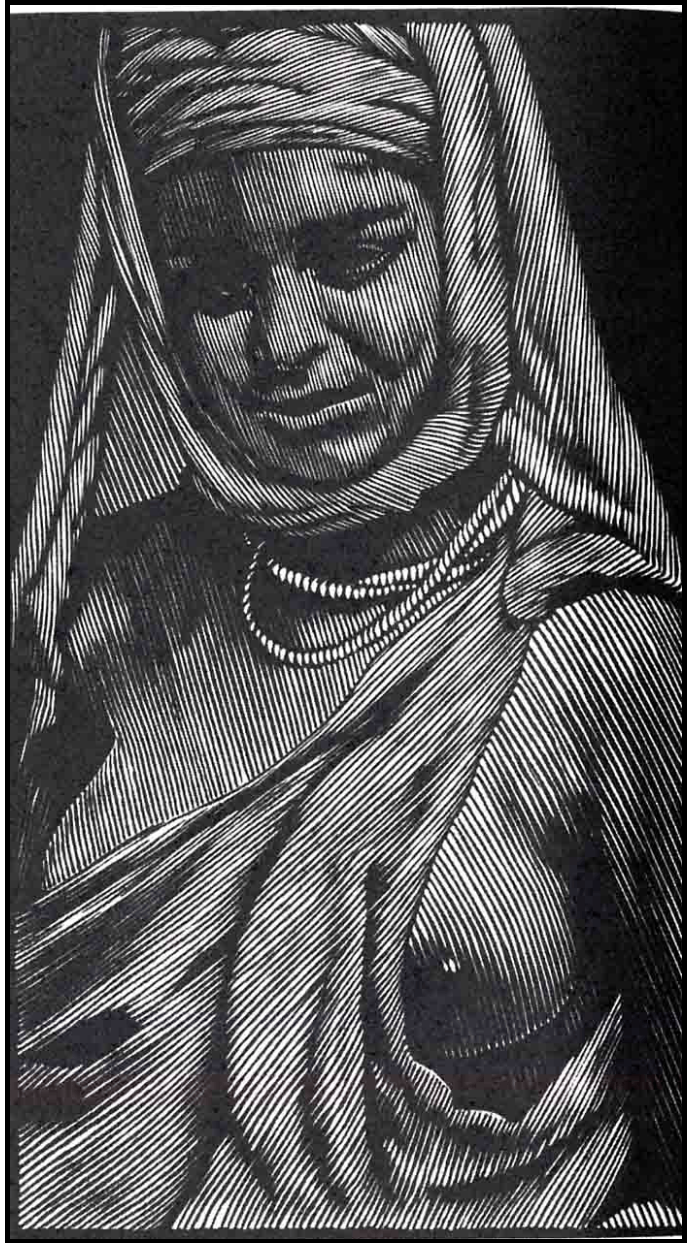
*“The Downfall of the Whore of Babylon”
14th Century Apocalypse*

“The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute.” - The angel’s initial invitation promised ***“I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters.”*** (Revelation 17:1). The angel brings John back to that theme and offers a preliminary account of the judgement of the whore which serves as an introduction to the more lengthy account which will follow in chapter 18. Evil is inherently destructive and those who are slaves to evil are ultimately self-destructive. Despite the harlot’s compelling allure and her semblance of overwhelming power the downfall of her anti-Christian spiritual reign is certain and will, in fact, come about at the hands of those who were her most devoted allies. The passionate attraction and admiration which had characterized the attitude of the political, economic, and military powers represented by the beast, the seven heads, and the ten horns will be

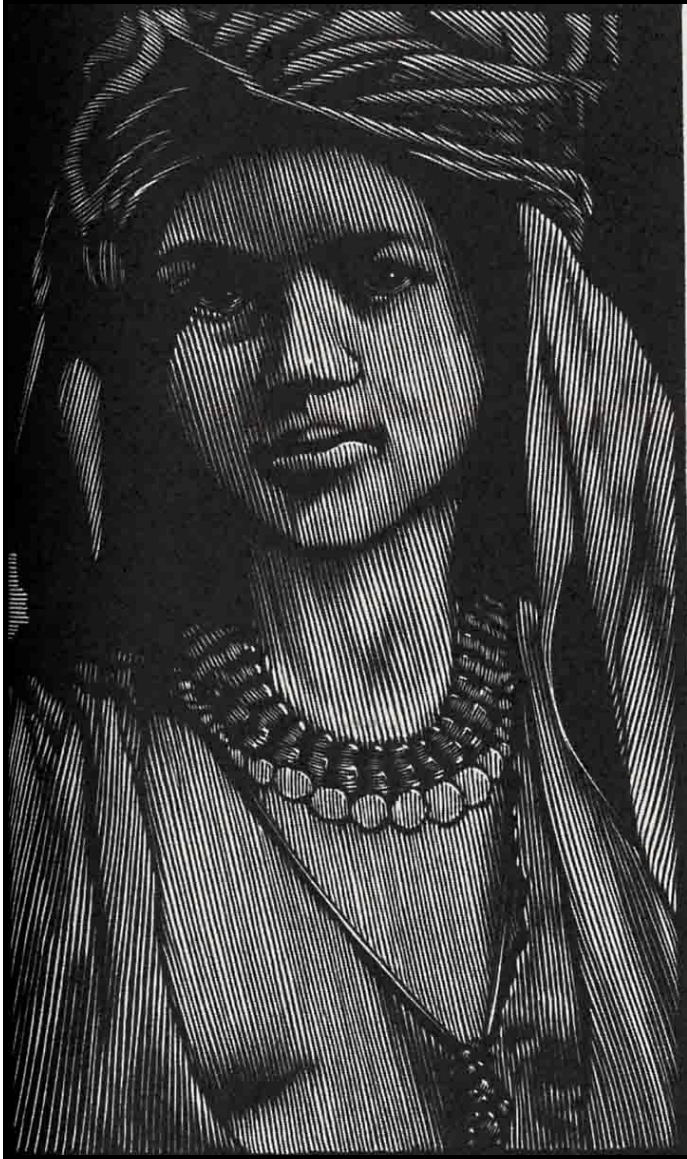
replaced by bitter hatred and loathing. The same is often true in life. Once those who have yielded to temptation achieve the object of their desire, that which had appeared to be irresistible and beautiful now becomes repulsive and disgusting. In its aftermath, sin's promises of delight are always revealed to be empty and false. The specific catalyst which brings about this change is not cited. Given the end times, final judgment, character of these events, it may be that as the Lord returns in glory the powers and dominions of this world will realize that they have been deceived and misled by the harlot. They will be roused from their drunkenness to sober reality. But at that moment it will be too late. Judgment has come. Nonetheless, they will strike out in bitter rage to destroy the source of their destruction.

“They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked...” The brutal imagery of the harlot's downfall is drawn from Ezekiel 23 where the prophet foretells God's judgment upon the apostate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, depicting them as ***“Aholah”*** and ***“Aholibah,”*** a pair of adulterous sisters who have indulged in prostitution:

“They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms



***Ezekiel's Image of Judah as the Harlot “Aholah”
by Barry Moser***



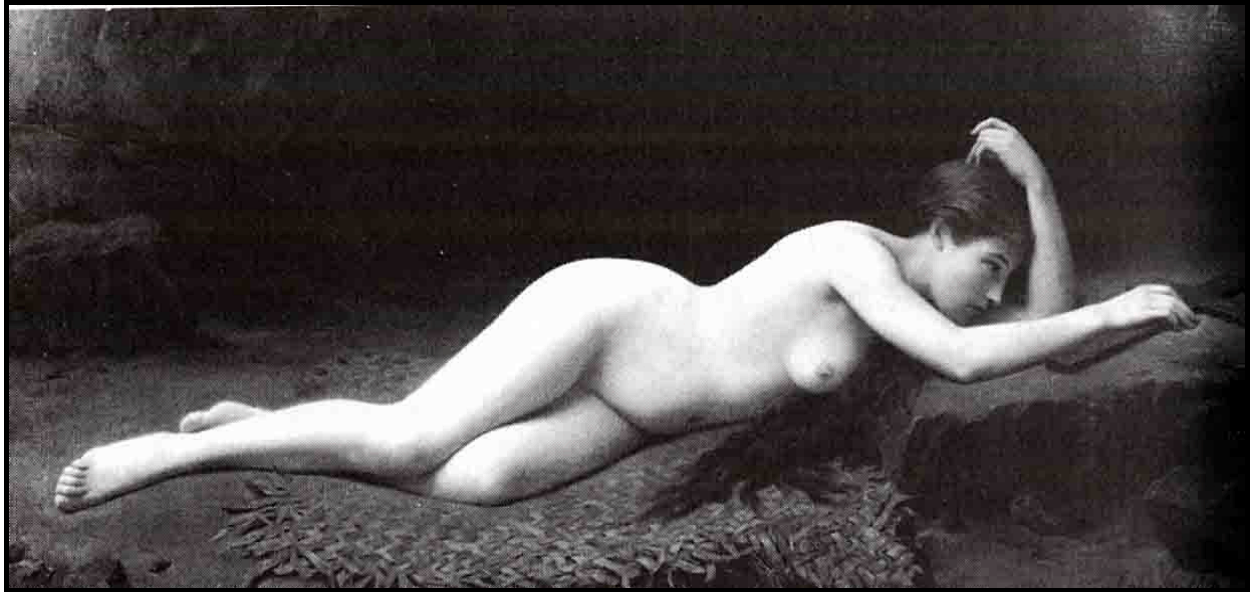
*Ezekiel's Image of Israel as the Harlot "Aholibah"
by Barry Moser*

caressed...I will stir up your lovers against you, those you turned away from in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side...I will direct My jealous anger against you and they will deal with you in fury. They will cut off your noses and your ears and those of you who are left will fall by the sword. They will take away your sons and daughters and those of you who are left will be consumed by fire...They will also strip you of your clothes and strip you of your fine jewels. They will deal with you in hatred and take away everything you have worked for. They will leave you naked and bare, the shame of your prostitution will be exposed. Your lewdness and promiscuity have brought this upon you because you lusted after the nations and defiled yourself with their idols...You will drink your sister's cup, a cup large and deep, it will bring scorn and derision for it holds so much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister

Samaria. You will drink it and drain it dry; you will dash it to pieces and tear your breasts...For they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children whom they bore to Me, as food for them...Then I said about the one worn out by adultery: "Now let them use her as a prostitute, for that is all she is." (Ezekiel 23)

The similarity between the two texts is remarkable. In both instances God uses His enemies to punish His fallen church, whose unfaithfulness and idolatry is depicted as

adultery and prostitution. The imagery of drinking a deadly cup to its bitter dregs is common to both passages. Like Israel and Judah, Harlot Babylon is stripped and humiliated before her hateful foes. The Great Prostitute is devoured and burned with fire just as Ezekiel's adulterous sisters see their own children fed to their idols and devoured by the flames.



“Mary Magdalene - The Penitent Adulteress” by Marius Vasselon - 1887

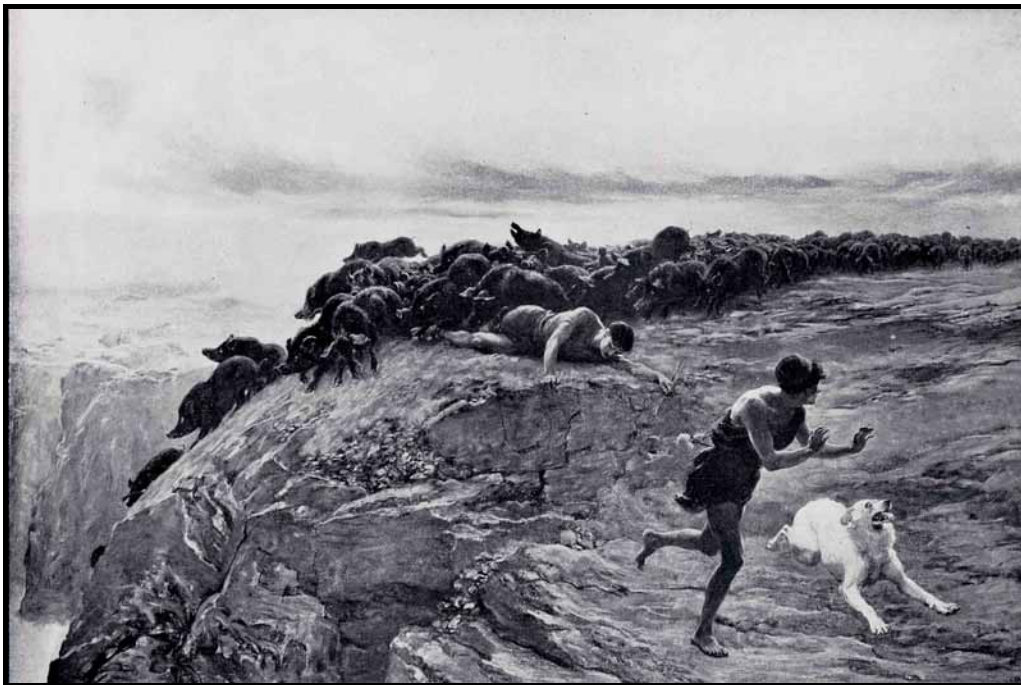
Three grim metaphors combine to describe the total destruction of Harlot Babylon. *“With a hatred as satanically irrational as their former devotion had been, they turn upon the harlot who once charmed them and made them drunk, to ravage and destroy her.”* (Franzmann, p. 119) She is stripped and ravished like a common whore - *“They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked.”* She is torn apart and devoured as by wild beasts of prey - *“they will eat her flesh.”* Finally she is consumed by the flames like a vanquished city set to the torch - *“and burn her with fire.”* Each metaphor of destruction serves to highlight a major aspect of the vision: the Great Prostitute receives the shameful execution of a harlot: the ferocious scarlet beast dismembers and devours his prey: and, Babylon the Great, the magnificent city, is reduced to dust and ashes by the fires of conquest.

Dissension in the ranks of the damned is a recurrent pattern throughout history, expressive of the inherent self-destructiveness of evil. Jealousy, envy, and the lust for power or pleasure have caused the slaves of the Lord of Darkness to turn upon one

another in vicious rage again and again. Like the Gadarene demons who destroyed the herd of swine into which they had begged to be cast out, the rage of Satan and his servants is always self-destructive (cf. Matthew 8:32). When the end comes this pattern will intensify and come to a final culmination as the enraged beast strikes down the Great Harlot. It will be just as Jesus predicted: ***“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.”*** (Mark 3:24-26)

“For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule...” - The sovereign Lord remains in absolute control. Even His enemies do His will and serve His purpose. *“They think they are fulfilling their own plans, but in reality they are blindly fulfilling the divine counsel.”* (Smith, p. 305) Whatever power the anti-Trinity possesses comes from God and can only be used in a manner consistent with His plan. The Word of God will stand unshakably firm and sure through all generations. His promises unfailingly hold true. That which He has prophesied will most surely come to pass.

“The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” - The theme of this awesome vision is repeated once more at its conclusion, identifying the woman and specifying the nature of the city which she personifies.



“The Self-Destruction of the Gadarene Swine” by Briton Rivere



"The Destruction of Babylon the Great" by Lucas Cranach

The Downfall of Babylon - Revelation 18:1-24

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive

any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow; and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come." The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more - cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said, "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of the bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."



“The Downfall of Babylon the Great” - Luther Bible Woodcut

“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by His splendor. With a mighty voice He shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.” - At the beginning of the previous chapter the angel had promised a vision of *“the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters.”* (Revelation 17:1). The remainder of the chapter had dealt with a description of the woman, the seven headed beast upon which she was seated, and a brief account of her downfall in the context of the betrayal of the harlot by the beast. The scene now shifts back to the subject of the punishment of the prostitute in order to present a detailed account of God’s judgment upon harlot Babylon. The closing verse of chapter 17 (Revelation 17:18), which re-emphasized the identification of the woman

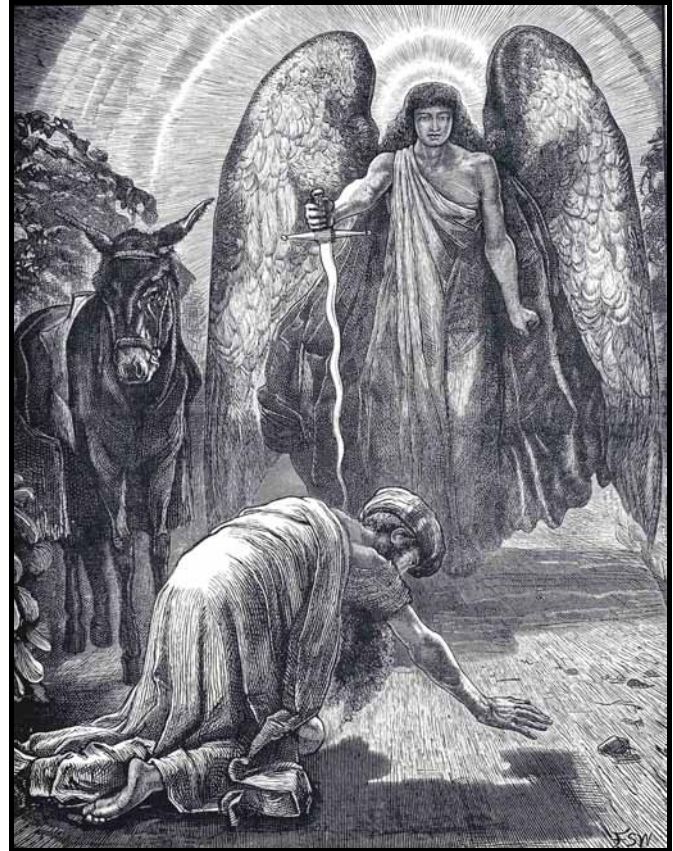
and the great city provided the transition to the vision of Babylon's downfall which now follows. The opening phrase, **"after this"** (Greek - *"meta tauta"*) occurs nine times in Revelation to signal the shift from one scene within a vision to the next (cf. Revelation 1:19; 4:1; 4:1; 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3). It indicates the sequence of the scenes from the seer's perspective, not the chronological sequence of the events described in the visions. In this case, for instance, what now follows is, to a large extent, an expansion and explanation of events already presented in the preceding scene. The scene opens with the appearance of a magnificent angel **"coming down from heaven."** The text places particular emphasis upon the unique stature of this messenger from heaven - **"He had great authority and the earth was illuminated by his splendor."** The only other comparable angel in the visions of

Revelation is the **"mighty angel"** of Revelation 10. The angel in that instance is depicted with the accouterments of deity - **"He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars."** (Revelation 10:1). We concluded that the angel in Revelation 10 was, like **"the angel of the Lord"** in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself. A similar conclusion seems to be warranted here. This is no ordinary angel but the Son of God. The Lord comes to pronounce God's judgment upon the sinful city, Babylon the Great. He brings with Him the splendor of the presence of God. Throughout the book of Revelation, whenever **"glory"** (Greek - *"doxes"*) is ascribed to a heavenly figure it refers to God or to Christ (cf. Revelation 1:6; 4:9,11; 5:12-13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 15:8; 16:9; 19:1;



"Guardian Angel" by Franz von Stuck

21:11). This is the same language used to describe the glorious presence of God and the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem - ***“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”*** (Revelation 21:23; cf. also 22:5) The precedent for referring to Jesus as an angel is well established in the Old Testament where the pre-incarnate Christ is consistently referred to as the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord is also closely associated with the cloud of God’s glory which traveled before Israel in the wilderness and stood between Israel and Egypt at the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14:19-20). The language here in Revelation 18 is very similar to that of Ezekiel’s messianic vision of God’s *“shekinah”* glory returning to the temple:



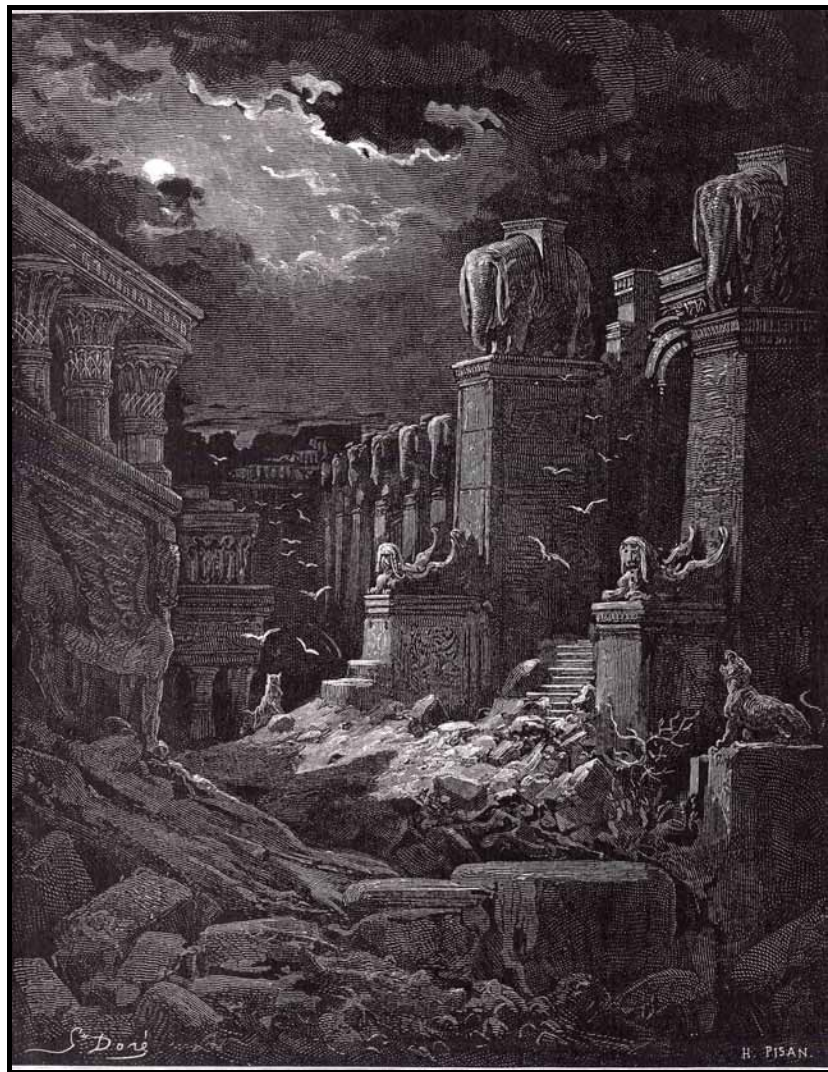
“The Angel of the Lord Before the False Prophet Balaam” by F.S. Waltges

“Then the man brought me to the gate facing east and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with His glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when He came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell face down. The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.” (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

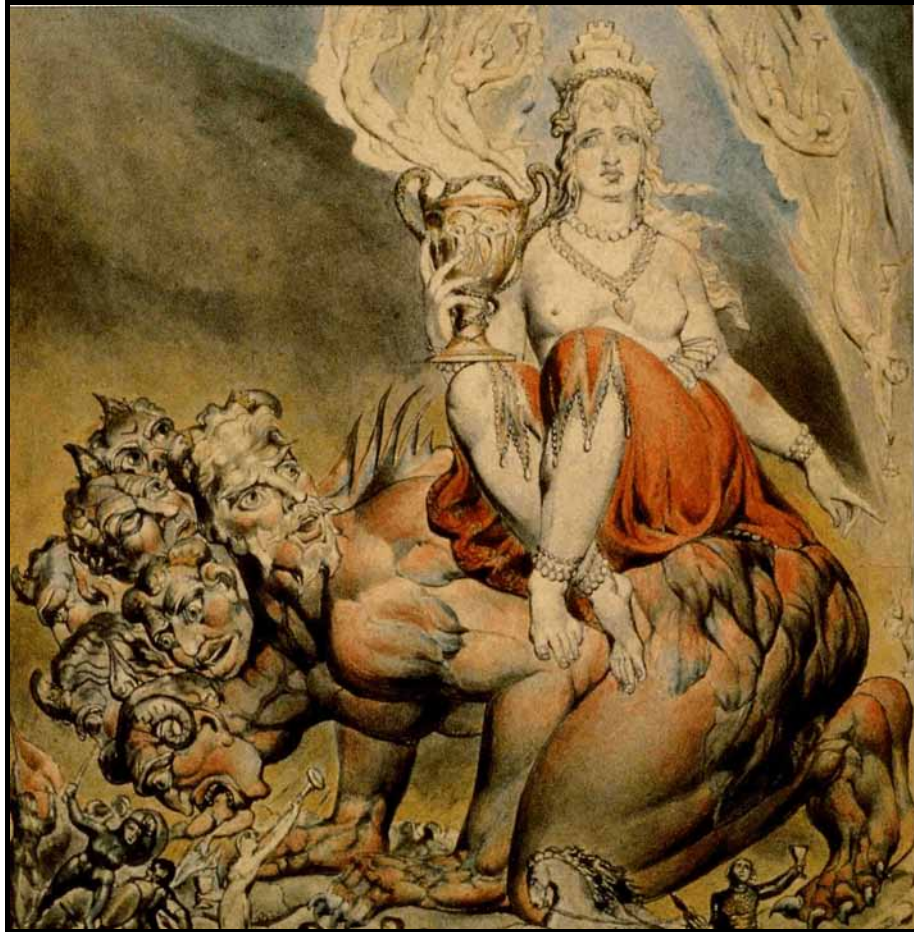
Ezekiel reports that ***“the land was radiant with His glory.”*** In virtually the same words John indicates ***“the earth was illuminated by His splendor.”*** In both texts the appearance of God’s glory is accompanied by the sound of a loud voice - ***“His voice was like the roar of rushing waters”*** (Ezekiel) - ***“With a mighty voice He shouted”***(John). Ezekiel also tells us that this vision of God’s gracious glory was

“like the vision I had seen when He came to destroy the city” which is precisely the purpose for which he appears in the vision of St. John. John’s evident reliance upon this prophetic text strongly reinforces the view that this angel is in fact the Angel of the Lord, our Lord Jesus Himself.

“With a mighty voice he shouted, `Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!’” - The Lord’s *“mighty voice”* (Greek - *“ischyra phone”*) reverberates across the world. Other angels in Revelation have spoken with loud voices (cf. Revelation 5:2; 7:2; 10:3; 14:6-7). But the sound of this voice far surpasses them. This particular adjective - *“mighty”* - is characteristically applied to God alone in the context of



“Fallen, Fallen Is Babylon the Great” by Gustave Dore



“Harlot Babylon Upon the Beast” by William Blake - 1809

heaven throughout Biblical literature. It emphasizes not only the volume but the divine authority of the voice which makes this great announcement.

The structure of Revelation 18 closely parallels the taunting dirges sung by the Old Testament prophets over the enemies of Israel (i.e. Isaiah 14:3-23; 47:1-15; Jeremiah 50:1-51:64; Ezekiel 27:1-36; 30:1-19; 32:1-16). These anticipatory funeral songs announced the death and destruction of kings and nations that were still very much alive and at the height of their power. But they had already been judged by God. Therefore their downfall was as certain as if it had already occurred. The opening words of the Lord’s announcement repeat Revelation 14:8. Both texts are drawn from Isaiah 21:8-9 - ***“And the lookout shouted...Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground.”*** The verb ***“fallen”*** is in the Greek aorist tense which refers to action completed in the past. The fall of the harlot,

Babylon the Great, has not yet actually taken place. Nonetheless, the prophet speaks of it in the past tense to indicate the absolute certainty of the judgment of God. The verb in Revelation is repeated for dramatic effect as in Isaiah's original announcement. The literal city of Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C., never to rise again as a significant world power. Here Babylon the Great represents all the forces of evil in this world. She is the harlot (cf. Revelation 17:18), the realm of the Anti-christ and all of the anti-Christian forces that have opposed and persecuted the people of God throughout history. New Babylon's rise and fall in every era, only to be replaced by others "*no less magnificent and depraved*" (Swete , p. 226) than their predecessors. Her ultimate downfall and destruction will be the culmination of human history, the final vindication of God and His faithful people.



"Isaiah's Vision of the Doom of Babylon" by Gustave Doré

"She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit." - The devastation of harlot Babylon will be total. The facade of her luxury and power will be stripped away to reveal the hideous reality of demonic presence which has always lurked there as Babylon's guiding and empowering force. John's language recalls that of Isaiah and Jeremiah:

“Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand and her days will not be prolonged.” (Isaiah 13: 19-22)



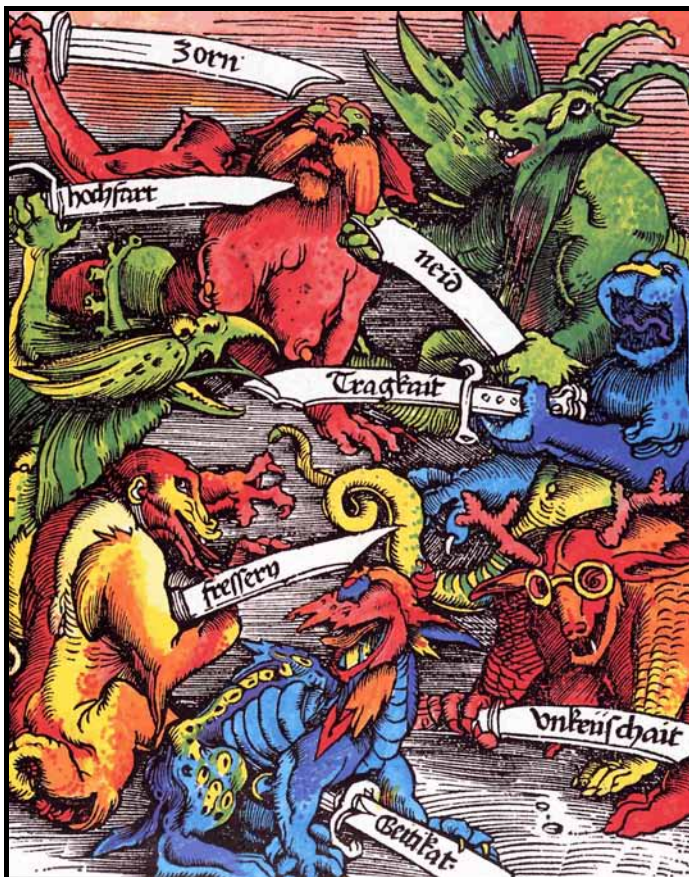
“The Prophet Isaiah” by Michelangelo

“A sword against the Babylonians! Declares the Lord - against those who live in Babylon and against her officials and her wise men! A sword against her false prophets! They will become fools. A sword against her warriors! They will be filled with terror. A sword against her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks! They will become women. A sword against her treasures! They will be plundered. A drought on her waters! They will dry up. For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror. So desert creatures and hyenas will live there, and there the owl will dwell. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation. As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns, declares the Lord, so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it.” (Jeremiah 50: 35-40)

The birds and animals to which the prophets refer are those which haunt places of darkness and death. They are eaters of carrion that feed upon the bodies of the dead. Rabbinic commentators consistently linked these creatures to demons and the powers of darkness. The Septuagint’s Greek translation of Isaiah 13 uses the word “*daimonia*” (“*demons*”) in place of “*wild goats*” in Isaiah 13:21. The apocryphal book of Baruch notes the fall of Babylon with these words: “*For fire will come upon*

her from the Everlasting for many days, and for a long time she will be inhabited by demons.” (Baruch 4:35) John affirms the historic understanding of the teachers of Israel when he warns - **“She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit.”** Dr. Brighton comments on the intriguing manner in which metaphor and reality overlap in this description:

“So destructive and fearful will be her judgement that all that is left within her, together with the jackals, hyenas, and birds of prey, are the ghost-like memories of those who once inhabited this house of wealth and sensual pleasure. Terrifying memories of the fallen, decaying corpses now haunt and eerily moan over the corpse of the fallen harlot herself. However, demons and unclean spirits could here be more than merely the memories that haunt the empty shell of Babylon. They could be the actual demons of hell itself which - have been all along the companions of the harlot as they inspired her to carry out her anti-Christian activities. Now, at her demise, having used her for their own devilish purposes, all that is left of the once proud city are the demons hovering over her corpse.” (Brighton, p. 465)



***“The Demons of the Seven Deadly Sins”
Tinted Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien***

“For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries.” - The Revelator sets forth the basis for God’s severe judgment upon harlot Babylon. Once again, using the imagery of Jeremiah and Isaiah, John reminds us of the harlot’s role in seducing the nations and their rulers into idolatry and sin. Beneath a deceiving facade of piety she has enticed the world into sin. **“Sanctioned by her perverted form of Christianity, they received from her license to indulge in and live by filthy lucre and sensual power and immorality.”** (Brighton, p. 466) Those who have benefitted most directly from **“the maddening wine of her adulteries,”** namely the rulers of the earth whose abuse of power was sanctioned by her

pseudo-religion and its merchants who grew fat and rich “*from her excessive luxuries*”, are specifically cited in the indictment. They will lead the chorus of lament through the balance of the chapter.



*“The Downfall of Babylon the Great”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Burgkmair*

“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, “I sit as queen, I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.” Therefore, in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning, and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.””

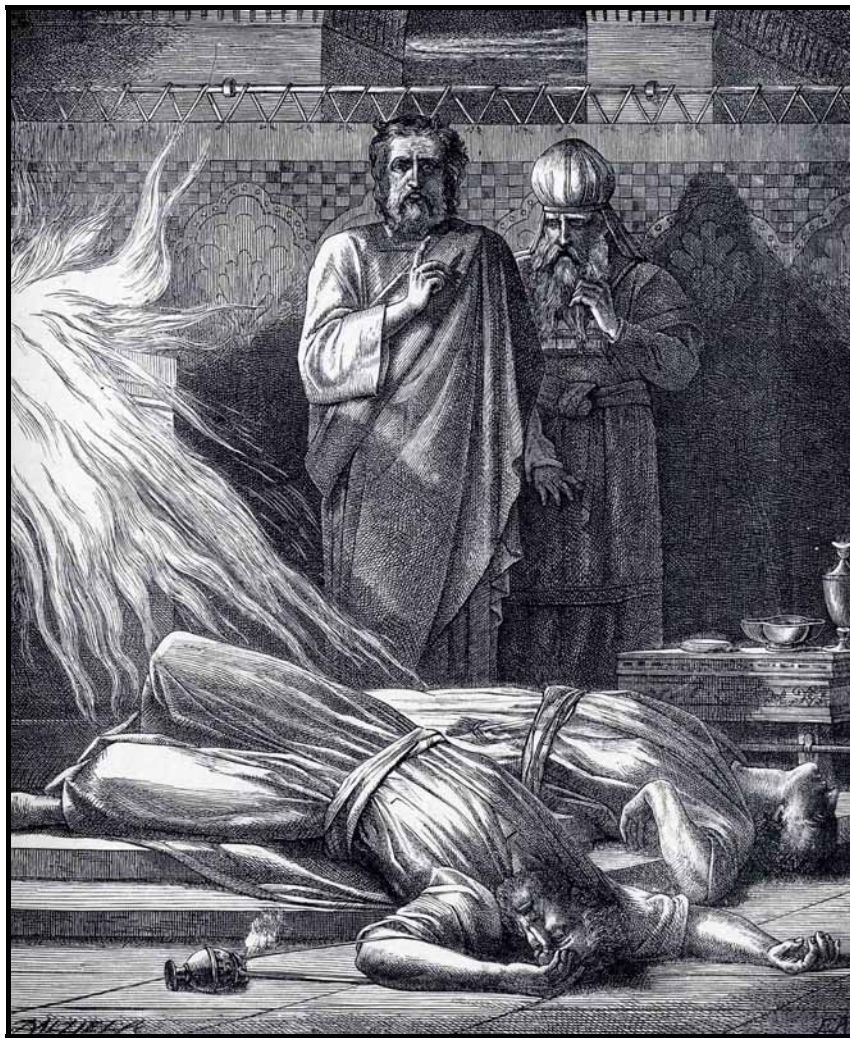


“Lot and His Daughters Escape from Sodom” by John Martin

“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, My people...” - The voice from heaven is unidentified. The speaker refers to the people of God in the first person **“My people”** (which is never done by an angel in Revelation) while at the same time it speaks of God as distinct from the voice itself (i.e. **“And God has remembered her crimes”**). It seems most likely that the voices remains that of Jesus Christ in which case the opening phrase might be translated - *“The I heard the voice from heaven again, saying...”*.

The appeal for God’s people to separate themselves from the realm of the Anti-Christ is couched in the language of the Old Testament prophets. **“Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it.”** (Isaiah 48:20) **“Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians, and be like the goats that lead the flock.”** (Jeremiah 50:8) **“Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord’s vengeance; He will pay her what she deserves...Come out of her, My people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord.”** (Jeremiah 51:6,45)

Our Lord's appeal is not a call for physical separation from a literal city. It is a call to shun the temptations and enticements of man made religion. At the heart of all the religions man devises for himself is self-righteousness and self-reliance. The Lutheran Confessions call the innate tendency of man's sinful nature to depend upon one's own efforts and good works the "*opinio legis*" (opinion of the law). The Confessions warn that this universal human inclination seeks to compromise and undermine the teaching of God's grace in Christ at every opportunity (Apol. IV, 146). Since the beginning, the fundamental temptation has been to spurn the gracious love of God in favor of human effort so that we might ourselves be like gods. This is the essence of the anti-Christian religion embodied by Babylon the Great. Beneath the deceiving facade of Christian piety, it glories in human wisdom and wealth, luxury and power.



The Deaths of Korah and the Levites” by E. Armytage

The concept of separation from evil, unbelief and false doctrine in order to avoid contamination and punishment is a consistent theme in Scripture. In the days of Korah's rebellion, Moses had warned the children of Israel to separate themselves from the tents of the wicked men so that they would not be punished along with them before Korah and his followers were slain by fire from the altar (cf. Number 16:25-27). Jesus urged His followers ***“to flee and not look back or go back to rescue anything”*** when they saw the Abomination of Desolation rise over Jerusalem (Mark



“The Desecration of the Great Altar of Sacrifice and Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman Legions in A.D. 70” - 19th Century Engraving

13:14-16). The Lord's language clearly alluded to the deliverance of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the *“lingering fondness of Lot's wife for Sodom”* which led to her transformation into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:1-29). In the same way, St. Paul quoted Isaiah 52:11 in support of his appeal to the Corinthians not to associate with the idolatry and immorality of unbelievers:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship



“Lot and His Family Reluctantly Leaving Sodom” by Rubens

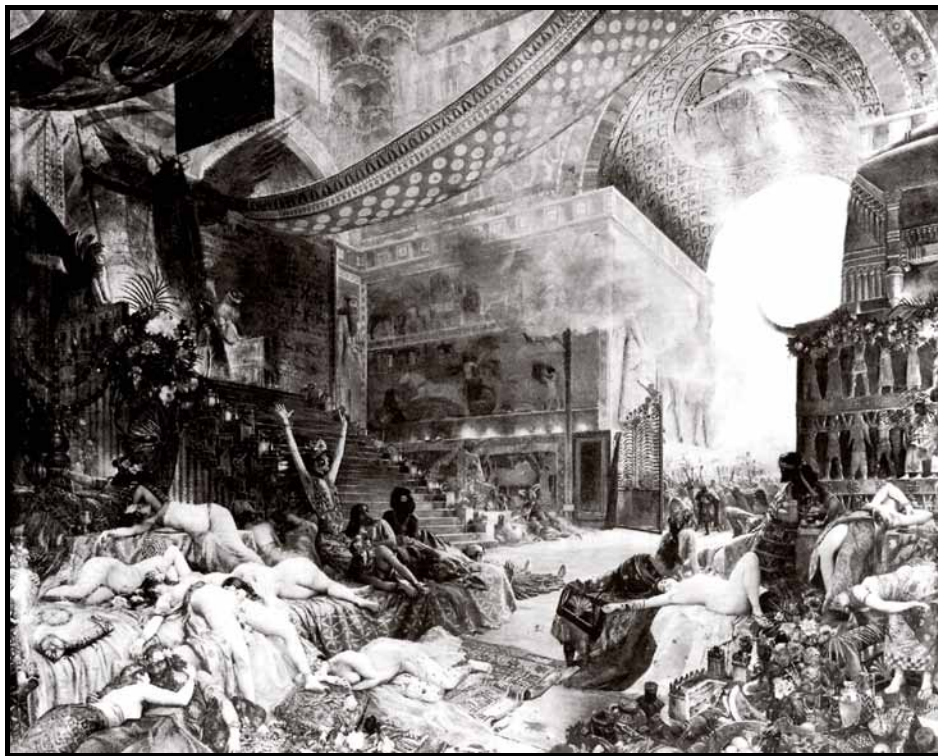
can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols...”Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

There is a deep sense of urgency in these texts which contradicts the lackadaisical attitude which prevails in much of the modern church toward false doctrine and moral impurity. The easy going tolerance which allows truth and error, right and wrong, to comfortably co-exist with one another is misguided and dangerous. Sin is never benign. It is always malignant. It corrupts and destroys. Sin is inherently contagious, reaching out to contaminate and spread. Living as God’s faithful people, *“in the world but not of the world”* (John 17:11,16), temptation to sin cannot be avoided. But to deliberately place one’s self in the path of temptation is spiritual folly. Luther notes: *“You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can certainly prevent them from building a nest in your hair.”* (AE,42,p.73). In his classic *“The City of God,”* St. Augustine demonstrates the same sense of urgency as he pleads with Christians not to underestimate the peril to their

salvation posed by the demonic forces of darkness which are at work in Babylon the Great. This is not a threat to be taken lightly. Augustine defines flight from Babylon spiritually as growth in the faith, ever greater watchfulness against the wiles of the enemy and dependence upon God's grace in Christ:

“For this prophetic precept is to be understood spiritually in this sense, that by going forward in the living God, by the steps of faith, which worketh by love, we must flee out of the city of this world, which is altogether a society of ungodly angels and men. Yea, the greater we see the power of the demons to be in these depths, so much the more tenaciously must we cleave to the Mediator through Whom we ascend from these lowest to the highest places.” (NPNF, 2, p. 369)

Accordingly our Lords pleads: ***“Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins.”*** The Greek verb *“synkoinonesete”* literally means *“to participate in something together.”* The word clearly suggests the contagious nature of sin and the risk that Christians will be drawn into the sinful conduct that surrounds them. Paul uses the same verb in Ephesians 5:11 as he admonishes Christians to recognize the unique identity of those who are in Christ and to live in a manner distinctly different from the unbelieving world: ***“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds***



“The Fall of Babylon” by George Rochegrosse



“The Tower of Babel” by Pieter Bruegel

of darkness.” “The persecuted church has always faced the temptation to compromise with worldliness and thus ease the tension of living in a hostile environment. Separation is the order of the day: sometimes physical, always ideological.” (Mounce, p. 324) Those who fail *“to come out of her,”* who are entrapped in the devil’s deadly web of temptation and sin, will be forced to endure the *“plagues”* of God’s judgment that are visited upon the anti-church and all of her worldly supporters.

“For her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.” - John’s language recalls historical Babylon’s first appearance as a focal point of anti-Christian religion and opposition to God. Shortly after the flood, mankind gathered on the *“plain in Shinar”* and conspired to build a mighty tower that *“reaches the heavens.”* To frustrate man’s presumption and pride the Lord confused the language of humanity and the race was scattered across the face of the earth. The name of that place and the tower that was begun there was called *“Babel”* to commemorate the



“The Destruction of Harlot Babylon and the Escape of God’s People From Her Downfall” Luther Bible Woodcut by Heinrich Vogtherr

confusion of the languages. (Cf. Genesis 11:1-9) Thus did the city of Babylon come into being. The erection of great towers, called “*ziggurats*,” as places of worship continued to be characteristic of Babylonian religion throughout its history. The Greek verb John uses in this passage “*ekollethesan*” is an unusual word, based on a root which means to glue or mortar together. This allusion is, most probably, to the bricks of Babel’s tower and Babylon’s most ancient pedigree as a center of anti-Christian religion. The image is used to depict the countless sins of Babylon the Great as joining together like bricks in a building so massive that it reaches “*up to heaven*.” The wording may be drawn from Jeremiah 51:9 - “*We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to his own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the clouds.*” (Cf. Genesis 18:20-21)

“*And God has remembered her crimes.*” - God the Righteous Judge is “*the living Rememberer of Iniquities*” (Franzmann, p. 120). His divine justice and holiness cannot allow sin to remain unpunished. To speak of God as remembering sins, is, of course, anthropomorphic language which speaks of God as if He were a man. God

is incapable of forgetfulness and thus to speak of God remembering does not refer to calling something to mind that has been forgotten. In the Old Testament to call upon God's remembrance of sin was to call for the execution of divine judgment. ***"They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins."*** (Hosea 9:9; cf. also Psalm 109:14)

"Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, "I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn." Therefore, in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her." - Having summoned the righteous out of Harlot Babylon that there may be left not even ten righteous to shield her from God's wrath (as in God's promise to Abraham on the day of Sodom's destruction - Genesis 18:32), the Lord's voice from heaven demands that just punishment be rendered upon the sinful city. The judgment of God is never arbitrary or capricious. God's punishment always fits the crime. So shall it be in His judgment upon Babylon. The verb ***"give back"*** (Greek - *"apodidomi"*) specifically refers to requital - appropriate repayment in kind. The NEB effectively translates the word *"pay her back in her own coin."* This is the Old Testament's *"lex talionis,"* an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, which reverberates throughout



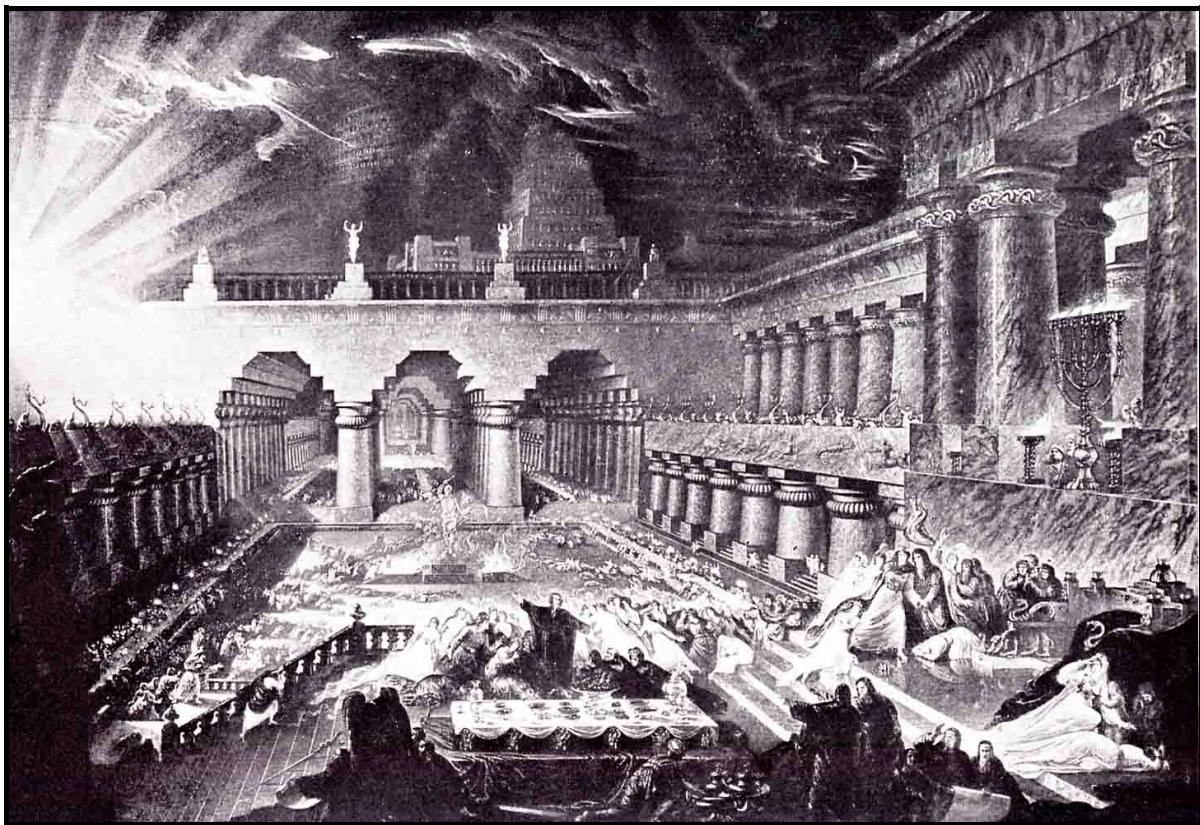
"The Whore of Babylon" by Matthias Gerung

the prophets' denunciations of ancient Babylon.

“O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us - he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.” (Psalm 137:8-9)

“Since this is the vengeance of the Lord, take vengeance on her; do to her as she has done to others... Repay her for her deeds; do to her as she has done. For she has defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.”
(Jeremiah 50:15, 29)

“Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion, declares the Lord...A destroyer will come against Babylon; her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God of retribution; He will repay in full.” (Jeremiah 51:24,56)



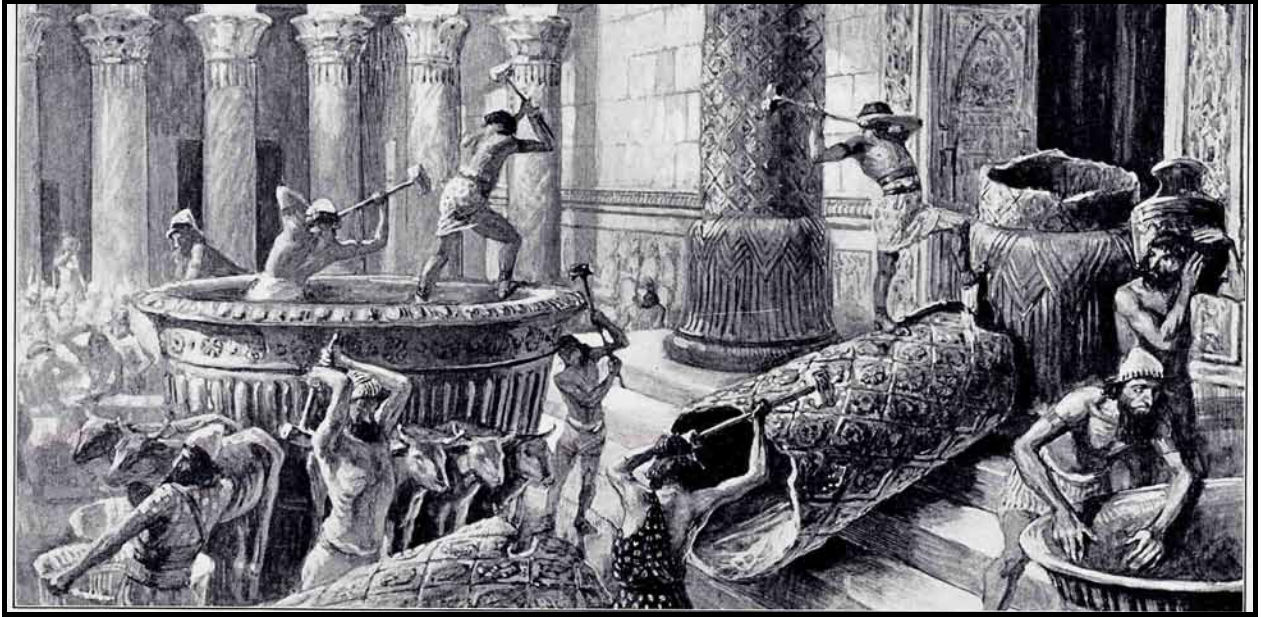
“Belshazzar’s Feast” by John Martin



“The Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem” by J. James Tissot

The NIV’s translation - **“pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup”** - contradicts this concept of punishment which fits the crime - an appropriate repayment in kind. G.K Beale argues that the NIV, along with the majority of other English translations, misunderstood the nature of the Hebrew idiom reflected in the Greek phrase *“diplosate ta dipla”* - literally *“double the double things.”* It does not indicate two for one repayment as the translation suggests. Instead *“to double the double things.”* means *“to produce a duplicate, a matching equivalent.”* The phrase would then be translated - *“give her the exact equivalent of her works; duplicate the same mixture for her in the cup which she has mixed.”* This insight removes the apparent inconsistency in the text.

“Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.” - The *“punishment fits the crime”* principle is more specifically applied to Babylon in Verse 7. The pseudo-church is condemned first of all for her arrogance and self-indulgence. The **“torture and grief”** which is visited upon her will be the exact equivalent (Greek - *“hosa”* - literally *“in as many things”*) of **“the glory and luxury she gave herself.”** She who had boasted that her power was limitless and her reign unending will be brought low. The omniscient Lord is fully aware of even the



“The Babylonians Plundering Solomon’s Temple” by J. James Tissot

innermost feelings of her heart. The language of the text is drawn from Isaiah 47 where the prophet contemptuously dismisses Babylon’s supreme self-confidence and her reliance upon the dark powers of magic and the supernatural:

“You said, “I will continue forever - the eternal queen!” But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. Now then, listen you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, “I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.” Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: the loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure in spite of all your sorceries and all your potent spells.” (Isaiah 47:7-9)

Pride is the mother of all sin, the willingness of the creature to place himself in the position of the Creator. Thus Isaiah’s repeated reference to the sacred name of God - **“I AM”** (Hebrew - *“Jahweh”*) in his condemnation of Babylon’s vain boasting. Ezekiel diagnosed the same idolatrous attitude within the heart of the king of Tyre: *“In the pride of your heart you say, “I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas. But you are a man and not a god though you think you are as wise as a god.” (Ezekiel 28:2).*

The first century apocryphal “*Sibylline Oracles*” adapts the same language in its dire prediction of the destruction and downfall of Rome, a contemporary manifestation of Babylon the Great :

“A great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea and will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself and the land of Italy, because of which many holy faithful Hebrews and a true people perished. You will be among evil mortals suffering evils but you will remain utterly desolate for all ages yet, despising your soil because you desired sorcery. With you were found adulteries and illicit intercourse with boys. Effeminate and unjust, evil city, ill-fated above all. Alas, city of the Latin land, unclean in all things, drunken slut, rejoicing in vipers, as a widow you will sit by the banks, and the river Tiber will weep for you, its consort...But you said, I alone am and no one will ravage me.” But now God who is forever will destroy you.” (SO, 5, 160-175)

“Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine.”
- The judgement of God upon great Babylon will be sudden and complete. John’s reliance upon Isaiah 47 continues - ***“Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day.”*** (Isaiah 47:9). The arrival of judgment will be completely unexpected and therefore all the more abrupt. The harlot’s boastful dreams of eternal existence (***“I am not a widow”***) will be replaced by ***“death.”*** Her confident expectation of permanent happiness (***“I will never mourn”***) will give way to the grim reality of ***“mourning”*** (Greek - *“penthos”* - *“sorrow”*). The opulence her ***“luxury”*** will melt away before the gaunt shadow of ***“famine.”*** The fires of hell will rise up to consume the harlot who has served the power of the devil, and reveled in the empty rewards which Satan bestows upon his own. The totality and the finality of this awful judgment is the expression of the almighty power of the only true God - ***“for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”***

“When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared in her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: “Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!” - Those who have benefitted the most from the long reign of Harlot Babylon now join in lamenting her downfall. The link between ***“the kings of the earth”*** - that is, those who exercise the power and authority of government - and Harlot Babylon has already been well established (cf. Revelation 17:2,18). These are the men who have manipulated the world’s power system to their own personal advantage. They have grown rich and fat from the corruption and abuse of that system. Having ***“committed adultery with her and***

shared in her luxury,” they lead the opening chorus of her dirge. The paradox is striking! These are the very same people who had viciously turned on the harlot to destroy her in a futile attempt to save themselves (Revelation 17:16-18). Now they weep and wail at her passing. There is no rhyme or reason to the actions of those who have turned their backs on God and His Word. Only unreason and mindless passion prevail here. Consistency should not be expected from such people. Those who have foolishly chosen to bow down before such masters are by their very nature fickle, unstable, and constantly changing. Lenski draws a stark but sadly realistic parallel: *“The lover of a whore strangles her and then weeps beside her corpse like a fool.”* (Lenski, p. 522)



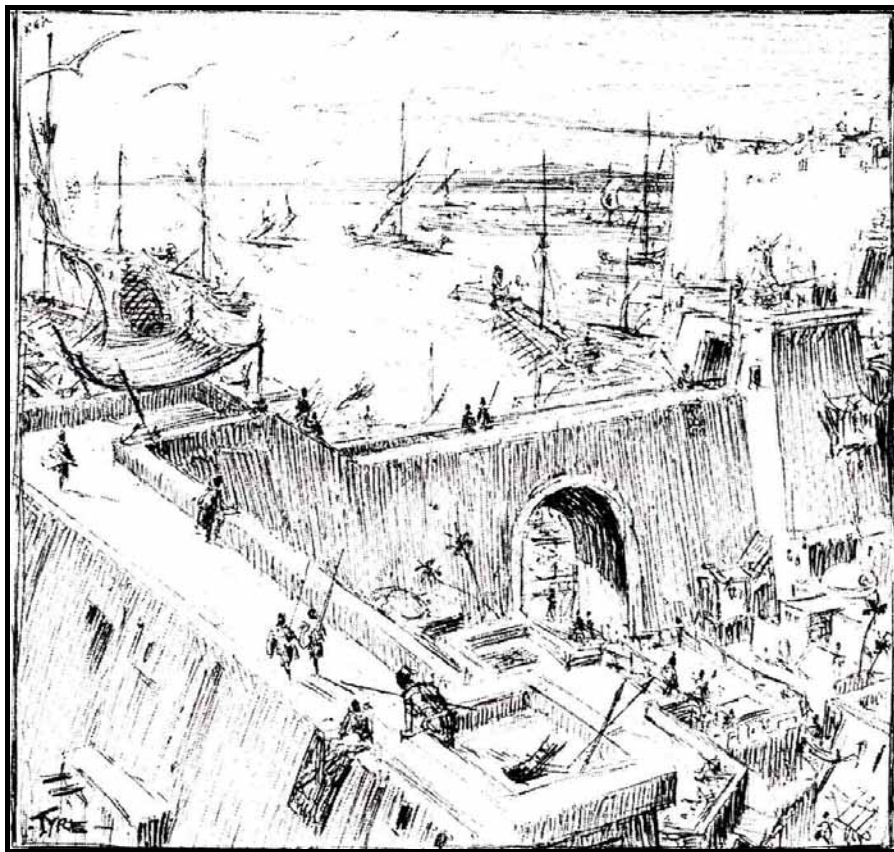
*“The Kings of the Earth Lamenting the Downfall of Babylon”
Detail from a Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Lufft*

The scene is very similar to that of the world’s re-action to God’s judgment of Tyre in Ezekiel’s funeral song over the monarch of that mighty Phoenician trading city. Ezekiel’s dirge over Tyre is also led by three groups, kings, merchants, and mariners. John reliance on Ezekiel can be observed in the prophet’s description of the king’s lament:

“Then all the princes of the seacoast will step down from their thrones and lay aside their robes and take off their embroidered garments. Clothed with terror, they will sit on the ground, trembling every

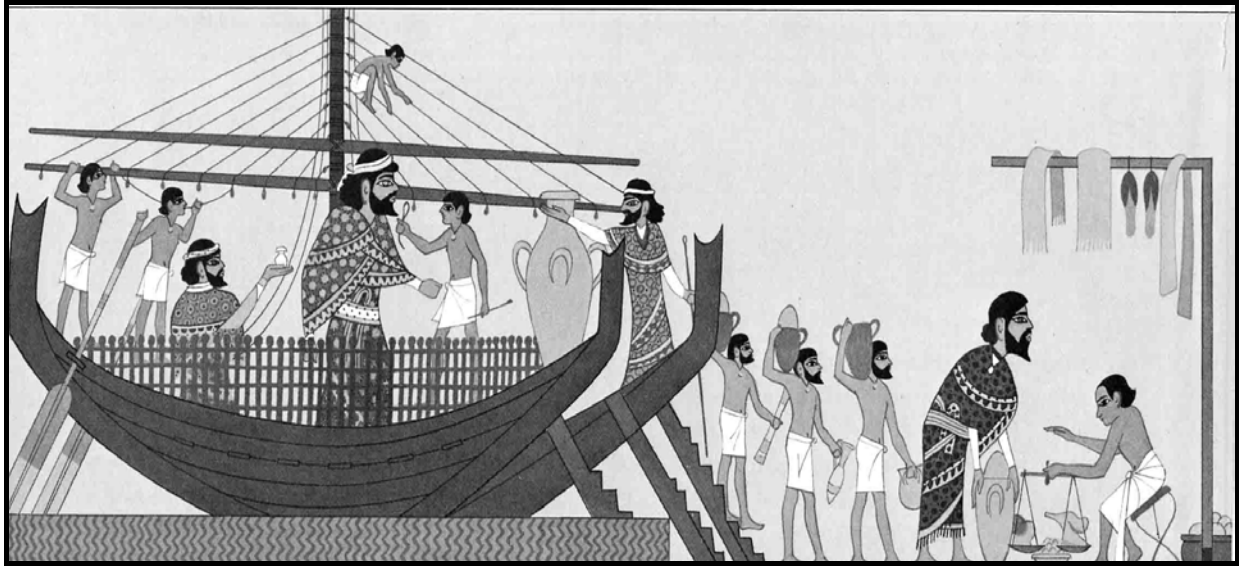
moment, appalled at you. They will take up a lament concerning you and say to you: “How you are destroyed, O city of renown...” All who live in the coast lands are appalled at you; the kings shudder with horror and their faces are distorted with fear.” (Ezekiel 26:16-17; 27:35)

There is nothing altruistic or unselfish in this song of grief. Their horror is intermingled with terror for they now recognize only too well that the same judgment which has devastated the harlot is sweeping inexorably toward them. They watch **“the smoke of her burning”** (cf. the destruction of Sodom - Genesis 19:28) with horrified fascination. The fire of judgment rages, and although they may seek to distance themselves from it - **“they will stand far off”** - there is no escape. **“Woe”** (Greek - *“ouai”*) has appeared before in Revelation’s visions (cf. Revelation 8:13). It is a cry of consternation and despair, uttered in the face of overwhelming catastrophe. All of Great Babylon’s glorious strength - emphasized in the threefold repetition **“O great city, O Babylon, city of power!”** - was not able to deliver her



“The Port of Ancient Tyre in the Days of Hiram and Solomon”

from the judgment of the mighty God. The absolute totality of her devastation, completely unexpected, descending upon her suddenly without warning is stressed by the king's lament - ***"In one hour your doom has come!"***



"A Phoenician Trading Vessel from Tyre Unloading Its Cargo"

"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more - cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, "The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered." The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" - The second chorus in the global lament over the downfall of Babylon the Great is sung by ***"the merchants of the earth."*** The merchants bitterly decry the market collapse that the destruction of Babylon represents - ***"because no one buys their cargoes any more."*** There is no personal sympathy here but only remorse over the loss of income. This a matter of economics not loyalty. The text continues to follow the pattern of Ezekiel 27 which lists a detailed inventory of the luxury trade which comes to an abrupt end because of the downfall of Tyre (cf. Ezekiel 27:12-24). Ezekiel concludes: ***"The merchants***



“The Rulers of the Earth Lament the Downfall of Babylon the Great” - Luther Bible Woodcut

among the nations hiss at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.” (Ezekiel 27:36) Harlot Babylon is the epitome of hedonism and consumerism. In her power and wealth she lives for the pleasure of the moment and satisfies her sensual needs with all that which money can buy. Lenski argues that given the spiritual nature of Harlot Babylon the application of this segment should not, however, be limited to economics and material wealth:

“When we recall that Babylon equals the whole anti-Christian seductiveness in all the departments of human life for all the earth dwellers we shall not regard these “merchants of the earth” as literal merchants but shall see that they are all those who pander to the anti-Christian seduction and fatten themselves upon this seduction. The world is full of them today, many of them being great, multitudes of them being small. They set up their emporiums everywhere:

thousands of them have big establishments in politics all over the world, hundreds of thousands have them in schools and education with seductive anti-Christian wares. Who will count them in books, magazines, the press! They import and export, ever doing a big selling business, finding delighted buyers everywhere, maintaining vast chain stores all over the world. Anti-Christian display wherever you turn. Babylon, “the Mother of the Whores” (17:5), is well served by her merchants who sell the seductive goods of her whoring. They grow rich through it, for it certainly pays...yet the whole statement is symbolical and should not be reduced to mere monetary riches but should be regarded in the light of what is considered as profit in Babylon the Great...The godless politician and the grafter of the government with his cargo of goods; the conscienceless lawyer in the court with his cargo; the sceptic editor, writer, professor with the cargoes they unload; the pulpiter and ecclesiastic with the anti-Christian cargoes they unpack; and so forth in the whole anti-Christian world, in every corner of it, down to the peddlers and all that all salesmen of anything in the way of anti-Christian seduction and attraction, offer, and all that in any way they make by it for their own satisfaction, are here referred to.” (Lenski, pp.516,524-525)

Fifteen of the twenty-nine items on Revelation’s cargo manifest also appear in

Ezekiel 27. The trade goods listed are representative of the type of luxury items prevalent in the Biblical world. The list begins with **“gold, silver, precious stones and pearls.”** These are the commodities that have defined material wealth throughout human history. Their ostentatious display in extravagant jewelry was

prominent in the description of the garish appearance of the harlot - **“The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.”** (Revelation 17:4) Their position at the head of the list signifies their relative value in the eyes of the world.



“Salome - Dressed in the Fine Jewels and Silks of a Courtesan - Dancing for Herod Antipas” by Armand Point

Next come **“fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth.”** **“Fine linen”** was a unique material of the highest quality made from Egyptian flax. It was also produced in Spain and Asia Minor. The cloth was extremely expensive, renowned for its beauty and delicacy. **“Purple”** was a fabric produced from a purple dye extracted from a particular species of snails one drop at a time. It was reported to take 60,000 snails to produce one pound of the dye. A single bolt of purple cloth would cost the modern equivalent of \$28,000. Cloth of purple was produced in Thyatira and Laodicea, two of Revelation’s seven cities. It became the distinctive color of the emperor. Its rarity and costliness

made it synonymous with the most extravagant luxury. Mark Anthony and Cleopatra are reputed to have set a new standard for ostentatiousness when they had the main sail of the great warship colored with Tyrian purple dye. **“Silk”** was imported at great

expense from China and the Orient. The Greek word for silk (“*sirikou*”) is derived from the Greek word for the Chinese people (“*hoi seres*”). Silk had first been introduced into the Mediterranean world in the wake of Alexander the Great’s incursions into India. Initially Rome banned men from wearing silken clothing, viewing it as effeminate and decadent, but those prohibitions had long since disappeared by the height of the empire. “*Scarlet*” is the brilliant color produced by the fruit of the “*kermas oaks*” that grew in various parts of Asia Minor. In Revelation, scarlet is the color of the dragon and the beast. John introduces the Great Harlot as “*a woman dressed in purple and scarlet.*” (Revelation 17:4)

The next cluster of items deal with furniture and building materials. “*Every sort of citron wood*” leads the list. This is the wood of the thyrine tree which grows in North Africa. It was highly prized for its beautiful color and varied grain. It was said that the wood of this tree could produce doors and tables which looked like the eyes of a peacock’s tail, the stripes of a tiger, or the spots of a leopard. A table constructed from this rare and precious wood cost more than a large country estate. Furniture made from citron wood was a fashion craze in imperial Rome. Fortunes were spent to buy it as an unmistakable mark of economic status. Ivory was also a popular status symbol among Rome’s economic elite. Prices rose steadily as the depletion of the elephant population in those portions of Africa accessible to Rome forced imports from as far away as India. Other “*costly wood*” of the era included ebony from Africa and cypress and cedar from Syria and Palestine. “*Bronze, iron, and marble*” were

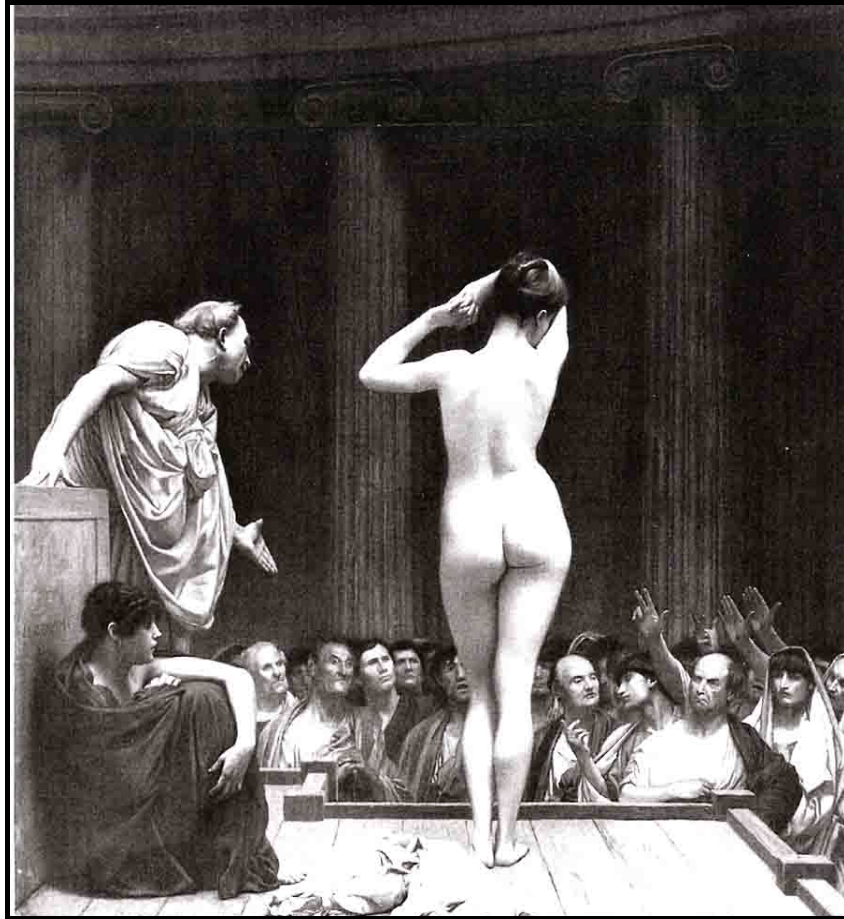


“*The Downfall of Babylon the Great*”
15th Century Bible Illumination

imported from across the empire to build the great monuments, palaces, and temples of the imperial city. The cargo manifest next turns to spices and food supplies - ***“cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of temples of the imperial city. The cargo manifest next turns to spices and food supplies - “cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat.”*** Spices in the ancient world were extremely costly. Among the most popular was cinnamon which came from China and East Asia. It was used to flavor food and wine and to scent oils and perfumes. ***“Spice”*** (Greek - *“amomon”*) came from the seeds of a fragrant shrub in India and Africa. It was used in perfume and hair oils. ***“Incense, myrrh, and frankincense”*** recall the precious gifts presented to the Christ child by the wise men (cf. Matthew 2:11). The food items listed - ***“of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat”*** - are of gourmet caliber signifying, along with the rest of the cargo list, self-indulgence and luxury. The extended listing concludes with a variety of livestock, human and otherwise - ***“cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.”*** ***“Cattle”*** in the Roman world were not primarily used as a food source, but as working animals and a source of dairy products. In the same way, ***“sheep”*** were raised primarily for their wool, not their meat. The Roman aristocracy had acquired huge land holdings throughout the provinces on which large herds of cattle and sheep were raised.



“The Babylonian Slave Market” by Edwin Long - 1875



“A Roman Slave Market” by Jean-Leon Gerome -1884

“Horses” were of crucial importance in Roman culture for transportation, sport, and war. The chariot races of the hippodrome in Rome drew tens of thousands of fanatical fans for whom recreation was the most important reality of life. The chariot was originally developed for military use although by this time its significance on the battlefield was diminishing. The **“carriages”** mentioned on John’s list are probably the four wheeled chariots favored by Roman noblemen, often plated with gold or silver. The final item on the list - **“and bodies and souls of men”** is a reference to the trade in slaves crucial to the economy of the Roman Empire. The Greek noun **“somaton”** (**“bodies”**) is characteristically used in reference to slave, viewing their bodies as a mere item of trade and merchandise. The Biblical author adds the telling observation that he who trades in human flesh is also guilty of buying and selling **“souls of men.”** Martin Franzmann labels this phrase as *“the harshest word spoken on slavery in the New Testament.”* (Franzmann, p. 122) It is estimated that there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire at the time the Book of

Revelation was written. The entire social structure and economy of Rome was based upon the availability of an endless supply of free labor, both skilled and unskilled. Although slavery in the Biblical world had more to do with economics and politics than race, the reduction of another human being to the level mere property, human livestock, powerfully indicates the brutality and inhumanity of the corrupt and evil system represented by Babylon the Great.

“They will say, “The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished.” - The wealth and power of Babylon - ***“all your riches and splendor”*** - are picturesquely described as sweet autumn fruit that has come to the pinnacle of ripeness (Greek - *“opora.”*) The Greek text designates this fruit as *“the lust of your soul”* which is somewhat more forceful than the NIV’s translation - ***“you longed for.”*** These things are the reason for living in Harlot Babylon but now they are gone forever. The concept that Babylon’s wealth and power are irretrievably lost is repeated three times for particular emphasis - ***“is gone...have vanished...never to be recovered.”*** The negative is repeated twice in the third phrase - literally *“in no way will they be found any longer.”*

“The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off...” - The language which described the lament of the kings is repeated as the merchants sing their chorus of woe. Like the kings, the merchants seek to distance themselves from the judgment which has come upon the city - ***“will stand far off.”*** But their fate is so closely interwoven with hers that there is no escape for them now. They are ***“the merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her.”*** Her downfall is theirs. Thus the bitter intensity of their lament as they ***“weep, mourn, and cry out.”*** The words of the lament are also very similar to that of the kings, prefaced by the triple woe and the emphasis on the contrast between her former and her present state - ***“Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls. In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin.”*** However, in keeping with the role of the merchants, the focus is not on power but on wealth. These scoundrels are desperately fearful about what the downfall of Harlot Babylon will mean for them.

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim: “Was there ever a city like this great city” They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: “Woe! Woe, O great city,



*“The Destruction of Babylon’s Commerce”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Matthias Merian*

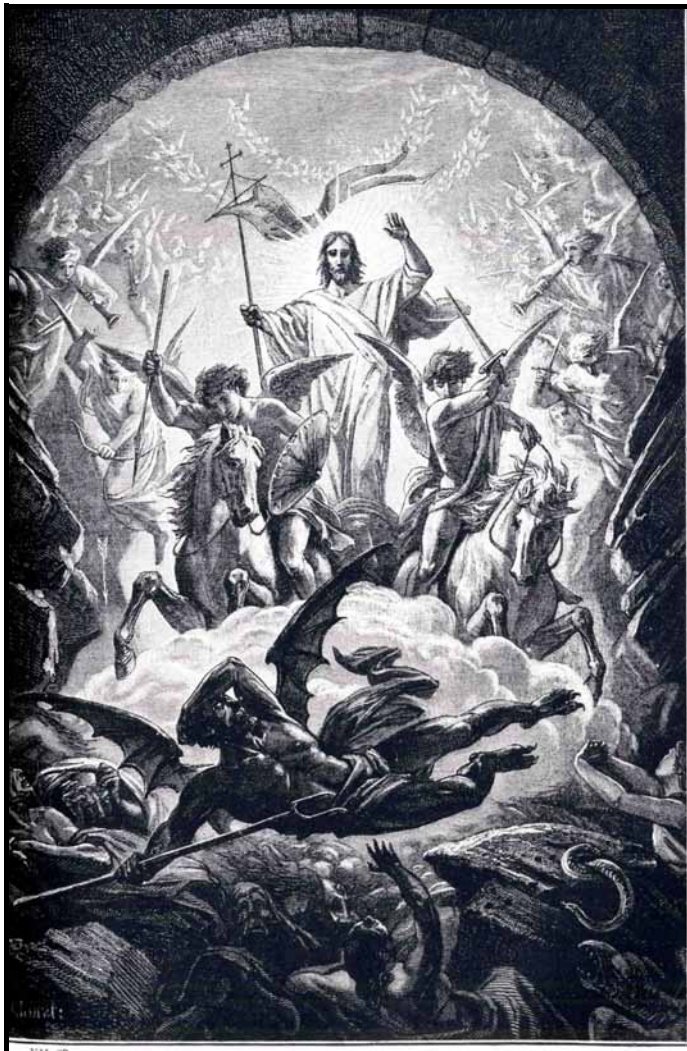
where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she had been brought to ruin!”

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship...” - The third chorus of Babylon the Great’s funeral dirge is sung by the world’s mariners. The prominence of seafarers in the lament is the result of John’s reliance upon Ezekiel’s lament over the downfall of the city of Tyre. The island city of Tyre was the headquarters of the Phoenician’s commercial empire. Phoenician trading ships set sail from Tyre across the Mediterranean and beyond establishing colonies and extending their reach throughout the ancient world. Recognizing this reality, Ezekiel depicts the destruction of Tyre as a catastrophic shipwreck. (Ezekiel 27) In Ezekiel’s vision the sailors who reach the shore bewail the city’s downfall and cover themselves with the dust and ashes of mourning.

“The shore lands will quake when your seamen cry out. All who handle the oars will abandon their ships; the mariners and all the seamen will stand on the shore. They will raise their voice and cry bitterly over you; they will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll in

ashes. They will shave their heads because of you and will put on sackcloth. They will weep over you with anguish of soul and with bitter mourning. As they wail and mourn over you they will take up a lament concerning you. “Who was ever silenced like Tyre, surrounded by the sea?” (Ezekiel 27:28-32)

The content of the seamen’s song closely resembles that of the kings and the merchants. Like their counterparts, the sailors **“stand far off”** and **“see the smoke of her burning.”** Their song is also motivated by self-interest, sorrowing over the loss of income which Babylon’s destruction represents - **“all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth.”** The mariners’ question - **“Was there ever a city like this great city?”** recalls the question posed in Revelation 13:4 in response to the



“Christ the Conqueror” by Plockhorst

awesome power of the beast - **“Who is like the beast?”** The traditional Old Testament imagery of mourning - **“They will throw dust and their heads and with weeping and mourning cry out”** - is drawn from the mariners’ lament in Ezekiel (cf. Ezekiel 27:30; also Joshua 7:6; 1 Samuel 4:12; 2 Samuel 1:2; 13:19; 15:32; Job 2:12; Lamentations 2:10). For the third time, the chorus ends with the awestruck, almost disbelieving, assertion of the suddenness and the totality of Great Babylon’s destruction - **“In one hour she has been brought to ruin.”**

“Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you!” - The tone of lamentation and gloom abruptly shifts to exultation in verse 20. To the multitudes of those who were allied with her or profited from her work, the destruction of



“The Downfall of Babylon the Great” - Luther Bible Woodcut by Virgil Solis

Harlot Babylon was an unmitigated catastrophe, signaling the coming of their own demise. But for the faithful people of God the news of Babylon the Great’s downfall is the sweetest gospel, cause for celebration and rejoicing. Accordingly, Babylon’s funeral song concludes with a call from the Lord for His people to break out in celebration. The hymns of jubilation which will follow in chapter 19 are sung in response to this summons. The bitter enemy of the true church has fallen and God’s people are encouraged to hold a joyful celebration over her dead body. The Greek verb *“euphrainou”* not only means to be happy, but to hold a celebration in expression of that happiness. Smith suggests the translation - *“Make merry over her.”* This is the same word the was used in Revelation 11:10 to describe the sinful world’s celebration over the destruction of the two witnesses. But now it is the people of God who are given cause for celebration. While unrepentant sinners on earth quail in terror before the judgment of God, the redeemed in heaven are invited to the victory party - *“Rejoice over her, O heaven!”* Those who have patiently borne the brunt of the whore’s fury - *“saints and apostles and prophets”* - are specified in the celebration invitation. God’s judgment upon Babylon is, in a sense, an expression of His love for his own. *“God has judged her for the way she treated*

you!” - The holy ones rejoice in their vindication, not in the sense of personal vengeance, but as a vindication of the justice and the holiness of God.

“The rejoicing does not arise out of a selfish spirit of revenge but out of a fulfilled hope that God has defended the honor of His just name by not leaving sin unpunished and by showing his people to have been in the right and the verdict rendered by the ungodly world against the saints to be wrong.” (Beale, pp. 916-917)



*“The Downfall of Harlot Babylon” - Woodcut from The Strassbourg Bible
1485*

John’s call to celebration recalls the prophecy of Jeremiah who had foretold the day when a song of joy would greet Babylon’s destruction because of all the innocent blood that she had shed (cf. Jeremiah 51:47-49)

“Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea and said, “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again! The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any

trade will ever be found in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of the bridegroom and the bride will never be heard in you again. You merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been killed upon the earth.” - The promise of God's judgement upon Babylon the Great and its dire consequences for her legions of followers are reaffirmed once

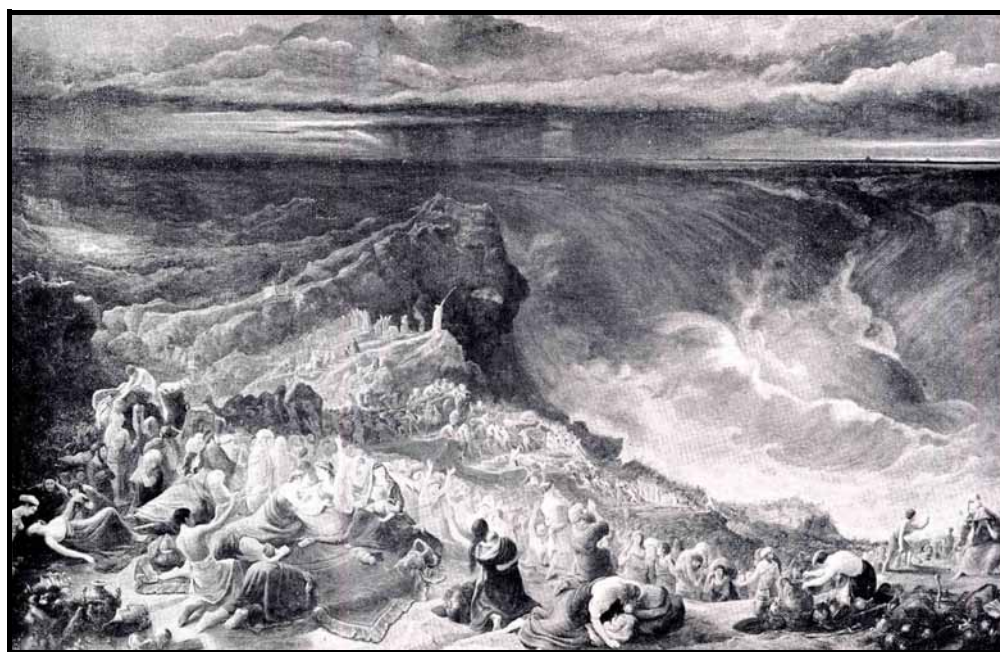


“The Mighty Angel and the Great Millstone” by Jean Duvet

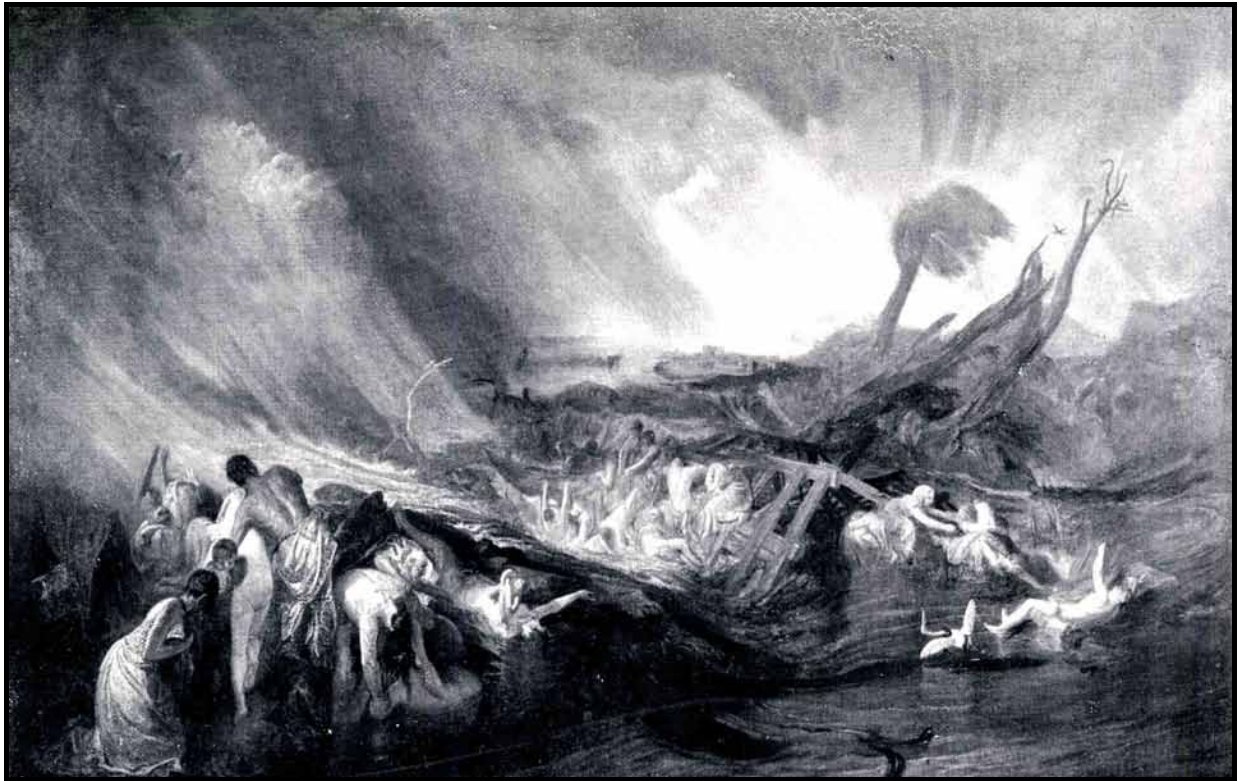
again in symbolic action and dramatic words. At the conclusion of the Book of Jeremiah, we had been informed that the prophet had sent the scroll of his prophecy of Babylon's downfall and destruction to be read in the city of Babylon itself by a military officer named Seraiah. The prophet had further instructed his messenger that when he had finished reading the prophecy of doom he was to wrap the scroll around a stone and hurl it into the River Euphrates (Jeremiah 51:59-64). Jeremiah had explained the symbolic significance of throwing the judgement scroll into the river as follows: ***“So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.”*** (Jeremiah 51:64) John adapts and extends Jeremiah's symbolism to convey both the suddenness and the permanence of God's judgement upon Harlot Babylon. All of the apostle's adaptations serve to intensify the message of irrevocable destruction.

The scene in the vision changes as John observes the coming of ***“a mighty angel.”*** The Greek adjective *“ischyros”* (*“mighty”*), characteristically applied only to God in heaven, describes this awesome messenger. The same word was used in Revelation 18:2 to describe the voice of the angel who came down from heaven to proclaim God’s judgement upon Babylon, identifying Him as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Its recurrence here seems to suggest that the figure bearing the millstone of God’s judgement is also Christ. The stone the Lord bears is ***“a boulder the size of a large millstone.”*** Such a stone, typically turned by a yoke of mules or oxen, was four or five feet in diameter and twelve to eighteen inches thick, weighing thousands of pounds. The language here recalls the words of our Lord in Matthew 18:6 - ***“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*** Harlot Babylon had existed across the centuries for the sole purpose of leading men to damnation. The use of the millstone plunged into the depths of the sea is therefore a most appropriate image of her destruction.

As Jeremiah had indicated, the image of the stone sinking beneath the water represents destruction that is complete and permanent. The stone slips below the surface of the water into oblivion; down into the depths of a watery grave. Nehemiah had used the same image to describe the utter destruction of Pharaoh and his mighty host in the Red Sea: ***“You divided the sea before them so they passed through it on dry ground, but You hurled their pursuers into the depths like a stone into the mighty waters.”*** (Nehemiah 9:11) Ezekiel explained the meaning of the image in



“Destruction at the Red Sea” by Francis Danby



“The World that Perished in the Flood” by J. M.W. Turner

greater detail as he promised that the great port city of Tyre would be submerged beneath the vast waters of the sea:

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘When I make you a desolate city, like the cities no longer inhabited, when I bring the ocean depths over you and its vast waters cover you, then I will bring you down with those who go down to the pit, to the people of long ago. I will make you dwell in the earth below, as in ancient ruins, with those who go down to the pit and you will not return or take your place in the land of the living. I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found.’ declares the Sovereign Lord.” (Ezekiel 26:19-21)

John’s language distinctly echoes that of Ezekiel - **“With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.”** The Greek text stresses the suddenness of Babylon’s demise - literally: *Thus, with a rush, will be cast down...* The adverb *“hormema”* is typically used of an attacking army which sweeps forward with such force and speed that there is no opportunity for defense. To use our modern idiom, the defenders are swept away *“before they knew what hit*

‘em.” With the Sovereign Lord’s judgement finally comes upon Harlot Babylon it will be suddenly and irrevocably - **“a horrible end and you will be no more.”**

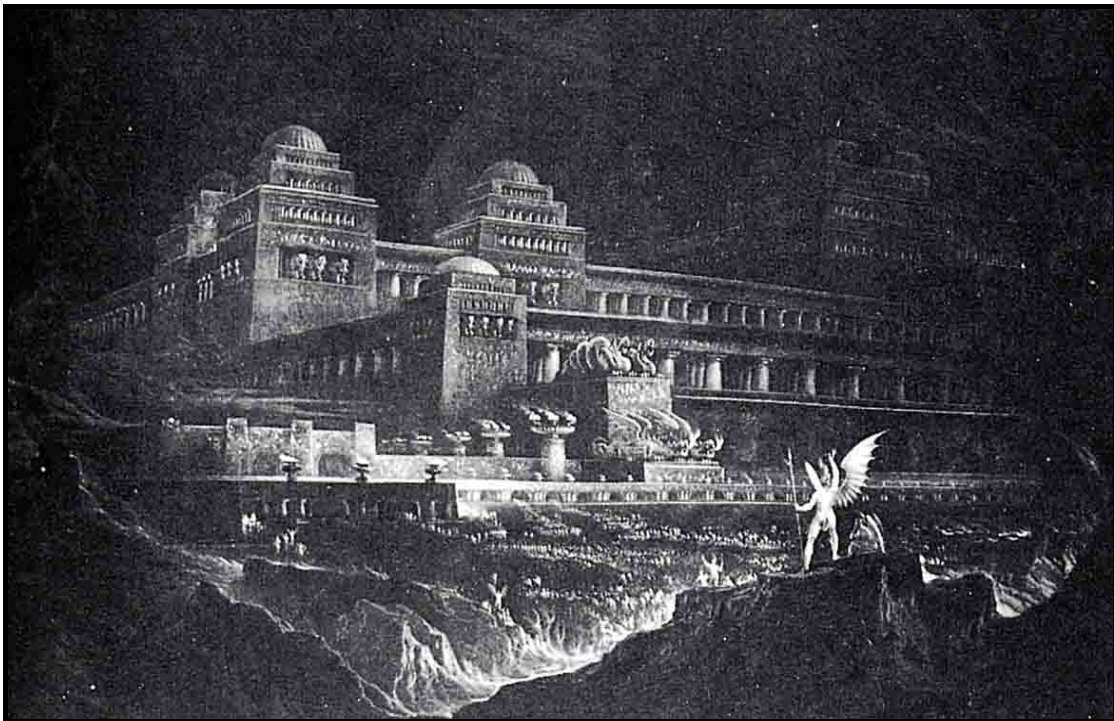


“The Death of Sardanapalis” by Eugene Delacroix

“The music of harpists and musicians...” - In the wake of the Lord’s judgement, the city will be desolate and empty, a ghost town devoid of the sounds of life. Where once the hustle and bustle of human activity abounded, now the chilling silence of death will prevail. In the utter darkness, demons will scurry through the shadows of a derelict ruin that now belongs to them alone. In fallen Babylon the Great the utter stillness of the grave prevails. Jeremiah had foretold such a devastation of Jerusalem by the hosts of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar: ***“I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.”*** (Jeremiah 25:10) Now John foretells the time when the destroyer will himself be destroyed: ***“O great city! O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!”*** 19th Century French artist Eugene Delacroix captures the despair of the moment of destruction in his magnificent painting ***“The Death of Sardanapalis.”*** As his enemies surrounded his palace and closed in for the kill, Sardanapalis, one of the last rulers of the Assyrian empire,

reclined on his golden bed atop a huge funeral pyre. His treasures heaped around him, he ordered the slaughter of his wives and servants, the last of whom lit the fire and hurled himself upon it, so that no one might survive the king's defeat. Such is the hopeless or utter despair. Babylon the Great is not one city but every city. Dr. Martin Franzmann correctly describes the grim message of the vision as *"a dirge upon human culture:"*

"In times of disaster, men comfort themselves with dreams of a time to come when 'things will be normal again' and old dear familiarities can be resumed. The angel bids Babylon to forego that dream; there will be for her no normal times again. The old songs will not be sung again and the old sweet music will not be made anymore. The longed for hum of human industry is banished; the busy sounds of craftsmen hammering and thumping are gone and gone the steady hum of millstones grinding grain for daily bread. The streets of darkened Babylon will never know again the snug hour when the evening lamps are lit. The ever-new rapturous voice of bride and bridegroom will not be heard again. The time of weddings is past. The mournful words of the mighty angel sound like a dirge upon human culture - what lovely gifts of God are lost when men use them against the God who gave them!"
(Franzmann, p. 124)



"The Demon City of the Damned" - 19th Century Engraving

"Your merchants were the world's great men..." - The justification and basis for such a horrendous judgment are now adduced again. First, Harlot Babylon deserves

to be utterly destroyed because she has gloried in wealth and power, sanctioning a worldly religion that is based upon such things. The text recalls the words of Isaiah's condemnation of mighty Tyre:

“Who planned this against Tyre, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are the renowned of the earth? The Lord Almighty planned it to bring low the pride of all glory and to humble those who are renowned on the earth.” (Isaiah 23:8-9)

God's harsh judgment upon Babylon shatters the arrogant pride of men who have trusted in their own riches and power and have live by sensual and luxurious self-indulgence.



“A Babylonian Magus” -by Jean Jacques Boissard

“By your magic spell, all the nations were led astray.” - Ancient Babylon was renown for its astrology, occult wisdom, and magic. Isaiah had denounced the great city for its involvement in sorcery and magic: ***“They will come upon you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries and all of your potent spells...Disaster will come upon you and you will not be able to conjure it away...Keep on then with your magic spells and with your many sorceries which you have labored at since childhood...Let your astrologers come forward, those star gazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.”*** (Isaiah 47:9-13) Harlot Babylon is condemned because of the ***“magic spell”*** (Greek - ***“pharmakia”***) by which she has misled and deceived the nations.



“Babylonians Magi at Work” - Medieval Woodcut

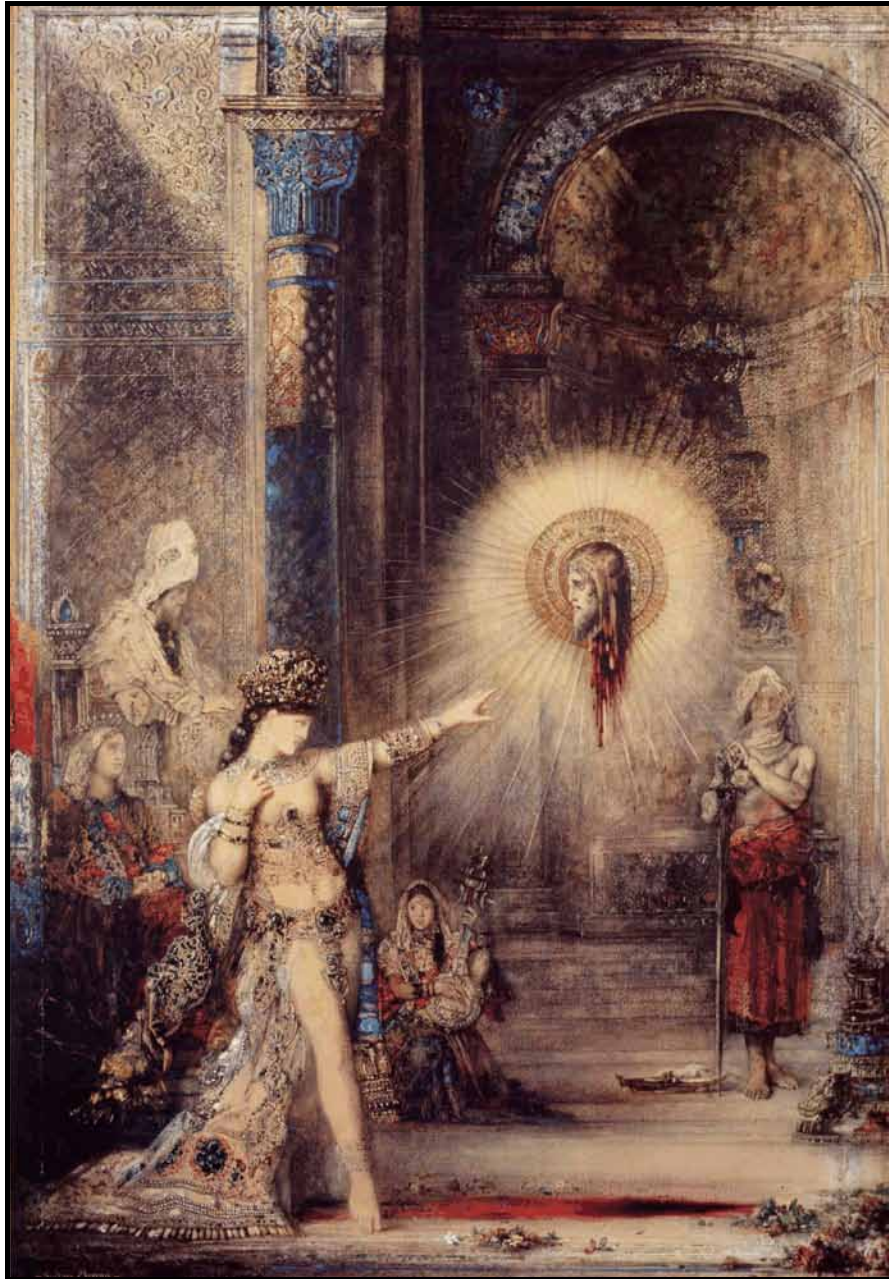
Behind the harlot lurks the dragon who empowers her to work supernatural wonders on behalf of her falsehood.

“Sorcery is here understood in its broadest sense as a reference to the harlot’s false spirituality, wonder-working signs, and apparent miracles (cf. Revelation 13:13-14; Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) by which she deceived and led astray people to believe that they had security through their trust in her.” ((Brighton, p. 480)

“In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints...” - Finally, Harlot Babylon must be utterly destroyed because she is guilty of murder most foul. Her streets are pooled with the blood of saints and martyrs. The blood of the innocent cries out to God for vengeance from the soil of the earth (cf. Genesis 4:10; Hebrew 12:24; Revelation 6:9-10) and justice demands that God hear that cry. Throughout history, harlot Babylon has been characterized by the bloody persecution and slaughter of the faithful. Her bitter opposition to the Gospel has been consistently expressed by the brutal murder of the Gospel’s faithful witnesses. When she was unable to destroy them herself, she has seduced the powers of secular government to act as her executioner. Harlot Babylon is covered with the stains of martyr’s blood.

The combination of supernatural seduction and the blood of the martyrs is powerfully

expressed in *"The Apparition,"* a painting by 19th Century French symbolist Gustav Moreau. Moreau depicts Salome, dressed in the fine jewels and silks of a courtesan as she dances before King Herod Antipas. Her intent is to use the King's lustful desire for her to obtain the execution of John the Baptist whose truthful condemnation had offended her mother. The painter presents the seductive young dancer with the apparition of the Baptist's severed head suspended over a pool of blood on the floor.



"The Apparition" by Gustav Moreau - 1875



“The Marriage Feast of the Lamb” from the Brussels Tapestry

The Marriage Feast of the Lamb

Revelation 19:1-10

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants.” And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” Then a voice came from the throne saying: “Praise our God, all you His servants, who fear Him, both small and great!” Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of

thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and

with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."



"The Messianic Bridegroom" by E. M. Lilien

"After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants."

- This grand celebration comes in response to the summons of Revelation 18:20. "After these things" (Greek - "meta tauta") The characteristic phrase signals the change of scene. Harlot Babylon has been judged. Just

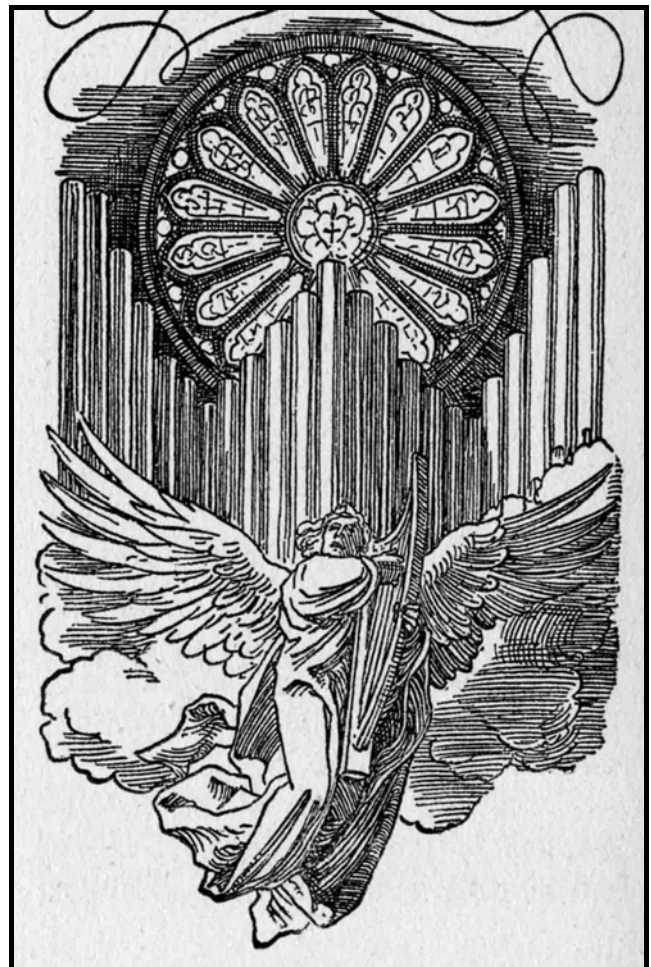
punishment has been meted out to her. In stark contrast to the deathly silence that reigns over the ruins of fallen Babylon the people of God break forth in jubilant song. The sound which falls upon John's ear transcends his descriptive ability - "what sounded like the roar of a great multitude." But this sound goes far beyond anything that has ever been heard on earth.

“Prior to receiving the revelation, John had never before heard such a harmonic and melodic voice. So beautiful was the voice of this heavenly choir that, though John could understand the words, the euphonious sound was beyond the ability of the natural human voice.” (Brighton, p. 487)

The **“great multitude”** whom John hears are all the people of God, the saints of every place and time assembled before the throne, joined by the majestic host of angels, praising God for the culmination of history and the victorious consummation of the plan of salvation. This is the triumph song of the universal church, the *“una sancta.”*

While the doleful sounds of the world’s lament over the downfall of Harlot Babylon still linger in the air, a mighty chorus of jubilation and praise arises from the people of God. The verses of the great hymn of praise are structured around the transliterated Hebrew composite **“Hallelujah”** which means *“Praise the Lord!”* The word is closely linked to the worship of the Old Testament church in the temple to express intense rejoicing and praise. It was evidently a prominent component of praise anthems of the priestly choirs who preformed the liturgical services of the sanctuary. Thus in the Old Testament, it appears exclusively in the so-called *“Hallel Psalms”* of the latter part of the hymn book of ancient Israel (cf. Psalms 104-106, 111-113, 115-117, 135, 146-150). Its New Testament usage is confined to the church’s great hymn of praise in Revelation 19 (cf. Revelation 19: 1,3,4,6).

“Salvation and glory and power belong to our God....” - The opening verse of the hymn celebrates God’s judgment of the harlot. Note that God is addressed as **“our God”** signifying the intimate bond of faith which unites this great host with the Creator. **“Salvation and glory and power”** are ascribed to God alone. **“Salvation”** (Greek - *“soteria”*)



“Hallelujah!” By Rudolf Schäfer



“The Great Dragon” by Barry Moser

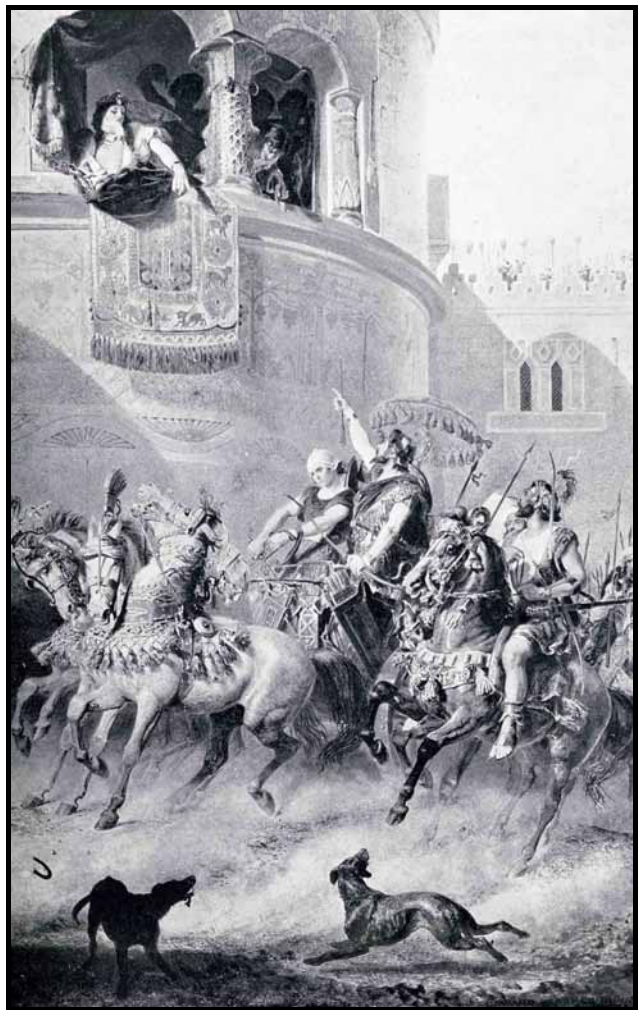
refers to all that which God has done through the sacrificial death of His Son to deliver fallen mankind from sin and its curse. The hymn acknowledges that this salvation, now fully accomplished, is God’s doing, not man’s, totally by grace through the blood of Jesus. **“Glory”** (Greek - *“doxa”*) is the awesome totality of all that which God has revealed about Himself in the salvation which He has graciously bestowed upon His people. **“Power”** (Greek - *“dynamis”*) is the divine omnipotence by which He has perfectly accomplished His purpose. The awful price of sin has been paid in full. Christ has taken our place and suffered our punishment. Therefore, **“true and just are His judgments.”** The victorious salvation which He bestows upon His people fully complies with the demands of His holiness and righteousness. The verdicts of His judgment are perfectly accurate and

completely fair both in salvation and in condemnation.

“He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants.” The **“true and just”** judgment of God is irrefutably demonstrated by the condemnation and destruction of Harlot Babylon. In John’s imagery Harlot Babylon personifies the great Antichrist and the legion of lesser anti-Christes who have populated human history. The title written on her forehead had identified her as **“THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”** (Revelation 17:5) Her pivotal role as the poisoned spring from which the pollution of sin has fouled the whole world is affirmed once again as evidence of the justice of God’s judgment upon her - **“who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.”** As has been amply demonstrated in the

preceding chapters, adultery is to be understood in a figurative sense in reference to idolatry and all false religion, particularly the pseudo-Christianity of the Harlot. Furthermore, the justice of God's judgment upon Babylon the Great is evident as appropriate punishment for her bloodthirsty persecution and opposition of the saints throughout history - ***"He has avenged on her the blood of His servants."*** The identification of Babylon as the vicious murderess of saints and prophets was emphasized earlier in Chapter 18: ***"In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."*** (Revelation 18:24) The language of the text here reflects that of God's command to Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab and Jezebel: ***"You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of My servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel."*** (2 Kings 9:7). The saints beneath the altar in the vision of the seven seals had prayed: ***"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*** (Revelation 6:10) Now the church triumphant celebrates God's response to that prayer as a vindication of His holiness and truth. It is significant to note that this celebration is not mere *"Schadenfreude"* - bitter delight in the downfall of a foe. The Church celebrates because her Lord has been conclusively vindicated. Harlot Babylon has received exactly the judgment which she deserved.

"And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." - The second "Hallelujah!" exclamation emphasizes the theme of divine judgment as the evidence of Babylon's total destruction for all of eternity is seen - ***"The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."*** Mounce calls this dramatic repetition a *"heavenly encore."* (Mounce, p. 338) It



"Jehu Commands the Death of Jezebel"
by E.H. Corbould

strengthens and reinforces the first. In pronouncing God's judgment upon Sodom and later the heathen nation of Edom, the Old Testament had declared the irreversible finality of their utter destruction in similar language: "***He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah , toward all the land of the plain. And he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.***" (Genesis 19:28) "***Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever.***" (Isaiah 34:9-10)



"The Adoration of the Lamb" by Hans Holbein

"The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" - The antiphonal nature of the anthems before the throne reasserts itself as "*choirmasters of the heavenly singers*" (Brighton, p. 489) now take up the triumph song (cf. Revelation 4:8,11; 5:9-12,14; 7:11; 11:17-18). Those who stand in the immediate presence of the Lord - "***the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures***" - fall down upon the ground in adoration and awe. Their simple two word response - "***Amen, Hallelujah!***" - endorses and reiterates the praise of God's justice which has already been expressed.

“One might imagine that even the rafters of God’s heavenly sanctuary shook and reverberated with this holy chorus and the shouts of hallelujahs and amens, just as the temple quaked when the prophet Isaiah heard the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of the winged creatures before God in his majestic vision.” (Brighton, p. 489)

“Then came a voice from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both great and small.”

- An unidentified voice from the throne, perhaps one of the four living creatures, invites the entire community of heaven to join in the worship and praise of the Lord. The imperative verb **“Praise”** (Greek - *“aineite”*) is in the present tense indicated continuous ongoing action. The words echo the command of Psalm 135:1-2 - **“Praise the Lord! Praise the Name of the Lord; Praise Him you servants of the Lord who minister in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God.”**

The Psalm then proceeds for twenty-one verses to define that which is praiseworthy about God and His mighty deeds. The command is addressed to **“all you His servants, you who fear Him both great and small.”** This language is also drawn from the great Hallel psalm - **“praise Him you servants of the Lord,”** (Psalm 135:1) **“you who fear Him, praise the Lord”** (Psalm 135:20). The invitation is universal. It brushes aside all human distinctions or class or rank. *“It seems here to embrace Christians of all intellectual capacities and social grades, and of all stages of progress in the life of Christ...all are included in the summons to thanksgiving and are capable of bearing a part in it.”* (Swete, pp. 244,245) The breathtaking scope of the invitation recalls the majestic words of the opening verses of the great *“Te Deum”* of Saint Ambrose, considered by many to be



“The Great Hallelujah” by Rudolf Schäfer

the most magnificent canticle of the church.

*“We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.
To Thee all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein.
To Thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry;
Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.
The glorious company of the apostles praise Thee.
The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise Thee.
The noble army of martyrs praise Thee.
The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee;
The Father of an infinite majesty;
Thine honorable, true and only Son; also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.
Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father
.When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man,
Thou didst humble Thyself to be born of a virgin.
When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,
Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.
We believe that Thou shalt come, to be our Judge.
We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants,
Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.
O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thy heritage.
Govern them, and lift them up forever.
Day by day we magnify Thee; and we worship Thy name ever, world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in Thee
O Lord in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded.”*

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters...” - The response of the church and the angelic hosts - ***a great multitude***” - to the invitation from the throne is immediate and overwhelming. The sound crashes



"We Praise Thee, O Lord" by Rudolf Schäfer



“An Angel Choir” by Jan van Eyck

down upon the Revelator - *“like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder.”*

These similes are drawn from the Old Testament prophets and have been used before in Revelation to describe the loudest and most impressive sounds (cf. Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 1:15; 14:2).

This is the last of Revelation’s songs, the final *“Hallelujah Chorus”* in the magnificent ongoing *“Te Deum”* which is interwoven throughout the visions of Revelation. (Cf. Brighton, pp.527-532) The song began in chapter 4 with the eternal *“tris-hagion”* of the four living creatures around the throne of God, and has been amplified and elaborated by choirs of men and angels, the church militant on earth and the

church triumphant in heaven, throughout the remainder of the book. It now achieves its breathtaking crescendo in the awesome *“Hallelujah Chorus.”* George Friedrich Handel composed the *“Hallelujah Chorus”* in his oratorio *“Messiah”* based upon this text. It is said that a friend found him at his writing desk, after a night of feverish composition, with his music scattered in every direction. Handel’s face was covered with tears as he explained: *“I did think that I saw all of heaven spread out before me and the great God Himself.”*

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.” - The time of waiting is over. The dramatic vision judgment of Harlot Babylon had depicted the second coming of Christ from the perspective of the unbelieving world. Now the imagery of the marriage feast of the Lamb presents the meaning of Christ’s glorious return for the

people of God. Gone are the laments of doom and destruction. In their place we hear majestic anthems of celebration and praise. The universal reign of God has begun. The fourth and final ***“Hallelujah!”*** introduces the announcement of the marriage of the Lamb. The title used for God in this phrase - ***“our Lord God Almighty”*** (Greek - *“kyrios o theos o pantokrator”*) occurs frequently in Revelation (cf. Revelation 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 21:22). It affirms the sovereign omnipotence of the Creator. Domitian, the current emperor of Rome, had bestowed upon himself the title *“our Lord and God.”* Accordingly, John’s repeated use of this title may well be an allusion to the emperor’s blasphemous presumption. *“In the historical context of a proud and powerful Roman Empire, for John to call God “the Almighty” is an act of extreme confidence...Literally the word means one who holds all things in his control.”* (Mounce, p. 339) The personal pronoun ***“our”*** expresses the bold assurance of the believer. We enjoy an individual relationship of personal trust and love with God by faith. The all powerful deity who now begins his unchallenged reign is ***“our Lord God.”***

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come...” - The inauguration of God’s glorious rule is the cause for rejoicing and gladness among the people of God - ***“Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him***



“The Marriage Feast of the Lamb” by Jan van Eyck



*“The Wise and the Foolish Virgins”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

glory.” The combination of these two concepts expresses the unique intensity of this celebration. The only other text in the New Testament where they are combined is in the Sermon on the Mount where Christ urges His people to savor the persecution of men because of the richness of the reward that awaits us in heaven - *“Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:12) God’s people freely acknowledge that these wondrous events are God’s doing, not theirs - *“give Him glory!”* There is no pretense here that man has done anything whatsoever to contribute to the coming of God’s kingdom.

“For the wedding of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself...” - John depicts the significance of the coming of God’s reign for believers with the classic image of a wedding celebration. The

wedding in question here is the marriage feast of the Lamb and His holy bride, the church. The relationship between God and His people is often depicted as a marriage in the Old Testament. The rabbis understood the entire book of Song of Songs as an allegory of God’s love for Israel depicted as the passion of a husband for his bride. The prophets also made consistent use of the marriage as an image of the relationship between God and His people as the following selection of passages demonstrates.

“For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is His name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth.” (Isaiah 54:5)

“As a young man married a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as

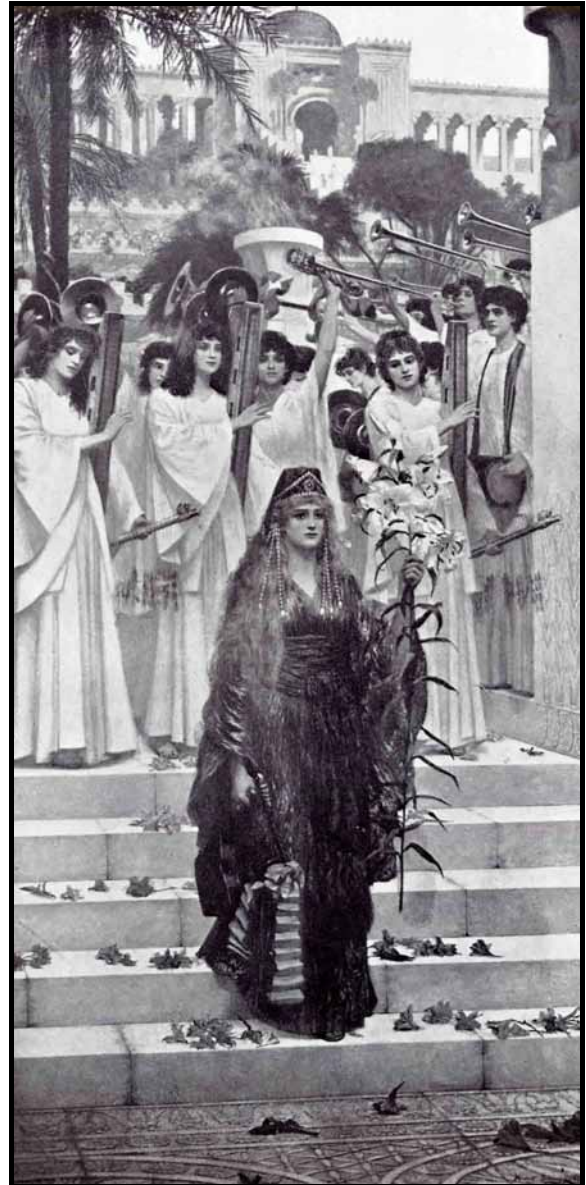
a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” (Isaiah 62:5)

“Return, faithless people,” declares the Lord, “for I am your husband.” (Jeremiah 3:14)

“I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion... I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.” (Hosea 2:19-20)

“I spread the corner of My garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you My solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine... You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband.” (Ezekiel 16:8,32)

The imagery shifts as it is carried over into the New Testament in that of an engagement which will be consummated upon the Lord’s return. The husband and wife of the Old Testament become the bride and groom of the New. Jesus is the bridegroom - the church is the bride. Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom in Matthew 9:15 - *“How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.”* In the parable of the marriage feast (Matthew 22: 2-14) *“the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”* John the Baptist describes his role in the plan of salvation to that of the best man at a wedding: *“I am not the Christ, but am sent ahead of Him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine and it is now complete.”* (John 3:28-29). The



*“The Arrival of the Bride”
by Herbert Schmalz*

parable of the Ten Virgins presents the second coming of Christ as the arrival of the bridegroom at his wedding feast (cf. Matthew 25:1-13).



“The Wise and Foolish Virgins” by J. M. Strudwick

St. Paul also makes effective use of the image of the Bridegroom and the bride. To the Corinthians he writes: ***“I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him.”*** (2 Corinthians 11:2). In his counsel to Christian husbands Paul writes:

“Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, holy and blameless.” (Ephesians 5: 25-27)

This imagery reflects the marriage/engagement practices of the ancient Near East. Biblical marriage customs revolved around two central events the betrothal, or engagement, and the wedding. In the Biblical world marriage was regarded as a covenant entered into by two families through their representatives the bridegroom and the bride. The plans for a marriage were typically initiated by the father of the groom on behalf of his son. The father of the bride was contacted and negotiations took place between the two families. While parental control of the process was

generally assumed, the possibility that these family negotiations would be instigated by the prospective bridegroom and the bride themselves is not ruled out. The betrothal was sealed with the payment of a “*bride price*” (i.e. Genesis 34:12) by the groom’s family and was celebrated by a feast. Betrothal was the legal equivalent of marriage although the bride and groom remained in the homes of their respective families and did not live together as husband and wife during the betrothal. Sexual activity by either partner during this period was regarded as adultery and punished accordingly. A legal divorce was required to terminate a betrothal. Betrothal culminated in the wedding ceremony itself. Both bride and groom were arrayed in special festive garments and jewelry, including a beautiful veil worn by the bride. On the day of the wedding, the groom, accompanied by his companions, proceeded to the bride’s home to formally escort her and her companions to the wedding feast, usually held at the home of the groom. This procession was surrounded by music and festive celebration as it moved through the streets toward the groom’s home. The wedding feast characteristically lasted from seven to fourteen days.

In the imagery of Revelation, the bride price has already been paid in full - “*not with perishable things such as silver or gold...but with precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without spot or defect.*” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Christ now returns to claim His bride and



“The Wise Virgins” by J. James Tissot

joyfully lead her to the wedding feast. The betrothal period of waiting is over. The bridegroom has finally come. Hence, this great anthem is technically referred to as an “*epithalamium*,” that is a song for rejoicing composed for a wedding.

The bride whom the Lamb purchased with His blood and to whom he was promised is fully prepared - ready and eager to meet her bridegroom - “***His bride has made herself ready.***” She is arrayed in the beautiful wedding gown which her groom has provided - the pure white robe of Christ’s righteousness - “***fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.***” The passive verb - “***was given***” - emphasizes the monergistic divine grace which is operative here. The bride did not provide her own dress; her dress was provided for her by God through the bridegroom. Dr. Brighton describes the Biblical context of the imagery:



*“The Parable of the Ten Virgins”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

“It is not her own preparation to be received by her husband in marriage that made her the bride of Christ. The Lord Christ Himself, when He chose her to be His wife, made her worthy of such an honor by paying the betrothal price. Ezekiel (16:8-10) had prophesied that God covered His chosen one with His garments when He betrothed Himself to her. And so Jesus Christ clothed His chosen one with the garments of righteousness, washing her in His blood and thus making her pure and holy (see Rev. 5:9-10; 7:14-15). Isaiah also described how Yahweh prepared His betrothed. God clothed His chosen people with the “garments of salvation” and adorned them with a “robe of righteousness” “as a bridegroom dresses his head...and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10).” (Brighton, pp. 496-497)

In striking contrast to the gaudy self-indulgent extravagance of the harlot (cf. Revelation 17:4) the bride is modestly dressed in “***fine linen, bright and clean.***” John adds the parenthetical note - “***Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.***” This emphasis on human deeds seems to sound an

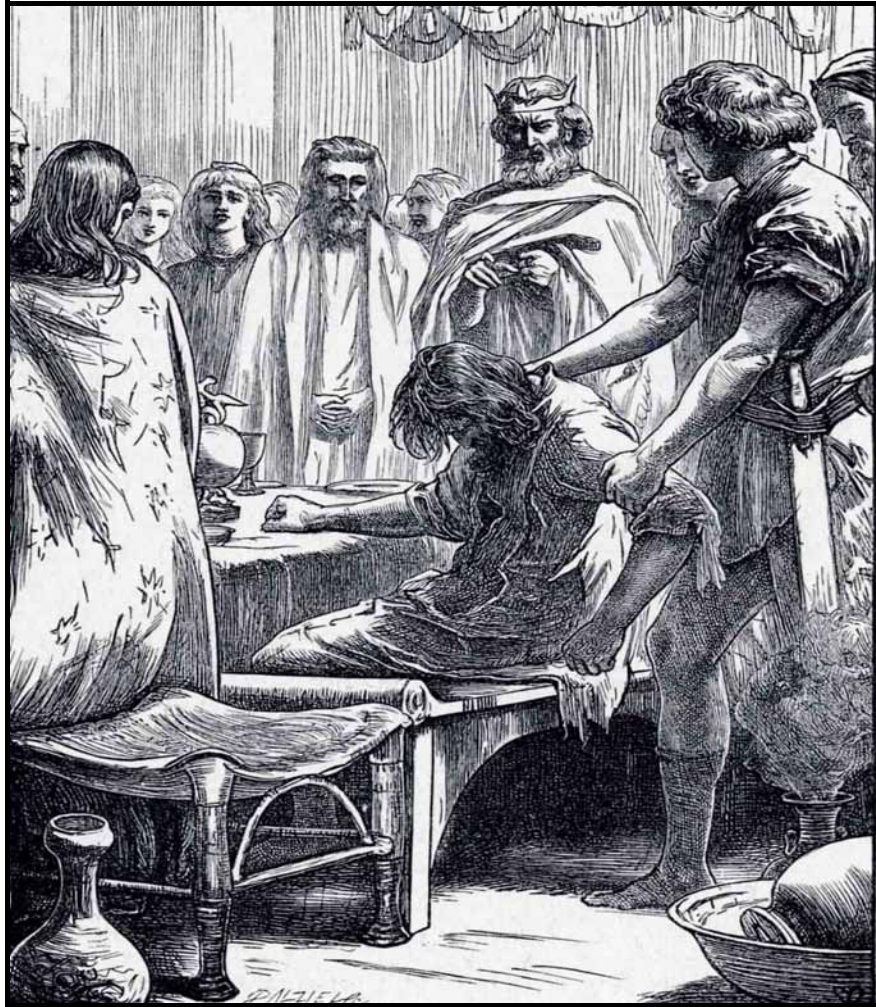


“The Foolish Virgins” by J. James Tissot

oddly dissonant note in the midst of the wedding celebration. It is certainly possible to properly understand *“the righteous acts of the saints”* in this context as the deeds of faith and love which are the inevitable result of God’s decree of justification in Christ. Thus Brighton explains:

“The righteous deeds of the saints are the saintly acts of the members of Christ, wrought in them by His Holy Spirit. These good works of Christian piety and sanctification are as much a gift of God’s grace in Christ as is the saving status of righteousness merited by His sacrificial work.” (Brighton, p. 497)

It is not unusual in Biblical texts which speak of the final judgment to refer to human works as the external evidence of justification by faith (i.e. Matthew 25:31-40). However, in the imagery of Revelation, the pure white robes of the saints consistently represent the righteousness which is the result of God’s action in declaring the sinner to be not guilty for Christ’s sake (cf. Revelation 6:11; 7:9,13-14; 22:14; cf also Zechariah 3:3-4). Accordingly in this context it may be preferable to translate the phrase - *“Fine linen stands for the not guilty verdicts pronounced upon the saints.”* In this translation, the Greek word *“dikaiomata”* is rendered as *“the not guilty verdicts pronounced upon the saints”* rather than *“the righteous acts of the saints.”*



*“The Parable of the Wedding Feast”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

This translation is consistent with the basic meaning of the noun *“dikaiomata”* and the grammar of the phrase, taking the genitive noun *“ton hagion”* as objective - *“upon the saints”* - instead of subjective - *“of the saints.”* To understand the phrase as a direct reference to that which God has done also serves to maintain the text’s consistent emphasis on God’s action for the salvation of His people (cf. Ephesians 5:26-27). A close parallel to this imagery can be found in Christ’s parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14) in which the guest who spurns the wedding garment graciously provided by the King is cast *“outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 22:13). Those who obstinately refuse the free offer of God’s grace in Christ in favor of their own self-righteousness and pride will be excluded from the wedding celebration of the Lamb.

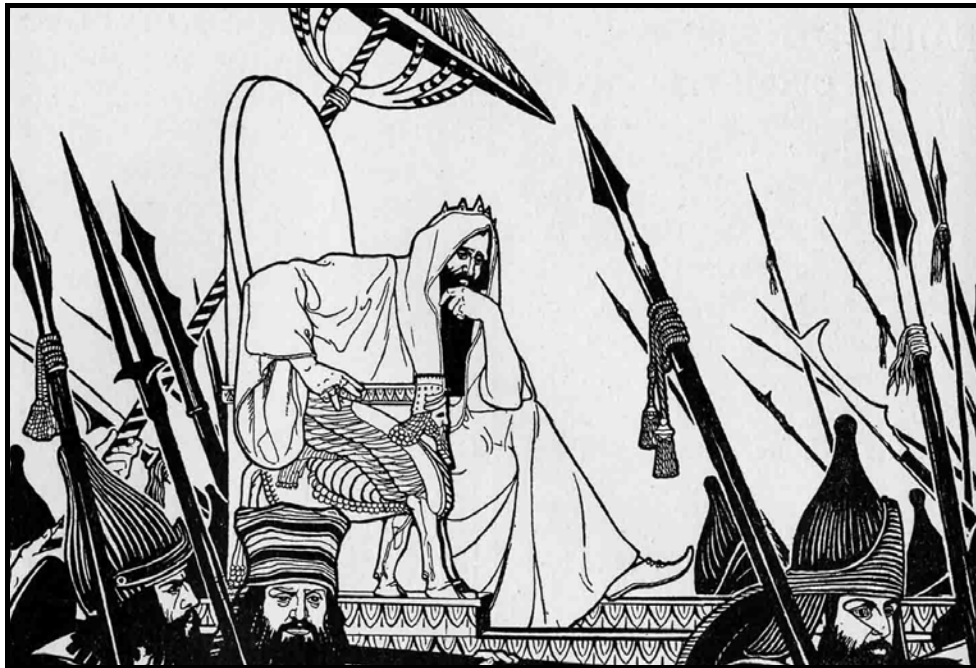
“Then the angel said to me, “Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” - This is the fourth of Revelation’s seven beatitudes (cf. Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). Each is introduced with the same word ***“Blessed”*** (Greek - *“makarios”*) used by our Lord in the opening segment of the Sermon on the Mount (*“The Beatitudes”* - Matthew 5:1-12 -***“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”***) The angel who pronounces this word of blessing is in all probability the same interpreter and guide who introduced and explained the vision of Harlot Babylon in Chapter 17. The urgency and importance of the message is indicated by the command to immediately ***“Write!”*** In this instance, the word of blessing is pronounced upon ***“those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.”*** The verb ***“are invited”*** is the Greek word *“keklamenoi,”* the perfect participle form of *“kaleo,”* which means *“to call.”* Here, as throughout Revelation, *“kaleo”* refers to *“the effective Gospel call, the call through which God makes us believers and saints.”* (Lenski, p. 544). The vast majority of those who receive this invitation spurn and reject it, as in Christ’s parable of the Wedding Feast (cf. Matthew 22:1-14).



“Guests at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb” by Jan van Eyck

The invitation has been issued to all of humanity. There is no blessing, however, for those who scorn and reject God's gracious offer of salvation. Our Lord Jesus had warned:

“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:11-12)

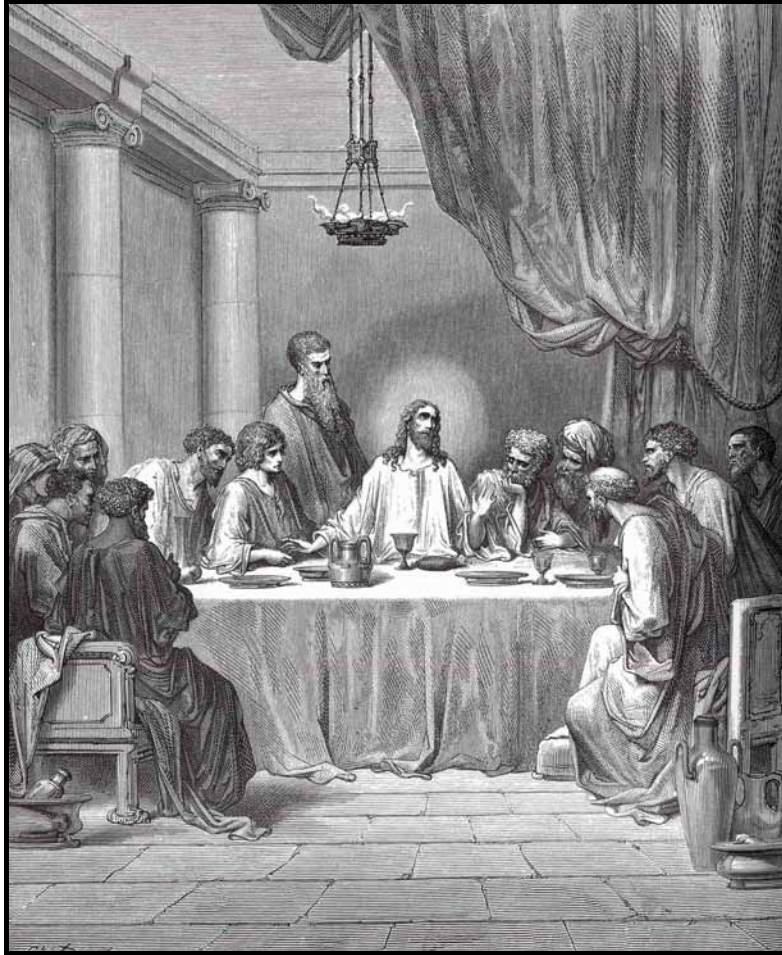


“The Coming of the Royal Bridegroom/Messiah” by E. M. Lilien

The image of eternal salvation as a rich banquet prepared by God and spread out before His people comes from the Old Testament. The Psalmist rejoiced: ***“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over; surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*** (Psalm 23:5-6) The prophet Isaiah utilized the same feast imagery in one of the most powerful portrayals of the blessedness of the saints in heaven anywhere in the Old Testament:

“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the

finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all the nations; He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 25:6-8; cf. also Isaiah 55:1-2)



“The Last Supper” by Gustav Dore

The apocryphal Fourth Book of Ezra, written around 100 A.D., may reflect a familiarity with Revelation as it tells of a similar banquet scene with the guests arrayed in white robes: *“Rise and stand and see at the feast of the Lord the number of those who have been sealed. Those who have departed from the shadow of this age have received glorious garments from the Lord...who are clothed in white.”* (4 Ezra 2:38-40).

The banquet imagery of Scripture conveys a sacramental connotation as it reminds



*“The Church as the Bride of Christ”
by C. Von Spanyol*

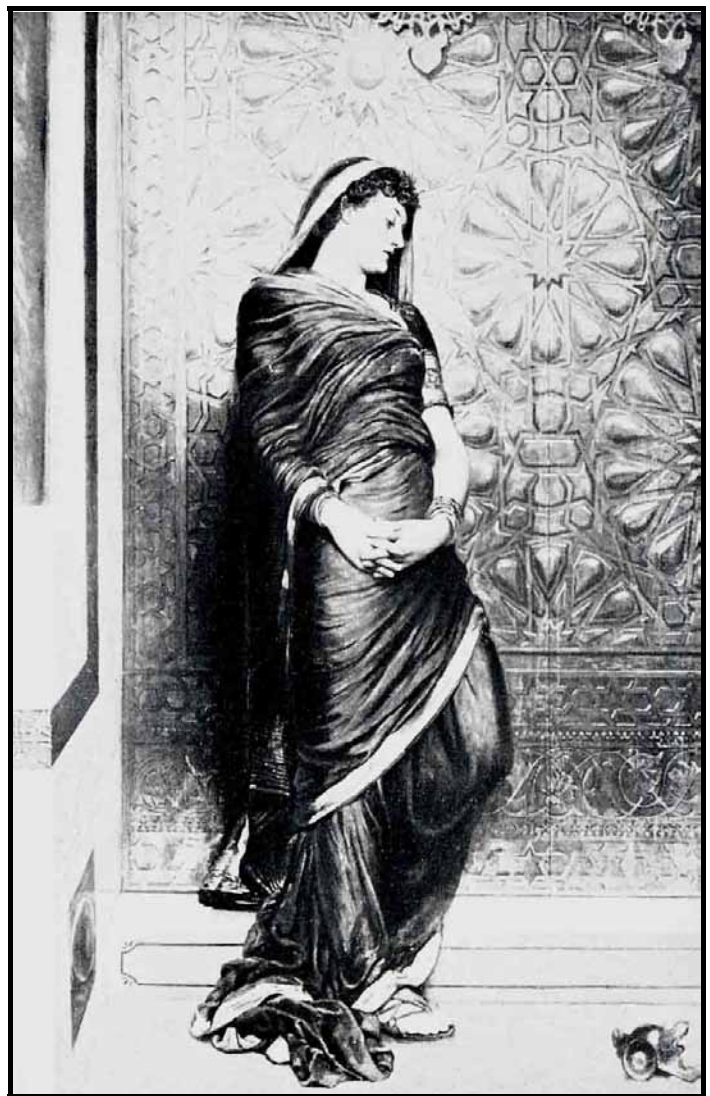
the church of the Eucharistic feast of our Lord’s Body and Blood as a foretaste of the intimate communion of God and His holy people in heaven. In the midst of the Last Supper, as Christ instituted the Sacrament, He observed: *“I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink of it anew with you in the kingdom of My Father.”* (Matthew 26:29). The divine service demonstrates this awareness both in the canticle - *“This is the Feast of Victory for our God”* - based on the visions of Revelation, and in the words of the Offertory - *“Grace our table with Your presence and give us a foretaste of the feast to come.”* Phillip Nicolai, one of the greatest hymnists of the Lutheran reformation, expresses the profound Scriptural insight that the Holy Eucharist is an earthly preview of heavenly communion in the second verse of his magnificent chorale *“Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying.”* The hymn is based on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins who await the coming of the bridegroom.

*“Zion hears the watchword sounding, with bridal joy her heart is bounding,
She wakes , and breaks the spell of sleep.
For her Lord comes forth in splendor, all rich in grace, truth’s strong Defender!
Her Star grows bright mid darkness deep.
Now come, O precious Crown. Lord Jesus, God’s own Son.
Hail, Hosanna!
We enter all, the marriage hall, to eat the Supper at Your call.”* (ELH #544)

That sacramental connotation can be clearly seen, not only here in the vision of the wedding feast, but also in the earlier depiction of Harlot Babylon, the mimic and counterpart of the true bride. The prostitute holds in her hand a golden chalice, filled to the brim with the poisonous and putrid brew of her corruption (Revelation 17:4). Here too is an allusion to the true church's *"cup of blessing which we bless."* (1 Corinthians 10:16). In the golden goblet, the harlot administers her own anti-sacrament, offering her followers death and damnation in fatal parody of the life and salvation which Christ presents to His own in His sacred body and blood. Martin Franzmann suggests: *"Is it far-fetched to see in the golden cup which she (the harlot) extends, a "cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication," the abominable counterpart to the "cup of blessing" which the church extends as her own?"* (Franzmann, p. 115).

"And he added, "These are the true words of God." - The beatitude is followed by a powerful affirmation of authenticity. The affirmation applies directly to the promise of blessing itself but should not be limited to it. The blessing rests upon the visions of judgment and salvation which have been presented in chapters 17-19. For it to be true, they must also be true. God's promise to judge the wicked and redeem His own will most surely be fulfilled. *"These words" are the beatitude, but this beatitude as illumined by the whole vision, which shows us the entire Una Sancta as the wedding is about to begin.*" (Lenski, p. 545)

"At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship



"One of the Foolish Virgins Excluded from the Feast" by Valentine Prinsep

God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” -John’s response to the awesome vision of the marriage celebration of the Lamb is to fall down in worship before the angelic messenger. No doubt he is simply overwhelmed by that which he has seen and heard. The angel’s response is immediate and emphatic - ***“Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”*** Worship belongs to God and to God alone. Not the most magnificent or glorious of His servants, neither His angels nor His saints may be accorded that which is the unique right and possession of the one God. The command ***“Worship God!”*** recalls Christ’s assertion during His temptation in the wilderness - ***“Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”*** (Matthew 4:10) An ongoing fascination with angels and their worship permeated Judaism during this period and occasionally became something of a problem in the Christian congregations of the first generation. Paul writes: ***“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.”*** (Colossians 2:18; cf. also Hebrews 1-2). The angel humbly identifies himself ***“a fellow servant with you and with your brothers.”*** That which characterizes every true servant of God is a willingness to ***“hold to the testimony of Jesus.”*** The noun ***“testimony”*** is the Greek word ***“martyria”*** which emphasizes the risk and responsibility of faithful witness in a sinful world. Brighton defines the nature of that witness in this way:

“It is the witness which Jesus gave concerning Himself in His ministry on earth, and which He now continues to give by the Spirit through the witness of God’s people on earth...that message about Jesus’ saving work...which He gave to the church to hold and proclaim to others, namely that Christ is the Savior of the world.” (Brighton, pp. 502-503)

This faithful testimony about Jesus as the Savior of the world is identified as ***“the spirit of prophecy.”*** With these words John asserts that the Gospel of Jesus is also the core message of the Old Testament, the heart and essence of all true prophecy. If it does not witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, then it is not of God.



*“The Vision of the Rider Upon the White Horse” by
Lucas Cranach*

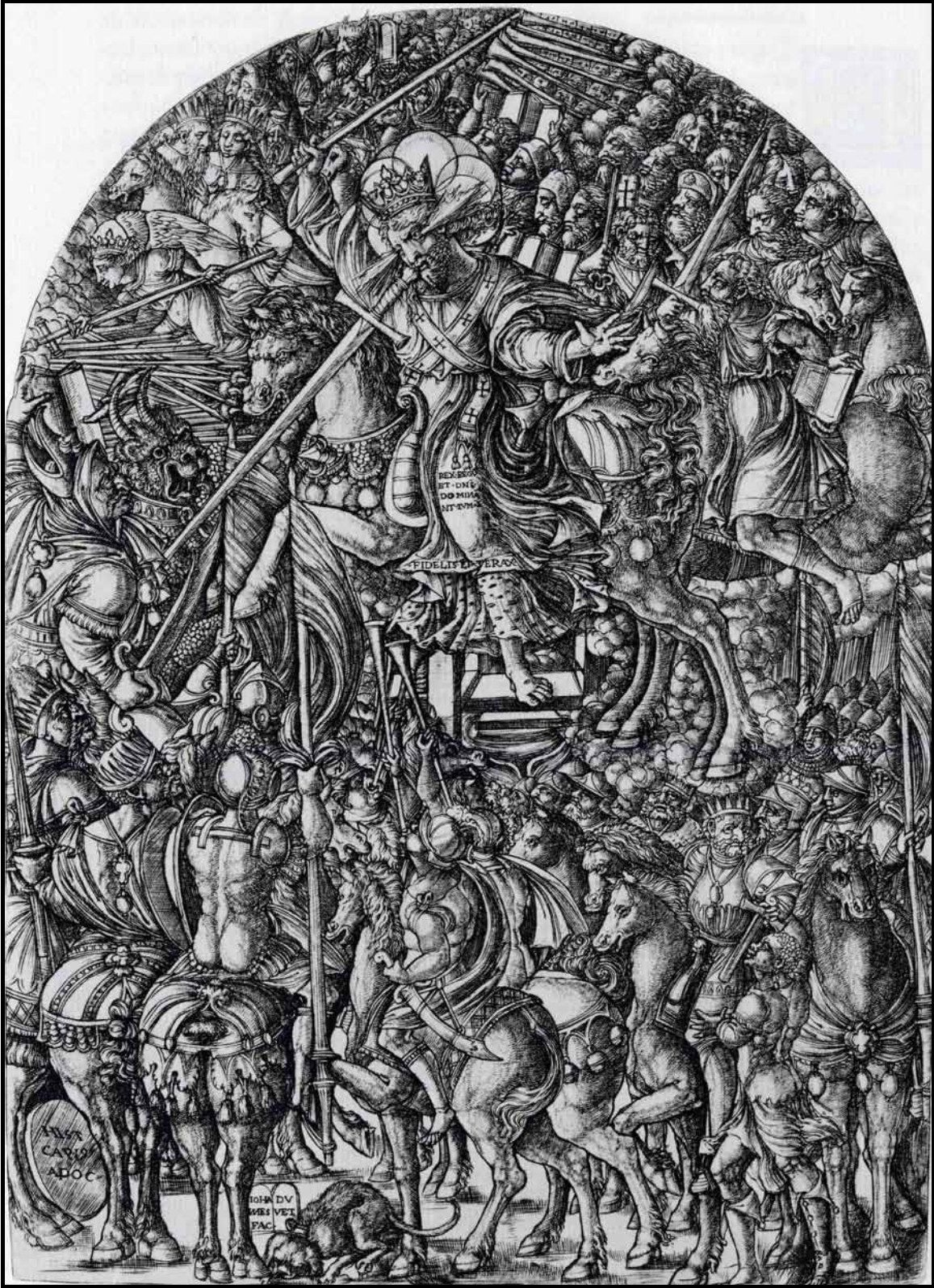
The Rider on the White Horse

Revelation 19:11-21

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose Rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding one white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God.." - The shift to the new scene is abrupt, without any transition or introduction. The magnificent chorus of angelic praise is over and heaven is opened before the enthralled eyes of the Revelator. The characteristic phrase *"I saw"* (Greek - *"kai eidon"*) indicates the beginning of the new scene. In the vision of the seven bowls John had introduced the concept of *"Armageddon"* as a symbol for the final culmination of the age-old conflict between God and Satan at the end of time (cf. Revelation 16:16). The victorious judgment of God upon the wicked was then presented in the imagery of the downfall and destruction of Harlot Babylon. John now returns to the Armageddon theme and expands the image in considerable detail. It is important to recognize that the content of these scenes is not historically sequential - first the fall of Babylon, next the marriage feast of the Lamb, and then finally Armageddon. Instead, these recurring scenes portray the same reality from different perspectives to enable us to fully understand all of its implications. The battle about to be presented depicts the same events portrayed in the vision of the fall of harlot Babylon, that is, the ultimate and total victory of God over sin, death, and the power of the devil. The phrase *"heaven standing open"* (Greek - *"eneogmenon"*) is a perfect participle which serves to strongly express the truth that the heavens stand completely open and revealed before John. God is about to act decisively upon the earth. A similar phrase occurred in Revelation 4:1.



"The Rider on the White Horse" by Jean Duvet



“The Vision of the Warrior Champion” - Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

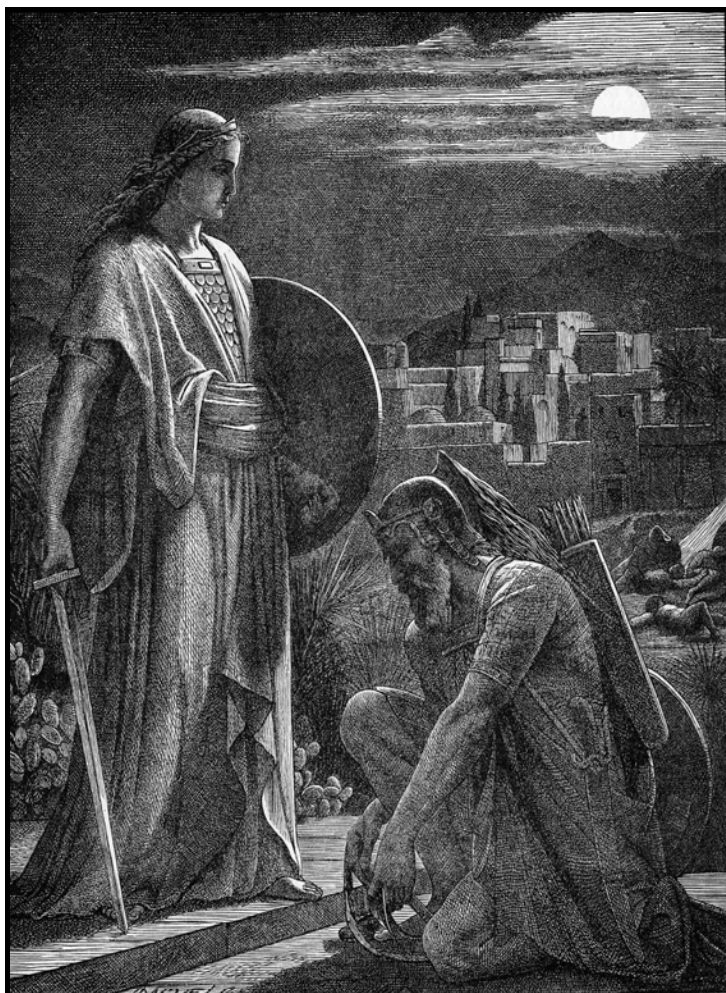
The battle scene opens dramatically with the introduction of the Warrior Champion of the hosts of heaven - ***“There before me was a white horse, whose Rider is called Faithful and True.”*** There is no doubt as to the identity of this mighty and majestic figure. He is our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. The depiction of the Messiah as a mighty warrior who will defeat and destroy the enemies of God and His people was not unusual in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Isaiah foretold the coming of God’s judgment in these words: ***“The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior He will stir up His zeal; with a shout He will raise the battle cry and will triumph over His enemies.”*** (Isaiah 42:13). In the closing verses of his book of prophecy, Isaiah anticipated the glorious vindication of God’s judgment:

“The hand of the Lord will be made known to His servants, but His fury will be shown to His foes. See, the Lord is coming with fire, and His chariots are like a whirlwind; He will bring down His anger and fury and His rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with His sword, the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.” (Isaiah 66:14-16)

Zechariah promised that God will fight on behalf of His people: ***“Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle...Then the Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with Him.”*** So also the messianic angel of the Lord had appeared to Joshua as a mighty warrior: ***“Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in His hand. Joshua went up to Him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” (Joshua 5:13)***

Once before the visions of Revelation had presented the image of a conquering warrior upon a white horse. He was the first of the four horsemen of the apocalypse in the vision of the seven seals - ***“I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.”*** (Revelation 6:2). In that instance, the rider was not the Christ, but the Anti-Christ, his appearance a deliberate imitation of the mighty Champion of the host of God (cf. Notes, p. 146ff.) ***“This victorious rider is the antithesis of the rider he had seen before (6:2). This is not the Antichrist, that imitator and opponent of the Christ who was permitted to go forth conquering and to conquer a world in love with the lie.”*** (Franzmann, p. 126)

John provides considerable detail in his description of the Lord’s Champion. The war horse which the Champion rides is ***“white.”*** Throughout the Book of Revelation, white is the color of holiness and righteousness. We are



“The Angel of the Lord Appears to Joshua as a Mighty Warrior” by E. Armytage



*“Jesus as the Warrior-Champion of the Hosts of Heaven
Our Savior Lutheran Church*

told that this Warrior *“is called Faithful and True.”* At the beginning of the seventh letter, addressed to the lukewarm church in Laodicea, Jesus identifies Himself as *“the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God’s creation.”* (Revelation 3:14) The combination emphasizes God’s reliability. He invariably fulfills His promises - in this context His promise of judgment upon the wicked and vindication for the saints in His glorious return.



*“He Who Has the Double Edged Sword”
Detail from a Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer*

“With justice He judges and makes war.” As previously noted, the image of God’s judgment upon the wicked as warfare is well established in the Old Testament. In the letter to the church at Pergamum, Christ uses the same language as he warns: *“These are the words of Him who has the sharp double-edged sword...Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My*



*“His Eyes Were Like Blazing Fire”
Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut - 16th Century*

mouth.” (Revelation 2:12,15). The judgment that He renders is absolutely righteous and fair - *“with justice”* (Greek - *“en dikaiosyne”*). This most important term refers to God’s act of justification. It is courtroom language which describes the man who has been acquitted, that is, declared to be *“Not Guilty!”* by the judge. This verdict is rendered on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Christ and is therefore completely just and fair. In this context the Greek might best be translated *“He judges righteously”* and thereby vindicates His persecuted and afflicted people. Furthermore, the judgement which He brings upon the sinful world - *“He judges and makes war”* is fully warranted and just. The warfare in question here is not literal military action upon an actual battlefield. Christ will not physically appear to lead a cavalry charge. Consistency would require that such a battle literally be fought on horseback with swords. This is

figurative language which graphically describes God’s condemnation and judgment of His foes.

“His eyes are like blazing fire , and on His head are many crowns.” - The simile eyes *“like blazing fire”* is drawn from the image of Christ amid the golden lampstands - *“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire.”* (Revelation 1:14), and the letter to the church in Thyatira. *“These are the words of the Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire...”* (Revelation 2:18). These references, in turn, are based upon the image of the Son of Man who stood before Daniel the prophet: *“His body was like chrysolite, his*

face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches.” (Daniel 10:6) The burning eyes of the Judge indicate the penetrating gaze from which nothing can be concealed. It is impossible to deceive Him. *“Such eyes indicate a penetrating look of holy purification before which no human can stand unless covered and cleansed by the forgiveness and righteousness of God. Nothing is unknown or hidden from such searching, searing eyes.”* (Brighton, p. 509)

His head is adorned with *“many crowns”* (Greek - *“diademata polla”*). These are not the victor’s crowns (Greek - *“stephanos”*) which have appeared elsewhere in Revelation (i.e. Revelation 14:14) but the royal headgear of a king, signifying the might and majesty of the monarch. He wears not one crown but many and in this way is designated not a one king among many but as He who alone is *“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”* (Revelation 19:16). As the hymn rejoices: *“Crown Him with many crowns as thrones before Him fall; crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns, for He is Lord of all!”* (ELH # 55 - Appropriately this classic hymn’s melody is entitled *“Diademata.”*) The deliberate contrast between the *“many crowns”* of the Savior King on the one hand, and the seven crowns of the dragon (Revelation 12:3) and ten crowns of the beast (Revelation 13:1) reveals the blasphemous claims of those who would usurp the authority of the true King. *“The undefined multiplicity of diadems shows Christ to be the only true king, on a grander*



“The Champion of the Host of Heaven” by Albrecht Dürer

scale than the dragon and the beast whose small number of crowns implies kingship of limited in time.” (Beale, p. 952)

“He has a name written on Him that no one but He Himself knows.” - The prerogative of withholding one’s name is indicative of superior rank and power. In the Biblical world the knowing of a name was significant of having some degree of control over the one named. Thus, for instance, when Jacob wrestled the Angel of the Lord at the ford of the Jabbok the patriarch’s request to know the angel’s name went unanswered while he not only revealed his own name to the angel but received a new name from Him (Genesis 32:22-30). The nature of this exchange reveals the status of each participant relative to the other. God’s remarkable condescension in revealing His sacred name “JHWH” to Moses at the burning bush signaled the unique covenant relationship into which God was prepared to enter with His people (Exodus 3). The fact that the warrior champion of God’s host



“The Champion Faithful and True”
by Hans Burgkmair

“Has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself” is indicative of His unique rank and stature. He has no peer and none may consider themselves His equal. *“The confidential nature of the name here...alludes to Christ being absolutely sovereign over humanity’s experiential access to His character.”* (Beale, p. 955) Put more simply, we have no independent knowledge of Christ. He is Creator; we are creatures. All that we know of Christ is that which He chooses to reveal of Himself to us. To imagine that it could possibly be otherwise is presumptuous and arrogant.

“He is dressed in a robe dipped

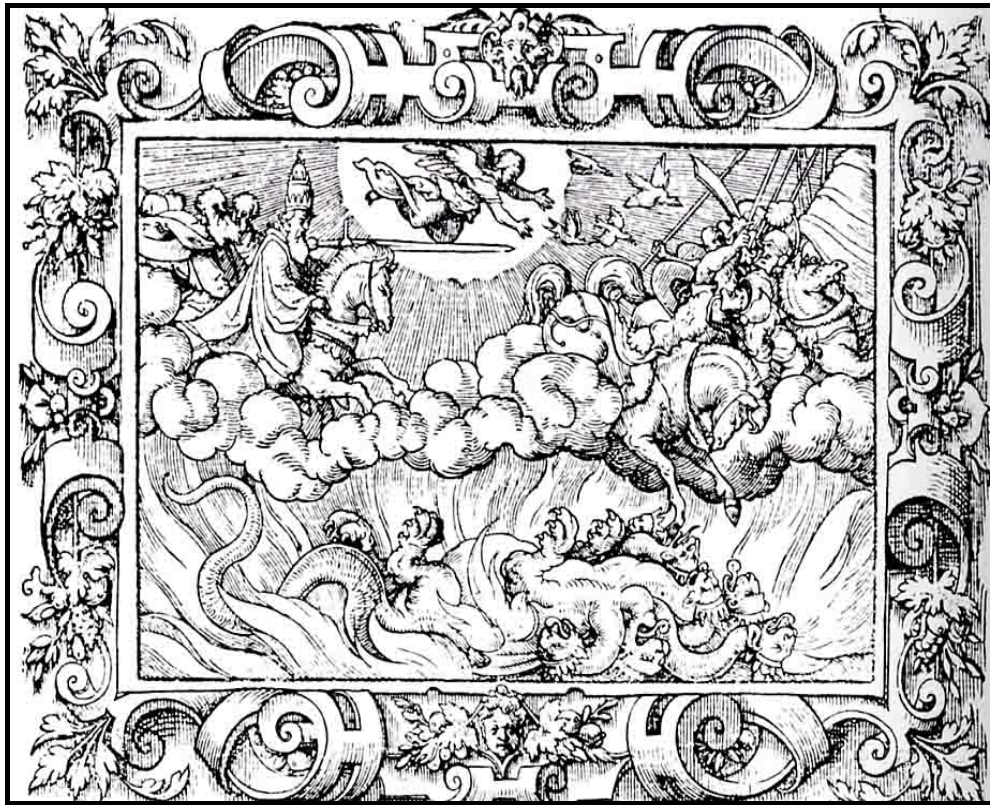


“The Marriage Feast of the Lamb and the Champion of the Host of Heaven” - 15th Century Bible Illumination

in blood and His Name is the Word of God.” - As previously noted (cf. p.333-334), the picture of the Messiah as a warrior returning in triumph from the battlefield, his robes stained with the blood of his fallen enemies, is drawn from Isaiah’s prophecy of doom upon the heathen nation of Edom (cf. Isaiah 63:1-6). Here, John depicts the blood of God’s enemies shed before the battle has begun, and in this way signals the certainty of God’s victory in this struggle.

In the magnificent Prologue to his Gospel, John identifies Jesus as the **“Word”** (Greek - *“logos”*) of God through whom all things were made in the beginning. (Cf.

John 1:1-14). As John's final contribution to the New Testament draws to its triumphant conclusion, the apostle is inspired once again to designate Jesus as ***"the Word of God."*** Jesus is God's once for all, decisive revelation of God to humanity (cf. Hebrews 1:1-14). As the universe of time and space which He called into being in the beginning now comes to its conclusion in victorious judgment, Jesus will once again speak for God and execute His judgment. He is the prophet *"par excellence,"* the fulfillment of all God's promises. The Word of God is not mere lifeless sound. It causes that which it speaks to be. Dr. Brighton adds the intriguing insight that John's use of the title in this context hints *"that after His second coming at the End, the Christ is going to do something more than judge - something positive by the grace of God, something creative and new."* (Brighton, p. 513)



"The Champion of the Hosts of Heaven" - 16th Century Bible Engraving

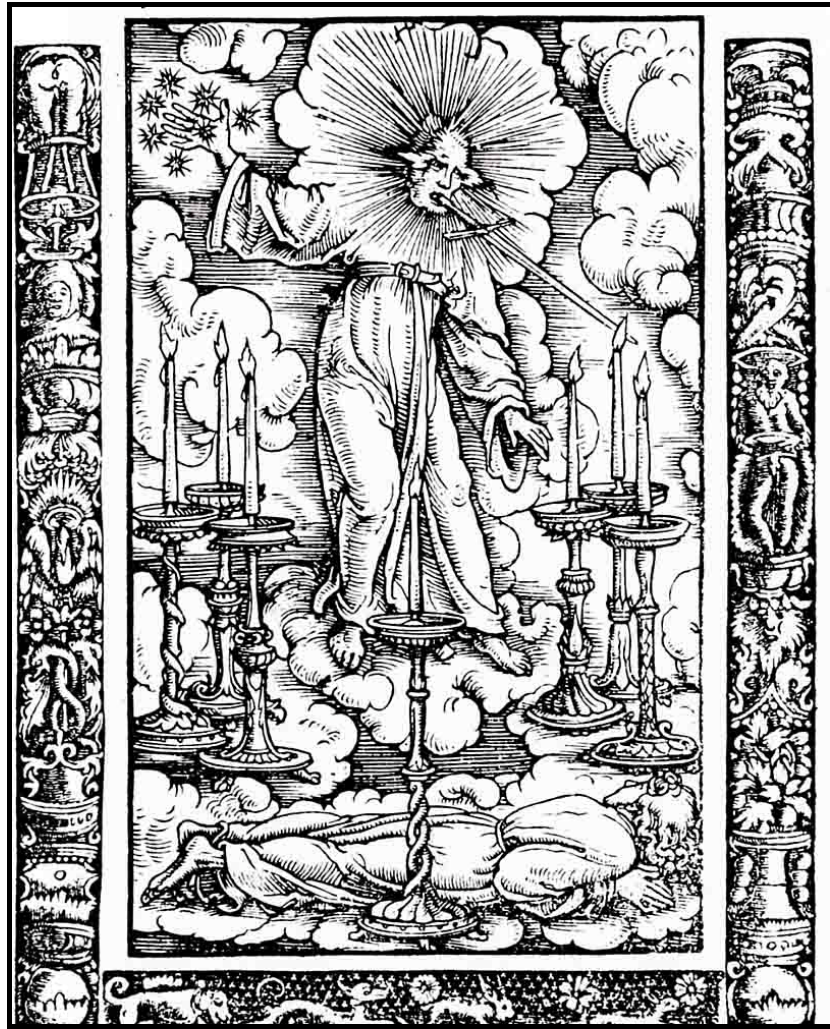
"The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." - The armies of heaven



*“Out of His Mouth Came a Sharp Double-edged Sword”
Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut*

which follow the Messiah King into battle are the people of God, justified and made righteous in the blood of Christ. This identification is clearly indicated in Revelation 17:14 which foretells the coming of this great conflict: ***“They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen, and faithful followers.”*** It is significant to note that although the Greek text uses the noun *“strateumata”* which means *“an army of armed troops,”* this army plays no role in the battle itself. It is the King of Kings alone who crushes and destroys His enemies. Hence this army is not arrayed in battle armor but ***“in fine linen, white and clean.”*** These are the garments of purity and holiness signifying the justification of those whom God has declared righteous in Christ. They are the same festive robes in which the church was depicted as the Bride.

“This heavenly army, unlike their leader, has no swords or spears. They take no part in the action. They wear no armor because, being immortal, they are immune to injury. They are non-combatant supporters of the Messiah as He wages war single-handedly.” (Thomas, p. 387)



“Out of His Mouth Came A Sharp Double-Edged Sword”

“Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.” - As previously noted (cf. Notes p. 605), this image also appeared in the prologue’s description of the Son of Man amid the golden lampstands: *“In His right hand He held seven stars and of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.”* (Revelation 1:16). In the letter to the church at Pergamum, Christ had introduced Himself as *“Him who has the sharp double-edged sword”* and warned that He would shortly come to wage war against the Nicolaitan heretics: *“I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”* (Revelation 2:12,16). The imagery is drawn from Isaiah 49 where the prophet uses this figure of speech to describe the Messiah’s ability to accomplish His purpose for the salvation of Israel and the nations by means of His word: *“He has made My mouth like a sharpened sword.”* (Isaiah 49:2). The image conveys the sense of the piercing and

penetrating power of the Word of God. In the apocryphal *“Wisdom of Solomon”* the same metaphor serves to describe God’s awful pronouncement of judgment upon His foes:

“For while gentle silence enveloped all things and night in its swift course was now half gone. Thy all powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sword of thy authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on earth.” (Wisdom of Solomon, 18:14-16)

God describes the effect of His law upon the people of Israel through the prophet Hosea: *“Therefore I cut you in pieces with My prophets, I killed you with the words of My mouth, My judgments flashed like lightning upon you.”* (Hosea 6:5). In the New Testament, the writer to the Hebrews declares: *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12). Accordingly the sword which here proceeds from the mouth of the champion with which He will *“strike down the nations”* does not describe physical combat or destruction but the declaration of God’s inescapable judgment upon the sinful world.

“He will rule them with an iron scepter.” - The allusion is to Psalm 2:9 - *“You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”* Isaiah utilizes similar language to describe the Messiah’s role as Judge of the nations: *“He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth; with the breath of His lips He will slay the*



“King of Kings and Lord of Lords” by Jean Duvet

wicked.” (Isaiah 11:4) John had referred to this passage previously in the letter to the church at Thyatira (cf. Revelation 2:27) and in the vision of the lady and the dragon (cf. Revelation 12:5). The *“iron scepter”* (Greek - *“hrabdo sidera”*) is the symbol of royal power and might. The fact that it is iron, rather than the customary gold or silver signifies the destructiveness of the Messiah King’s judgment upon the nations.

“He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.” - John returns to Isaiah’s powerful depiction of the Messiah as a victorious warrior returning from battle with his clothes stained by the blood of his vanquished enemies (cf. Isaiah 63:2-6). This theme had first been introduced in the vision of the judgment harvest (cf. Revelation 14:17-20). It was also alluded to earlier in this scene when John describes the Savior’s *“robe dipped in blood.”* (Revelation 19:13). The image is one of absolute victory.



“Jacob Wrestling With the Angel” by G. Abbey

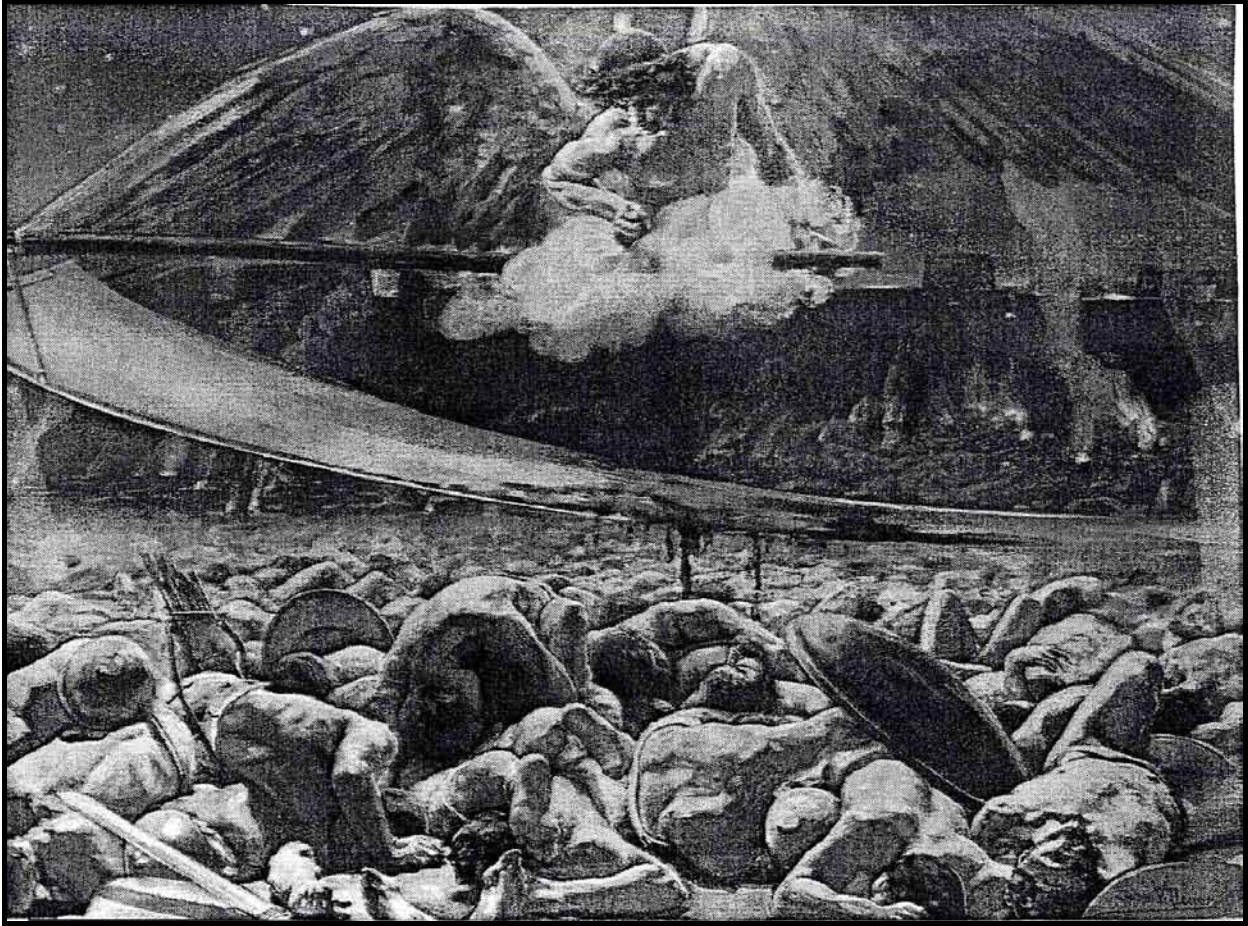
“On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” - For the fourth time in this scene the Warrior Messiah is named. First He was called *“Faithful and True.”* (19:11). Then we were told that He has another name *“written on Him that no one but He Himself knows.”* (19:12) Next he was designated as *“the Word of God.”* (19:13) Finally, the revelator describes the name that is written *“on His robe and on His thigh.”* (19:16) Each of these names and titles provides insight into the nature and the identity of the Warrior Messiah. The phrase *“on His robe and on His thigh”* is somewhat ambiguous. It may refer to two different inscriptions, one upon the champion’s garment and the second upon his leg itself.

It could, however, also refer to a single inscription on that portion of the Warrior's robe which covered His thigh. In that case, the conjunction would be epexegetical, and should be translated *"on His robe, that is upon His thigh."* If the dual reference to both the robe and the thigh is intended, its purpose may be an allusion to Jacob who became Israel after contending with the angel. At the conclusion of their contest, the angel touched Jacob's thigh, causing its dislocation (Genesis 32:25). As a result, Jacob, now Israel, walked with a limp for the rest of his life to remind him of God's merciful condescension and love. The name upon His thigh serves to identify the Warrior Messiah as the new Israel, the fulfillment of all God's promises to the descendants of Jacob. The title itself, **"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"** was previously applied to Christ in Revelation 17:14 (in reverse order). It expresses the sovereign supremacy of Christ over all earthly kings and rulers.



"Jacob Wrestling With the Angel" by Jacques Patisou

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders,



*“The Angel of the Lord Destroys the Host of Assyria Before the Walls of Jerusalem”
by Jose Villegas*

and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” - The angel’s summons of the scavengers and birds of prey to feast upon the bodies of the slain expresses both the certainty and the totality of the Messiah’s victory over His enemies. Although the battle itself has not yet occurred, its outcome is a foregone conclusion. *“With the Messiah and His armies poised and ready for battle, the insertion of this brief vision adds to the suspense of this dramatic moment.”* (Thomas, p. 393) The angelic messenger is *“standing in the sun,”* the position of God’s glorious majesty as he proclaims the downfall of all of God’s enemies. The angel is well placed to effectively deliver his message to *“all the birds flying in midair.”* The angel’s gruesome invitation to *“great supper of God”* forms a grim counterpart to joyful invitation to the marriage feast of the Lamb which had been issued earlier in the chapter (cf. Revelation 19:6-9). The imagery is drawn from the similarly grotesque words of Ezekiel’s summons of the scavengers and birds of prey to feast upon the

sacrifice of the hordes of Gog (cf. Ezekiel 39:17-20). In both instances God is the host (“*At My table you will eat your fill...*” Ezekiel 39:20) for He has planned this feast and supplied its provisions - the corpses of the fallen hosts of His enemies, those who have persecuted and oppressed the church. The language of the text leaves no doubt that the bodies of the slain will be drawn from every class and category of men - *“kings, generals and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”* The only survivors of this conflagration will be those who follow the Champion and are loyal to Christ. In the Biblical world to remain unburied, torn apart and devoured by scavengers and birds of prey, was the ultimate disgrace, the most ignominious and shameful form of death.



“The Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet” by B. West

“Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.” - The hosts of the foe marshal for war. This is “*Armageddon*” (Revelation 16:16) the ultimate culmination of the ancient warfare. The beast comes

forth surrounded by the worldly powers - *“the kings of the earth and their armies”* - which have prostituted their authority in his service. The language closely parallels that of Revelation 16:14 - *“they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty”* - and Revelation 20:8 - *“and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - to gather them for battle”* both of which describe the same scene. The imagery of the culmination of Satan’s age old conflict with Christ and His church and God’s judgment upon the nations as a great battle is drawn from Ezekiel 38 and 39 (cf. also Zechariah 12:3; 14:2, 13-14). The language of Psalm 2:2 - *“The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One”* - also *“rings in the background.”* (Beale, p. 968) The focus of their opposition is *“the Rider on the horse and His army.”*



*“The Destruction of the Beast”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

John’s description of the battle itself is remarkably restrained, no doubt reflecting the symbolic nature of these events.

“Interestingly enough, there is no description of the actual warfare. This should remind the reader that the Apocalypse is dominated by metaphor and symbol. While the events portrayed in apocalyptic language are to be taken with all seriousness, they are not to be taken literalistically. Armageddon portrays the eschatological defeat of Antichrist (an event which takes place in time and brings to a close this age as we know it) but does not require that we accept in a literal fashion the specific imagery with which the event is described.” (Mounce, p. 349)

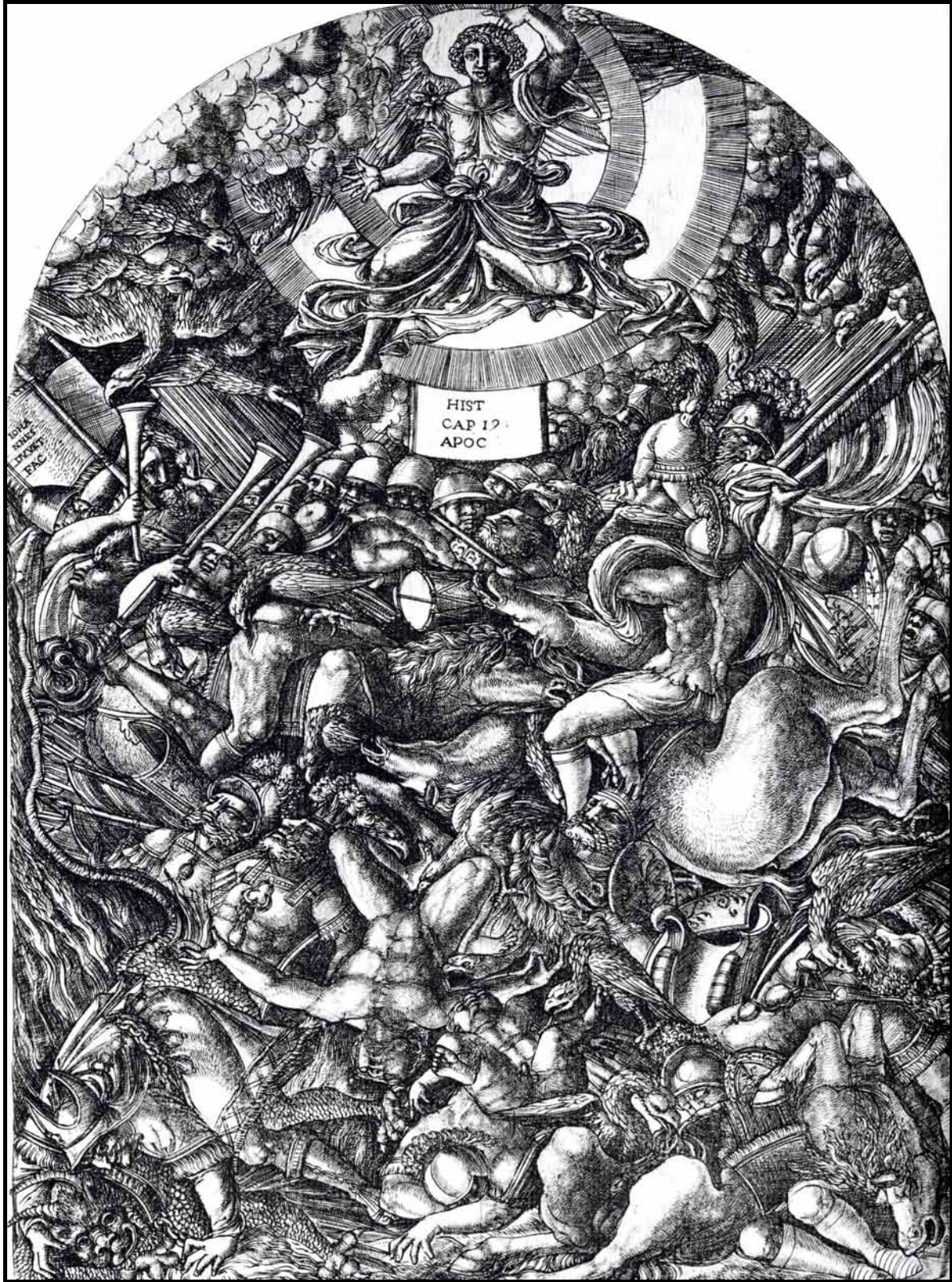
“But the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf...” - The



“The Beast and the Dragon” - Luther Bible Woodcut

text proceeds directly from the battle’s prelude to its conclusion. The outcome of this conflict was never in doubt, although it may have often seemed so to the saints in the heat of the struggle. The resistance of Satan and those who are his slaves has been futile from the beginning. The two dimensions of Antichrist’s realm, his coercive power (*“the beast”*) and his deceptive power (*“the false prophet”*), are reunited in this image of defeat and destruction. The pair have reverted to the relationship described in chapter 13, depicting the land beast as the servant and agent of the beast from the sea - *“the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf.”* This is the reversal of their role in chapters 17-18 where the land beast - harlot Babylon - was the mistress, astride the sea beast who served her evil will. This interchangeability continues to reflect the nature of the two beasts as contrasting aspects of the same reality. The dual role of this agent of Satan, the dragon, is the basis for the judgment which now overtakes them - *“With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”*

“But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet...The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.” - The defeat of the beast and the



“The Destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet” by Jean Duvet

false prophet is utter and abject. The verb *“was captured”* (Greek - *“epiasthe”*) means to seize or lay hold of with hostile intent. Even the cold comfort of an honorable death upon the battlefield is denied to the beast and the false prophet. Instead, theirs is the ignominy of falling helplessly into the hands of their enemy. They are taken alive so that they may be appropriately punished. That just punishment is immediately forthcoming - *“The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”* To be cast into the fire while still living indicates the ongoing, eternal torment of hell. This is conscious punishment that will endure throughout eternity as stated in the parallel text which describes the dragon’s consignment to the same fate - *“They will be tormented day and night forever and*



*“Thrown Alive Into the Fiery Lake of Burning Sulfur”
Detail from a Woodcut by Lucas Cranach*

ever.” (Revelation 20:10). This is Scripture’s first reference to **“the fiery lake of burning sulfur”** as a fearsome image of eternal damnation in hell. It appears a total of six times in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). Revelation 20:14 explains: **“The lake of fire is the second death.”** The link between fire and the torments of the damned is well established in the Bible. Jesus warns: **“But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”** (Matthew 5:22) Christ uses the Hebrew contraction **“Gehenna”** (the valley of the son of Hinnon) in this text. **“Gehenna”** is the term used most often in the New Testament for the fiery torment of hell (cf. Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6). The word originally referred to a ravine outside of Jerusalem where grotesque idolatry, including sacrifice of living children in the fires of Molech (cf. 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35). The prophets denounced Gehenna as a place of wickedness and corruption, drenched **“in the blood of the innocent”** over which the terrible judgment of God impended (Jeremiah 19:2-10). By New Testament times the notorious area had become the town dump where fires burned perpetually. Thus the use of Gehenna for the fires of hell was a natural development. The term is also widely used in the Apocrypha. 2 Esdras indicates that **“Gehenna - the furnace of hell”** will be located opposite the paradise of heaven (2 Esdras 7:36). Apocryphal 1 Enoch speaks of the **“accursed valley”** of those who are damned eternally (1 Enoch 27:2-3) and warns that **“the kings and potentates of the earth”** will be cast down into this valley **“deep and burning with fire”** to be bound in iron chains for eternity (1 Enoch 54:1-3). 2 Enoch expands the dreadful scene further:

“a very frightful place; and all kinds of torture and torment are in that place, cruel darkness and lightless gloom. And there is no light there, and a black fire blazes up perpetually with a river of fire that comes out over the whole place, fire here, freezing ice there, and it dries up and it freezes.” (2 Enoch 10:1-2)

John also mentions **“burning sulfur.”** This is the infamous **“brimstone”** of classical English, a yellow sulfurous substance which burns with great heat sending acrid fumes into the air. It is traditionally associated with the fires of hell.

“The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the Rider...” - The remainder of the hosts of the enemy is slain by the judgment sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Warrior Messiah. The reference is obviously not to literal physical death but to the condemnation of the impenitent by the stern word of God’s holy law. The grisly image is completed as the carrion eaters gorge themselves on the bodies of the fallen.



“The Binding of Satan” by Lucas Cranach

The Seventh Vision
The Final Victory of Christ and His Church
Revelation 20:1 - 22:5

The First Scene-The Binding of Satan
Revelation 20:1-3

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain, He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations

any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Verse 1

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in His hand a great chain.

“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven...” - The new scene opens with the typical phrase *“And I saw”* (Greek - *“kai eidon”*). Throughout the Book of Revelation, this phrase has indicated the simple transition from one visionary scene to the next - not the historical sequence of the events within the visions. In this instance the phrase introduces the descent of an angel from heaven. Elsewhere in Revelation whenever this phrase occurs in conjunction with an angelic appearance it interrupts the historical progression of events either to introduce another series of events which are taking place at the same time or to revert back to a time prior to the preceding segment (cf. Revelation 7:2; 10:1; 18:1). This characteristic pattern also appears in this transition. The first scene, in Revelation 20:1-6, describes events



“The Binding of Satan” - Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

which are actually prior in time to Armageddon, depicted in the preceding verses (Revelation 19:11-21). The second half of chapter 20 (vs. 7-15), returns to Armageddon and thus temporally parallels Revelation 19:11-21.

The figure that appears is simply described as *“an angel coming down out of heaven.”* The angel has in His hands *“the key to the Abyss”* and *“a great chain.”* Twice before in the visions of St. John our Lord has appeared as a mighty angel, the Messenger of God (cf. Revelation 10:1; 18:1). As previously noted, this language is consistent with the Old Testament depiction of Jesus as the *“Angel of the Lord.”* In this



“The Binding of Satan” by Hans Burgkmair

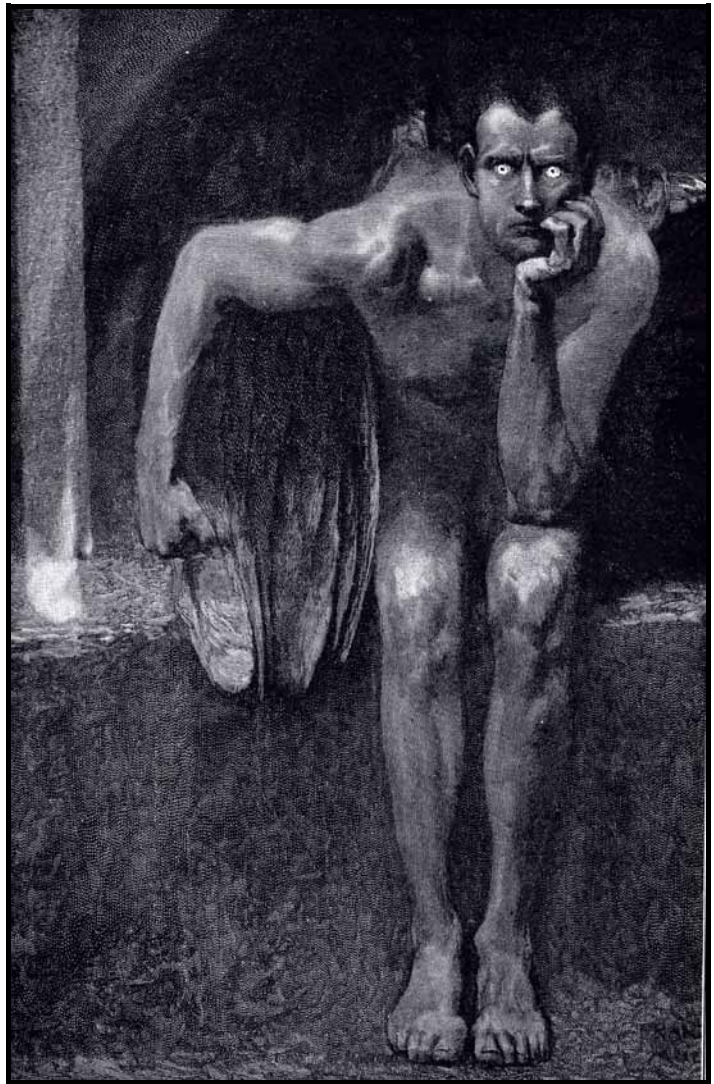
passage, the angel holds the key to the bottomless pit of hell. The allusion is to Christ’s comment in the opening vision of the Lord among the golden lampstands. There the risen Jesus had declared His victorious power over death and the devil with the assertion: *“And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”* (Revelation 1:18). Now, using the same language, the complete victory of Christ over Satan is presented in the imagery of the binding of the ancient serpent. When Jewish scribes accused Jesus of casting out demons with the power of Beelzebub, our Lord retorted that His ability to cast out demons reflected the fact that His power was greater than the devil’s. In terminology that may well have influenced the symbolism of this scene, Jesus said: *“In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.”* (Mark 3:27).

The key in Revelation, and throughout Scripture, represents power and authority: the power to open and close, the authority to command and control (cf. Revelation 1:18;



“The Binding of Satan” by Albrecht Dürer

3:7-9; 9:1; Isaiah 22:22). The same symbolism is used in reference to the “*Office of the Keys*,” that is the authority/responsibility which Christ has entrusted to His church on earth to open or close the gates of heaven by forgiving or retaining sins (Matthew 16:19). In this scene, the Angel of the Lord bears “*the key to the Abyss.*” The Greek word “*abyssus*” literally refers to a bottomless pit (“*a*” = no; “*byssus*” = bottom). The term occurs nine times in the New Testament. Seven of those occurrences are in the book of Revelation. The “*Abyss*” is a fearsome image of the torment of hell - an endless plunge into the dark and limitless depths of a black pit beyond the ability of human imagination (cf. Notes p.189). The Legion of demons who possess the Gaderene demoniac are desperately afraid that Jesus will command them to return to the darkness of the Abyss (cf. Luke 8: 31). In Revelation 9, “*the key to the shaft of the abyss*” was given to the King of the demon hordes, “*the Angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon.*” (Revelation 9:1,11). The power and authority represented by that key enabled the devil to unleash his demonic riders upon the earth. The language shifts slightly in this passage, for the key borne by the Angel of the Lord is “*the key to the Abyss*” in contrast to “*the key to the shaft of the Abyss.*” In both instances, the key represents power and authority. The devil has no power of his own. Whatever power he may have has been given him by God as a part of His sovereign purpose for His universe. The power that the devil has been granted can only be utilized within the constraints which God places upon him. He must always remain “*Gottes Teufel.*” (Luther) The angel also bears “*a great chain.*” This is no ordinary manacle that



“*Satan Bound*” by Franz Stuck

might possibly be shattered by the berserk power of demonic rage like that of **“Legion”** who broke apart the chains of the Gaderene demoniac, (cf. Mark 5:3-4) but a massive restraint (Greek - *“megale”*) representing the irresistible power of God.



“The Binding of the Ancient Serpent” by William Blake

Verse 2

He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

“He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan...” - The enemy does yield not willingly or gracefully. His opposition to God’s power remains desperately bitter despite its utter futility. He must be taken by force. The identity of the foe is conclusively established with a series of four designations (cf. Revelation 12:9). He is **“the dragon,”** (Greek - *“drakonta”*). This is the title most frequently

applied to Satan in Revelation. The image of the devil as a huge reptilian monster is drawn from the Old Testament's "*Leviathon*" (Cf. Notes p. 248). The huge red dragon is introduced in the vision of the lady and the dragon (Revelation 12:3). The dragon raised up the beasts from sea and land and empowered them to serve him (Revelation 13). The dragon is "*the ancient serpent*," a clear allusion to the temptation in the Garden of Eden and mankind's fall into sin (cf. Genesis 3). Finally, he is "*the devil* (Greek - "*diabolus*" - "*the Slanderer*"), or *Satan* (Greek - "*satanas*" - from the Hebrew - "*the Adversary*").

"And bound him for a thousand years." - The symbol of Satan's binding must be understood in its Biblical context. As previously noted (cf. Notes, p. 485) the image of a strong man bound by One stronger yet than he is based on the words of Christ in Mark 3:27 (cf. also Matthew 12:29; Luke 11:14-26). To be bound (Greek - "*edesen*") suggests restraint and restriction of activity. The same verb is used in these Gospel texts and Revelation 20:2.

In Christ's original illustration, the binding of the strong man enabled the stronger man to deprive him of his possessions. In order to liberate the demon-possessed from their bondage, it was first necessary for Jesus to bind their Satanic master, that is, to restrain him and restrict his power. Christ's ability to do so demonstrated the superiority of His strength to Satan's. Mark's account of the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac uses the same language with the specific reference to the possessed man's ability to break out of the chains with which he had been bound which parallels Revelation 20's reference to the great chain by which the dragon is bound: "*No one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his legs.*" (Mark 5:3-4) "*Legion*," the



*"The Binding of Satan" - Luther Bible
Woodcut*



“The Binding of the Ancient Serpent - 10th Century Spanish Apocalypse”

mighty demon whom no chain could bind cowered in fear before **“Jesus, Son of the Most High God”** and was cast out into a herd of swine (Mark 5:6-13). The prominence of exorcism in the earthly ministry of Jesus was indicative of the limitation of Satan’s power - the binding of Satan - which was already underway at that time for the promised Christ had come into the world.

Our Lord uses other language to make the same point about the impact of His life, death, and resurrection on the kingdom and power of the devil. As the seventy-two disciples return with triumphant reports of their gospel proclamation, Jesus responds: **“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”** (Luke 10:18-19). As the time of the cross approaches, Jesus affirms: **“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”** (John 12:31-32) It is clear that the binding of Satan is not a future event designed to pave the way for an earthly millennium at the end of time. The binding

of Satan is a present reality which began 2,000 years ago with the successful accomplishment of the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ. It does not represent the elimination or absolute immobilization of the devil but rather the reduction of his efforts to the level of futility and the restriction of his ability to oppose and prevent the proclamation of the Gospel. The imagery is that of a vicious beast collared and chained. While he is still deadly, his power to maim and kill is now limited to the length of his chain. He cannot break the chain that binds him. Only those who are so careless as to stray within his reach will become his prey. Although the ancient foe fights on in bitter desperation, he has already been defeated. His power has been broken. Martin Luther declares the invincible confidence of the Christian in his magnificent “*Mighty Fortress*” - “*This world’s Prince may still, scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He’s judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him.*” This is the case both in the Gospel texts cited which used the Greek verb “*deo*” and here in Revelation 20. Dr. Brighton summarizes the significance of the binding symbol in its Scriptural context:

“According to the four gospels, then, the devil was bound, conquered, judged, and cast out as a result of Jesus’ saving ministry, culminating in His death on the cross and His resurrection. Therefore, the binding of Satan, the dragon, took place at



“The Binding of Satan” - Luther Bible Engraving

Jesus' victory, accomplished by His ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. also Revelation 12:5,7-10) - at the beginning of the "thousand years." (Brighton, p. 549)



"The Binding of Satan" - Luther Bible Engraving

The material in this vision closely parallels that of Revelation 12:7-11. Both texts symbolically depict the impact of Christ's successful completion of God's plan of salvation upon the devil and his kingdom. In Revelation 12, the symbolism is that of a great war in heaven between Satan and his demons over against the archangel Michael and the hosts of heaven. The devil is defeated, cast out of heaven, and hurled down to the earth. Here, in Revelation 20, the same point is represented by the binding of Satan and his confinement within the Abyss. The message is the same in both instances. Our enemy has been defeated. By His perfect life and innocent death in our place Christ has removed the basis for Satan's accusation against us and broken his power over us. The devil and his legions are defeated but not destroyed. Their power has been broken, but it has not yet been eliminated. They will stubbornly continue to oppose Christ and His Gospel, throughout the New Testament

era, but they will not prevail. (Cf. Notes, p. 329-344)

This understanding of the text not only conforms to the use of this language elsewhere in Scripture, it is also fully consistent with the design and purpose of Revelation itself. The Book of Revelation was inspired by God to comfort and sustain His people in the midst of earthly trial and tribulation - from the contemporaries of St. John at the end of the first century to those who will still be alive on earth when the Lord returns in triumph at the end of time. The reduction of Satan's binding to the status of a facilitating event for an earthly millennium at some point in the future contradicts that purpose.

“Revelation 20 is not concerned with describing a single episode just prior to the last judgment, but rather with encouraging the beleaguered people of God in the setting of a description of the whole New Testament era from the incarnation to the parousia.” (Stephenson, p. 93)

R.C.H. Lenski offers this forceful conclusion:

*“So we see where **the Scriptures** have the 1,000 years begin. I will let the Scriptures tell me although 10,000 chiliasts insist that **they** must tell me! They may keep their **novum** which means “new thing,” “novelty.” So the 1,000 years are the complete New Testament era. John was in it; you and I are in it now. The two beasts and the whore are working now. This text is not concerned about the dim future so that chiliasts may embroider it at will. As it had value for John, so it has for us.”* (Lenski, p. 576)

*“**And bound him for a thousand years.**”* - With this goal in mind, the numerological symbol of *“a thousand”* becomes a most effective means of expressing the totality of the



“The Ancient Serpent” by Hugo van der Goes



*“And Cast Him Into the Pit”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

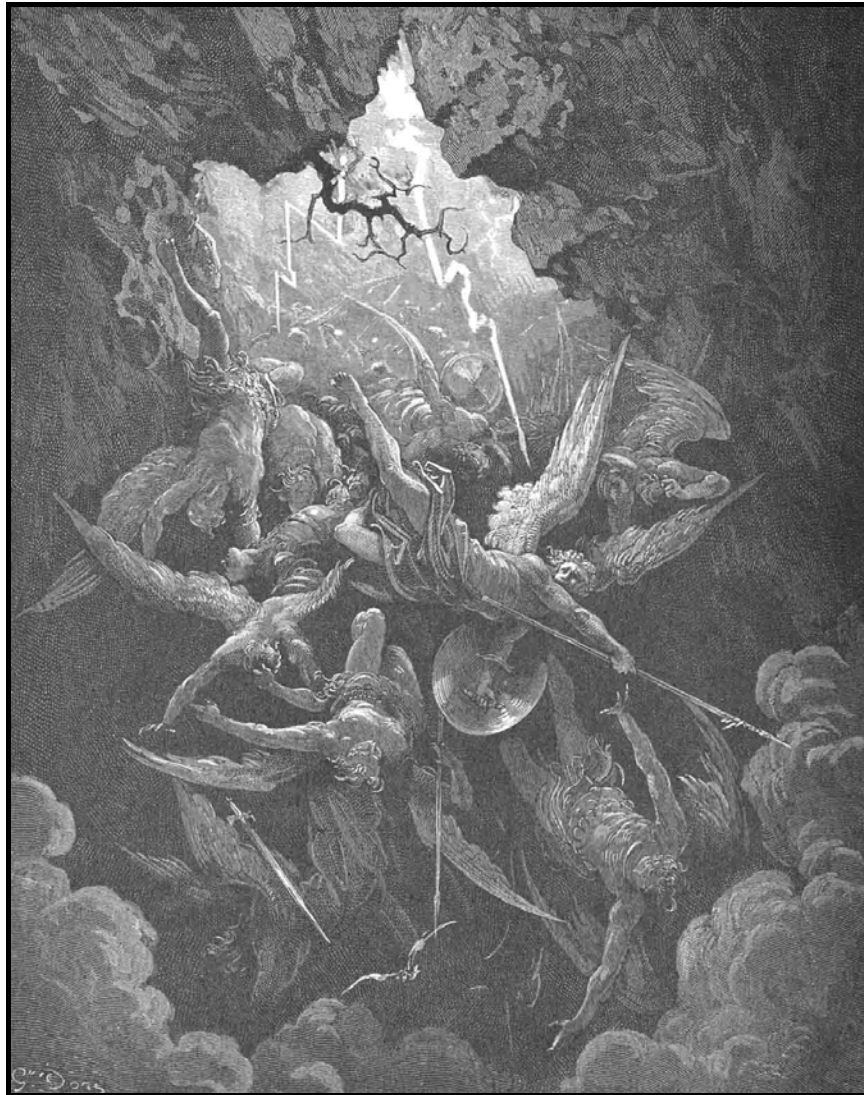
New Testament era. One thousand is the cube of the ordinal number ten (10x10x10) - *“ten raised to the third degree, that of highest completeness.”* (Lenski, p. 572). It signifies a lengthy period of time which is in itself a complete unit. In this instance that time period is the interval between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. The thousand years only occur in two other texts in the Bible. In both instances it is not a *“specific period of earthly history, exactly one thousand years long”* (Brighton, p. 551) but a general reference to a lengthy period of time (Psalm 90:4 - *“For a thousand years in Your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.”*; 2 Peter 3:8 - *“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day.”* A similar reference, although not in terms of years, can be found in Psalm 50:10 in which God declares - *“For every animal of the forest is mine*

and the cattle on a thousand hills.” The numeral one thousand, in this instance, is obviously not literal. It signifies completeness - all the cattle on earth belong to God (cf. also Isaiah 7:23). To understand this numeral as a literal designation for a specific period of time is inconsistent with its immediate context in Revelation 20 and the pattern of numerological symbolism which prevails throughout the book of Revelation. G.K. Beale lists five Biblical and historical reasons why the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 cannot be understood a literal chronological number:

“(1) the consistently figurative use of numbers elsewhere in the book, (2) the figurative nature of much of the immediate context (“chain,” “abyss,” “dragon,”

“serpent,” “locked,” “sealed,” “beast”), (3) the predominantly figurative tone of the entire book (so 1:1), (4) the figurative use of “1,000” in the OT, and (5) the use in Jewish and early Christian writings of “1,000” years as a figure for the eternal blessing of the redeemed.” (Beale, p. 995)

“He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.” - The image of Satan’s restriction and confinement is reiterated as the Angel of the Lord hurls the bound figure of the Dragon down into the Abyss and locks and seals its lid over him. The New Testament uses similar imagery in regard to the punishment of the fallen angels elsewhere. In Jude 6 we are told that the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion



“He Threw Him Into the Abyss” by Gustav Dore



*“The Defeat of Satan”
by Maestro di Castelsardo -1498*

the definitive nature of the action and the devil’s inability to resist or undo it. Seals were used to provide special security when the prevention of access or exit was of particular importance (i.e. the sealing of the lions den in which Daniel was confined (Daniel 6:17), and the sealing of the entrance to the tomb of Jesus (Matthew 27:66). Official documents were also sealed to ensure that only the appropriate individual with sufficient authority would open them (cf. Revelation 5:1). It was common practice in the Roman world for the cell doors in prisons to be officially sealed so that no one but the judge who had pronounced the sentence could open the cell door.

against God are bound with eternal chains in a place of unending darkness: *“And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”* Peter uses the example of God’s stern punishment of the fallen angels to warn sinners not to trifle with the judgment of God: *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them into the deepest pit of hell, putting them into chains of darkness to be held for judgment.”* (2 Peter 2:4) All of this language is clearly metaphoric, describing realities beyond our comprehension. Chains and locks cannot literally bind spirits. Even darkness and light are physical realities which do not directly apply to the invisible creatures whom God has fashioned.

The angel’s dual action - *“locked and sealed it over him”* - stresses

Thus the imposition of a seal on the lid of the abyss signifies that only God may break the seal which He has imposed and remove the restraint which He has placed upon the activities of the devil.

Like the binding itself, the devil's confinement within the Abyss signifies his defeat and the limitation of his ability to oppose and suppress the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world. This is clearly indicated by the purpose clause which follows - *"to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore."* The Greek noun *"ethne"* usually refers only to non-Jewish nations, namely the Gentiles. Siegbert Becker suggests that the phrase ought to be translated to reflect that emphasis - *"to keep him from deceiving the Gentiles anymore."* In the aftermath of Christ's perfect life, substitutionary death, and triumphant resurrection the almost universal dominion which Satan enjoyed over the gentile nations of the world is ended. The Gospel will now be proclaimed with great power across the globe. The significance of this shift



"The Devil Cast Into the Pit" - Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Brosamer



“Satan Bound for 1,000 Years” - Luther Bible Woodcut by Bockesperger-Amman

can be more clearly perceived in the broader context of salvation history:

“After the fall, the serpent and his agents do on a worldwide scale what the devil began to do in the garden. In the OT age Satan was able to delude the majority of Israel so that they were not able to fulfill their commission to be a salvific light to the nations. As a result, the good news of God’s kingdom was not heralded to the pagan nations, and the nations remained in spiritual darkness. Also, because of Israel’s sin, Israel remained in subjection to Satanic oppression from foreign nations attempting to exterminate Israel. This attempted extermination was climaxed by Satan’s attempted attack on Christ, who summed up the community of the true Israel in Himself...All who subsequently identify with Jesus as the true Israel begin to fulfill the commission to be a light to the nations, so that Satan’s veil of deception over the nations is lifted. This means that the devil will not be able to stop the spread of the preaching of the gospel or its expanding reception (= the church) during the age preceding Christ’s return. So Christ commands His followers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). The gospel will “be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations and then the end will come” (Matt.24:14).” (Beale, pp.

“After that, he must be set free for a short time.” - At the end of the New Testament era, when God’s purpose for the evangelization of the gentiles has been accomplished, the restraint that has been imposed upon Satan will be removed to enable him to marshal his forces for one final foredoomed assault upon Christ and His people. But even this last desperate outburst of opposition to the Gospel takes places within the purpose and providence of Almighty God. This is clearly indicated by the verb ***“must”*** (Greek - ***“dei”***) which consistently refers to that which is necessary according to the will of God for the accomplishment of the plan of salvation. The devil does not break out of prison by his own power. He is briefly released by his jailor to present himself and his followers for judgment. This is Satan’s ***“little season”*** of which our Lord had warned in Matthew 24:

“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. At that time, if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or, “There He is!” do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonder to deceive even the elect - if that were possible.”
(Matthew 24:21-25)

The Bible consistently teaches that the world will grow ever more evil and corrupt throughout the New Testament era. False teachers and the errant doctrines they cleverly propose will endlessly proliferate. Mankind will become increasingly resistant to the Gospel of salvation and large segments of the visible church will succumb to apostasy. As the moment of Christ’s return finally approaches this pattern will sharply intensify for the restraining hand of God will have been removed from our ancient enemy. From a human perspective it will be impossible to determine whether Satan’s little season has begun. Devout Christians in every generation have been convinced that human culture in their day had descended to the deepest depth of corruption and degradation and that the end was therefore nigh. Nonetheless, time has continued, and humanity has discovered ever new ways to deny and defy God, His righteousness and His mercy. The text stresses the brevity of Satan’s release - ***“for a short time”*** (Greek - ***“mikron chronon”***). This is not a new historical period but the culmination of the New Testament era which sets the stage for the judgment and the ultimate downfall of the dragon and his kingdom.



“The Elders Before the Throne of God” by Albrecht Dürer

The Thousand Year Reign

Revelation 20:4-6

“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” - The customary “*kai eidon*” (“And I saw”) signals

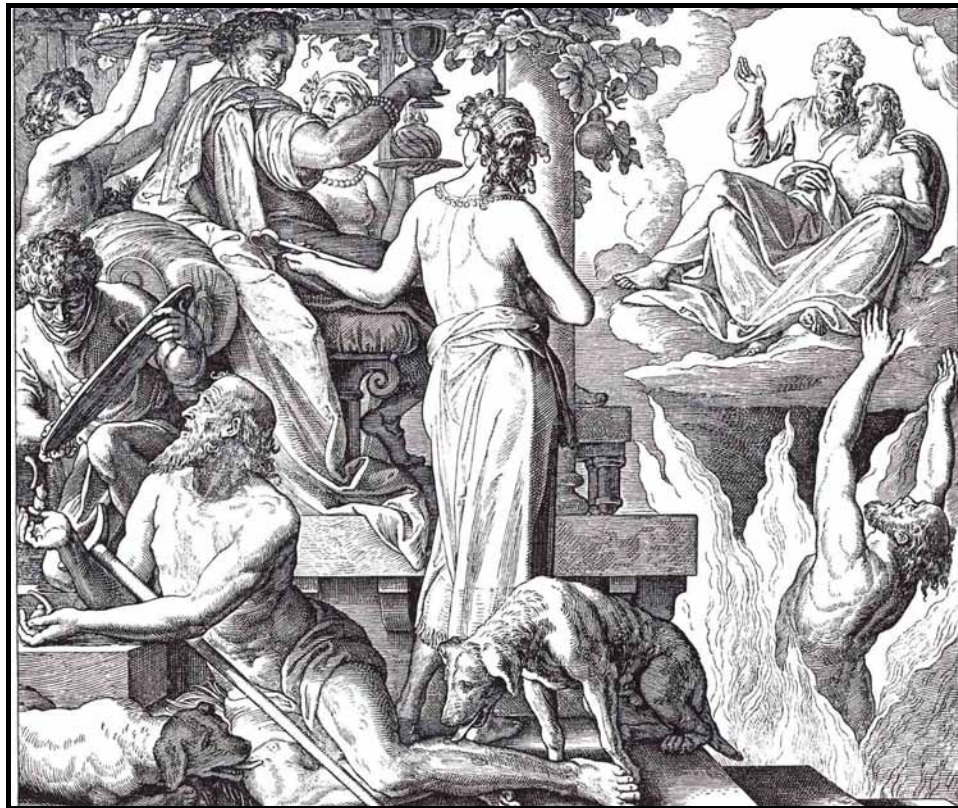
the shift to the next scene in the vision. The close parallel between the visions of Revelation 12 and the scenes now before us in Revelation 20 has already been noted (cf. Notes, p. 489). In Revelation 12, the scene which depicts the defeat and the downfall of Satan (Revelation 12:7-9) is followed by the triumphant response of saints and angels in heaven. (Revelation 12:10-12). That is also the case here. Having seen the result of Christ's victory on earth in the curtailment of Satan's ability to deceive the nations "*until the thousand years were ended*" (vs.3), our attention is directed to heaven where the triumphant reign of saints and martyrs has already begun and will continue throughout the New Testament era "*until the thousand years were ended*" (vs.5) as the result of the victory of Christ and the binding of Satan. Accordingly, both scenes describe the same time period - "*the thousand years*" - on earth and in heaven.

The Revelator observes "*thrones,*" the seat of authority and power. In this context, the thrones represent both the seat of judgment, "*the tribunal seats for the assessors of the divine Judge,*" (Thomas, p. 413), and the royal throne of a king from which he

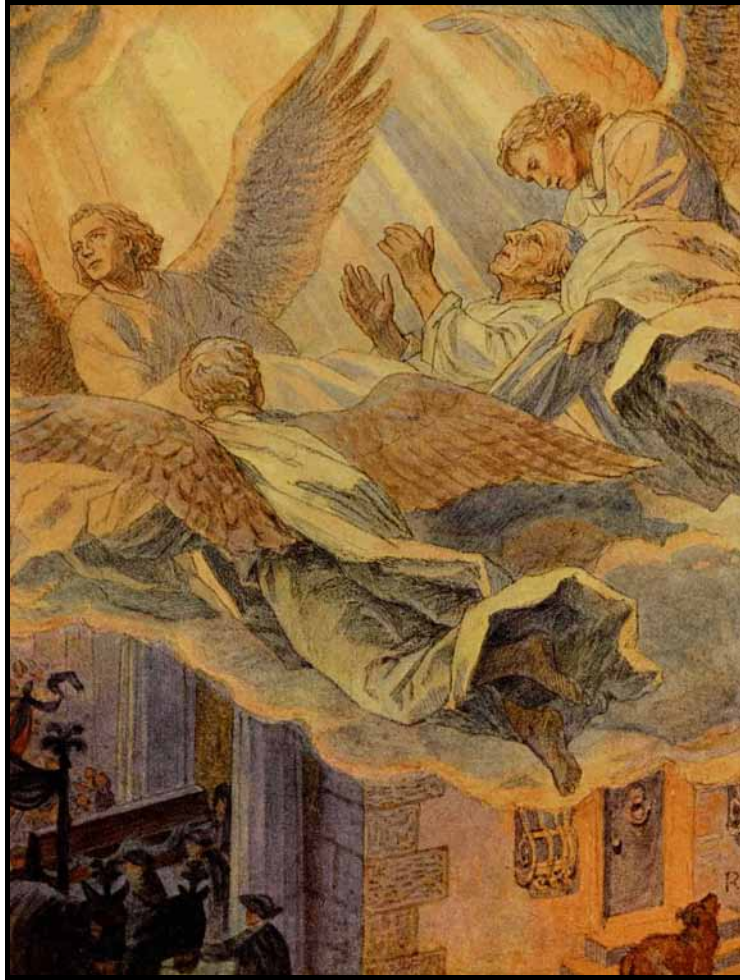


"Michael - Prince of the Host of Heaven" by Ricci

rules and reigns. The number of thrones is not specified, nor are their occupants personally identified. Those who are seated upon the thrones are ***“those who have been given authority to judge.”*** The image is drawn from Daniel chapter 7 where the prophet foretells the day of judgment in this way: ***“Thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took His seat...The court was seated and the books were opened...the Ancient of Days came and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.”*** (Daniel 7:9-10,22). Jesus had promised His disciples: ***“I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*** (Matthew 19:28; cf. also Luke 22:30). As Paul admonished the Corinthians to avoid the pagan courts and settle disputes among themselves he wrote: ***“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?”*** (1 Corinthians 6:2). Thus those seated upon the thrones are the people of God. The Scriptural evidence supporting a role for God’s people in judgment is well attested. This scene, with its royal/judgment thrones was also anticipated earlier in Revelation as the twenty-four elders who represent



“The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld



*“The Soul of Lazarus Carried to Heaven by the Angels”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

the people of God are depicted seated upon thrones around the throne of God with golden crowns upon their heads (Revelation 4:4). The text notes that this judgment authority is not inherent, it is bestowed by God. The people of God are ***“those who had been given authority to judge.”*** The authority rests with God alone who graciously permits His faithful people to participate in the final judgement of humanity.

“And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus...” -. John sees ***“the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus.”*** The heavenly setting of this scene is emphatically confirmed by John’s reference to ***“the souls of those.”*** John does not see physical

bodies. He sees the disembodied souls of those who have died in Christ. One might object that a soul cannot be seen. While that is literally true, it does not apply to the supernatural visions of St. John, in which God, angels, and a great many other invisible realities visibly appeared. Despite the limitations of our finite minds, the Scriptural text clearly asserts that John saw these souls (cf. The Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31). The direct object of the verb “saw” is the Greek accusative noun “*psychas*.” Those who misuse this passage in support of an earthly millennium are forced to argue

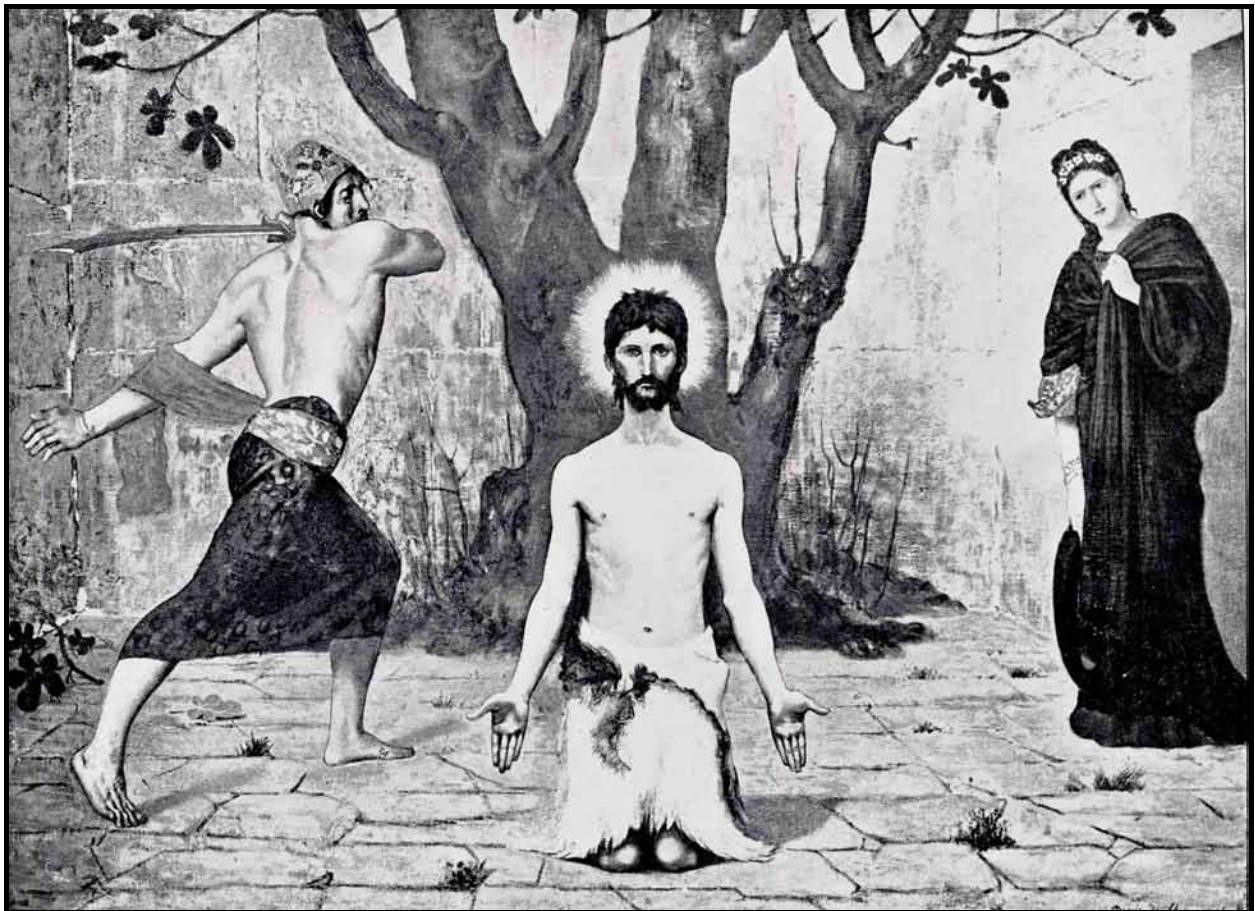


“To The Eternal Home” by Wilhelm von Kaulbach

that this is not a reference to the disembodied souls of believers who have died on earth but now live in heaven. Instead, they argue, this is a figurative reference to the whole person, body and soul together. It is true that the word “*psyche*” is sometimes used in that sense in Scripture - as in Romans 13:1, for example. However that cannot be the case here. John does not say “*I saw souls who had been beheaded*” which would obviously be understood as a reference to the whole person. He says “*I saw the souls of those,*” clearly distinguishing between the soul and the whole person. This particular wording can only refer to disembodied souls of those who have died. The Bible teaches that at the moment of

physical death the soul of the believer is in heaven with the Lord (cf. Gen. 25:7-8; Psalm 23:4; Matthew 10:28; 22:31-32; Luke 16:22; Luke 23:43; John 11:25-27; John 14:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:20-26; Revelation 6:9-11; 14:13). It is to such believers, now at home with Christ in heaven, to whom John directs our attention.

The identification of the throne judges as the people of God is reinforced as the description continues. The Greek verb “*pepelekizo*” (“*beheaded*”) is derived from the noun “*pelekys*” which means “*axe*.” The grisly verb literally means “*to chop off one’s head with an axe*.” This is the only time in which the word occurs in the Bible. If one is to interpret this phrase literalistically it would refer only to those who have been beheaded with an axe. That is clearly not the intent of the text. In Revelation 6:9 “*the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they maintained*” represented all of God’s faithful people who now live and reign with God in heaven, eagerly awaiting the Day of Judgment. So also here in Revelation 20:4, “*the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus*” serve as the epitome of all those who have offered the good confession in life and have suffered for it, that is, every faithful Christian believer who has fought the good fight of faith and has finished his course on earth. The souls of these redeemed witnesses now enjoy the blessedness of the “*dead who die in the Lord*.” (Revelation 14:13) The Greek word “*marturia*” was used broadly in



“The Beheading of St. John the Baptist” by Puvis de Chavannes

Biblical times to refer to any form of witness without the specific, more modern, connotation of being killed because of that witness. Brighton summarizes:

“A martyr of Jesus, then, is a Christian who witnesses to the truth of Jesus and the Word of God. And for this he will suffer various forms of persecution. Whether he dies a martyr’s death or not, he is still a martyr of Jesus. The Biblical usage of “martyr” and “martyrdom” supports an interpretation of beheading here in 20:4 as the epitome of the persecutions that all Christians experience. For Christian witnesses (martyrs) back up their testimony with their lives, and, if necessary, by the way they meet their death.” (Brighton, p. 559)

Hence, ***“the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God”*** represent the souls of all of the faithful departed who now live and reign with Christ in heaven.



“Poor Lazarus In Life” - 19th Century Engraving

The nature of the martyrs’ testimony ***“for Jesus and because of the word of God”*** is defined using the beast imagery of Revelation 13: ***“They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.”*** (Cf. Revelation 13:1-15).

“They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

- There are two verbs in this phrase - ***“came to life”*** (Greek - *“ezesan”*) and ***“reigned”*** (Greek - *“ebasileusan”*). Both are in the Greek aorist tense which denotes past action. The NIV incorrectly translates the first verb in the phrase as what grammarians call an ingressive aorist-***“They came to***

life.” The ingressive aorist places particular emphasis upon the moment in which the action began. The second verb is simply translated as an ordinary, constantive aorist, **“they...reigned.”** This translation of the two verbs is not only inconsistent, it is substantively inappropriate in the context of the sentence. The ingressive aorist translation - **“they came to life”** suggests that the subject had been alive, then died, and has now come to life again. That cannot be the case here, because the subject of the verb in this sentence is **“souls.”** A soul does not die. At the instant of physical death the soul is either in heaven with the Lord or in hell to await the official condemnation of Judgment Day. In this context, both of the verbs should be translated as simple constantive aorists - **“they lived and reigned”**. The comforting assurance of the text is that all those who die in the Lord, throughout the New Testament era - **“a thousand years”** - are alive at this very moment, living and reigning with Christ in heaven. *“The whole purpose of this vision is to reveal the royal exaltation and power of every faithful believer, when at his death his soul enters into heaven.”* (Little, p.205) This great scene depicts the fulfillment of Christ’s promise: **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.”** (John 11:25) Martin Franzmann expresses the delightful irony of the scene from the perspective of the persecuted church which was John’s original audience:

“During those thousand years the church has before it the key signature of “dying and behold we live” (2 Cor.6:9). Those faithful ones who have been judged and condemned in human courts, “beheaded for their testimony to Jesus” - they are in reality not judged and condemned men but the judges; they are enthroned as judges over all the hostile powers which have apparently triumphed over them. In the court of God the verdict of the world is reversed; there the Spirit pleads their cause and “convinces the world concerning...judgment because the ruler of this world (Satan) is judged” (John 16:8-11)...Those who have lost their lives for Christ’s sake find their life (Matthew 10:39); they come to life and reign with Christ.” (Franzmann, p. 131)

“(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.” - A parenthetical remark is added concerning the state of the souls of the unbelieving dead - **“the rest of the dead”** - during the 1,000 years, that is, the interim between the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ.



“The Death of the Just and the Unjust” by Heinrich Vogtherr -1540

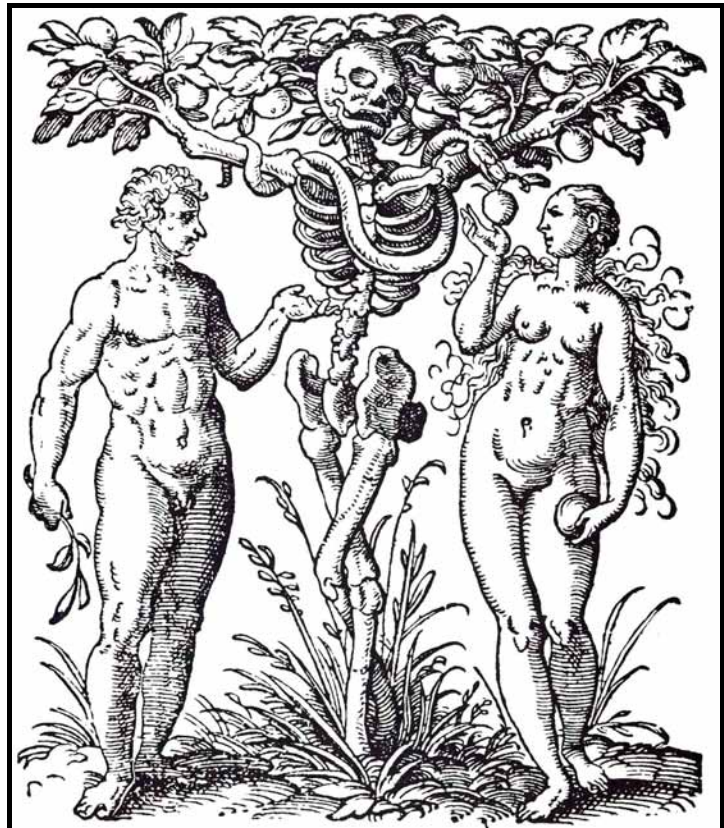
A magnificent woodcut entitled *“The Death of the Just and the Unjust”* by Reformation era artist Heinrich Vogtherr presents the transformation of death’s significance for those who die in a faith relationship with the Savior Jesus Christ. Holbein conveys the stark contrast between the meaning of death for the believer and the unbeliever by presenting a Christian and a non-Christian at opposite ends of the same death bed. The Christian is surrounded by the three cardinal virtues of *“Faith”* (*“Glaub”*), *“Hope”* (*“Hoffnung”*), and *“Love”* (*“Liebe”*). Above him, one angel prepares to place the victor’s crown of blessing (*“Glücksagung”*) upon his head while another gestures toward the home in heaven which awaits him. In the background, the sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock graze securely on the green pastures which He has provided. This man, justified by grace through faith in Jesus, meets death serenely, his Bible at his bedside, and his hands folded in prayer over his heart. The tortured figure on the other end of the deathbed presents the opposite in every way. His female companion, *“the World”* (*“die Welt”*) flees from him in terror. The sweet pleasures that she offered him in life are of no value now. The skeletal figure of death (*“Todt”*) looms triumphantly over him, his skull and crossbones banner of victory in one hand.. In the other is an empty hourglass with the despairing message that for this man time has run out. The beastly figure of the devil rises up from

the flames of hell to snatch him down to damnation. Around the devil and the fires of perdition are two grim texts. The first identifies Hell: *“Such is the place of one who knows not God.”* (Job 18:21) The second text labels the horned figure rising up from the fire: *“Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8) The emaciated figure on the bed twists in torment as he desperately seeks to evade his fate. In the background, the goats, which have been separated from the sheep, look on helplessly and battle with one another. Holbein’s images present a powerfully effective message of Law and Gospel.

+ + +

The crucial word for an accurate understanding of this phrase is the verb “*zao*” (“*to live*”). Once again, the NIV unnecessarily translates this verb as an ingressive aorist - *“did not come to life.”* The simple constantive aorist - *“did not live”* is more appropriate in this context.

In the New Testament generally, and in the writings of St. John particularly, the verb “*to live*” (Greek - “*zao*”) and the corresponding noun “*life*” (“*zoe*”) tend to take on a unique, intensified meaning. They do not merely refer to physical existence, as is often the case elsewhere but become in the writings of St. John the characteristic terms which describe the true, abundant, everlasting life which can only be experienced in relationship to God by faith in Jesus Christ. This usage is distinctive and consistent. Thus, in the prologue to his Gospel, John declares the impact of Jesus’ coming in this way: *“In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.”* (John 1:4). To the recalcitrant religious leaders of Israel, Jesus asserts: *“I tell you the truth, he who believes has*



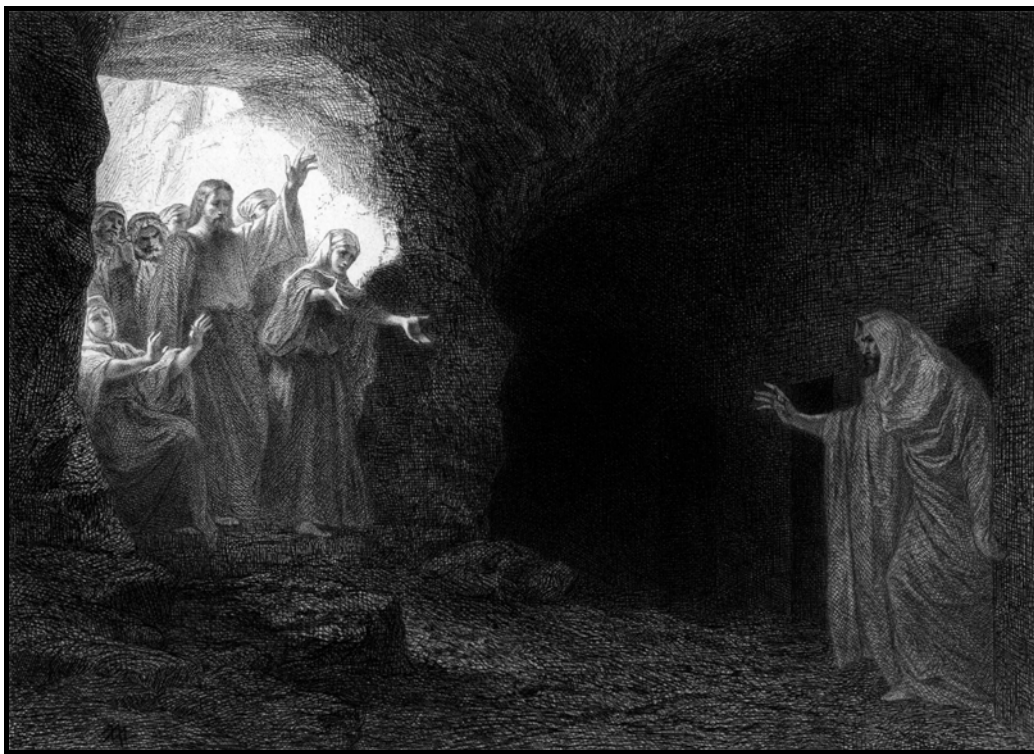
“Medieval Woodcut Depicting The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as the Skeletal Figure of Death”



Medieval Woodcut of Death Riding Forth from the Jaws of Hell as a Conqueror

everlasting life. I am the bread of life.” (John 6:47) Our Lord defines the bestowal of that abundant life as the very reason for His coming: **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** (John 10:10). In His high priestly prayer, Jesus’ words to the Father define the true meaning of life - **“Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”** (John 17:3) Real life, according to the Bible, is much more than mere physical existence. In fact, the great majority of those who are physically alive are not truly alive at all. They are dead in their transgressions and sins (cf. Ephesians 2:1); cut off from the life-giving mercy and grace of God in Christ. Unlike the believers who live and reign with Christ in heaven throughout the New Testament era, **“the rest of the dead”** - that is, all those who die apart from a saving relationship with God through faith in Christ - do not live during this time period. To be sure, their existence does not cease. But the existence experienced by the unbelieving dead is not life in any Biblical sense of the term, and Scripture never uses *“zoe”* to describe their status. At the moment of physical death the souls of those who die outside of the faith are in hell, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies and the coming of the judgment with desperate fear.

The use of the Greek preposition “*achri*” (English - “*until*”) is somewhat misleading in this phrase. The English word “*until*” suggests a change in condition at the end of the specified period. In this case the implication would be that the unbelieving dead did come to life after the end of the 1,000 years. The Greek text, however, does not carry that connotation. In both Greek and Hebrew “*not until*” clauses often imply nothing whatever about what happened after the limit of the “*until*” was reached. “*An until clause or phrase does not of itself tell us what happened when the designated point was reached. That always depends on the context.*” (Becker, p. 310). 2 Samuel 6:23 is a clear example of this linguistic pattern: “*And Micah the daughter of Saul had no children until the day of her death.*” Obviously the intent of the phrase is to indicate that Micah remained childless for the rest of her life, not to imply that she began to have children after her death. In this instance, the phrase - “*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended*” - simply contrasts the state of the unbelieving dead with that of believers during the thousand years, the interval between the first and second comings of Christ. The souls of believers will live and reign with Christ in heaven throughout the New Testament era. The souls of unbelievers will not.



“Lazarus Come Forth!” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“This is the first resurrection.” - Having commented on the state of the unbelieving dead, John returns to the main theme of this scene - the glorious reign of the saints in heaven during the New Testament era. He describes the triumphant life of the saints and martyrs in heaven as ***“the first resurrection.”*** The phrase is particularly apt. Scorned and rejected by the world, they were condemned and killed for their faith. But dying they live (2 Corinthians 6:9)! Although their bodies, awaiting the trumpet call and the archangel’s voice, rest in the grave - their souls are alive at this moment. And not merely alive, but savoring the richness of abundant eternal life in the presence of God! *“Accordingly, the resurrection of which John here speaks is a resurrection pertaining to souls. The term is not used here in a literal, but in a*



“The Resurrection of Lazarus” by William Hilton

symbolic sense, signifying a quickening and raising up.” (Little, p. 206) Millennialists, who imagine two bodily resurrections, one at the beginning of the millennium for believers and another at the end of the millennium for unbelievers, insist that the word ***“resurrection”*** can only be understood in a physical or bodily sense. This insistence is contrary to the usage of the New Testament. Jesus uses the terminology of resurrection from the dead in both a spiritual and a physical sense in John 5. In fact He uses the power of His Word to accomplish the physical

resurrection of the dead as proof of the power of His Word to accomplish the resurrection of those who are dead in unbelief and sin to new life in Him:

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and now has come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live...Do not be amazed at this for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:24-29)

Note also that the wording of John 5 allows for only one physical resurrection which will include both believers and unbelievers. Paul uses remarkably similar language in Ephesians 2:5-6 to describe that which God has done for His people in Christ: ***“God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”*** St. Augustine cites a plethora of parallel passages where the concept of resurrection is applied in a spiritual context:

*“There are some who suppose that resurrection can be predicated only of the body, and therefore they contend that this first resurrection of the Apocalypse is a bodily resurrection...But what do they say to the apostle who speaks of a resurrection of souls? For certainly in was in the inner and not the outer man that those had risen to whom he says: **“If ye have risen with Christ, mind the things which are above.”** (Colossians 3:1). The same sense he elsewhere conveyed in other words, saying: **“That as Christ has risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we may also walk in newness of life.”** (Romans 6:4). So, too, **“Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”** (Ephesians 5:14)”* (Augustine, *The City of God*, XX,10)



Saint Augustine



*“The First Resurrection, the Downfall of Satan, and the Rise of Gog and Magog” -
Luther Bible Woodcut*

“Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” - This is the fifth of Revelation’s seven beatitudes. It differs from its counterparts in that it asserts not only blessedness (Greek - “*makarios*”) but holiness (Greek - “*hagios*”) for all **“those who have a part in the first resurrection.”** This is consistent with the view that the **“first resurrection”** refers to the transition of the souls of believers from physical death to eternal life with Christ in heaven. Lenski summarizes:

“This is what the first resurrection means: the dying person’s soul is transferred to, literally ‘has part in the rising up, the first one.’ ‘Blessed’ is he indeed! This verdict accords him the highest happiness. ‘Holy’ is significantly added; the last race of sin and of the flesh has been swept out of the soul at the moment of death. By its anastasis, its rising up, the soul passes into heaven to its royal throne in a pure and stainless state. The body will follow in due time when the 1,000 years are ended, and

the Lord calls it from the dust for its anastasis, its rising up to the same heavenly exaltation.” (Lenski, p. 589)

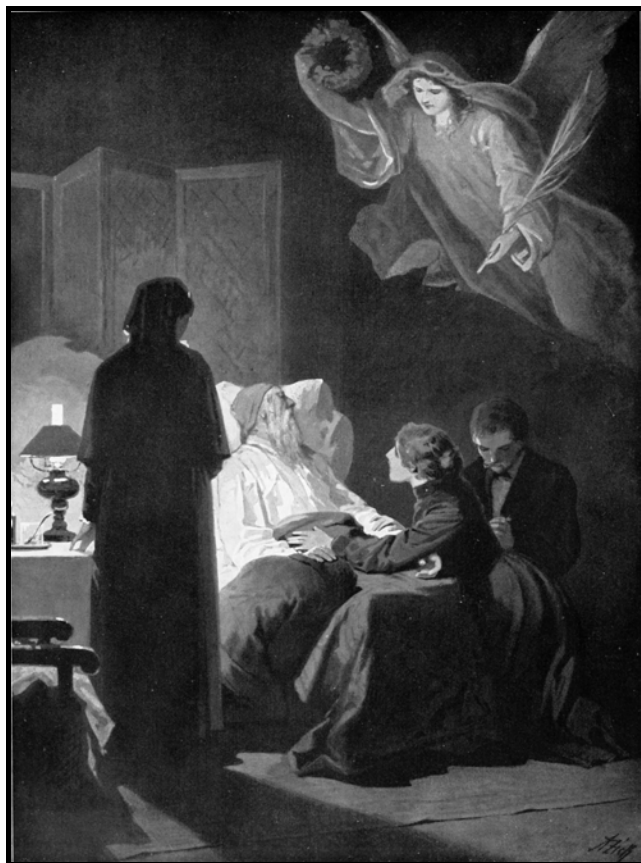
“The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” - The text goes on to define the blessedness of those who participate in the first resurrection. The blessedness of those who have experienced the ***“first resurrection”*** consists first of all in their immunity from the ***“second death.”*** The numerical contrast is striking by design. Believers, those who have participated in the ***“first resurrection”*** rise twice, first spiritually and then physically; but only die once, when they pass through physical death. The opposite is true for unbelievers, those who have not experienced the ***“first resurrection.”*** They will die twice, first physically and then eternally, but they will only rise once, in the resurrection of all flesh on the Last Day. The ***“second death”*** is permanent separation from God in the eternal torment of hell, represented in the vision by ***“the lake of fire and sulfur.”*** (Revelation 20:14) The ***“second death”*** holds no threat for those who have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They stand before God righteous and holy, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. Damnation cannot touch them. Its fatal power over them was destroyed once and for



“The Heavenly Jerusalem” by Peter Cornelius

all at the cross. The words recall Paul's declaration in Romans 6:9 - ***“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again: death no longer has mastery over Him.”*** While the damned suffer the non-life of eternal existence in hell, the redeemed are blessed to enjoy eternity as ***“priests of God and of Christ”*** who will ***“reign with Him for a thousand years.”*** (Cf. 1 Peter 2:9) In Revelation 1:6, John had celebrated that which Christ has accomplished for His people with these words: ***“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power forever and ever.”*** The twenty-four elders who represent God's people before the divine throne sang the praises of the Lamb because: ***“You were slain and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.”*** (Revelation 5:10). The reign and the priesthood which Christ purchased for His people with His own precious blood is now being exercised by victorious saints and martyrs in heaven. ***“The destiny purchased by Christ for all Christians will be***

realized by those who partake in the first resurrection; for them, priestly service in the glory of its ideal perfection is an accomplished fact.” (Swete, p. 264). It was the role and privilege of the priest to stand in the sacred presence of God on behalf of the people. Now in heaven's perfection of holiness God's royal priests stand in His glorious presence continuously bringing their sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise before the throne and interceding on behalf of the church still on earth. The Lutheran Confessions acknowledge this ministry of heavenly intercession while sternly rejecting the unbiblical practice of praying to or for the dead: ***“Besides, we also grant that the angels pray for us...Although concerning the saints we concede that, just as, when alive, they pray for the Church universal in general, so in heaven they pray for the Church in general.”*** (Apol. XXI, 8)



“The Crown of Life” by Alexander Zick



“Satan Bound for 1,000 Years” by Peter Paul Rubens

Excursus: The Millennium

The doctrine of the “*Millennium*” has proven to be one of the most controversial and divisive topics in Christian theology. Dr. Brighton does not exaggerate in the least when he contends:

“No other portion of Revelation has caused more confusion and consternation than the first six verses of chapter 20, which describe what has come to be known as the millennium. One could receive the impression from the amount of interest caused by these verses that they are the most important and influential in the entire book.”
(Brighton, p. 533)

This distorted emphasis is most unfortunate in that it detracts from the real message

of encouragement and hope which God offers His people in this remarkable book of prophecy.

The term “*millennium*” is derived from the Latin words “*mille*” (one thousand) and “*annus*” (year). The two words are combined to form the compound “*millennium*” which refers to a period of one thousand years. Historically, millennialism is also known as “*chiliasm*” from “*chilia*,” the Greek word for one thousand.

The four basic categories of millennial opinion in Christian history are: (1) dispensational premillennialism; (2) historic premillennialism; (3) postmillennialism; and, (4) amillennialism. Numerous variations exist within each of the four categories. Each of these basic viewpoints utilizes a prefix which signals their perspective on the millennium and the timing of Christ’s return in relation to it. Thus, premillennialists believe that Christ will return before the 1,000 years (Latin - “*pre*” = before). Postmillennialists believe that Christ will return after the 1,000 years (Latin “*post*” = after). Those who do not believe that the Bible teaches a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth are known as amillennialists utilizing the Greek negative prefix “*a*”. The four millennial views may be summarized as follows:



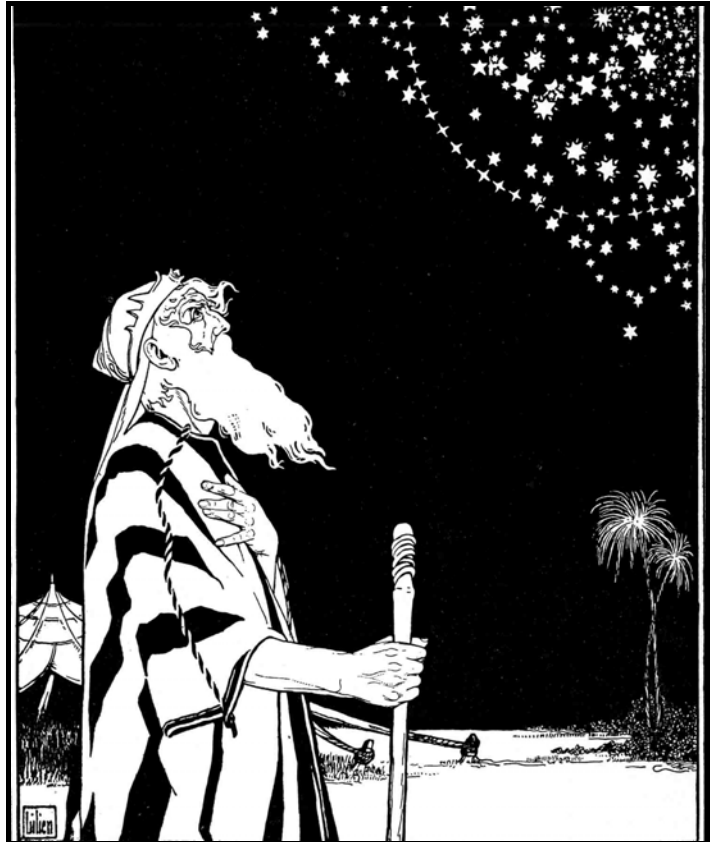
John Nelson Darby
Founder of Dispensational Premillennialism

1. Dispensational Premillennialism

Dispensational premillennialism enjoys widespread popularity among conservative Protestants and fundamentalists today. It is certainly the best known millennial alternative, extensively promoted by television preachers and evangelists and best selling authors and novelists. Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* and its sequels, along with Tim LaHaye’s best selling novels in the *Left Behind* series (now both books and movies), have sold hundreds of millions of copies and popularized this view throughout American culture.

Dispensational premillennialism originated

early in the 19th century in a splinter group from the Church of England known as the Plymouth Brethren. Its chief advocate was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). The view was introduced in America and promoted by C.I. Scofield through his widely used *Scofield Reference Bible*. Darby, and those who follow him, argue that God's dealings with humanity are divided into seven distinct "*dispensations.*" Scofield defined a dispensation as "*a period of time in which man is tested in regard to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.*" Charles Ryrie offers this more detailed definition:



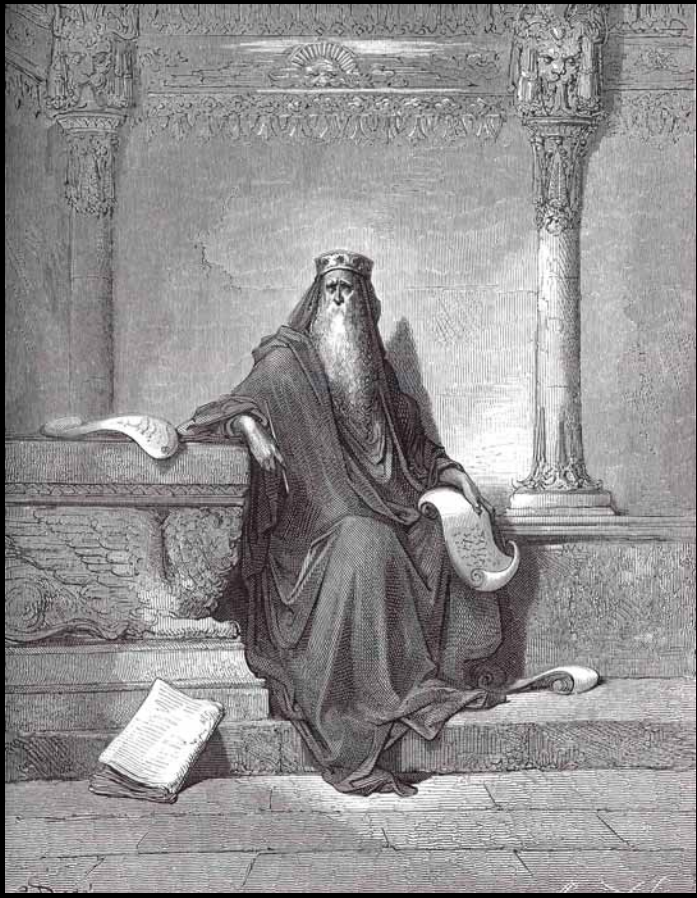
"The Call of Abraham" by E.M. Lillien

"A dispensation is God's distinctive method of governing mankind or a group of men during a period of human history, marked by a crucial event, test, failure, and judgment. From the divine standpoint, it is a stewardship, a rule of life or a responsibility for managing God's affairs in His house. From the historical standpoint, it is a stage in the progress of revelation." (Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 32)

Dispensationalists list seven such periods in the history of God's dealings with humanity: 1. Innocence (Creation -Fall); 2. Conscience (Fall - Flood); 3. Civil Government (Flood - Babel); 4. Promise (Abraham - Sinai); 5. Mosaic Law (Sinai - Pentecost); 6. Grace (Pentecost - Second Coming); 7. Millennium (Second Coming - Final Revolt).

The doctrinal keystone of dispensational premillennialism is an absolute distinction between ethnic Israel and the Christian Church. Without it, the entire system collapses. Dispensationalist Lewis Sperry Chafer writes:

"Throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes; one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the



*“King Solomon Upon His Throne”
by Gustave Dore*

other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives, which is Christianity.” (Chafer, Dispensationalism, p. 107)

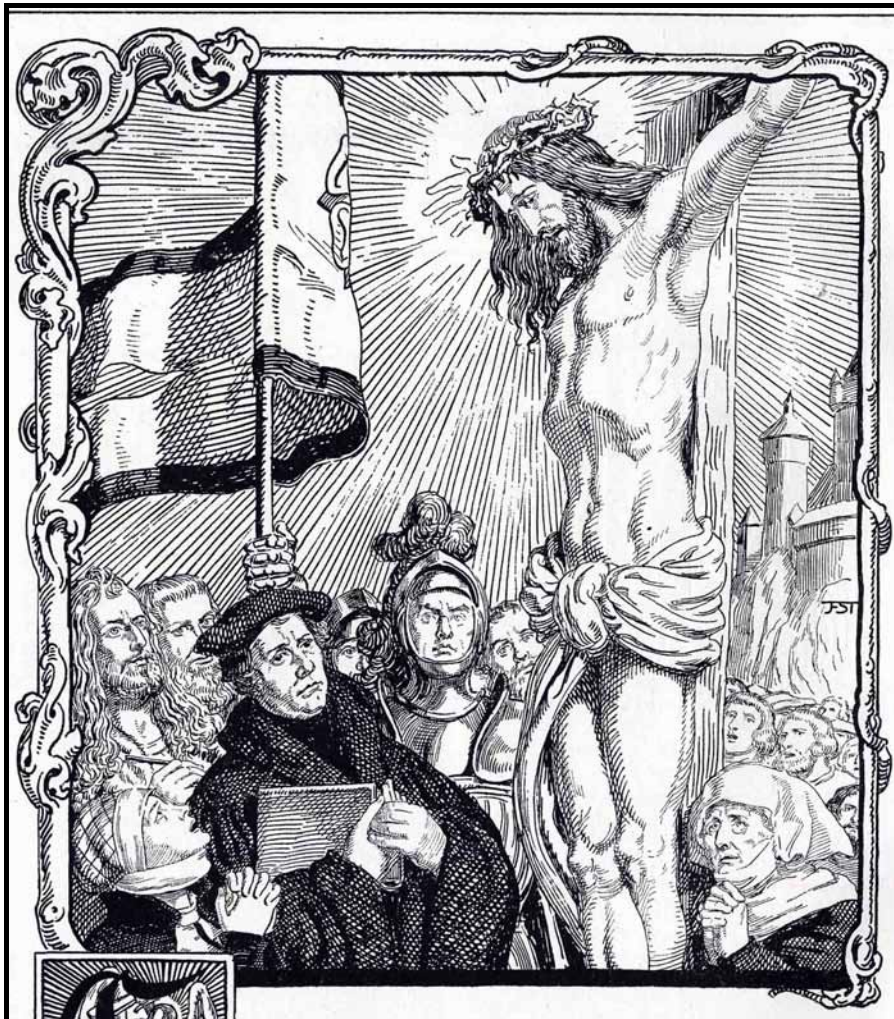
Dispensationalists believe that God promised ethnic Israel a glorious earthly kingdom, a restoration of the Kingdom of David and Solomon, ruled by the Messiah. They further believe that when the Jews of Christ’s time rejected His offer of that kingdom it was postponed until some point in the future. In the meantime, often referred to as a “*parenthesis*,” the Gentile church was formed. That parenthesis has now endured for 2,000 years! At the end of the church age, the Lord will secretly return to carry out “*the Rapture*.” The purpose of the Rapture is to remove the Gentile church from earth and

thereby enable God’s promised purpose for Israel to resume. The Rapture marks the beginning of a seven year “*Tribulation Period*” during which the Antichrist will arise and God’s plan for the salvation of ethnic Israel will be accomplished. The Tribulation Period will conclude with a literal battle of Armageddon, at which time Christ will visibly return to begin His 1,000 year reign in Jerusalem over the earthly kingdom promised to Israel.

19th Century Presbyterian scholar Phillip Mauro said it well when he characterized premillennial dispensationalism as “*a humanly contrived system that has been imposed on the Bible and not a scheme of doctrine derived from the Bible.*” (Engelder, *Popular Symbolics*, p. 335) Lutheran theologian C.H. Little concurs while emphasizing the historic link between millennialism and the heretical fringes of the church:

“This doctrine has been the rallying point of heretics and fanatics from the earliest period the church down to the present day. It is the characteristic doctrine of the Ebionites and the Montanists of the early church; of the mystics of the Middle Ages; of the Anabaptists of the Reformation era; and of such modern sects as the Adventists. The Russellites and others in our own day... We conclude that the doctrine of the millennium finds no support from Revelation 20 and is also without any Scriptural support. In many respects it stands in actual contradiction to the clear statements of Scripture.” (Engelder, *Popular Symbolics*, p. 494)

Dr. John Stephenson offers an incisive critique of dispensational premillennialism in his recent volume on “*Eschatology*” in the *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series. Dr. Stephenson laments the fact that “*North American Protestantism stands in large part under the spell of Gospel-destroying dispensationalist error.*” (Stephenson, p. 83) He warns that:

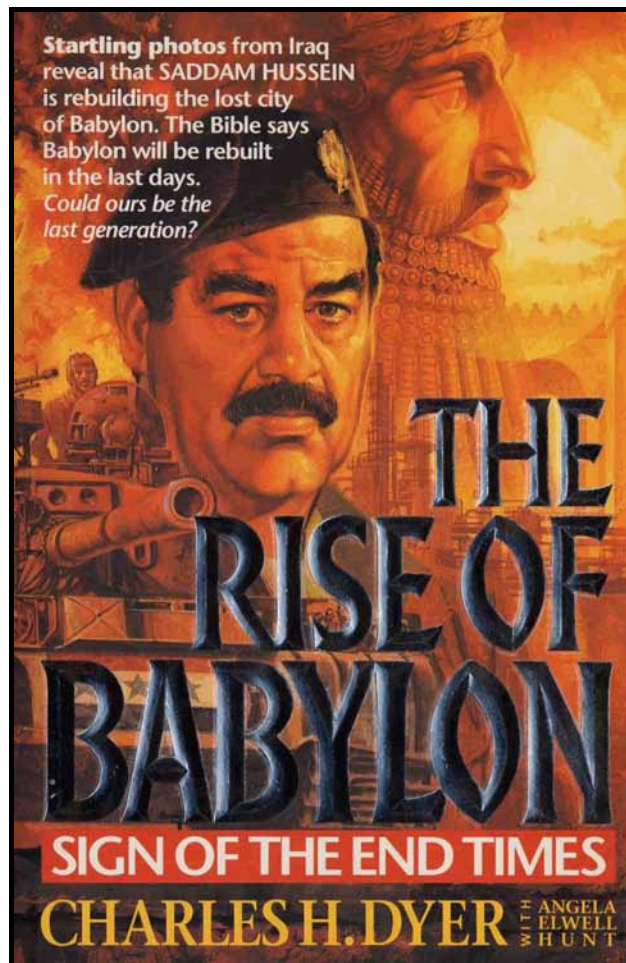


“Luther’s Theology of the Cross” by Franz Stassen

“the ‘dispensationalism’ promoted by Scofield displaces Christ as the center of Scripture and deflects Christian hope from the humble awaiting of His coming in glory to a macabre reckoning on the occurrence of a series of intermediate lurid events whose dating becomes the object of feverish speculation.” (Stephenson, p. 15)

Dr. Stephenson further observes that dispensationalism’s confusion extends far beyond the millennium itself to involve virtually every aspect of Bible teaching on the last things:

“Not only does dispensationalism concoct a fictitious sign of our Lord’s coming through its fantasies concerning God’s purposes with respect to ethnic Jews; it also breeds errors under the headings of the parousia, the general resurrection of the dead, the last judgement, and even heaven itself.” (Stephenson, p. 83)



*“The Rise of Babylon” - 1991
Dispensationalist Best Seller Linking
Saddam’s Iraq to the End Times*

He argues that Scripture clearly teaches that God’s people in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, are the New Israel and that once this Biblical truth is recognized dispensationalism collapses: *“With this demonstration that the church is Israel, the whole dispensationalist house of cards tumbles to the ground.”* (Stephenson, p. 87) The manner in which dispensationalists interpret Scripture is backwards, Dr. Stephenson insists:

“At the root of the lurid dispensationalist delight in fantasy - which loves to use figurative apocalyptic sections of the Bible as fodder for something akin to science fiction - lies a breathtaking hermeneutical perversity. Lutherans have followed the Reformer by interpreting obscure passages of Scripture in light of clear texts; dispensationalists do the very opposite, beclouding clear texts by interpreting them in light of eccentric and unprovable expositions of obscure passages.” (Stephenson p. 87)

He comes to the heart of the matter in his

perceptive conclusion that: “A golden age for Christendom to be granted within this worldly time and space is a dream without Scriptural warrant imagined by those in full flight from the theology of the cross.” (Stephenson, p.94). Martin Franzmann offers a similar assessment, concluding that “the millennial hope,” “the desire to have and enjoy a visible victory before the final victory of the Crucified” in fact constitutes “a subtle and unconscious form of objection to the Crucified...who in His wisdom and power keeps the church hidden under the cross, and He has promised to be with His church, under the cross, “to the close of the age.” (Franzmann, p. 133)



“King Solomon in All His Glory” by E. M. Lilien

The Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations summarized Lutheran concerns about dispensation premillennialism in eleven points:

“1. Dispensational premillennialism teaches that the Messiah and His kingdom promised in the Old Testament are essentially political in nature. In this respect, it

takes a position which resembles the Messianic expectation of first-century Judaism (cf. AC XVII). Christ's atoning work on the cross is not central in God's plan according to this view. Rather, He is wrongly perceived as coming to set up a this-worldly kingdom, and when rejected, as postponing it.

2. The view regards the Messianic age as only a future reality. It tends to exchange the "now" for a "not yet," thereby depriving people of the comforting promises of the Gospel in the present. In truth, Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven at His first advent, a kingdom which is now ours by faith even while it is yet hidden under the cross until its consummation at Christ's second advent.

3. Dispensational premillennialism tends to regard the glory of God as the center of theology, rather than the mercy of God revealed, and yet hidden, in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross for the sins of the world. The visible manifestations of God's power at the end of history and obedience to the will of God become the primary foci, instead of the grace of God revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Cor.2:2) - which by faith the Christian regards and accepts as God's definitive triumph over sin and every evil (in Lutheran theology, the "theology of the cross" as opposed to a "theology of glory").

4. Dispensational premillennialism underestimates, and even ignores the significance of Biblical typology. All prophecy points to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment. He is the antitype of the Old Testament types. When the reality to which the Old Testament points does come, one cannot revert back to the "shadows," such as the Old Testament temple (Col. 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1).

5. The compartmentalization of Scripture into distinct dispensations seriously overlooks the Law/Gospel unity of the Old and New Testaments. For example, it makes a radical distinction between the Mosaic "law" period and the church age of "grace." The relationship between the Old and New Testaments is that of promise and fulfillment, not one of distinct dispensations.

6. Ultimately, the eschatology of dispensationalism offers a dangerously false hope. The views of pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture offer the Christian the false hope of exemption from the intensified persecution toward the end. Moreover, they offer a second chance of conversion for those who are left after the rapture. The focus of Scripture's hope is not on an earthly kingdom lasting 1,000 years but eternity with Christ.

7. The dispensationalist view of a radical break between Israel and the church contradicts the Scriptural teaching that the cross of Christ has eliminated forever the distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-12; Rom. 2:25-29).

8. *The dispensational hermeneutic of consistent literalism is contrary to the Scripturally derived principles of interpretation.*

9. *Dispensationalism's multiple resurrections and judgments are contrary to the clear Scriptural teaching on eschatology.*

10. *The assurance and hope of salvation tend to be grounded on an interpretation of the signs of the times rather than on the sure Word of promise imparted in the means of grace.*

11. *The sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which are important for a Biblical understanding of eschatology, have little place in dispensationalist teaching.” (CTCR, “Eschatology” pp.42-43)*

2. Historic Premillennialism

Historic premillennialism also teaches that Christ will return prior to a literal 1,000 year reign on earth. However, the theological peculiarities of dispensationalism are absent in this view. Historic premillennialists believe that Christ will return at the end of the tribulation and that the dead in Christ will rise to meet Him in the air and return with Him to earth. Christ will then slay the Antichrist, bind Satan, and inaugurate His millennial kingdom. At some point in this process, a general conversion of the Jews will also occur. Christ and His redeemed, both Jew and Gentile will reign over the unbelieving nations still on earth. Sin and death will still exist, but overall evil will be restrained. The 1,000 years will be a time of unprecedented social, political, and economic justice and great prosperity.

At the end of the 1,000 years Satan will be loosed and the nations will rise in one final assault against God's people. Satan and his followers will be destroyed and the



*“Tertullian of Carthage”
19th Century Engraving*

resurrection of the unbelieving dead will take place. At that point, the final judgment will mark the beginning of eternity. This view was advocated by some fathers of the early church, most notably Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus. By the third century the orthodox church, largely under the leadership of St. Augustine, had rejected premillennialism as contrary to Scripture. Reflecting this view, the Roman Catholic Church today continues to identify premillennialism in both its historic and dispensational variations as heresy.



“St. Jerome (l.) and St. Augustine (r.)”

3. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism teaches that Christ will return in judgment after a prolonged period of triumphant Christianity. Postmillennialists do not believe that Christ will reign on earth during this period nor that it will necessarily be exactly 1,000 years in length. The millennium will arrive gradually under the increasing influence of Christianity. Evil will be reduced and overcome as human progress moves ever forward, constantly improving social, economic, and cultural conditions. Peace and prosperity will abound until the entire world progresses to a point where Christian beliefs and values will become the norm for all nations. Developments in education and science will minimize and ultimately eliminate disease, suffering, poverty and war. At the end of this golden age of prosperity and peace, Christ will return and the

resurrection and judgment will mark the commencement of eternity. The optimistic view of postmillennialism dominated much of mainline Protestantism at the turn of the 20th century. Human progress seemed unstoppable. A social gospel which sought the elimination of poverty and war had very nearly replaced the Biblical gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Scripture's assertion of original sin and human depravity were spurned as antiquated and irrelevant to modern man. Things were better than they had ever been and it seemed that there were no limits to what modern enlightened man could accomplish. Then came two world wars, the rise and domination of totalitarian dictatorships over much of the world, and the nuclear standoff of the cold war. In the aftermath of these grim realities postmillennialism has virtually disappeared in the contemporary church. Its optimism now seems hopelessly unrealistic.



“The Christian’s Life in Humble Submission to the Lordship of Jesus” by Franz Stassen

4. Amillennialism

Amillennialism rejects the doctrine of a literal 1,000 year earthly reign of Christ. In the amillennialist view, the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 are a numerological symbol (10 x 10 x 10) for the entire New Testament era, the interval between Christ’s first and second comings.

Amillennialism is the doctrine of historic Christendom. It was affirmed both by Roman Catholicism and the leaders of the Reformation. Martin Luther rejected the “*false notion*” of an earthly millennium as a basic misunderstanding of the nature of the church and salvation. God does not promise His church a life of ease and glory here on earth. Instead the faithful Christian can expect only hardship and tribulation, for the devil will relentlessly attack the Gospel



*“The Means of Grace in the Lutheran Church”
Reformation Era Woodcut*

“with tongue and sword until the end of the world.” “Wherever the Gospel is, one must expect all sorts of plagues, for the devil will assault that Gospel with all of his hordes and his lies.” Luther lumps together the Jews of Christ’s time, the heretics of the early church, the Turks, and the Anabaptists of his own day, as those who have been beguiled by an illusion of worldly ease and glory. (St,L. VII, pp.1289-1290). The Reformer’s insight penetrates directly to the heart of the matter, as is so often the case. Herein lies millennialism’s basic danger. Millennial dreams direct the hope and expectation of humanity away from the spiritual treasure of the forgiveness of sins toward that which is much more attractive to our sinful human natures, the

worldly pleasures of an earthly kingdom.

“When chiliasm actually enters the heart, it diverts the Christian heart and mind from the hidden spiritual glory of the Christian life, which consists in the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and of future heavenly heritage, and puts in place of it the expectation of external and earthly grandeur.” (Pieper, III, p. 592)

This malignant pattern can be clearly observed in the crass assertions of dispensationalism. The alleged “*secret rapture*,” after which no believer will be left behind, purports to grant Christians an exemption from the very trials which our Lord urged them to patiently endure, just as He endured the cross for us.

“The fantasy of the earthly church’s being raptured into Christ’s immediate presence while great tribulation rages below has not a little to do with the refusal of the flesh of dispensationalists to accept the fact that Christian existence in the world is a life lived under the cross. Christians are called to suffer in and with and for the world, not to lord it over the world in some airtight provisional heaven whence they may behold the final great tribulation in the manner of popcorn munching couch potatoes watching a horror movie.”(Stephenson, p. 90)

The cross is reduced to the status of an afterthought in the complex fantasies of dispensational premillennialism. Christ, the rejected King, dies there only because Israel would not have Him. The good news of forgiveness in His blood is relegated to a distinctly secondary position in the entirety of God’s plan of salvation. Dr. Scofield calls the primary form of the Gospel “*the Gospel of the Kingdom*.” The kingdom he has in mind is the earthly realm which God has prepared for ethnic Israel:

“The Gospel of the Kingdom. This is the good news that God proposes to set up on the earth, in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:16) a kingdom, political, spiritual, Israelitish, universal, over which God’s Son, David heir, shall be King, which shall be, for 1,000 years, the manifestation of the righteousness of God in human affairs.” (Scofield, p. 1343)

Such delusions are at best a distraction from the precious gospel of salvation. At worst, they threaten to become a replacement for it.



*“The First Resurrection, the Downfall of Satan, and the Muster of Gog and Magog
Luther Bible Woodcut - 1685*

The Defeat of Satan Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will

go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - to gather them for battle.”

“When the thousand years are over...” - The culmination and climax of the ancient conflict between God and Satan - depicted in the imagery of Armageddon, the final battle - has already appeared repeatedly in the visions of St. John. As the sixth angel poured out his bowl of wrath, hellish demons gathered the kings of the earth for battle *“at the place which in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”* (cf. Revelation 16:12-16). The war of the earth’s kings against the Lamb is next mentioned in conjunction with the judgment of Harlot Babylon with the assurance that the outcome of this battle is absolutely certain (cf. Revelation 17:14-18). The details of the battle are brutally presented once more in the vision of the Lord’s Champion, He who is *“Faithful and True,”* along with the downfall of the beast and the false prophet amid the catastrophic destruction of all those who followed them (cf, Revelation 19:11-21). Now, for the fourth and final time, the horror of Armageddon is introduced to signal the ultimate judgment of the devil and his kingdom.

As the *“thousand years”* draw to their conclusion and the glorious return of Christ is imminent, the great chain of God’s restraint upon Satan (Revelation 20:2) will be



“The Assault of Gog and Magog Upon the Beloved City” by Hans Lufft



*“The Attack of Gog and Magog Upon the Beloved City”
Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut*

removed and the dragon will be released from his prison. He will burst upon the world with raging fury, like a ravenous beast set free from the chains which had held it back, for he will know that judgment is at hand - **“He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short.”** (Revelation 12:12) This is the **“little season”** of which John had warned earlier in the chapter (cf. Notes pp. 493-494). It will be a time of unprecedented devastation and calamity for the great red dragon will have been unleashed. The peril of these times is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s dire warning of chaos in the aftermath of the assassination of Julius Caesar: *“Caesar’s spirit, ranging for revenge, with Ate (the Greek goddess of Destruction) by his side, come hot from hell, shall in these confines with a monarch’s voice cry “Havoc!” and let slip the dogs of war.”* (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III,i,270). The removal of God’s restraint upon Satan takes place within the providential purposes of God - **“He must be set free.”** (Revelation 20:3) This point is also emphasized by the passive verb **“will be released.”** The devil does not break loose by his own power. He is set free by the same Almighty Sovereign who originally placed him under restraint.

Nonetheless, in His mercy, God has determined that this final period of Satan's unbridled activity will be strictly curtailed:

“Those will be days of distress unequalled since the beginning, when God created the world until now - and never to be equalled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom He has chosen, He has shortened them.”
(Mark 13:19-20)

“And will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth...” - The focus of the devil's effort - his bitter opposition to Christ, His Gospel, and His Church - remains unchanged. *“A thousand years have wrought no change in Satan's*



“The Attack of the Huns”

methods; no sooner has he been set free than he is at his old work of deceiving the world and turning it against the Church; his limitations removed, the deception of the nations begins again.” (Swete, p. 267) The military metaphor of Armageddon should not be allowed to obscure the fact that while the devils' little season (like the entire New Testament era) will be characterized by ***“wars and rumors of war”*** (Matthew 24:6) and upheaval throughout every part of human culture and the world of nature itself (Matthew 24:7-8), the primary target of the devil's assault will remain the Gospel and the Church of Christ. Lutheran commentator, Siegbert Becker has perceptively noted that the meaning behind the symbols of the great chain and the locking and sealing of the abyss, that is, the means of the devil's binding and confinement, are the power of the

Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and its proclamation throughout the world.

“Where the message of the gospel is no longer to be heard or where it is so obscured by false teaching that the light of salvation shines very dimly, the devil is free to continue to deceive men and to lead them astray to the eternal destruction of their souls. The devil is loosed whenever large segments of the visible church become apostate and non-evangelical cults and sects proliferate.” (Becker, pp.301-302)

The text repeatedly stresses the worldwide character of Satan’s final deception. The phrase **“the four corners of the earth,”** which locates the nations to be deceived,

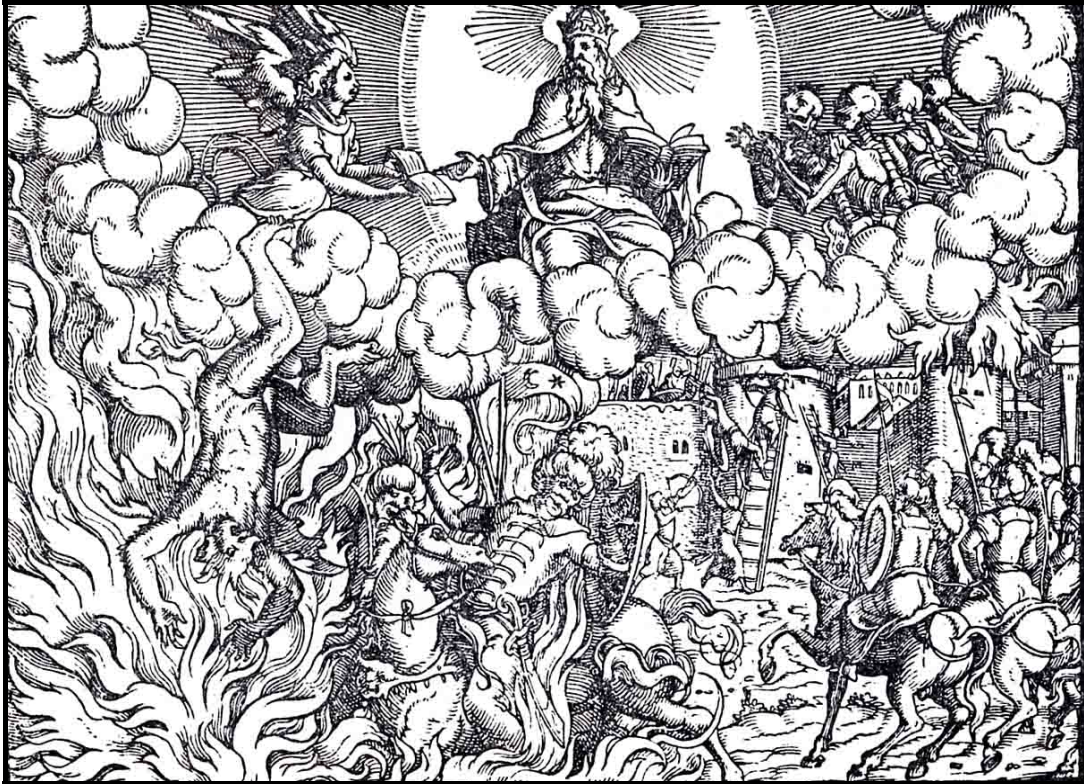


“The Vandals Sack Rome”

is a Semitic idiom referring to the whole world. The scope of the devil’s deception will be reinforced in subsequent phrases as we are told that the number of the host is **“like the sand on the seashore,”** and that **“they marched across the breadth of the earth.”** The concept of totality is further emphasized by the use of the prophetic terminology of **“Gog and Magog.”** The titles are drawn from the Ezekiel 38 and 39 where they serve to designate the arch enemies of the people of God who assault the Israel of God and are utterly destroyed. David Aune outlines the Biblical usage these infamous names:

“In the OT and early Jewish tradition, Gog and Magog are understood in a bewildering variety of ways. In Ezekiel, Gog is the name of the prince of Meshech and Tubal (Ezekiel 38:2-3;;39:1-16), whose land was called Magog; the names Meshech and Tubal are also found associated with Gog in the table of nations in Genesis 10:2. Elsewhere in the Old

Testament, Gog is a personal name (1 Chr. 5:4), while Magog refers to the eponymous ancestor of a people (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chr. 1:5). In Jub. 8:25 Gog is used in a strictly geographic sense. In Rev. 20:8 Gog and Magog serve as symbols for the hostile nations who will make war on God and His people. In Sib.Or. 3:319 are names for the Ethiopians or Nubians who accompanied Antiochus IV when he captured the temple in Jerusalem. In Josephus Ant. 1,123 Magog is regarded as a name for the Scythians. In other early Jewish literature, Gog and Magog are leaders of the Gentile nations who will attack Israel in the end times.” (Aune, p. 1094)



*“Gog and Magog as the Ottoman Turks Besieging Vienna”
Luther Bible Woodcut, Bocksperger-Amman 1564*

This proliferation of references and applications suggests that by the latter part of the Old Testament era the ancient ominous names Gog and Magog had come to represent all the enemies of God and their destructive rage against the people of God. This is certainly the sense in which they are used in Ezekiel 38 and 39 and here in Revelation 20. This interpretation is strengthened by John’s equation of “**Gog and Magog**” with “**the nations in the four corners of the earth.**” The specific historical identification of Gog and Magog in this text is not only impossible; it is superfluous. Dr. Edwin Yamuchi is correct when he notes: “*The identification of any future fulfillment of the*



“The Huns in Battle” - 19th Century Engraving

apocalyptic reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:7-9 would require the inspiration of a prophet rather than the insights of an archaeologist or historian.” (Yamuchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier*, p. 22) Those who offer precise identifications of Gog and Magog with modern nations or contemporary world leaders are not dealing in Biblical scholarship but indulging in sensationalism and fantasy. It is more prudent to follow the counsel of wise Augustine who concludes that Gog and Magog signify all the enemies of the Church of Christ:

“For these nations, which he names Gog and Magog are not to be understood as some barbarous nations in some part of the world...or some other foreign nations not under the Roman government...For John marks that they are spread over the whole earth...The words and they went up on the breadth of the earth and encompassed the camp of the saints and the beloved city do not mean that they have come, or shall come, to one place, as if the camp of the saints and the beloved city should be in some one place; for this camp is nothing else than the Church of Christ extending over the whole world. And consequently, wherever the Church shall be...there shall also be the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and there it shall be encompassed by the savage persecution of all its enemies.” (Augustine, *The City of God*, XX,11)

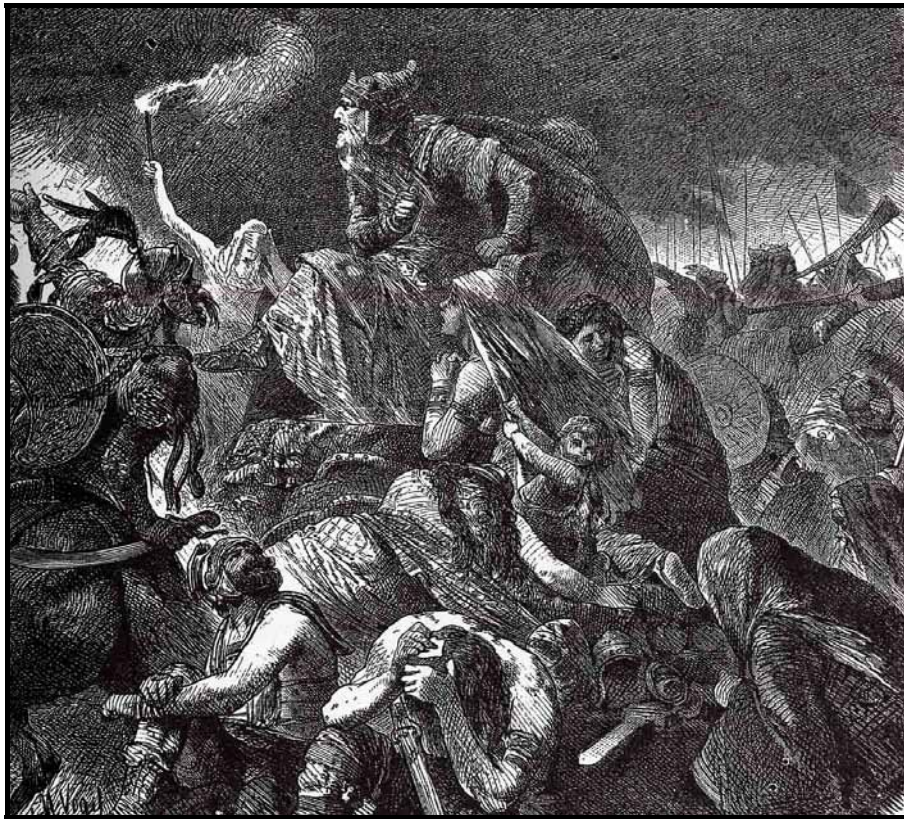
“In number they are like the sand on the seashore.” - The sand of the sea is commonly used in Scripture as a simile for countless numbers, enormous armies, or unimaginable abundance (cf. Genesis 41:49; Joshua 11:4; Judges 7:12; 1 Samuel 13:5; Job 29:18; Psalm 139:18; Jeremiah 15:8; Habbakuk 1:9). The simile occurs most prominently in Genesis 22:17 where God promises Abraham; ***“I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.”*** In this passage it serves to emphasize the global nature of Satan’s final assault and the almost universal support that he will be able to muster for his last frantic effort to defeat God and destroy His holy people. Throughout history the devil has had the numbers. He has consistently enjoyed the support of the vast majority of humankind. The faithful of God have always been a tiny remnant. That will continue to be the case right up to the bitter end.



“I Will Make Your Descendants as Numerous as the Stars in the Sky and as the Sand on the Seashore” by Julius Schnorr Carolsfeld

“They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and destroyed them.”

“They marched across the breadth of the earth...” - The phrase stresses the unimaginable magnitude of this vast host. Its point is size, not distance. The Greek text literally says *“They came up across the entire expanse of the earth.”* As this army advances upon the saints it overflows across the entire horizon - *“hordes and hordes as far as one could see and farther still, and these encircling the saints with no avenue of retreat anywhere...enemies encircling the horizon and only the fortified*



“Attila Commanding the Huns” - 19th Century Engraving

camp, namely the lone city for the saints. Is there no hope?” (Lenski, p. 597) Like an irresistible river this horde sweeps around the encampment of the saints, completely surrounding them. There is no escape. The imagery parallels Ezekiel’s description of the advance of Gog as a great storm that covers the land:

“You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land...You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against My people Israel like a cloud that



“God’s Judgement Upon Gog” by Asher Brown Durand

covers the land.” (Ezekiel 38:9,15-16)

The Church is designated as *“the camp of God’s people, the city that He loves.”* *“The camp of God’s people”* recalls the wilderness wandering of Israel, a reminder the saints have always been a pilgrim people, strangers and foreigners in this world on a journey toward the land of promise. In Deuteronomy 23:14 Moses reminded the children of Israel: *“Because the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, your camp must be holy.”* *“The city He loves”* is not a second location. The phrase defines and explains its predecessor. The Greek preposition *“kai”* which links the two phrases is epexegetical. The designation of the Church as *“the city He loves”* is based on the

Scripture's common reference to Jerusalem and Mt. Zion as representative of the people of God (cf. Psalm 87:2; Hebrews 12:22; Galatians 4:24-26; Revelation 21:2). "**He loves**" is the Greek perfect participle "*egapemenen*." It portrays the enduring and unending love of God for His people.

"But fire came down from heaven and destroyed them." The daunting appearance of the battlefield notwithstanding, the outcome of this conflict was never in doubt. The language of the text is almost curt in its description of the total defeat of Satan and his followers - nine words (both in Greek and English) - for the ultimate outcome of the ancient conflict!. Ezekiel had also used the imagery of judgment by fire to depict the destruction of Gog:



"The Gates of Hell" by Auguste Rodin

"I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him...I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coast lands, and they will know that I am the Lord." (Ezekiel 38:22; 39:6)

"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

- The proud spirit whose stubborn defiance of the Creator led to the downfall of legions of angels and the temptation and condemnation of countless numbers of Adam's descendants now finally meets his own eternal fate. His opposition

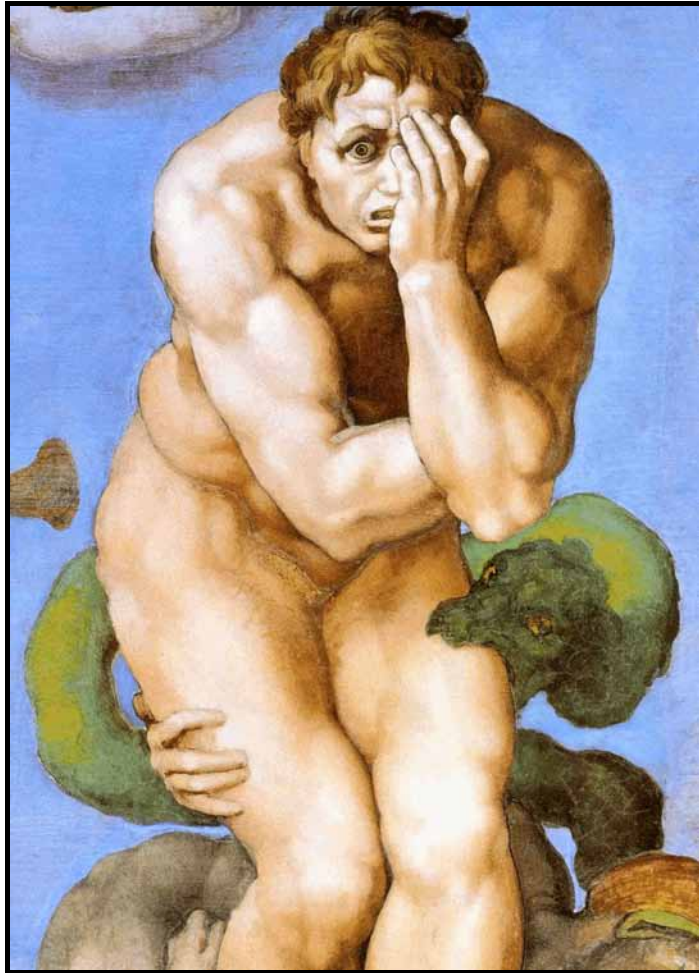


“The Downfall of Satan and His Angels” by Jean-Marc Nattier

had spanned the centuries but now, in the face of God’s decisive judgment, the career of mankind’s ancient enemy ends (to borrow the poet’s description of the world’s demise) *“not with a bang but a whimper.”* The power and malice of the devil had lurked behind all of the machinations of his hellish agents *“the beast and the false prophet.”* Now their Master joins them in being consigned to an eternity of torment within *“the lake of burning sulfur.”* The concept of eternal torment in hell staggers the human imagination. Nonetheless, Franz Pieper is completely correct in his assertion:

“Holy Scripture teaches the truth of an eternal damnation so clearly and emphatically that one cannot deny it without at the same time denying the authority of Scripture. Scripture parallels the eternal salvation of the believers and the eternal

damnation of the unbelievers. Whoever, therefore, denies the one must, to be consistent, deny the other.” (Pieper, III, p. 544)



“The Despair of the Damned” - Detail from “The Last Judgement” by Michelangelo

The Lutheran Church, along with all of historic Christendom, affirms this Biblical truth. The Lutheran Confessions declare: *“Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devil and condemned men will not suffer eternal pain and torment.”* (Apol.. XVII, 66). The text indicates that the unholy trinity will endure torment **“forever and ever”** (Greek - *“en tous aionas ton aionon”* literally - *“to the ages of the ages”*). This is the Biblical phrase for eternity (cf. Romans 16:27; Galatians 1:5; Philippians 4:20; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2 Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 13:21; 1 Peter 4:11; 5:11). The concept of eternity is of the essence of hell’s torment. Michelangelo brilliantly depicts this truth in his *“The Last Judgement”* in the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel. One of the damned, being drawn down into hell by a cluster of demons, cradles his horror-struck

face in hand as he begins to comprehend the awful reality of damnation, an eternity of separation from God. The figure is the absolute personification of despair. Dante had it exactly right when he engraved these words upon the portal of the infernal realm:

“I am the way into the city of woe. I am the way to a forsaken people. I am the way to eternal sorrow. Sacred justice moved my architect. I was raised here by divine omnipotence, primordial and ultimate intelligence. Only those elements time cannot wear were made before me, and beyond time I stand. Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.”



"The Last Judgement" by Gustave Dore

The Final Judgment - Revelation 20:11-15

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

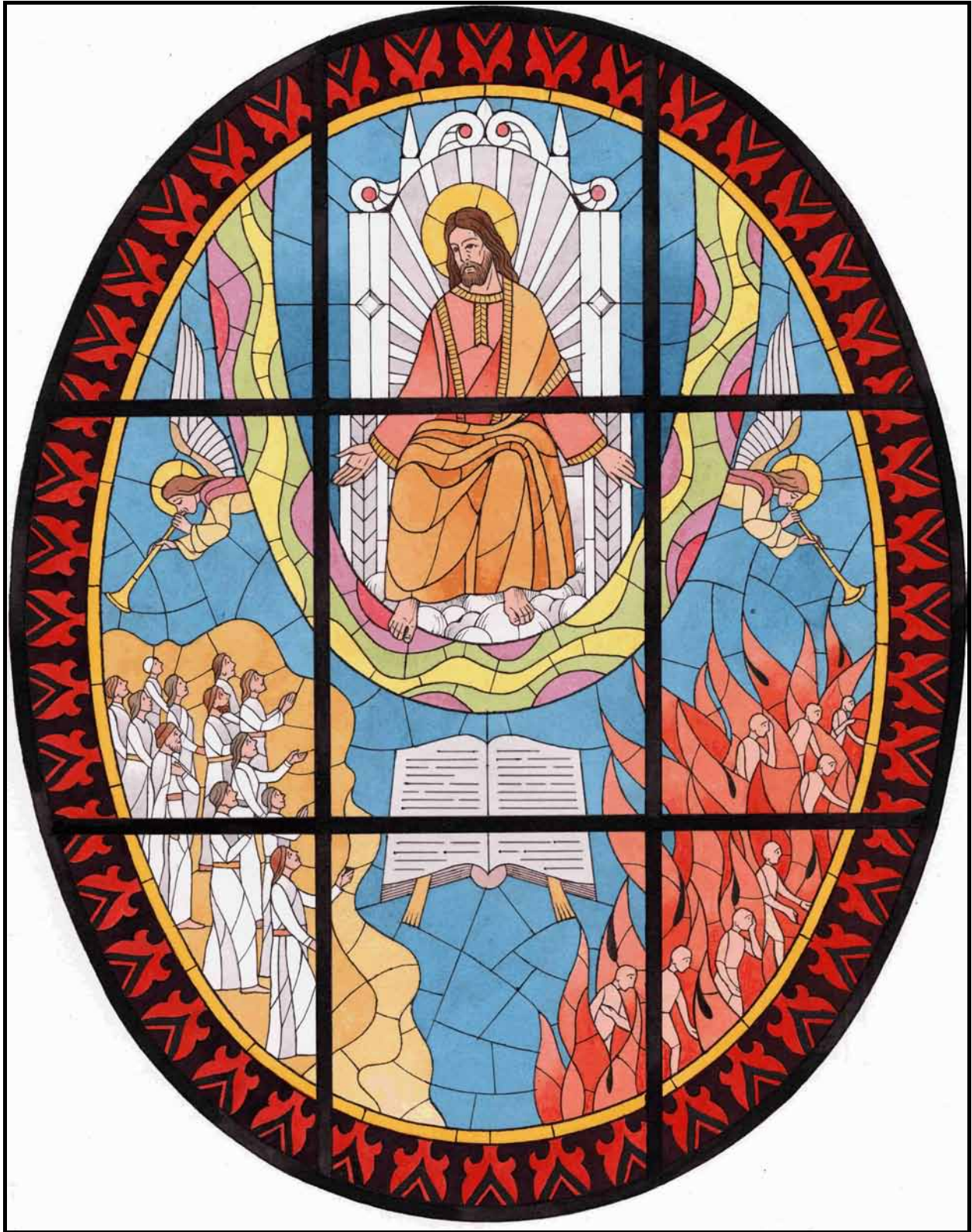
“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them.” - The shift to a new scene is the vision is signaled by the customary phrase ***“Then I saw”*** (Greek - *“kai eidon”*). The devil and his kingdom have been destroyed. All who would oppose the Lord and His reign have been silenced. The end of the present order has come. The revelator sees the King of Kings seated upon His royal throne, the seat of authority, power, and judgment. Jesus had foretold the coming of this great day: ***“When the***



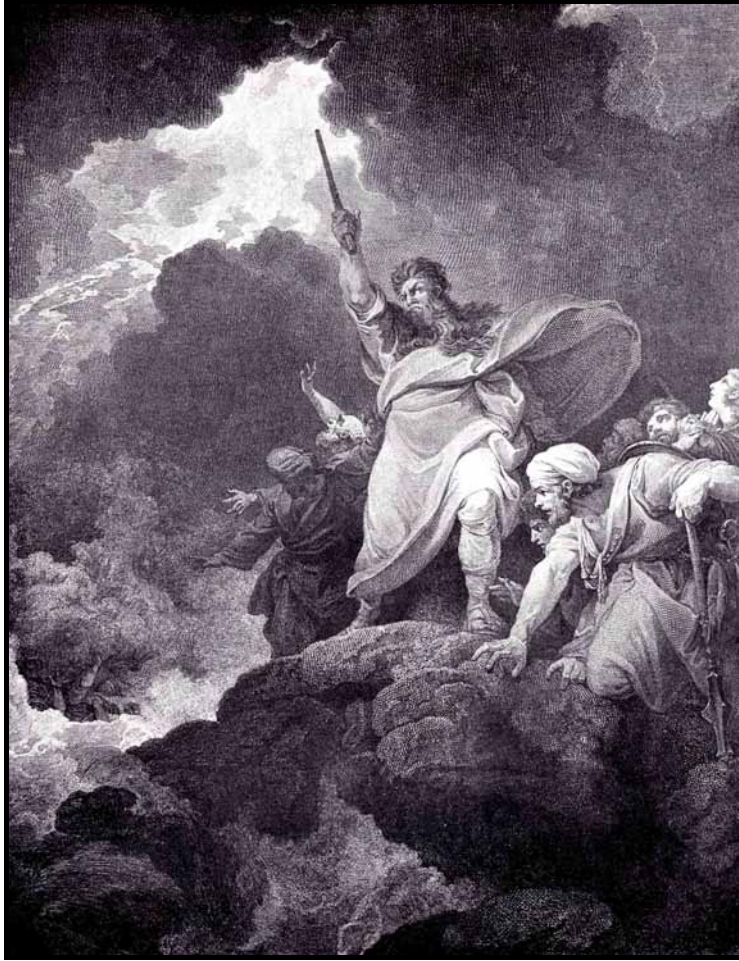
“The Last Judgement” - German Woodcut, 1510

that: ***“The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before him and consumes His foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles.”*** (Psalm 97:1-2)

Son of Man comes in His glory and all His angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory.” (Matthew 25:11; cf. also Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22-23; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 3:21). This is the sixth and final depiction of the Last Judgment in the Book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 6:12-17; 11:15-19; 14:14-20; 16:17-21; 19:17-21). The throne and its occupant are the dominant feature of the scene. Both the size (***“great”*** - Greek - *“megas”*) and the color (***“white”*** - Greek - *“leukos”*) of the throne are noted. The size of this royal seat of judgment is appropriate for the magnitude of the great event in which it is used and the divine dignity of the Judge who is seated upon it. The white color of the judge’s throne signifies the holiness and righteousness of his judgment. The Psalmist rejoices



"The Last Judgement" - Our Savior Lutheran Church



“The Destruction of the Hosts of Pharaoh at the Red Sea” by P. J. De Loutherbourg

“Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them.” - As in Psalm 97, so also here, the decisive finality of this judgment is illustrated by its impact not only upon humanity but upon all of creation. The imagery of cosmic conflagration, as the old order passes away to make way for the new heaven and earth (cf. Revelation 21:1ff.), is consistent in Biblical texts which speak of the last judgment (cf. Revelation 6:12-14; 16:17-21; Psalm 102:26; Isaiah 51:6; Mark 13:31; 2 Peter 3:10-13). All that exists within the universe of time and space was fashioned by God as a part of the perfect environment for man, the unique creature fashioned in the image and after the likeness of God. Therefore, all of creation was tainted and

twisted by man’s sinful disobedience of the Creator God (cf. Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:19-22). The creation which has been subjected to decay because of man’s sin does not dare to stand in the presence of God. To speak of *“earth and sky”* fleeing from the presence of the holy and righteous God is personification, describing inanimate objects as if they were human persons. The language here is reminiscent of Psalm 114’s description of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and entry into the Promised Land.

“The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why was it, O sea, that you fled, O Jordan, that you turned back, you mountains that you skipped like rams, you hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock



"The Last Judgement" by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel in Rome

into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water.” (Psalm 114:3-8)

The phrase **“and there was no place for them”** indicates the impossibility of evading God’s judgment or concealing one’s self from his presence. We might paraphrase the text to say - *“There was no place for them to hide.”*

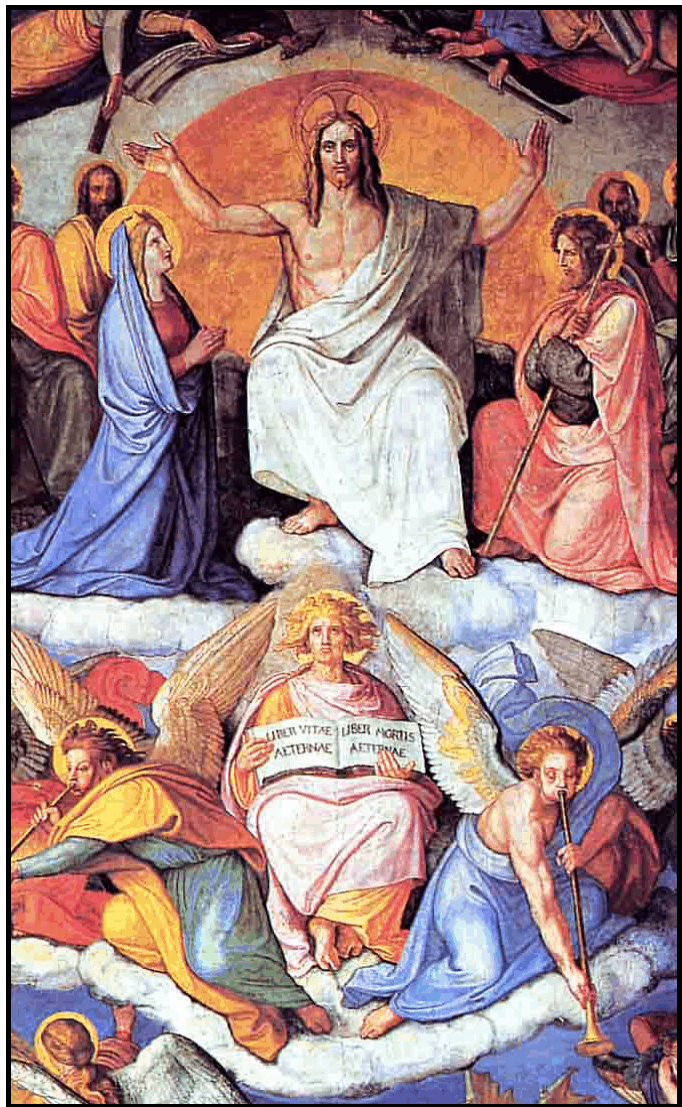


“Dies Domini” (“The Day of the Lord”) by Edward Burne-Jones

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” - Every human being who has ever lived from the creation of Adam to the end of time shall stand before the Lord on this great day. The language of the text is comprehensive - **“the dead, great and small.”** The Biblical assertion of the universal nature of the last judgment is consistent and emphatic. Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth: **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is**

due him for the many things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who were quick to judge their Christian brothers in Rome were admonished: *“For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live, says the Lord, Every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”* (Romans 14:11-12). The *“Little Apocalypse”* of Matthew’s Gospel describes the coming of the judgment in the same comprehensive language: *“All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people, one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.”* (Matthew 25:32-33). As Jesus reproved Jewish religious leaders who doubted the power of His word he pointed toward the last day when His word would call forth all the dead from their tombs: *“Do not be amazed at this for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”* (John 5:28-29)

“And books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life.” - The imagery comes from Daniel 7:10 and the vision of the Ancient of Days: *“Thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took His seat...The court was seated and the books were opened.”* (Daniel 7:9-10). In the Jewish apocryphal writings of the inter-testamental period and the early New Testament era the opening of books of evidence before the court of God commonly came to represent the action of God’s judgment. This is the judicial language of the human



“Christ the Almighty Judge With the Book of Eternal Life and Death” by Peter Cornelius

courtroom. The image of man's every action and transgression, recorded with unfailing accuracy in heaven, came to represent divine omniscience and human accountability. The following selection of citations illustrate this pattern:

“For behold, the days are coming and the books will be opened in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned...” (2 Baruch 24:1)

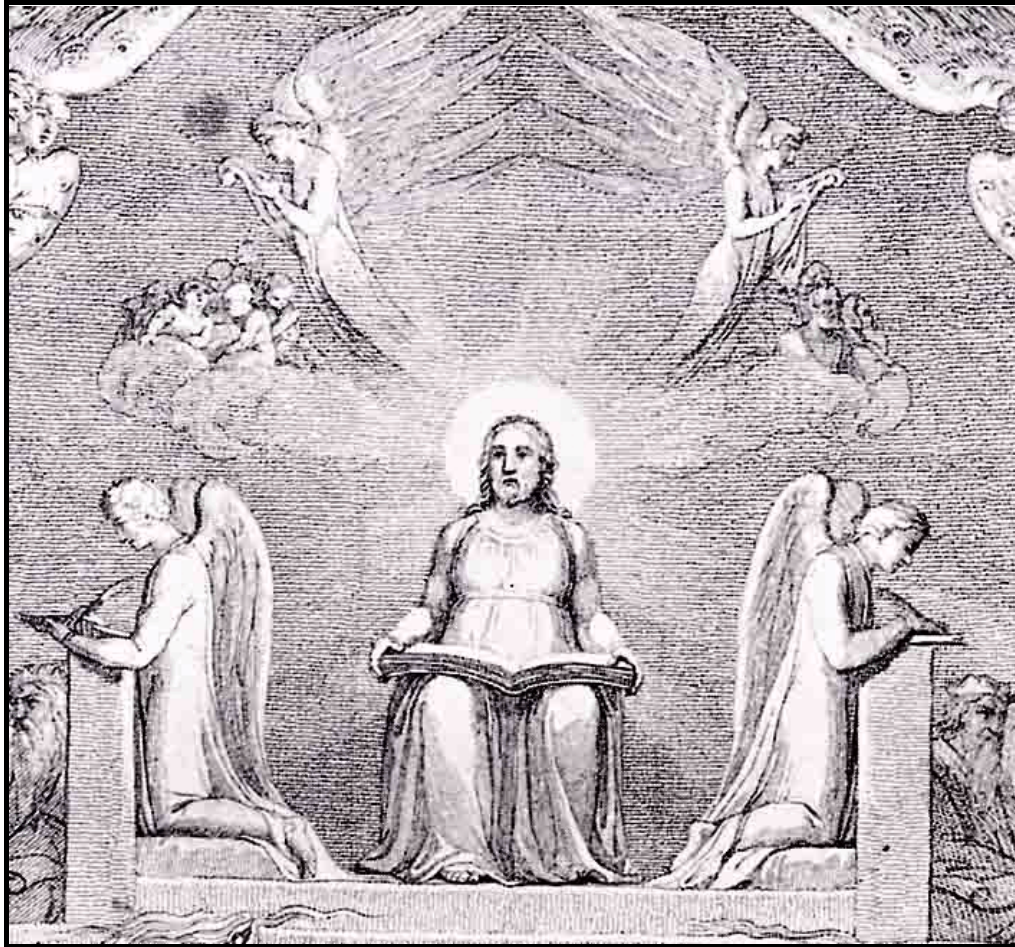
“Enoch, look at the tablets of heaven; read what is written upon them and understand each element of them one by one. So I looked at the tablets of heaven, read all the writing on them, and came to understand everything. I read that book and all the deeds of humanity and all the children of the flesh upon earth for all the generations of the world. At that very moment, I blessed the great Lord, the King of Glory forever. For He has created all things on earth. I praised the Lord because of His patience and I wept on account of the children of all the people upon the earth.” (1 Enoch 81:1-4)

“You shall not have to hide on the day of the great judgment and you shall not be found as the sinners; but the eternal judgment shall be far away from you...Now, you sinners, even if you say, “All our sins shall not be investigated or written down, nevertheless, all your sins are being written down every day.” (1 Enoch 104: 5-7)

“Behold the days are coming and it shall be that when I draw near to visit the inhabitants of the earth, and when I require from the doers of iniquity the penalty of their iniquity, and when the humiliation of Zion is complete, and when the seal is placed upon the age which is about to pass away; then I will show these signs; the books shall be opened before the firmament, and all shall see it together.” (4 Ezra 6:18-20)

“Whenever the great law court sits in the height of heaven of Arabot only the great princes who are called YHWH by the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, are permitted to speak...Every day at the hour when the book is opened, in which every deed in the world is recorded, as it is written “A court was held and the books were opened.”...When the Holy One, blessed be He, opens the book half of which is fire and half flame, the angels of destruction go out from His presence moment by moment to execute judgment against the wicked with the unsheathed sword of God...” (3 Enoch 30:1-2; 32:1)

The opened books signify God's infallible and absolute knowledge of all things. The books are comprehensive and complete. They comprise the evidentiary documentation upon which the impending judgement is to be based. The judgement

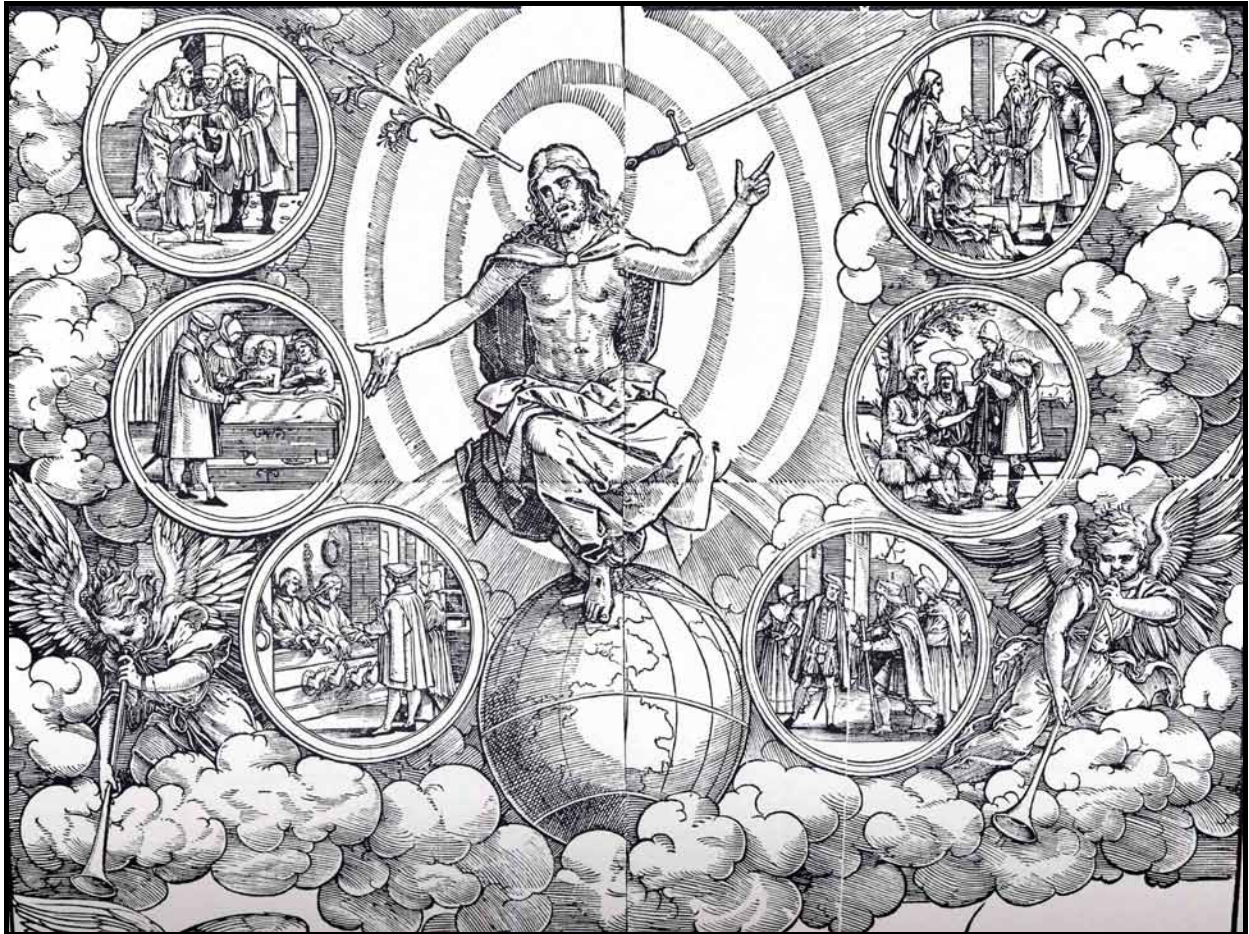


“Christ the Judge with the Book of Life” - Detail from “The Last Judgement” by William Blake

of God is not arbitrary. The divine Judge is intimately and completely familiar with every detail of the life of every person who stands before His judgment seat. No sin shall escape the scrutiny of the Holy One and none shall evade His justice.

John makes effective use of this imagery but with a most significant adjustment. In addition to the courtroom records of human wrongdoing, John introduces yet another book, *“the book of life.”* The Book of Life is mentioned seven times in Revelation (cf. Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27; 22:19). It contains the names of those whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world as His elect (cf. Ephesians 1:3-6). The Book of Life in Revelation is the visual symbol of the Biblical doctrine of predestination - the believer’s assurance that his salvation is secure because it rests solely upon God gracious plan and purpose accomplished in Christ. St. Paul uses the same language in Philippians 4:3 - *“Help these women who have*

contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” Old Testament allusions to the same concept can be found in Exodus (32:32), Psalms (69:28), Daniel (11:1), and Malachi (3:16).



“Christ the Judge” - Woodcut by Heinrich Vogtherr

Those who stand condemned before the judgment seat of God are sentenced on the basis of their sins, fully recorded in the books. Those who are acquitted, declared to be not guilty and granted eternal salvation are sentenced not on the basis of their sins but because their names are recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Damnation is by works. Salvation is by grace. Yet the text specifically states: ***“The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”*** The point is repeated again in verse 13 - ***“each person was judged according to what he had done.”*** How then, can the salvation of the redeemed be accomplished solely by grace? To some

extent, the answer lies in the nature of the final judgment, which is not a determination of one's eternal fate, but a public pronouncement of sentence designed to demonstrate the perfect justice of God. The classic Lutheran theologian, Adolf Hoenecke offers this clarification:

“We must distinguish between the personal judgment which occurs for each individual man in the rigors of death, and the universal judgment on the Last Day. The former is hidden, the latter is public. We must distinguish between judgment itself and the revelation of the judgment. The Last Judgment is not arranged so that men may at that juncture be judged for the first time, but rather (John 3:18) the judgment that took place at death will be revealed on the Last Day (Matthew 25:32). Moreover, the justice of the judgment will be publicly made known; hence, the universal public judgment.” (Hoenecke IV, p.239)

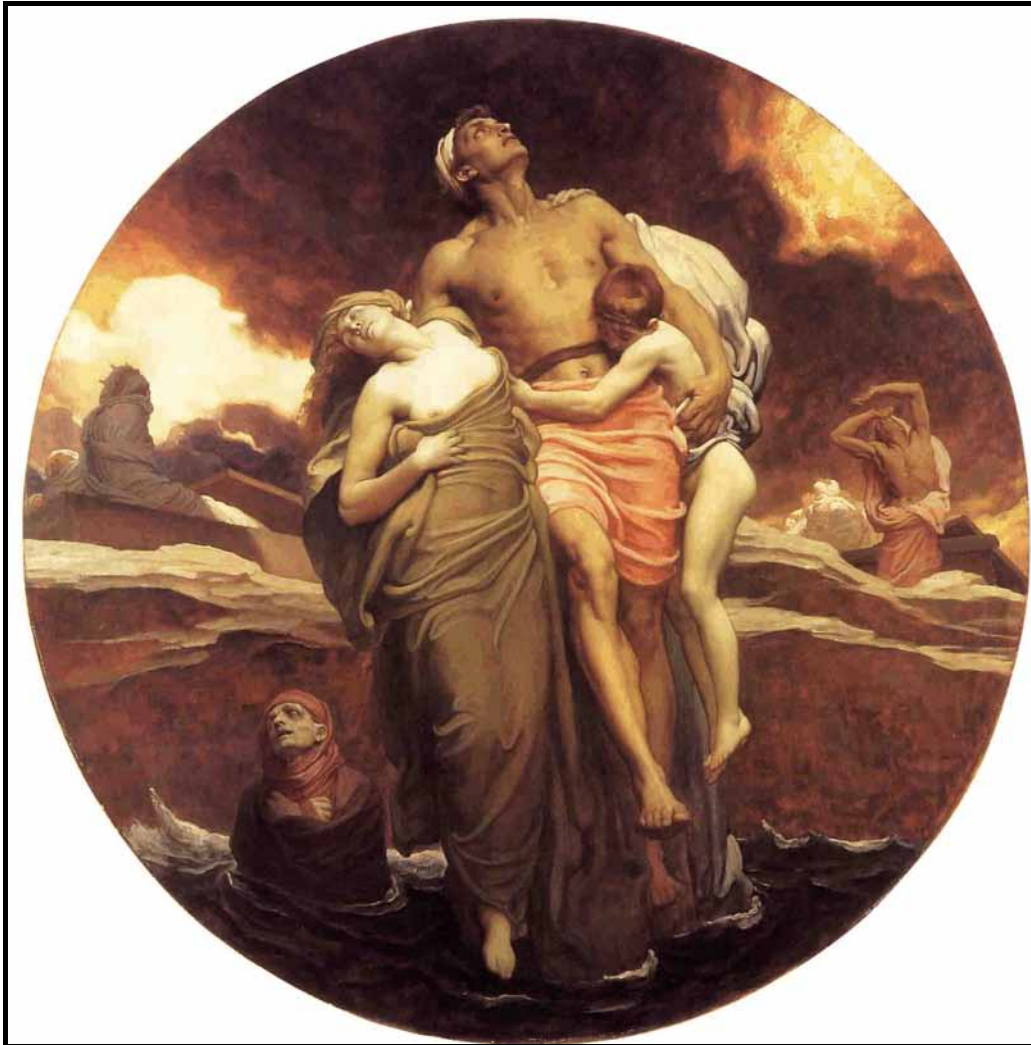


“The Last Judgement” -13th Century French Illumination

With that purpose in mind, works are cited, both positively and negatively on Judgment Day as the objective evidence of the presence or absence of a faith relationship with God in Christ. They are, so to speak, the documentation of that faith which, in itself cannot be seen. Furthermore, as Siegbert Becker explains, every believer has perfectly fulfilled the law of God in the person of Christ who is our Substitute:

“The answer is found in many passages of Scripture. One of the clearest of these is Christ’s statement that He had not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). The law demands that a person, in order to be saved, must keep all the commandments. Jesus did not come to set aside this requirement. He kept the commandments as our Substitute and by faith we make His obedience our own, so that we can say that in Him we have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law. In God’s book all of the Savior’s righteousness is credited to our account. If God would ask us on the day of judgment if we have done everything the law requires, we can say, “Yes, through Him who knew no sin, but was made to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through the

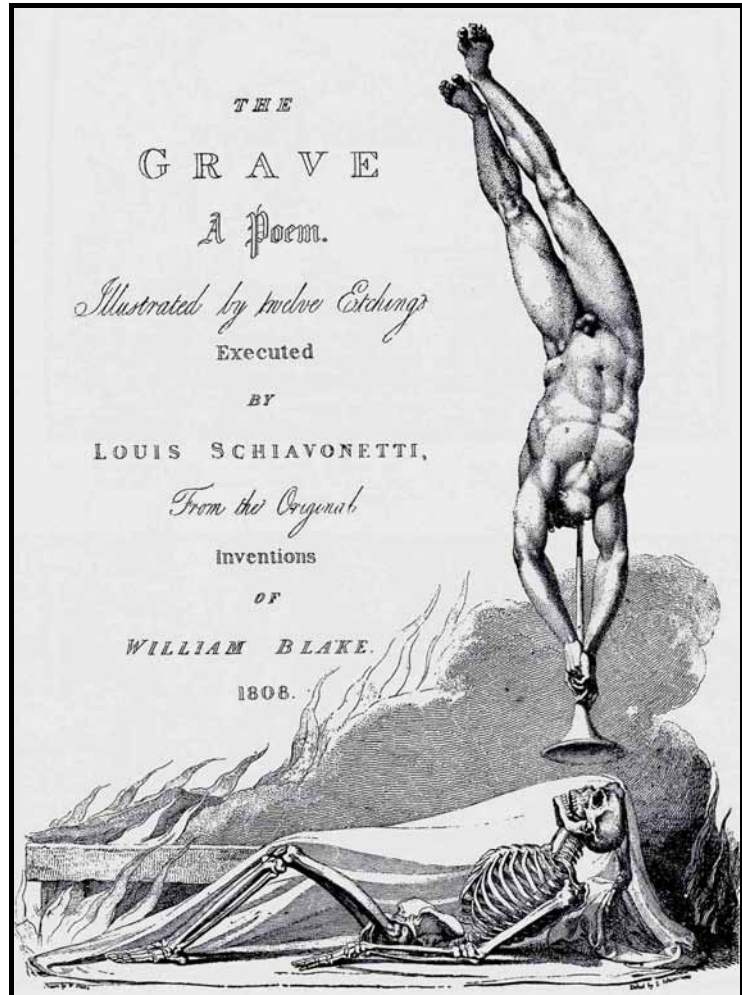
forgiveness of sins, all the wrong deeds that might have been recorded in the books have been erased and blotted out (Isaiah 43:25). While God says He will remember the sins of Babylon (Revelation 18:5), He also promises to forget the sins of His people (Jeremiah 31:34; Isaiah 43:25). The only works of the believers that will be remembered are the good deeds that they have done in faith (Matthew 25:35f.; Revelation 14:13) and which are acceptable to God through the forgiveness we have in Christ (1 Peter 2:5). In that sense also believers will be judged according to their works. (Becker, p.322)



“The Sea Gave Up its Dead” by Frederic Leighton

“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.”
The events in the visions of St. John are often thematic rather than sequential. That approach is not uncharacteristic of apocalyptic literature. This vivid description of

the resurrection of all flesh follows the description of the Final Judgment, obviously not the actual sequence of events in which the resurrection must precede the judgment. The threefold repetition of “*the sea..and death and Hades*” giving up the dead that were in them serves to emphasize the universal nature of the resurrection. Every naturally born descendant of Adam who ever lived, no matter when or where he lived and died, will rise on the last day. At the same time, the repetition also serves to stress the physical nature of this resurrection. The bodies of all men will rise irrespective of their condition, status, or location. The physical bodies of all men will rise - those that were buried and those that were not; - those whose bodies remain intact and those whose bodies have long been reduced to

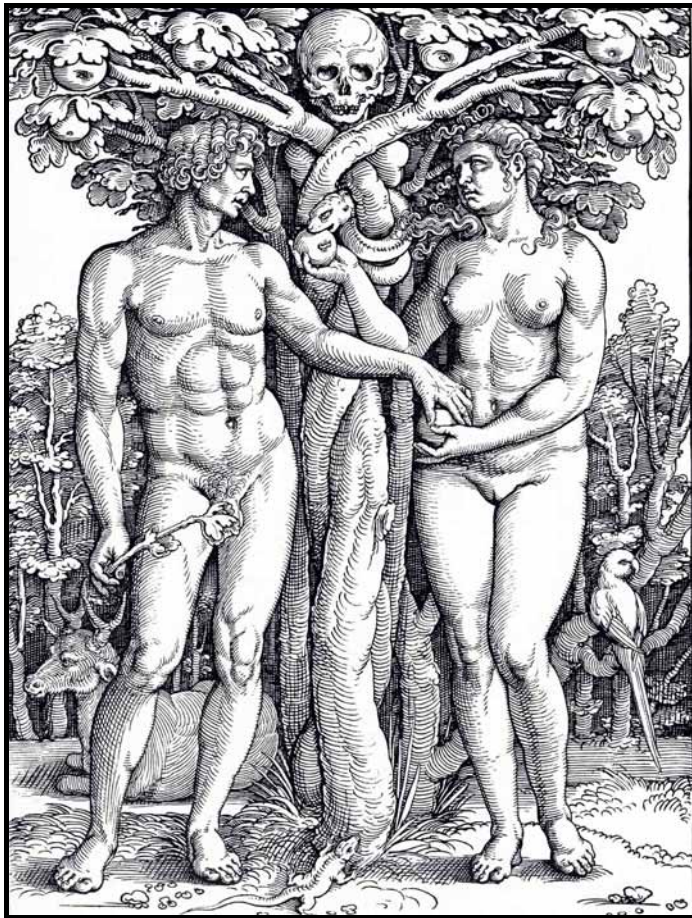


“The Trumpet Shall Sound” - 19th Century Engraving

dust and ashes. That same insistence on the literal reality of the resurrection of the body can be seen in the triple repetition of the patriarch Job: “*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see Him with my own eyes - I, and not another.*” (Job 19:25-27)

John proclaims that the cold grasp of “*death*” (Greek-*thanatos*) will be loosed on that day. The transliterated Greek word “*Hades*” refers not merely to Hell, as is often the case, but more generally to the grave, the place of the dead. The prophet Daniel had foretold: “*Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*” (Daniel 12:2) Ezekiel had been taken by God to the vast valley of the dry bones and had seen the dead come to life as the breath of God’s Spirit was breathed upon them (Ezekiel 37). This vision

of restoration for Israel was but a glimpse of the great resurrection that is to come on the last day.

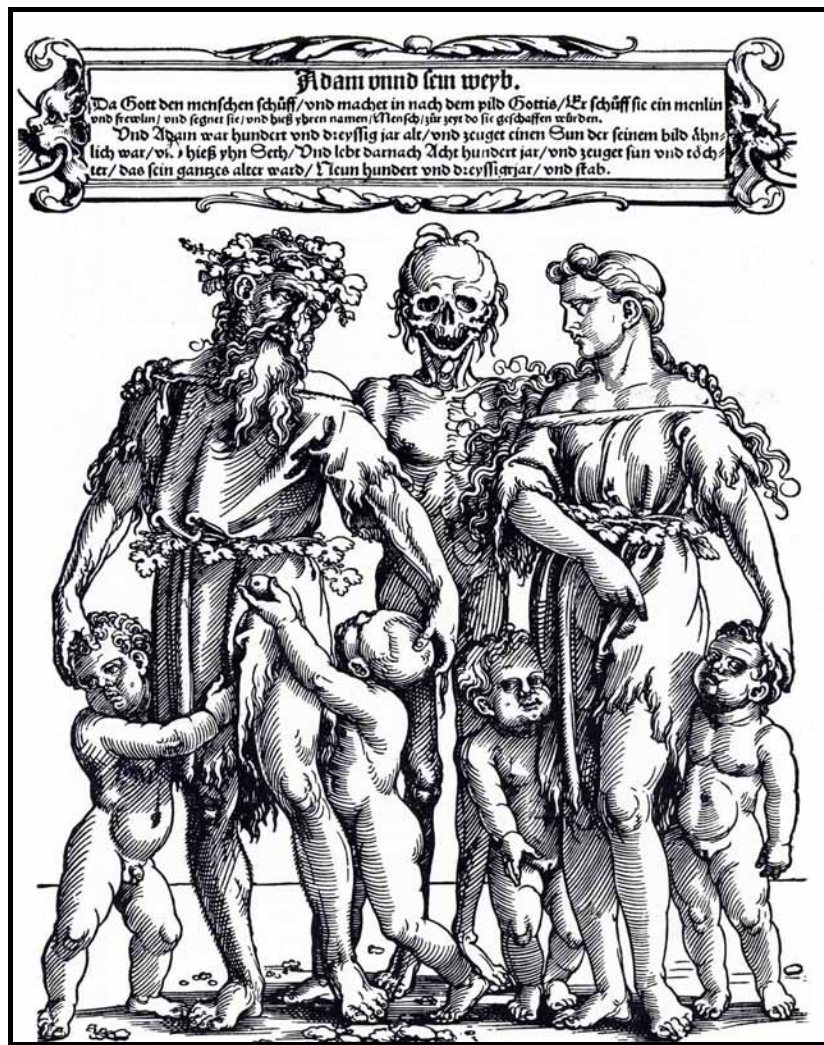


“The Wages of Sin Is Death”
Woodcut by Hans Sebald Beham - 1535

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” -

The end of the dark reign of sin has finally come and physical death and the grave must also meet their doom. Since the dark day of Adam’s fall, physical death had reigned triumphant over all his descendants. In the beginning, God had warned the first man - *“But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”* (Genesis 2:17) But now the victorious return of the risen Christ ends the reign of death. Those who *“all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”* (Hebrews 2:15) have been set free. God’s promise through

Isaiah has been fulfilled: *“On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.”* (Isaiah 25:7-8). As St. Paul had taught: *“For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”* (1 Corinthians 15: 25-26) Let the triumph song ring out: *“Death has been swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”* (1 Corinthians 15: 54-57) The English poet John Donne



“Death Embraces Fallen Adam and His Family”

Woodcut by Hans Sebald Beham - 1530

expressed that victory well indeed in his classic poem *“Death Be Not Proud.”*

“Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe, for those whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow, die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me... One short sleep past, wee wake eternally, and death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.”

Physical death and the grave are personified in the vision *“as two voracious and insatiable monsters who have swallowed all past generations but now are forced to disgorge their prey.”* (Swete, p. 273). Like Satan, the beast, and the false prophet, they are cast into the burning lake of fire, the place of God’s judgment.

“The lake of fire is the second death.” - The identification of the ***“lake of fire”*** as the second death is repeated in Revelation 21:8. The ***“second death”*** is eternal death, the unending torment of hell. Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the body and the soul. Eternal death is the permanent separation of the damned from the Creator God. *“As a second, higher life exists for the righteous, a second and deeper death awaits the wicked.”* (Thomas, p. 434) The second death is the just and inescapable punishment of a just and holy God upon sin. Only those whose names are written in the ***“book of life”*** shall escape the torment of the second death.



“The Downfall of the Damned” by Peter Paul Rubens

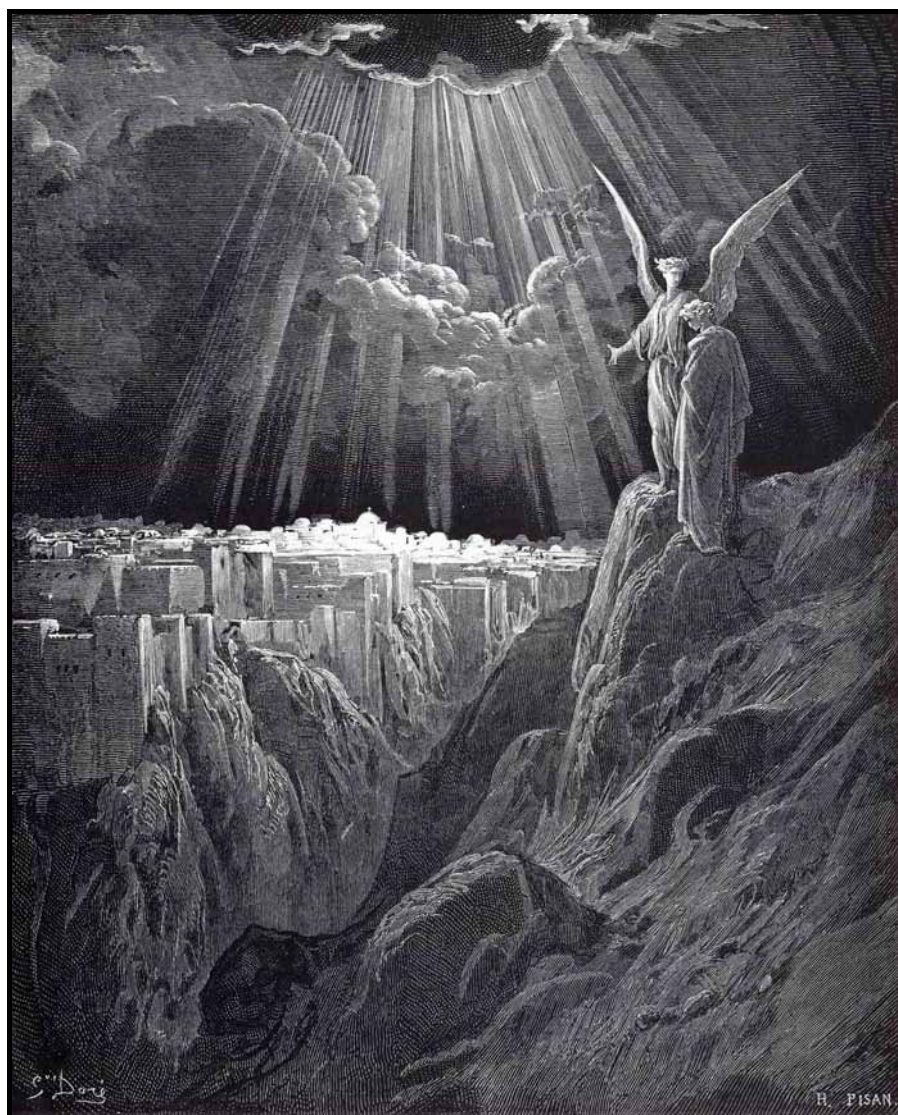


“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” by Lucas Cranach

The New Heaven and New Earth Revelation 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His

people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He Who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then He said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this and I will be his God, and he will be My son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”



“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” by Gustave Dore

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.” - The preceding visions have described the ultimate outcome and the end of the first, sin-tainted world in graphic detail. In rapid succession we have observed the judgment of the harlot and the beast (Revelation 17:1-18:24), then the Marriage Feast of the Lamb and the Lord’s Second Coming (Revelation 19:1-21), the unleashing of the dragon - in the context of his having been bound at the beginning of the New Testament era (Revelation 20:1-10), and finally the resurrection and judgment of all humanity (Revelation 20:11-15). Each scene had displayed one aspect of the consummation of the present reality. Now John gazes beyond time to the wonderful eternity which God has prepared for His saints. The appearance of the new scene is signaled by the characteristic ***“Then I saw”*** (Greek - *“kai eidon”*).

The heaven and earth which John observes are ***“new”*** (Greek - *“kainos”*). This adjective *“indicates newness in terms of quality, not time; newness in time is a typical nuance of “neos”... “kainos” refers predominantly to a change in quality or essence rather than something new that has never previously been in existence.”* (Beale, p. 1040). The term has been used repeatedly in Revelation in reference to the uniqueness of that which God has done for His people. They bear a new name (Revelation 2:17, 3:12) and sing a new song (Revelation 14:3). Now they will dwell in a new universe. In this context, the use of the term signals *“a radically changed cosmos, involving not merely ethical renovation but transformation of the fundamental cosmic structure including physical elements.”* (Beale, p. 1040).

The concept of ***“a new heaven and a new earth”*** is drawn from the prophetic imagery of the Old Testament. Isaiah uses the same terminology to describe the splendor of the coming Messianic age:

“Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in My people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.” (Isaiah 65:17-19)

“As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make endure before Me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure.



"The New Jerusalem" by Albrecht Dürer

From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before Me,” says the Lord. And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against Me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.” (Isaiah 66:22-24)

Apocryphal 1 Enoch, written during the second century BC, repeatedly sounds the same theme:

“On that day I shall cause My Elect One to dwell among them, I shall transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever. I shall also transform the earth and make it a blessing, and cause My Elect One to dwell in her.” (1 Enoch 45:4-5)

“Uriel, the holy angel who was with me, and who also is their guide, showed me - just as he showed me all their treatises and the nature of the years of the world unto eternity, till the new creation which abides forever is created.” (1 Enoch 72:1)



“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

“Then, after this manner, on the tenth week in the seventh part, there shall be the eternal judgment, and it shall be executed by the angels of the eternal heaven - the great judgment which emanates from all the angels. The first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold.” (1 Enoch 91:15-16)

Peter had previously affirmed the promise of the new heavens and the new earth and described the dreadful chaos of the passing of the old order:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by their fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:10,12-13)

The renewal of the present universe and its restoration to the pristine condition of its original creation is a major theme of the closing visions of the Book of Revelation. Martin Franzmann notes with characteristic eloquence:

“In His wrath upon man in his revolt against Him God has harried and scourged the world created for man; the earth and the sky disfigured by satanic revolt and human sin have had to flee from the presence of God the Judge, Who will not tolerate the marring of His creation. But He is not minded to annihilate the “very good” creation which He once hallowed with His blessing...This crowning vision of Revelation is therefore both a song of creation, celebrating the making new of heaven and earth, and a song of redemption, celebrating the consummated communion between God and man in His holy city, new Jerusalem...This ancient twin theme of God the Creator and Redeemer, a theme already announced in the vision of Chs. 4 and 5 (cf. 4:11; 5:9-14), receives its full climactic treatment here.” (Franzmann, pp. 136-137)

In Romans 8:19-22, St. Paul had promised the deliverance of creation from its ***“bondage to decay”***:

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought



"The Measuring of the New Jerusalem" by Jean Duvet



*“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” by Hans
Burgkmair*

into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

Luther commented on the parallel between the expectation of the saints and that of the entire creation in his magnificent Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. The reformer noted Paul’s unique emphasis on the role of creation in this anticipation:

“Nowhere else in Holy Scriptures do we find anything like Paul’s declaration here concerning the earnest expectation and waiting of the creatures for the revelation of the children of God, which waiting the apostle characterized as a sighing in eager desire for man’s redemption. A little later he compares the state of the creation to a woman in travail, saying it cries out in anguish. The sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth, the bread we eat, the water or wine we drink, the cattle and sheep, in short, all things that minister to our comfort cry out in accusation against the world because they are subjected to vanity and must suffer with Christ and His children...Neither would the earth produce thorns or thistles were it not cursed for our sins. So it, with all creatures, longs for the day when it shall be changed and

renewed...There is a refined and comforting perception in the apostle's exposition where he represents the entire creation as one being, with us looking forward to entrance upon another life...With all creation and with the true saints, it waits and longs, being subject meanwhile to vanity - that is, the devil and the wicked world - for the sake of God alone, who subjects, yet leaves hope that the trial shall not continue forever.” (Luther Sermons, VIII, pp. 104,106,110-111)

In his magnificent Pentecost sermon, Peter had also asserted the restoration of the universe: **“He (Christ) must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.”** (Acts 3:21; cf. Also Matthew 19:28) John describes the fulfillment of these divine promises here in the final chapters of the Bible.

“For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” - Introduced by the conjunction **“for”** (Greek - “gar”), this phrase explains the reason for the appearance of the new heaven and earth in the passing of the old order. In Revelation 20:11,



“The Second Coming of Christ” by Little Gidding, 1635

John had reported that at the coming of Christ, the Judge - ***“Earth and sky fled from His presence and there was no place for them.”*** The Greek verb in this phrase is *“ephygen”* which indicates *“the sudden and violent termination of the physical universe.”* (Thomas, p. 429) The verb ***“passed away”*** (Greek - *“apelthan”*) carries



“John Beholds the Holy City” by Rudolf Schäfer

the same connotation of discontinuity and radical change. The language recalls the words of Christ - ***“Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will never pass away.”*** (Matthew 24:35) The most explicit Scriptural account of these events is provided by St. Peter - ***“The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat.”*** (2 Peter 3:10,12) This forceful language would seem to suggest the utter destruction of the present universe in contradiction to the texts cited above which describe the renewal and restoration of the creation. John Stephenson argues that the dialectic between annihilation and transformation must be allowed to remain in *“full force”* if the Biblical message is to be properly understood. *“The*

passing away of the old order and the advent of the new will involve both annihilation and transformation of the old creation.” (Stephenson, p. 111) He wisely cautions against *“making any attempt to smooth out tensions to render the mystery comprehensible”* and urges the student of Scripture to humbly recognize that *“The proportion of continuity and discontinuity between the old and the new creations is a mystery now hidden with Christ in God.”* (Stephenson, p. 113) Irenaeus, one of

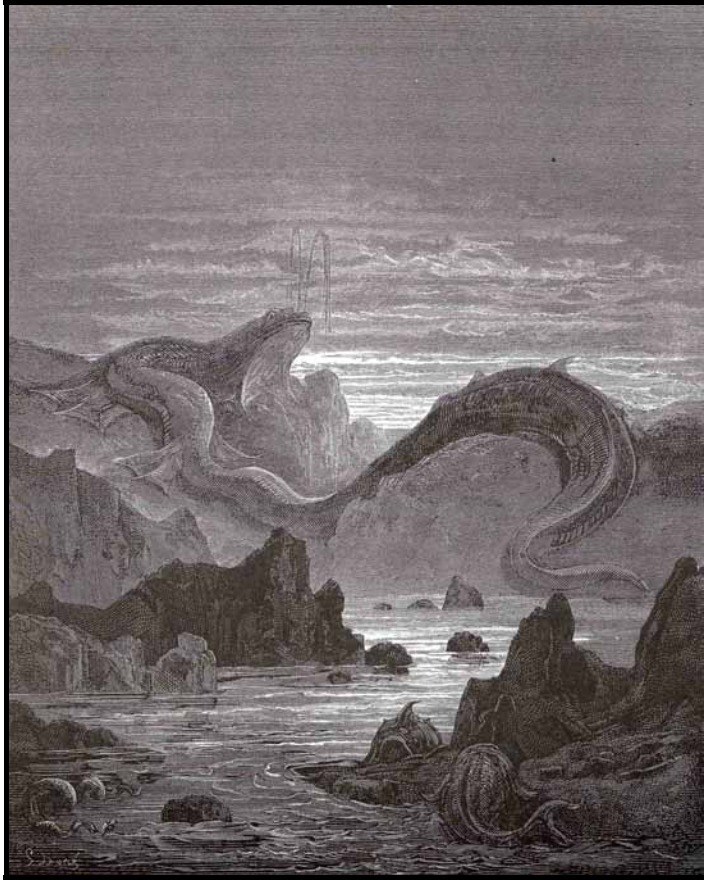


“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” - Luther Bible Woodcut

the great teachers of the early church, offered the helpful suggestion that the establishment of the new heaven and earth parallels the glorification of the bodies of the saints in the resurrection:

*“For since there are real men, so must there also be a real establishment, that they vanish not away among non-existent things, but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He Who established it), but **“the fashion of the world passeth away”** (1 Corinthians 7:31); that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them...But when this present fashion of things passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, then there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain.” (ANF,1, p.566)*

“And there was no longer any sea.” - The only specific difference between the old and the new heaven and earth which John cites is the absence of the sea. Drawing on the symbolism of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Isaiah 57:20), John has previously



*“The Creation of the Primordial Serpent”
by Gustave Doré*

used the sea as the symbol of evil and the chaos of sin. In Revelation 4:6, the surging waves of the sea have been completely calmed and what stands before the heavenly throne is *“what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”* The first of the satanic beasts of Revelation 13 rose up from the waters of the sea at the summons of the dragon (cf. Revelation 13:1-2). All of these things are now gone. *“The sea had disappeared because in the mind of the writer it was associated with ideas which are at variance with the character of the new creation.”* (Swete, p. 275) The nature of the new heaven and earth as the restoration of the original creation does not require the literal absence of the sea, for the ocean did exist in the perfect world prior to the fall into

sin as a part of God’s perfect creation (cf. Genesis 1:9-10; Job 38:8; Psalm 95:5). Louis Brighton explains that the message of this phrase is not geographic but symbolic:

*“If the new heaven and earth is the renewed and restored present heaven and earth and is thus patterned after the original, there may well be waters collected together into bodies of waters and seas just as the first earth had. But the sea in its storm tossed boiling rage, and as the symbolical domain of the primeval serpent, will no longer be present. That is, even if an ocean were physically present in the new earth, it would not have its terror and fearful character, for **that** sea has passed away. In the new heaven and earth the sea will be calm and at peace...The absence of the sea from the new heaven and earth from the context of Revelation 21:1-8 suggests not the absence of water in the geophysically renewed earth but the absence of any of the fear and terror that the sea evoked, and especially the absence of any painful reminder that God’s saints had once been separated from Him.”* (Brighton, p. 594-595)

“I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” - At the heart of the new heaven and earth is a mighty and majestic city - ***“the holy city, the new Jerusalem.”*** The ancient city of Jerusalem, the home of the sacred Temple where God had dwelt in the midst of His people, lends its name to this familiar image. The language is drawn from Isaiah 52:1 - ***“Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city.”*** To clearly distinguish this new city from its old historic counterpart, John indicates that the new city is ***“coming down out of heaven from God.”*** The ***“holy city”*** represents the Church, the people of God in Christ. In the letter to the church in Philadelphia, Christ had promised those who remained faithful to end - ***“I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven from my God.”*** (Revelation 3:12). The church was depicted as a beautiful bride who has ***“made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear”*** (Revelation 19:8) in the vision of the marriage feast of the Lamb. Here the new Jerusalem is similarly described as ***“prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”*** *The figure of a bride-city captures two characteristics of the new Jerusalem: God’s personal relationship with His people (i.e. the bride) and the life of the people in communion with Him (i.e. the city with its social connotations.)*



“The Bride Awaits Her Beloved”
by Edward Burne-Jones

(Thomas, p. 442) This is the city of which the writer to the Hebrews spoke ***“the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.”*** (Hebrews 11:10). To those Jews who believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah he declared: ***“But you have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.”***



“John Is Shown the New Jerusalem”
Flemish Apocalypse

“the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.” in contrast to Judaism, ***“the present city of Jerusalem because she is in slavery with her children.”*** (Galatians 4:25,26)

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God..” -

This is the twentieth time in Revelation that John hears the sound of a ***“loud voice.”*** In this instance, as in Revelation 19:5, the voice originates ***“from the throne.”*** The throne is God’s, but this is not the voice of God Himself. It is rather a word about God, perhaps from one of the four living beings,

the throne angels who stand in the immediate presence of the Holy One. ***“Even if it is an angel who is speaking, he is doing so for God and under God’s authority, that is, by and under the authority of the royal Lord, Who alone is the object of the worship of all creation in the new heaven and earth.”*** (Brighton, p. 597) The proclamation from the throne announces the glad tidings that the ancient separation

that has divided the creature from the Creator since the Fall into sin is finally over. The importance of the announcement is signaled by its introduction with the Greek word “*idou*” (English - “*Behold!*”). The NIV’s translation “*now*” muffles the dramatic effect of the term.



*“The Glory of God Within the Holy Place of the Tabernacle”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

“The dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and He Himself will live with them and be their God.” - The text literally says - “*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men...*” Once again (cf. Revelation 13:6; 15:5), John uses the Greek noun “*skene*” (“*tent or tabernacle*”) as an allusion to the tabernacle in the wilderness which was “*the visible location of God’s covenantal presence with His people.*” (Brighton, p. 597). During the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and for centuries thereafter, the glory cloud (Hebrew - “*shekinah*”) resting over the Ark of the Covenant within the tabernacle’s Holy of Holies assured God’s people of His gracious and glorious presence in their midst. In the Prologue to his Gospel John has used the same language to signal that in the



“Aaron Praying at the Incense Altar Within the Holy Place of the Tabernacle” by Rudolf Schäfer

person of Jesus Christ God had again come to dwell in the midst of His own as in the days of the tabernacle - *“The Word became flesh and lived (literally - “tabernacled”) for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14) The prophets had foretold a time when God would once again tabernacle among His people in perfect harmony and intimacy. John’s vision reflects the fulfillment of those promises:

“I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put My sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then the nations will know that I, the

Lord, make Israel holy, when My sanctuary is among them forever.” (Ezekiel 37:26-27)

“I will put My dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people. I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians.” (Leviticus 26:11-13)

“Shout and be glad, O daughter of Zion. For I am coming and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. “Many nations will be joined with

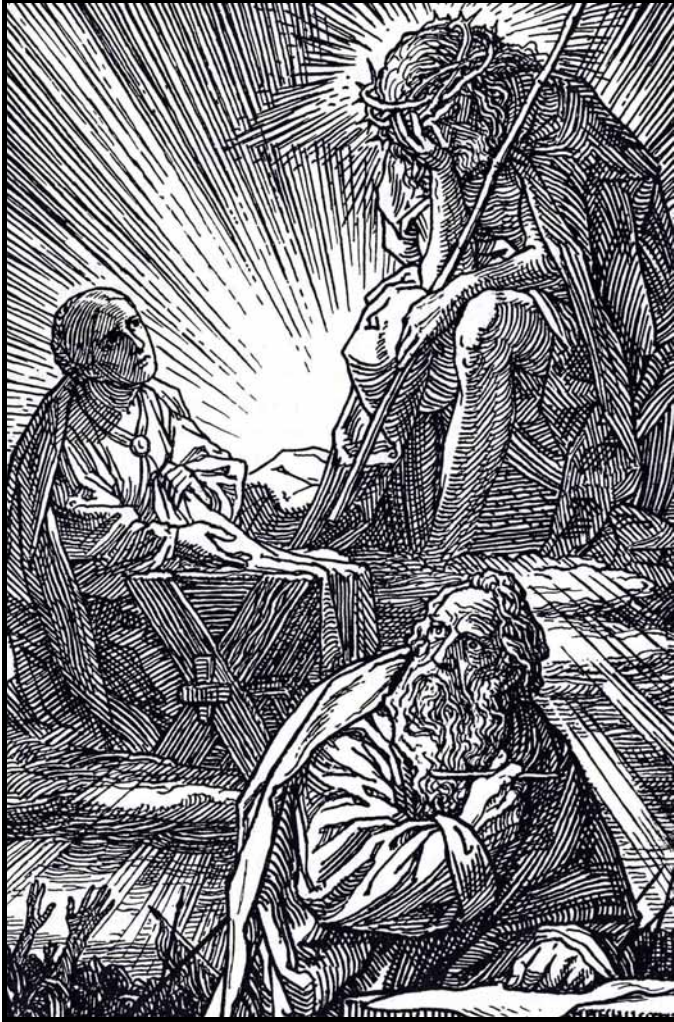
the Lord in that day and will become My people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent Me to you.”
(Zechariah 2:10-11)



“The Tabernacle and Its Furnishings” - Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

There is however, a significant change in the language of Revelation. As the inspired apostle paraphrases the words of the inspired prophets the noun **“people”** shifts from singular to plural. Thus in the best manuscripts, the original text of Revelation 21:3 actually reads - *“They will be His peoples”* - a reality which the NIV fails to note. This universal inclusion of all nations was anticipated in the prophecy of Zechariah.

The emphasis throughout this segment is upon the intimacy of the divine fellowship with His people. Phrase is heaped upon phrase to repeatedly stress the point. God’s name or pronouns referring to Him occur eight times in verses 2-4 in a manner similar to the frequent repetition of the divine name in the Genesis creation account - 34



*“Isaiah Foretells the Coming of Immanuel”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

times in 34 verses. The phrase “*God is with men*” is reminiscent of the Messianic title “*Immanuel*” (Isaiah 7:14).

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.” - The negative description which follows defines the result of God’s immediate presence in terms of the absence of all of the consequences of sin. God’s intent for human life was twisted and distorted by sin and its fatal after effects. The perfect environment which God fashioned for the crown of His creation was ravaged and subjected to the bondage of decay (cf. Romans 8:20-25). All of that will be swept away in the passing of “*the old order of things*” and God’s original intent will be fully restored. The definition is negative - in the sense that it describes what will not

be - because the actual reality of the new heaven and earth exceed the present powers of human comprehension. A poignant expression of God’s compassionate care introduces the segment - “*He will wipe every tear from their eyes.*” (Cf. Revelation 7:17) This language is drawn from a similar description of God’s ultimate deliverance of His people in Isaiah 25:8 - “*The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.*” (Cf. Isaiah 65:19) Four nouns summarize sin’s grim consequences: “*death*” (Greek - “*thanatos*”); “*mourning*” (Greek - “*penthos*”); “*crying*” (Greek - “*krauge*”); and, “*pain*” (Greek - “*ponos*”). Together, these words sum up all the anguish and suffering, both physical and emotional, brought upon mankind by the death sentence of sin. Isaiah had recorded the Lord’s promise nearly a thousand years

earlier: *“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wines - the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all the nations; He will swallow up death forever.”* (Isaiah 25:6-8) In language very similar to that of Revelation 20:11, Isaiah had prophesied that the everlasting joy and gladness of God’s people would be so intense and complete that *“sorrow and sighing will flee away.”* (Isaiah 51:11) Now the Revelator foresees the glorious fulfillment of those ancient promises. The paragraph concludes with the summary statement - *“The old order of things has passed away.”* (literally - *“the first things”*). *“All the things of the first creation are gone, gone because they were corrupted and twisted out of their original godly purpose. Their corruption resulted in death, and because death is now gone forever, so are all the first things.”* (Brighton, p. 599)



“The Dance of Death” by Michael Wohlgemuth

“He Who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then He said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me:

“It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.”
“He who was seated on the throne said...” - These are the first words of God the Father recorded in Revelation - the Speaker unmistakably identified as ***“He Who was seated upon the throne.”*** The significance of the declaration is highlighted in the Greek text by the interjection of *“idou”* - *“Behold”* at the outset. The NIV omits this word. The comment is an allusion to Isaiah 43:19 - ***“See I am doing a new thing.”*** John adds the intensification ***“all”*** (Greek - *“panta”*) to signal *“the consummate redemptive-historical fulfillment”* (Beale, p. 1052). These comprehensive words reach out to include the entirety of the new heaven and earth. *“To “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5) thus means that all things that God had originally created will be recreated and restored to their original pristine state.”* (Brighton, p. 601) The text clearly indicates that *“God will not annihilate the present creation, cast it out as some trash, but rather, He will, by recreation, transform the old into the new.”* (Brighton, p. 601)

The sweeping declaration of recreation is followed by a firm assertion of reliability - ***“then He said, “Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.”*** John has been repeatedly commanded to record the content of his visions in writing - (cf. Revelation 1:11,19; 2:8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 14:13; 19:9). The absolute reliability of this message as the Word of God is the basis for this command.

“What John has seen and heard was not meant for his eyes and ears alone. He was to share the message with others. What he produced in this book was to be a part of the writings which had come into being by the inspiration of God; it was to become a part of the Holy Writings, the Holy Scriptures, all of which were written for our learning, to teach us, “so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)” (Becker, p. 331)

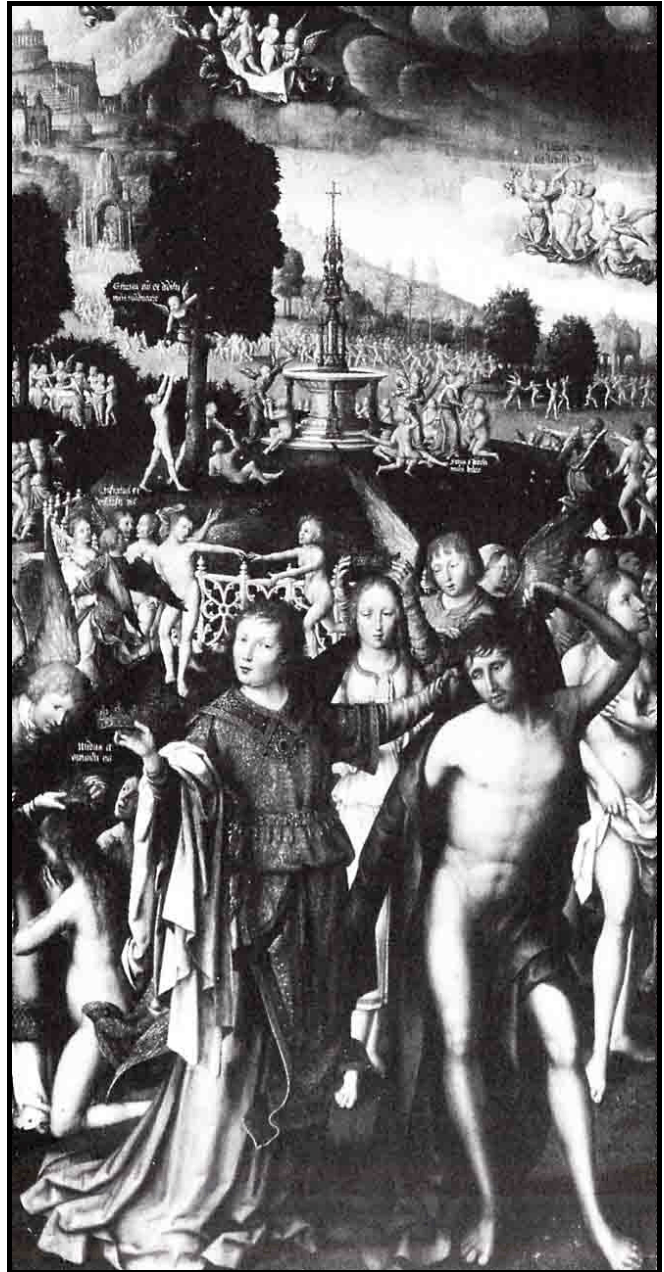
“He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” That which God declares will surely come to pass. The verb *“gegonan”* is a perfect indicative active third person plural form. It is literally translated - *“they have come into being.”* The verb’s plural subject refers to the words mentioned in the preceding phrase. Though the complete fulfillment of God’s promises may yet lie in the temporal future, they are already accomplished fact for God has spoken them.

The divine titles cited - ***“the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”***

“express God’s sovereignty over history, especially by bringing it to an end in salvation and judgment...The point of the title is that God Who transcends time guides the entire course of history, because He stands as Sovereign over its beginning and end.” (Beale, p. 1055). God the Creator is the ultimate source of all things. He is the only independent existence. God the Redeemer and Judge is the ultimate destination of all things. He is the God of our beginning and our end.

“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” The terminology of this gracious promise is derived from Isaiah 55: *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!”* (Isaiah 55:1) God had lamented the idolatry of His people and its destructive effect on their lives in similar language - *“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”* (Jeremiah 2:13). The image of Christ and faith in Him as the water of life occurs regularly in both John’s gospel and Revelation. The wording here parallels Christ’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well:

“If you knew the gift of god and Who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living



*“The Spring of the Water of Life”
by Jean Bellegambe - 1528*

water...Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:10, 13-14)



“Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s Well” by William Dyce

Jesus used the same imagery in the Temple in Jerusalem when He declared: ***“If a man is thirsty let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”*** (John 7:37) Earlier in Revelation the elder had said of the 144,000 who have been redeemed by the Lamb: ***“The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*** (Revelation 7:17) In the following chapter John will return to this theme once again in a final invitation to drink deeply from the abundant grace of the heavenly Father: ***“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”*** (Revelation 22:17)

The verb ***“I will give”*** (Greek - *“doso”*) is in the future tense - a usage grammarians call the *“durative future”* which describes on-going action which begins in the present

and will continue indefinitely into the future. *“We conclude that God’s words to John describe the gospel offer which God will continue to make to men so long as this present world stands.”* (Becker, - p. 333) The emphasis, both here in Revelation and in the original Isaiah text on the gratuitous nature of the gift of the water of life - *“I will give to drink without cost”* *“You who have no money, come, buy and eat”* - expresses the foundational Biblical truth that salvation is God’s free gift by grace through faith. Henry Barclay Swete is exactly correct when he asserts that this emphasis *“lies at the root of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith without works of the law.”* (Swete, p. 280)

“He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. - Each of the letters to the seven churches had concluded with the promise of blessing to *“him who overcomes”*. At the same time, each of those seven blessings had described an essential component in the blessedness of those who will dwell with God forever in the new heaven and earth.

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7)

“He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” (Revelation 2:11)



*“The Fountain of the Water of Life”
by Jan van Eyck*

“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” (Revelation 2:17)

“To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations - “He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery” - just as I have received authority from My Father. I will also give him the morning star.” (Revelation 2:26)

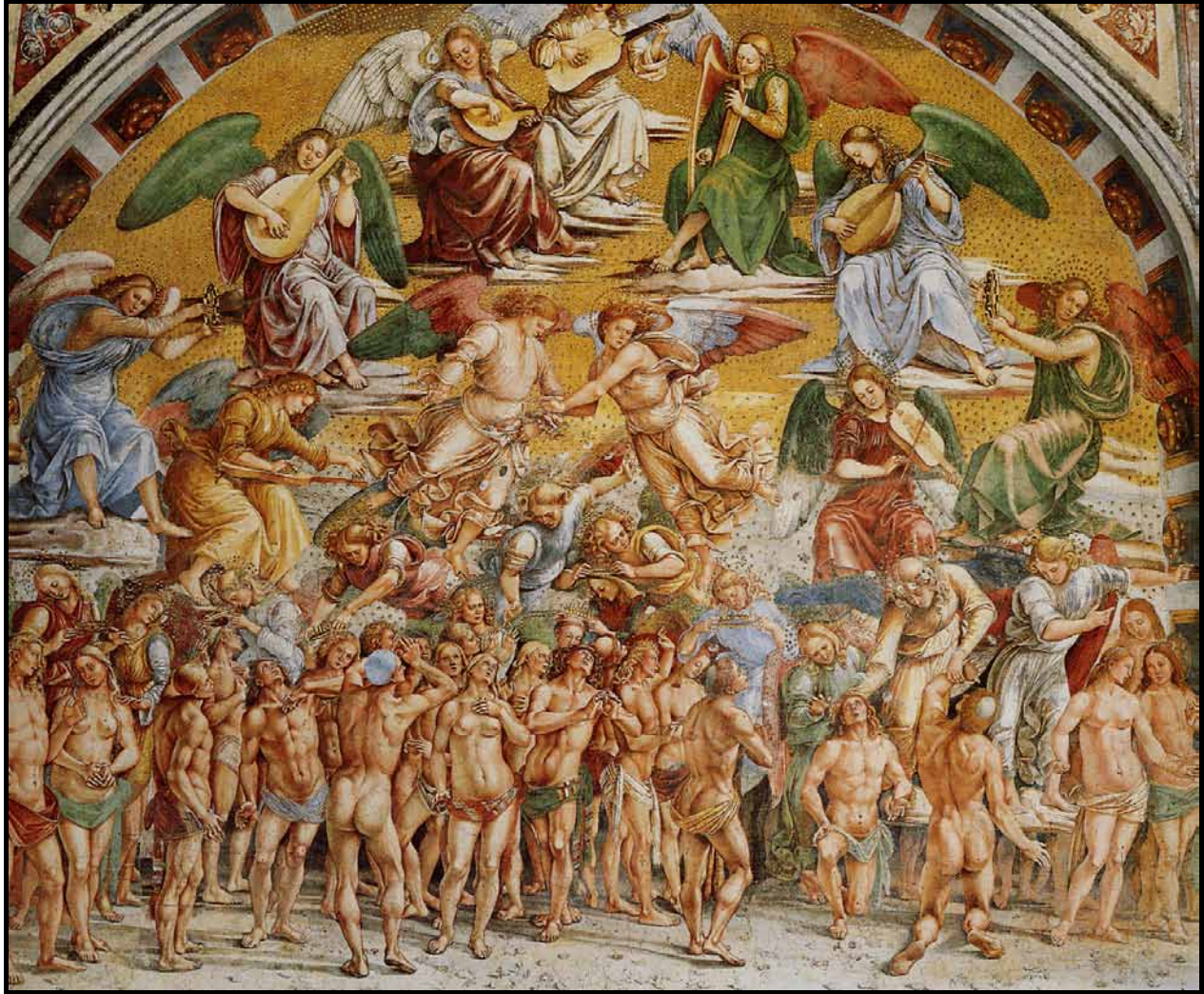
“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels.” (Revelation 3:5)

“Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven from My God; and I will also write on him My new name.” (Revelation 3: 12)

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:21)

Together, the over-comer blessings of the seven letters form one composite image. As Revelation draws to its victorious conclusion John returns to that theme to assert the blessedness of those who will have a share in the victory (Greek “*nike*”) of Christ. John uses the same victory language in his first epistle: ***“Everyone who has been born of God conquers the world, and this is the victory which has conquered the world, our faith.”*** (1 John 5:4) The essence of the believer’s victory is the restoration of the intimate fellowship with God for which humanity was created in the beginning. That intimacy is expressed here in the language of inheritance and sonship - ***“He who overcomes will inherit all this and I will be his God and he will be My Son.”***

“To be an heir of God is to share in all the blessings that He confers upon His own Son. The one who is in Christ, who has been clothed with Christ in baptism and believes in Him as the Savior, becomes such an heir of God, for it is through the righteousness of faith in Christ that the sinner is adopted as a son of God and so an heir.” (Brighton, p. 604)



“The Coronation of the Elect” by Luca Signorelli

To speak of eternal life as an inheritance from the Lord is not uncommon in the New Testament. Jesus promises: **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for My sake will receive one hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”** (Matthew 19:29). We are told that on the day of judgment the Lord will say to the redeemed: **“Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”** (Matthew 25:34). St. Paul uses the same language, linking our status as heirs with our identity as sons of God in Christ:

“Now if we are children then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” (Romans 8:17)

“But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law so that we might receive the full rights of sons...So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has also made you an heir.” (Galatians 4:4-5,7)

The additional promise ***“I will be his God and he will be My son”*** is the familiar language of the Old Testament covenant. God had promised Abraham: ***“I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you...and I will be their God.”*** (Genesis 17:7-8; cf. Exodus 6:7; 20:2; 29:45; Leviticus 26:12; Numbers 15:41; Deuteronomy 29:13; 2 Samuel 7:24; Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; Ezekiel 11:20; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23,27; Zechariah 8:8). The phrase ***“He will be My son”*** was first spoken to David in reference to his sons and heirs and ultimately to the Messianic king Who would come to rule forever upon the throne of David: ***“I will be his Father and he will be My***



“Solomon Anointed As David’s Heir” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld



*“The Torment of the Damned In Hell - The Lustful Boiled in
Cauldrons of Oil” by Nicholas le Rouge - 1496*

son...Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:14,16; cf. Psalm 89:26-27).

“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be...” - The adversative conjunction **“But”** (Greek - *“de”*) introduces the list of those who will be excluded from the blessedness of the new heaven and earth contrasting the conquerors with the cowards who have yielded to coercion and temptation. Eight categories of vices and those who commit them are listed. The list is representative, not comprehensive, differing in some details from its counterparts elsewhere in Revelation and the New Testament (cf. Revelation 9:20-21; 22:15; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). At the head of the list, for special emphasis in the position of greatest prominence, are **“the cowardly”** (Greek - *“deilois”*). *“Leading the retreat are the*

cowardly, who in the last resort choose personal safety over faithfulness to Christ.” (Mounce, p. 375) This term is more specialized than the “*phobos*,” the more general Greek word for fear. The “*deilois*” are those who know what is right, but who lack the courage in the face of opposition and persecution to do what is right (cf. Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:20). In this context, the word takes on the specific connotation of those who profess to be Christians but fail to live their faith because they fear the world’s reaction. “*They are those in the visible community of faith who have turned back in the holy war with the world and have not demonstrated courageous faith in the battle against the beast.*” (Beale, p. 1059) They are people who would like to wear the crown of life - receiving the blessings of life and salvation - but are unwilling to bear the cross - consistently demonstrating their faith in action and enduring the scorn and opposition of the world. The author of Hebrews has such cowards in mind when he writes: “***But My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.***” (Hebrews 10:38-39) Paul uses a form of the same word when he encourages Timothy: “***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.***” (2 Timothy 1:7)



“The Torments of the Damned” by Giorgio Vasari - 1572

Next are *“the unbelieving”* (Greek - *“apistois”*). While the NIV’s translation *“unbelieving”* is possible, in this context *“unfaithful”* or *“untrustworthy”* would seem to be a better rendering of the Greek. Once again, these are professing Christians who have failed the test of faithfulness. In the moment of trial they have compromised and yielded rather than offering the good confession and paying the personal price of such faithfulness. *“It applies to the Christian who by act of word denies his faith as well as to the pagan who insults and blasphemes it.”* (Swete, p. 282)



“The Punishment of the Seven Deadly Sins in Hell - Gluttons Stuffed with Toads, Rats and Snakes” by Nicholas le Rouge - 1496

Having censured the faint of heart within the visible fellowship of believers, John goes on to condemn *“the vile,”* that is *“the monstrous and unnatural vices of heathendom...persons whose very natures have been saturated with the abominations which they practiced in their lifestyle.”* (Swete, p. 282). The Greek noun is *“ebdelygmenois”* from a verb which mean *“to pollute or corrupt.”* In this emphatic form it might be translated as *“abominable”* - behavior which the holy God detests and which He cannot and will not tolerate.

The next category of the condemned is *“the murderers”* (Greek - *“phoneusin”*). Those who worship the beast and have cast aside and rejected the Creator God are themselves reduced to the level of beasts, living by the law of tooth and



Detail from "The Torment of the Damned" by Luca Signorelli

claw. Human life is precious because humanity was first created in the image of God (cf. Genesis 9:5-6). Without this insight, man is just another animal, his life of no greater value than that of any other. Human life become cheap indeed once the Creator God is removed from our world view. The weak and the vulnerable among us become expendable, obstacles to the achievement of our pleasure or our power. Those who are guilty of the brutal and wanton destruction of human life will not have a place in the new heaven and earth.

"The sexually immoral" (Greek - "*pornois*") are also excluded from the blessedness of the victorious saints. "*Pornia*" is the abuse of God's gift of human sexuality, that is, sexual activity outside of the love and commitment of man and a woman in holy marriage. Sex that is nothing more than the selfish pursuit of personal pleasure reduces my partner to the status of an object and diminishes and denies my own humanity. As St. Paul says: ***"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man***

commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”
(1 Corinthians 6:18)

“Those who practice magic arts” - This phrase translates the Greek noun *“pharmakois”* from which the English word pharmacist is derived. The Greek word means to engage in sorcery or magic, often involving the use of potions or drugs in conjunction with the casting of spells and ritual incantation.

“Modern equivalents to these evils certainly include witchcraft; both “good” or “white” and “evil” or “black” magic; all kinds of occult practices and spiritism, including attempts to divine the future, for example, by horoscopes and psychics; and the abuse of drugs.” (Brighton, p. 235)

“The idolaters and all liars” - The Bible is strictly monotheistic. There is one God and one God alone. All other gods are false - projections of sinful man’s imagination or manifestations of demonic power from hell. Those who worship such idols (Greek - *“eidololatriais”*) will have no place in the new heaven and earth. At the end of the list of those cast out and condemned are **“all liars.”** The sin of lying is singled out for particular reprobation in Revelation (cf. Revelation 2:2; 3:9; 22:15). The lie is intolerable to the God of Truth and those who serve Him. **“Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”** - Those who will dwell in the new heaven and earth are the heirs of an eternal inheritance (Cf. Revelation 21:7). The damned will also receive an inheritance, not of blessing but of condemnation. The opening words of this phrase, literally - *“their part”* or *“portion”* - refers to that inheritance in contrast to the blessedness of the redeemed.

“This will be their allotted portion, their share in eternity. Side by side with the most glorious gospel promises, God also proclaims the most severe threats of the law, so that the new man may be encouraged by the promises and the old man terrified by the threats.” (Becker, p. 335)

They will join the false gods whom they have followed, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, **“in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”** The image of eternal damnation as a lake of fire and brimstone is ultimately drawn from the Old Testament’s description of God’s judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 19:24; cf. Psalm 11:6; Isaiah 30:33; Ezekiel 38:22). John has utilized this fearsome picture of unending torment repeatedly in the visions of Revelation (cf. Revelation 14:10-11; 19:20; 20:15). Once again (cf. Revelation 20:14) the text explicitly indicates that the **“fiery lake of burning sulfur”** is, in fact, an image of eternal damnation - **“This is the second death.”**



“The New Jerusalem” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-27

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels as the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, , three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were

the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its wall. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it was long. It measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city wall were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.



*“The Angel Shows John the New Jerusalem”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Holbein - 1523*

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the

Holy City, , Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

“One of the seven angels...” The scene is introduced by deliberate design with language that closely parallels the introduction of the vision of Harlot Babylon in Revelation 17:1.



*“The Church as the Bride of Christ”
Detail from a 19th Century Bible Illustration by
Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

“Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth” (Revelation 17:5) was the dragon’s counterfeit replacement for *“the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*

These two women personify the kingdoms of Christ and Antichrist, the true church and the false church. In the imagery of Revelation, they are depicted as rival cities - Jerusalem the holy and Babylon the great. The bride and the harlot are the opposite of one another in every way. As in the vision of the harlot, so also in the vision of the bride, the scene is introduced and explained by *“one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues.”* (Cf. Revelation 17:1) It may well be the same angel in both instances, although the text does not specifically indicate that to be the case. The parallel continues in the identical language of the angel’s invitations to John, *“Come, I will show you...”* (Revelation 17:1; 21:9).

There is some irony in the fact that one of the plague angels, who had earlier served to rain down the judgment of God upon a sinful world, would now be called upon to introduce the wonders of the heavenly city. Swete aptly calls it *“a divine paradox.”* (Swete, p. 283)

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high...” - This is

the fourth and final time that John is carried away *“in the Spirit”* in Revelation’s visions (cf. 1:10; 4:1;17:3). The *“Spirit”* in question is, of course, the third member of the divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit of God. Similar language is used in the visions of Ezekiel - *“The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God He took me to Jerusalem.”* (Ezekiel 8:3) - and St. Paul -

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows. And I know that this man - whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know but God knows - was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things that a man is not permitted to tell.” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)



*“Carried to a Mountain Great and High”
Luther Bible Woodcut - 1530*

The nature of this transport is, as Paul indicates, beyond human comprehension and description. That which is clearly indicated, however, is the control of the Holy Spirit over the process of revelation. The repeated use of this phrase affirms John’s role as God’s inspired spokesman. *“John’s repeated rapture into the realm of the Spirit further underscores his prophetic commission and authority”* (Beale, p. 1065) John is carried *“to a mountain great and high,”* the vantage point from which he will observe the Holy City. This is in stark contrast to the barren *“desert”* (Revelation 17:3) in which he observed Harlot Babylon.

That which John sees from the mountaintop is *“the Holy City, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.”* This is the same language used earlier in the vision (cf. Revelation 21:2) as an image of the Christian Church, the people of God in Christ. Once again, the Church is described in bridal language - *“I will show you the*

bride, the wife of the Lamb” (cf. *“Prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”* Revelation 21:2; cf.19:7-8). The vision proceeds to describe the Holy City in detail, each symbolic feature providing insight into the eternal bliss of the saints.



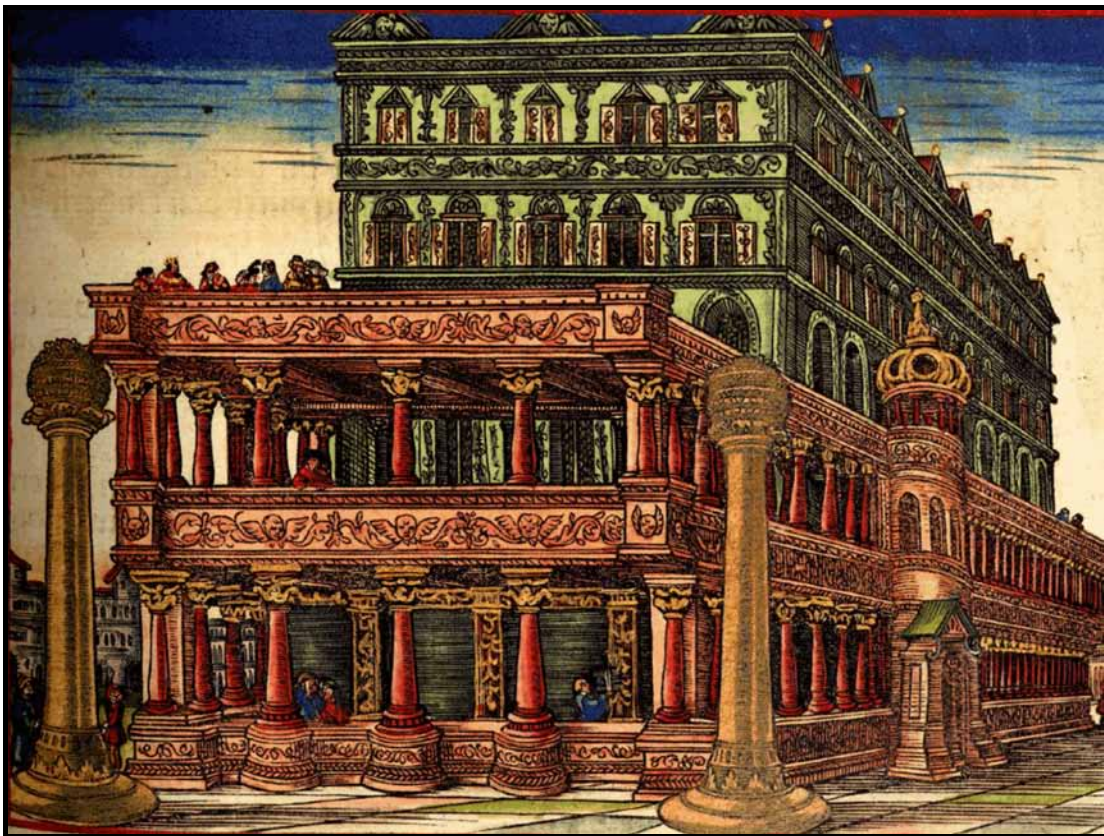
“The Heavenly Jerusalem With the Lamb at Its Center” by J. Köler - 1630

“It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lord.” - This expanded description of the new Jerusalem relies heavily upon Ezekiel’s visions of the heavenly city and temple (cf. Ezekiel 40-48). G.K. Beale comments on the manner in which John adapts the material from the Old Testament prophet’s visions:

“The broad structure of the city from 2:12 thru 22:5 is based on the vision in Ezekiel 40-48. That vision prophesies the pattern of the final temple (chaps. 40-44) and the

arrangement of the eschatological city and divisions of the land around the temple compound (chaps. 45-48). Revelation 21:12-22:5 interprets the future fulfillment of Ezekiel by collapsing temple, city and land into one end time picture of the one reality of God's communion with His people.” (Beale, p. 1061)

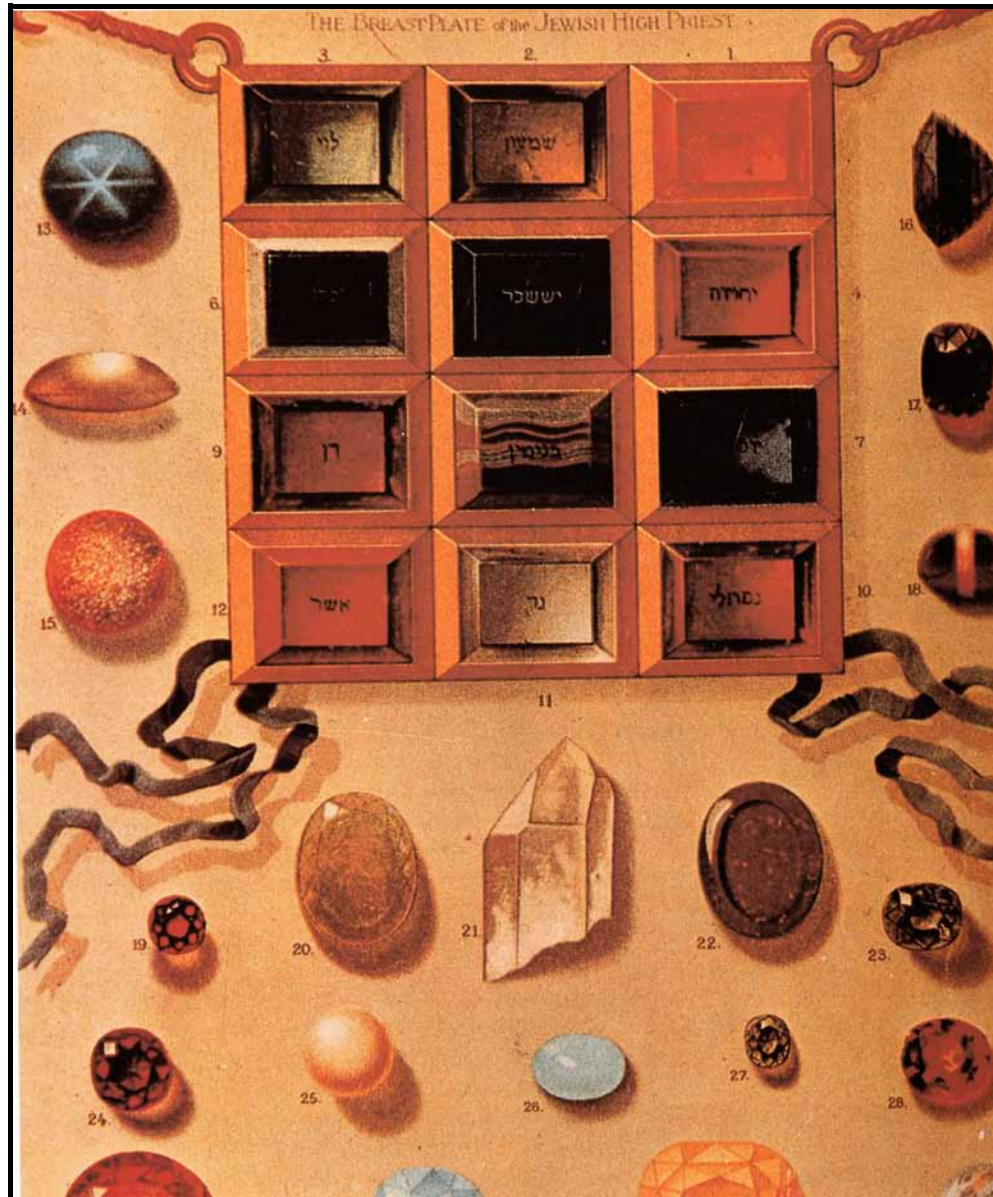
In the visions of both Ezekiel and John the essence of the heavenly Jerusalem's glory and the blessedness of the saints who will dwell therein is the immediate presence of God. Through Ezekiel God promises: ***“My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then the nations will know that I, the Lord, make Israel holy, when My sanctuary is among them forever.”*** (Ezekiel 37:27-28). God makes the same promise through John in virtually identical language: ***“Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God.”*** (Revelation 21:3)



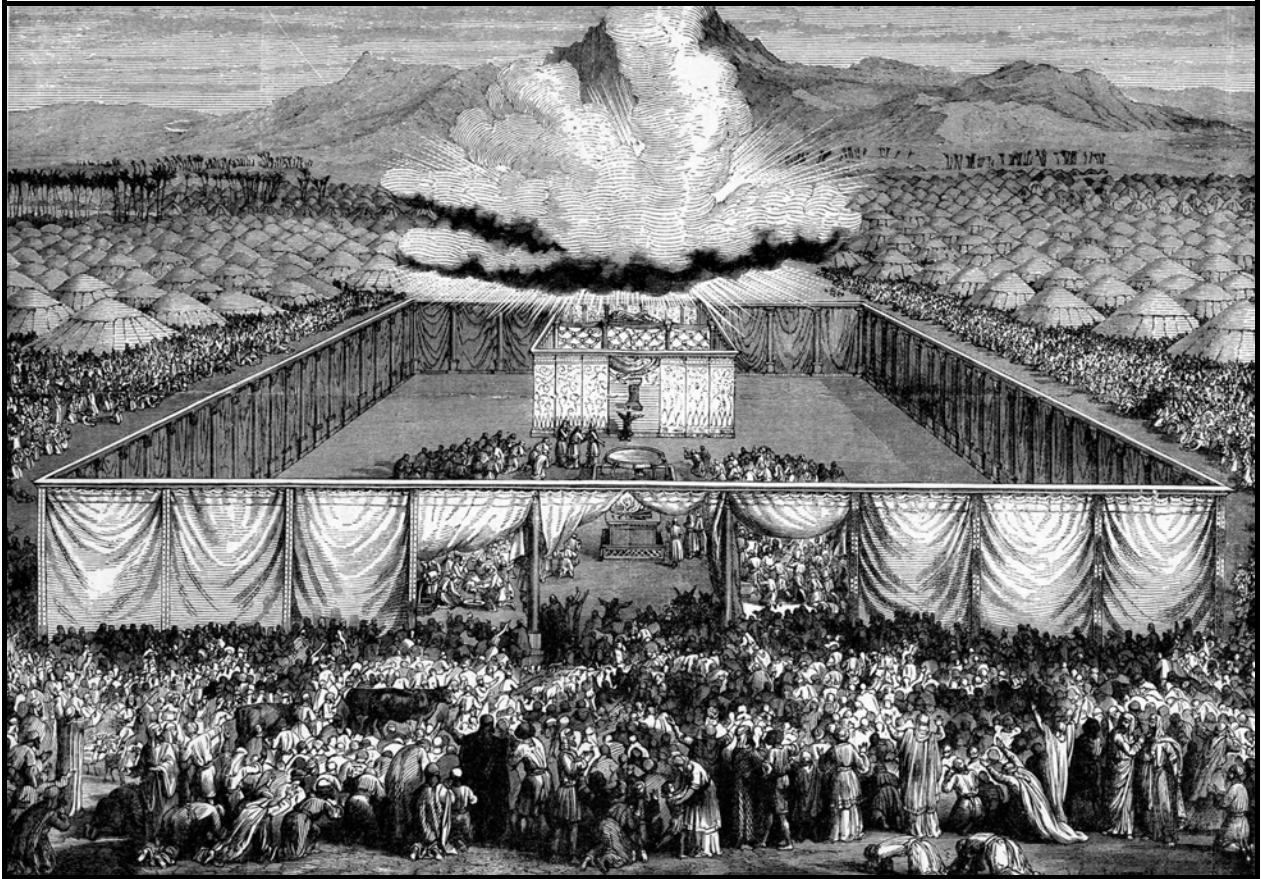
“The Temple of Solomon” Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut - 1534

In the wilderness tabernacle and later in the grand temple of Solomon, the visible presence of God in the form of the glory cloud, the *“shekinah,”* rested over the ark

of the covenant within the Holy of Holies (cf. Exodus 40:34-38; 2 Chronicles 5:13-14). Ezekiel had foreseen the magnificent return of God’s glory to the temple- ***“I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east...and the land was radiant with His glory... and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.”*** (Ezekiel 43:1-12). In the vision of St. John, the radiance of God’s glorious presence is not limited to one place or one particular building but envelopes and characterizes the entire city - ***“It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel...”***



“The Breastplate of the High Priest With Its Inscribed Gems” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

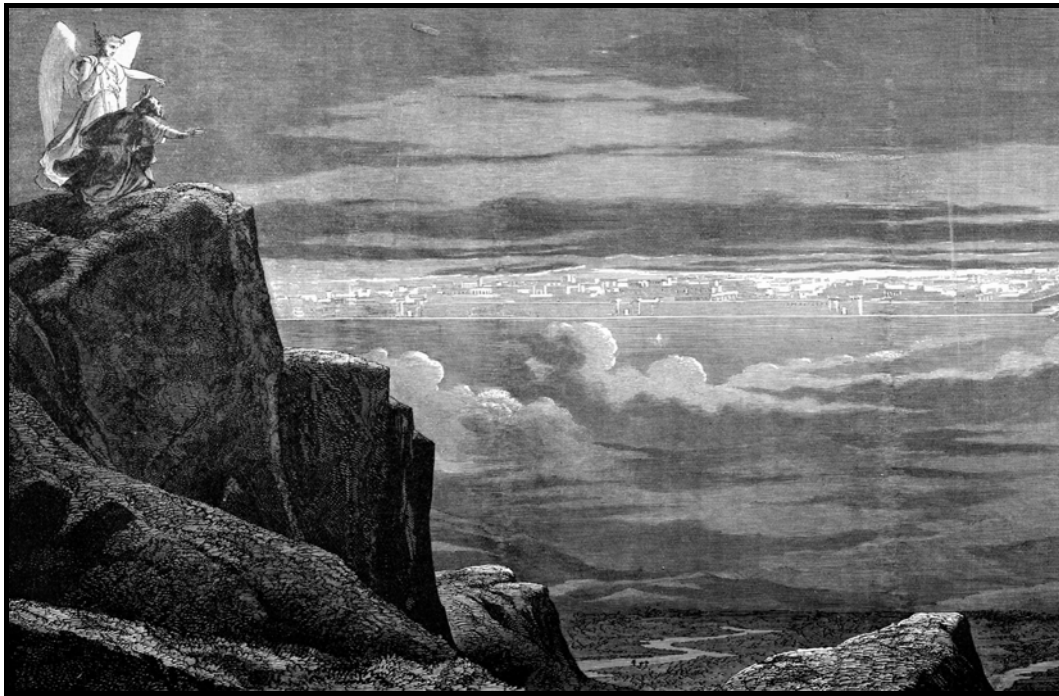


“The Shekinah Over the Ark Within the Tabernacle” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“This is not just a divinely caused splendor. It is the splendor of the presence of God Himself, the Shekinah. His very presence dwells in the Holy City which is the bride of the Lamb. That she possesses the glory of God, is the most striking feature of this city.” (Thomas, p. 460)

“Brilliance” is the Greek noun *“phoster.”* It refers to a luminary or light-bearer, typically one of the stars. Its only other occurrence in the New Testament is Philippians 2:15 where it is used to describe the role of Christians in a sin darkened world - **“So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.”** John attempts to describe the brightness of this glory by comparing it to the diamond like gleam of a most precious stone - **“its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”** The jasper is a clear crystalline gem of green-white color which gleams with reflected light like the facets of a diamond. John referred to the same gemstone earlier in

Revelation 4:3 in reference to the appearance of God upon His throne - ***“And the One Who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.”*** A jasper was also included on the jeweled breastplate of the high priest (cf. Exodus 28:20) That sacred breastplate included twelve gemstones each of which was inscribed with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Precious gemstones and gold will continue to figure prominently in the Revelator’s imagery of the Holy City.



***“John’s Vision of the New Jerusalem”
19th Century Bible Illustration***

“It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.”
- The massive city wall of new Jerusalem has caused some confusion among commentators. The walls around the cities of the ancient world were designed for defense, to repel attacks and protect the citizens from their enemies. New Jerusalem has no enemies. All of her foes have been vanquished and destroyed. The rampart surrounding this citadel represents the eternal security of the saints. Isaiah expresses the concept in a song of praise which celebrates the invincible security of God’s own:

“We have a strong city, God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. You keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord is the Rock eternal.” (Isaiah 26:1-4)

Zechariah promises the same steadfast security for those who trust in the Lord: ***“Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. And I Myself will be a wall of fire around it,”*** declares the Lord, ***“and I will be its glory within.”*** (Zechariah 2:3-5)

The wall is interrupted by ***“twelve gates,”*** three on each of its four sides. The Greek noun is *“pylon”* which more accurately refers to a gate tower, not merely the gate itself. In the fortifications of the ancient Near East the gates were a city’s point of greatest vulnerability. Accordingly they were sheltered and protected by elaborate towers and parapets designed to enable the defenders to rain down death and destruction upon their attackers.

For the same reason, the number of gates into a city was limited to an absolute minimum. The extravagantly large number of gates in new Jerusalem expresses the city’s openness and accessibility. The number and placement of the gates of John’s city reflects the prophet Ezekiel’s vision (cf. Ezekiel 48:30-34). John further indicates that his gate towers were inscribed with ***“the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.”*** Unlike Ezekiel, John does not indicate the assignment of specific tribes to particular gate towers, although he does follow the prophet’s directional sequence. In Ezekiel, the three gates on the north are those of Reuben, Judah and Levi. On the east are Joseph, Benjamin and Dan. Gad, Asher and Naphtali are on the west, while Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun are on the south. These assignments do not conform to the placement of the tribes in the wilderness encampment around the tabernacle (Numbers 2:1-31). The inscription of the tribe names on the gate towers is reminiscent of the engraving of these names on the jeweled breastplate of the high priest. The gate-tower inscriptions with the names of the twelve tribes of the Old



“Behold the Holy City” by Rudolf Schäfer

Testament are balanced by the inscription of twelve apostles' names from the New Testament. In this way, John indicates that the city represents the entire people of God from throughout history. St Paul utilizes a similar image in Ephesians 2: 19-20 -

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.”

The assignment of the twelve tribes to the gate towers and the twelve apostles to the foundations is somewhat surprising. Given the historical reality that Israel preceded the apostolic church in time one might have expected the opposite portrayal in John’s imagery. However, since New Jerusalem represents the church, the people of God throughout time, the association of the apostles with the foundation serves to indicate the fulfillment of all God’s Old Testament promises in Christ.

“The reversal figuratively highlights the fact that the fulfillment of Israel’s promises has finally come in Christ, who, together with the apostolic witness to His fulfilling work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the new Israel. Specific reference to historical Israel in the Old Testament is not in mind here. Rather the apostles are portrayed as the foundation of the new Israel which is the church.” (Neale, p. 1070)



“The Watchmen on the Heights” by Rudolf Schärer



*“The Angel Guardians of the Gates of the New Jerusalem”
Detail from a Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer*

The vision “*lingers lovingly over the details and the dimensions of the holy city*” (Franzmann, p. 141) in keeping with the admonition of Psalm 48: **“Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our Guide, even to the end.”** (Psalm 48:12-14)

“And with twelve angels at the gates” - Each of the twelve gate towers is manned by an angel guardian. These watchmen reinforce the impression of safety and security. **“I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent, day or night.”** (Isaiah 62:6; cf. 2 Chronicles 8:14- **“He also appointed gatekeepers by divisions for the various gates.”**) Like the mighty cherubim with their fiery swords who guarded the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24) these angelic gatekeepers protect the Holy City and maintain a careful watch over its blessed inhabitants.



“The Measuring of the Heavenly Jerusalem” by Jean Duvet

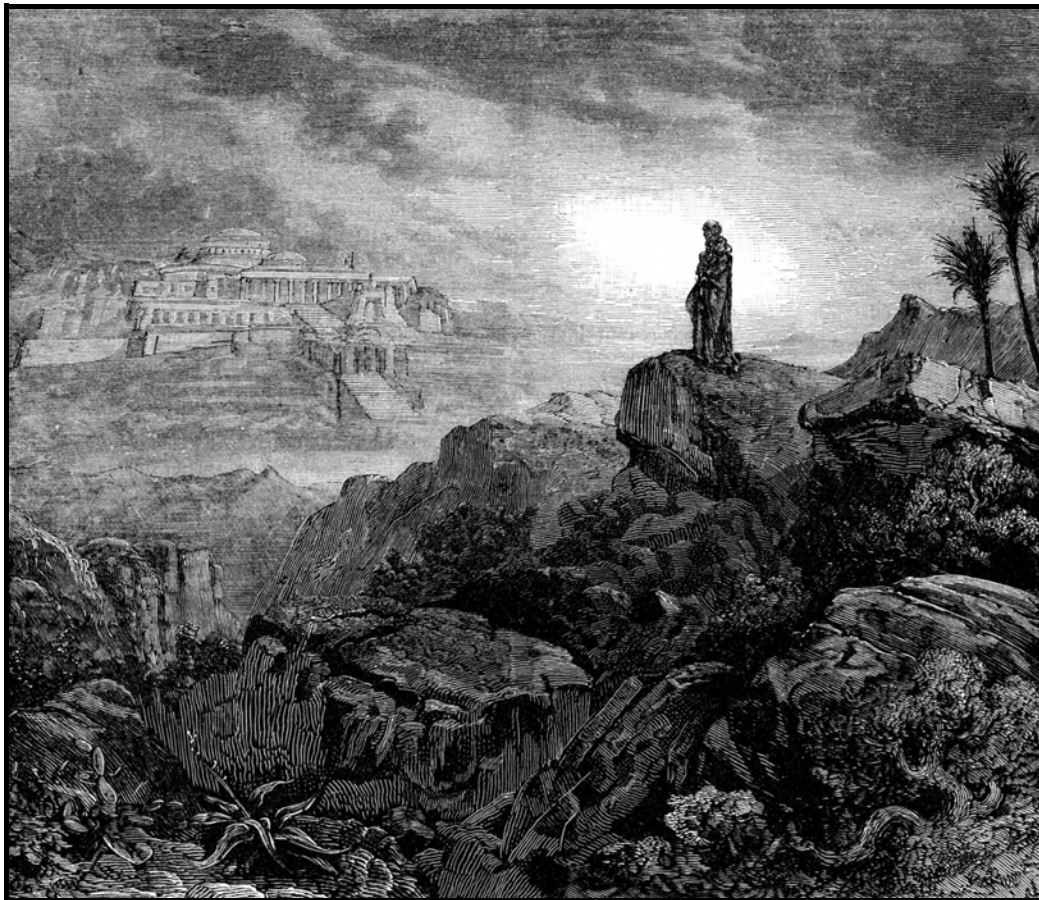
The repeated emphasis upon the number “*twelve*” (12 gates - 12 angels - 12 tribes - 12 foundations - 12 apostles, etc.) signals the identity of the Holy City as a symbol of the Christian Church. In Biblical numerology generally, and throughout Revelation particularly, twelve is the “*church number*” signifying the people of God. This signification is derived from the twelve tribes of Israel, the Old Testament people of God, and the twelve apostles of the New Testament.

“The number twelve, occurring three times in one verse in the description of the city recalls the first striking root of God’s plant in “the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.” From that unpromising beginning has come this high-walled radiant fortress with its twelve gates guarded by twelve angels, as impregnable as it is bright, for all that the twelve gates open in all directions to all the world. The roots struck in Israel have spread to all the world; the twelve foundation stones have inscribed on them the “names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb,” the messengers sent by the risen Christ to all the nations.” (Franzmann, pp. 140-141)

“The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its wall. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as

wide and high as it was long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement which the angel was using.

“The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold...” The image of an angelic measurement of the city/temple is derived from Ezekiel 40 -43 and Zechariah 2:1-5. In these Old Testament texts every dimension of the city, the temple and its courts are carefully measured. The act of measurement is a promise of protection and restoration. It signifies certainty and precision. All has been exactly predetermined in the providence of God. Earlier, in Revelation 11:1-2, John had been instructed to measure the temple and the altar but to leave the outer court unmeasured (cf, pp. 219ff.). In that instance, the absence of outer court measurement signaled the ongoing persecution and opposition to which the church would remain subject throughout the New Testament era. Here the measurement is performed by the angel himself, rather than by St. John. The accuracy and perfection of the New Jerusalem's measurement is designed to send a message of encouragement and comfort. *“It is*

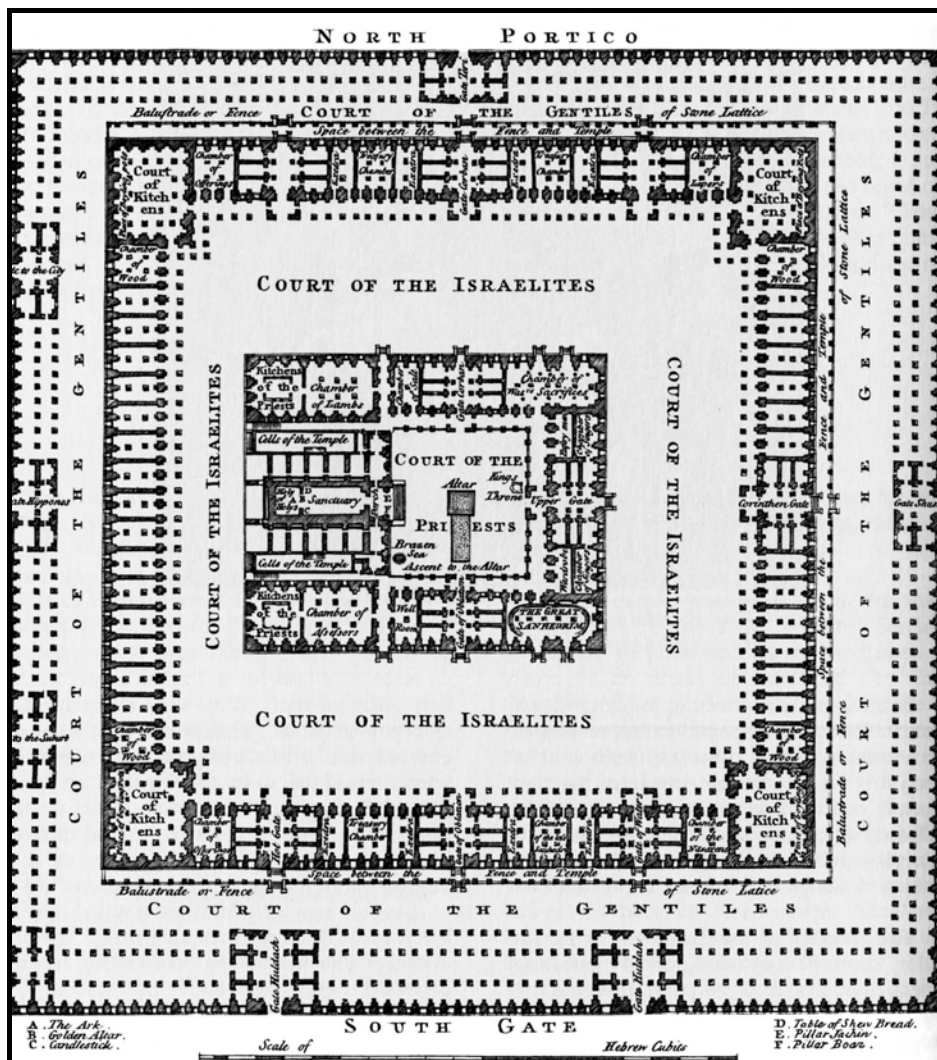


*“The Prophet Ezekiel’s Vision of a Perfect New Temple”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

to assure John of the certainty and the concreteness of the new and restored Jerusalem, which will last forever and which will be God's holy dwelling place in the new heaven and the new earth." (Brighton, p. 614)

The angel's "measuring rod of gold" (literally - "a golden rod as a measure" - Greek - "metron kalamon chrysoun") indicates the importance of this divinely commanded activity. The tool provided for the measurement of the city is of precious metal for nothing less would be worthy of use in the magnificent dwelling place of God Himself. Dr. Swete notes:

"The kalamos which the angel carries is not, as in the Seer's case, a natural reed, cut perhaps in the Jordan valley (Matthew xi,7), or in the valley of the upper Nile



18th Century Diagram of the Temple

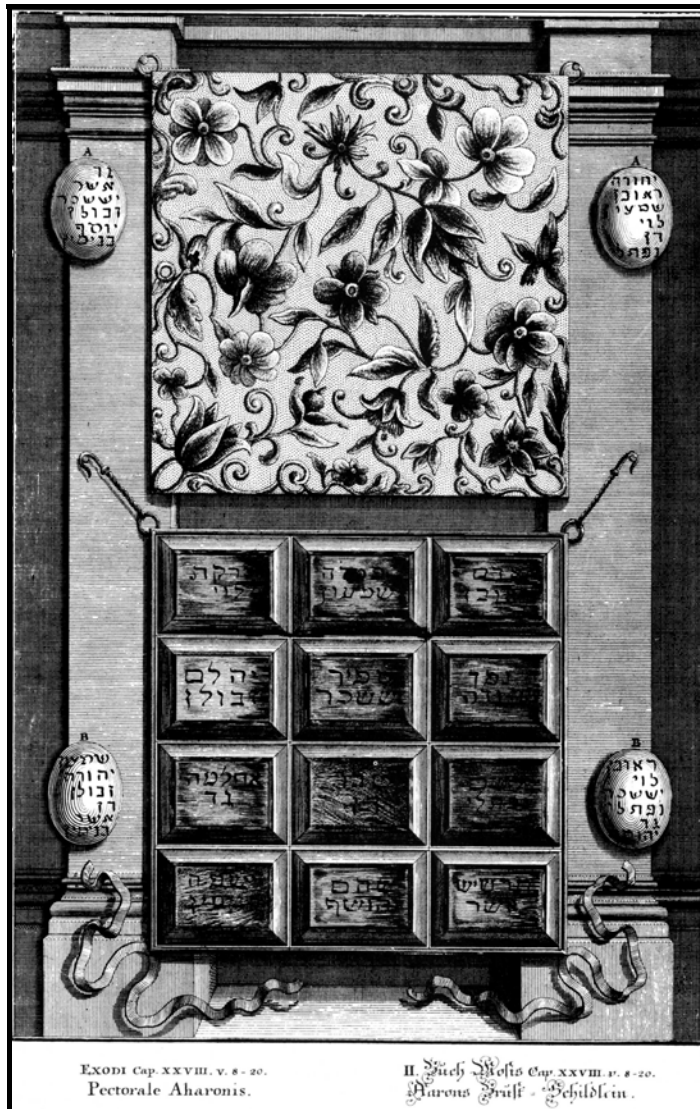
(Job xl,16), but a rod of gold, such as befitted an instrument used in the service of God; cf. Rev. 12:8; 8:3;9:13; 15:7. (Swete, p. 287)

“The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide...” The Greek text uses the adjective “*tetragonos*” - literally “*foursquare or four cornered*” - to describe the city. The angel’s measurement demonstrates that the Holy City is a perfect cube, like the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 6:19-20). In this instance, however, the cube is 12,000 stadia in width, height, and length. The Roman “*stadion*” was just over 606 feet long. By this standard the vast dimensions of John’s New Jerusalem would exceed fifteen hundred miles, roughly the distance between Houston and New York City. “*Such dimensions defy imagination*” (Swete, p. 289) and are clearly figurative. The use of the number 12, symbolic of the church, the people of God, multiplied by 1,000 (10x10x10) signifies the perfect inclusion of each and every one of God’s elect without exception or exclusion.

“The size and scope of the holy city Jerusalem in Revelation 21 certainly declares that it is all encompassing in its perfection...The holy city - that is, the Bride of Christ under God’s majestic glory in Christ - will dominate the new heaven and earth as the magnificent precious stone of a ring in all its radiant splendor dominates its setting.” (Brighton, p. 615)

“He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.” - Next the angel takes the measure of the city’s massive wall and finds it to be “**144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.**” “**144 cubits**” equals about 216 feet. By comparison, Herodotus reports that the battlements of mighty Babylon, renown throughout the ancient world, comprised a circuit of nearly 300,000 feet, 75 feet wide and 300 feet high. Solomon’s Porch, on the southern end of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was 30 feet wide and 180 feet tall (2 Chronicles 3:4) In this instance, the symbolic number points, once again, to the people of God, the Church. “**144**” is the square of twelve. Its use here is reminiscent of the triumphant host arrayed in white - the 144,000 - of Revelation 7:4-8. The reference to “**man’s measurement**” is intended to assure the reader that although the calculation is being made by an angel it, nonetheless, conforms to the ordinary human standards which men can understand. “*The measurements taken by angelic hands are such as are in common use among men; no fantastic standards are to be employed by the reader.*” (Swete, p. 290) The language is similar to that of Revelation 13:18’s description of the number of the beast - “**for it is a man’s number.**” Dr. Franzmann observes:

“The ‘great high wall’ (vs.12) seems in comparison with the other dimensions strangely small (only 216 feet tall). The dimension is symbolic rather than descriptive. The number 144 is one of the many multiples of 12 which abound in the description of the city as the home of the enlarged 12 tribes, and the puny scale of the wall indicates that it serves not as a defense (since all God’s enemies lie conquered) by merely as a delimiting enclosure.” (Franzmann, p. 141)



***“The Sacred Breastplate of the High Priest”
18th Century Bible Illustration***

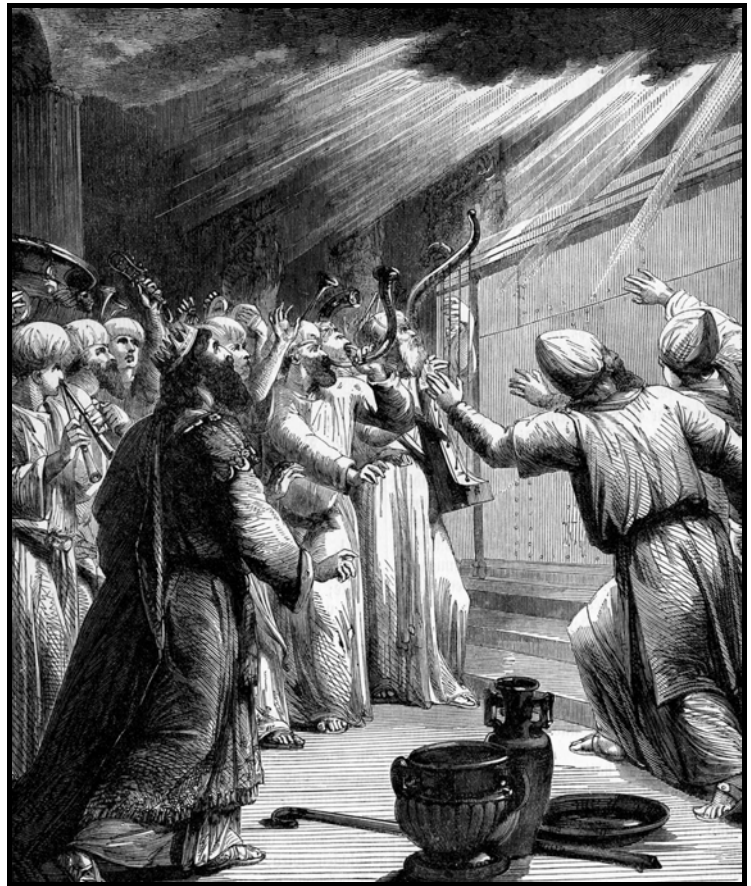
“The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. - Having described the dimensions of New Jerusalem, the seer now goes on to narrate the magnificent materials from which it is constructed. The overall image is one of resplendent glory and unimaginable beauty which reflect the majesty and the splendor of God. Franzmann summarizes:

“Though the wall is slight it is precious and splendid, built of the jasper which serves as a picture of the effulgent glory of God (cf. 11). And the city itself is a city of gold strangely and wondrously pellucid. The whole structure of the city is adazzle with

the brilliance and color of gems and gold, its foundations adorned with the jewels that once were set in gold filigree in the high priest's breastpiece (Exodus 28:17-20), its twelve gates each a single pearl, its streets of shimmering transparent gold." (Franzmann, pp. 141-142)

“Jasper” is a sparkling, diamond-like crystal. The construction of New Jerusalem’s wall symbolizes the radiance of God’s glory which surrounds and characterizes the Holy City (cf. Revelation 4:3; 21:11). John’s description repeatedly emphasizes purity and transparency - **“the city was made of pure gold, as pure as glass;”** (vs.18), **“the street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass** (vs. 21). This is designed to remind the reader that the glorious light of New Jerusalem is reflected not inherent. The true glory of this splendid place is the presence of God in her midst and that divine presence is the source of her radiance.

As noted above, the jewels which comprise the city’s twelve foundations are similar to those on the breastplate of the high priest, with some variation. Eight of the twelve stones match (cf. Exodus 28:17-20; 39:8-14). The discrepancy in the remaining four may be the result of variations in terminology. The stones on the high priest’s vestments were a glittering reminder that he stood before the Lord on behalf of all the people of God. The greatest privilege of the high priest was to stand in the immediate presence of God before the sacred ark in the Holy of Holies. In New Jerusalem that privilege is extended to all God’s people who in Christ have become - **“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God**



“The Glory of the Lord Filling the Temple of Solomon”
19th Century Bible Illustration



“The Adoration of the Lamb” by Rudolf Schärer

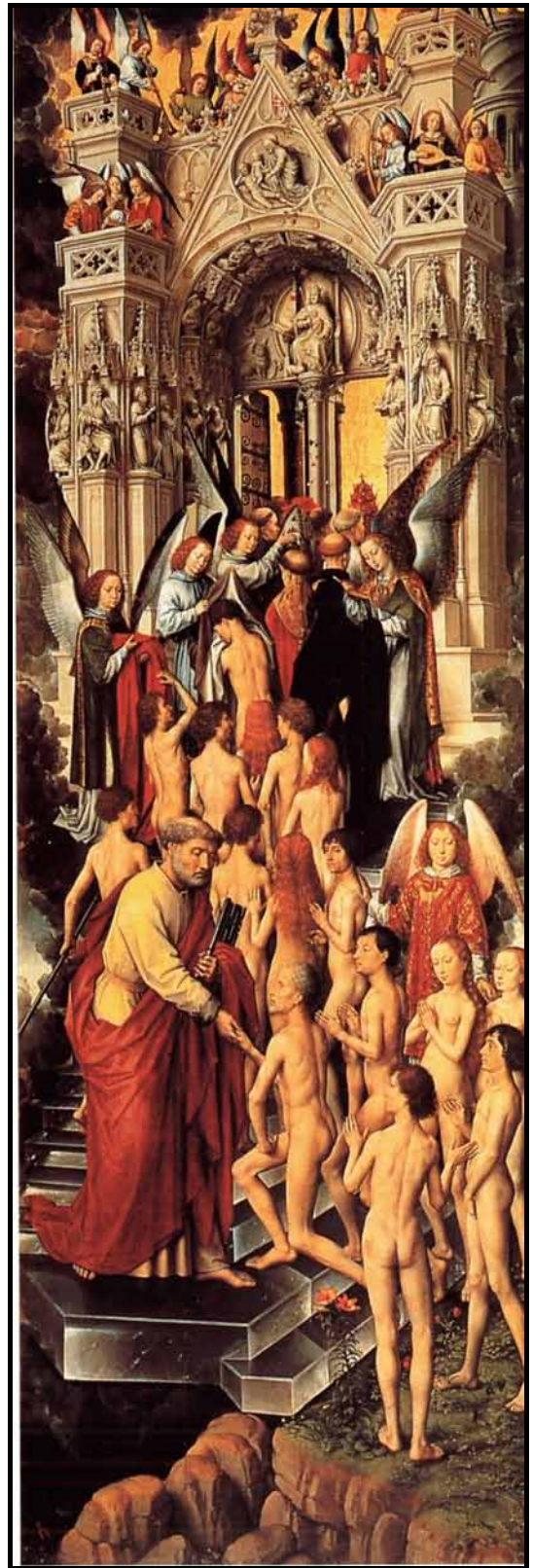
through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:9,5).

The twelve foundation stones include: (1) jasper - a clear, diamond-like crystal; (2) sapphire - a sky blue gem sometimes flecked with gold; (3) chalcedony - a green agate found near the Greek city of Chalcedon in Asia Minor; (4) emerald - a clear green gemstone; (5) sardonyx - a white stone with even layers of bright red; (6) carnelian - a bright red stone similar to a ruby; (7) chrysolite - a stone of golden color; (8) beryl - a opaque blue or sea green stone; (9) topaz - a gold-green gem; (10) chrysoprase a translucent pale green jewel similar to beryl; (11) jacinth - similar to the modern sapphire, clear and deep blue in color; and, (12) amethyst a brilliant violet or purple gemstone.

“The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.” - Heaven’s famous “pearly gates” are surely the best known feature of John’s magnificent vision. Pearls were among the most precious treasures of the Roman world. Jesus uses the pearl as the treasure of great price for which a man would give up everything he owned (Matthew 13:45-46). Long before, God had promised that the gates of restored Jerusalem would be precious jewels: *“I will make your*

battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your wall of precious stones.” (Isaiah 54:12) John describes the fulfillment of that prophecy on a scale that overwhelms the human imagination, each gate tower fashioned from a single massive pearl. The theme of royal luxury continues as we pass through the great pearl gates to the city’s main thoroughfare. *“The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.”* The Greek (“plateia” - literally an adjective “broad or wide” whose use alone implies the noun “hodos” - “way”) is singular. It may be used to refer to a major street or plaza or collectively to all the streets of the city, viewing the entire network of streets as one extended reality. Once again, the text notes the particularly fine nature of the gold from this street is fashioned - *“pure gold, like transparent glass.”* Nothing in the old creation could compare will gold so pure and precious. Lenski adds an important word of caution about the symbolic nature of this awesome vision:

“The material of which the city is built is precious and beautiful beyond all imagination. All of it is pure gold and priceless jewels and pearls. Silver is ignored because it was regarded as being too tawdry and cheap. This is not gold as we see it in great government vaults, but everything is made of gold save where jewels and pearls are seen. These are not jewels and pearls as we know them, but are tremendous in size, vast foundation stones and doors that are each made of a single pearl. Stop imagining. Eye hath not seen what God has prepared for those who love Him! All is intended to be humanly unimaginable. All of this language is human symbolism which means that the half has not been told. All of this is only a dim shadow of the reality; it multiplies beyond conception the precious material of which we have bits on



“The Redeemed Entering the Gates of Heaven” by Hans Memling

this old earth, multiplies it beyond all bounds in order to give us at least a faint inkling of the infinite reality of what the Eternal City or union with God in the new world means.” (Lenski, pp. 638-639)



“The Dedication of Solomon’s Temple” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful and deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” - In the present reality, no sinful human being can endure the majestic glory of the holy God. To Moses on Sinai God had declared: ***“You cannot see My face for no one may see Me and live.”*** (Exodus 33:20). Isaiah had fallen down before God’s throne and had cried out in despair: ***“Woe to me. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!”*** (Isaiah 6:5). But in the new heaven and earth, man -

cleansed from his sin by the blood of Christ - is banished from God's glorious presence no more. This joyous truth is indicated by the absence of a temple in the golden city. A church is place where God's people may gather to worship Him. A temple, on the other hand, is the place where God Himself deigns to dwell. In his eloquent prayer at the dedication of the first temple, Solomon acknowledged this reality: ***"I have built a magnificent temple for You, a place for You to dwell forever...But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain You."*** (2 Chronicles 6:1,18). God's presence within the temple of Solomon was indicated by the visible presence of the Shekinah glory above the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. (2 Chronicles 7:1-3) According to His Word and promise, the Temple became the nexus of God and His people. Again, Solomon reflects this confidence in his dedicatory prayer:

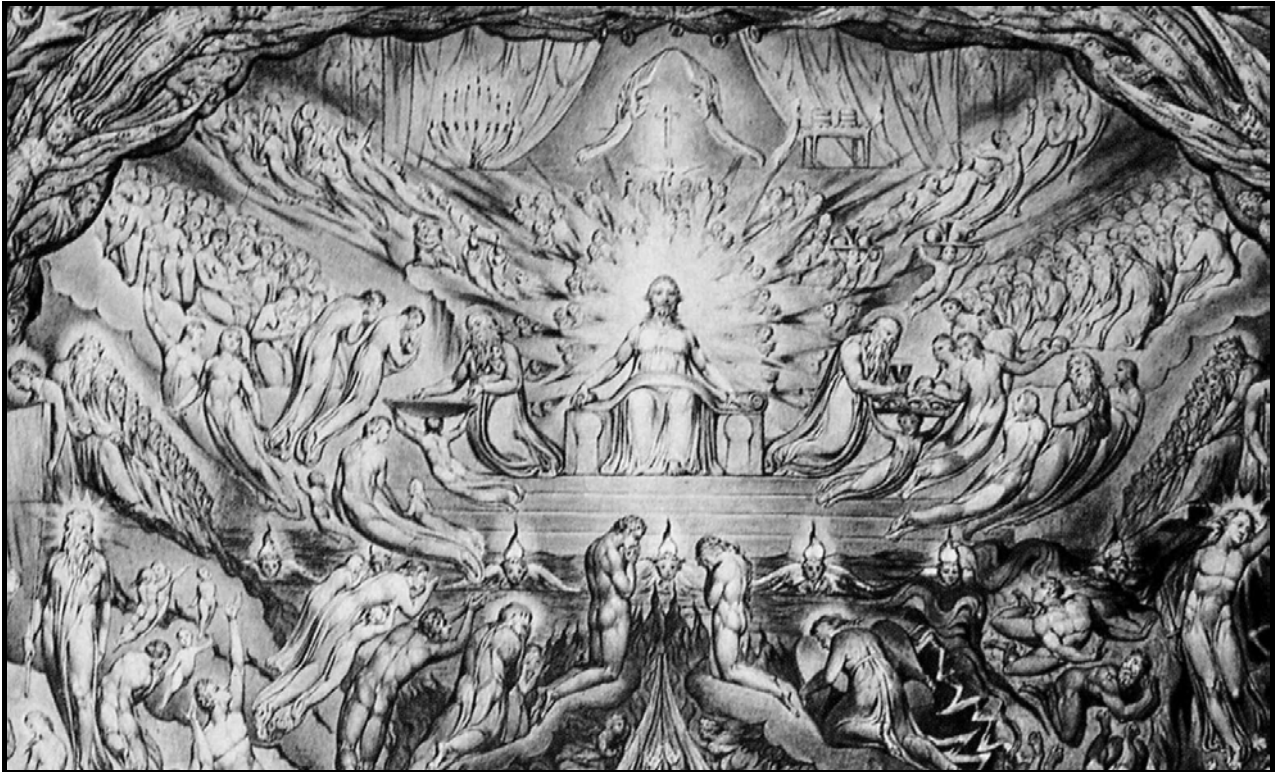
"Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your presence. May Your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which You said You would put Your name there. May You



"The Call of Isaiah" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

hear the prayer Your servant prays toward this place. Hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.” (2 Chronicles 6:19-21)

In this sense, the entire city has been transformed into a temple, a place where God deigns to dwell in the midst of His people. Thus the text asserts - *“the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”* The barriers and boundaries are gone and the original harmony and fellowship of Eden has been perfectly restored.



“The Glory of God Gives It Light” - Detail from “The Last Judgment” by William Blake

“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” - The imagery shifts to reiterate the point with the assertion that not only the temple but also the sun and the moon will be superfluous in New Jerusalem. *“John is not supplying his readers with information about future astrological changes but setting forth by means of accepted apocalyptic imagery the splendor which will radiate from the presence of God and the Lamb.”* (Mounce, p. 384) Isaiah had foretold: *“The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory.”* (Isaiah 60:19) The equation of God’s presence with

light is common throughout Scripture. In the prologue to his Gospel, John uses the same theme to illustrate the significance of the incarnation of Christ:

“In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it...The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world...The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:5,9,14)

The brightness of this light will reach out to embrace all the redeemed - ***“The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.”*** Once more the text echoes the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 60:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” (Isaiah 60:1-3)



“The Star in the East” by Edward Burne Jones



*“The Adoration of the Magi”
by Albrecht Dürer*

The fulfillment of this prophetic promise was previewed in the journey of the wise men from the East to Bethlehem (cf. Matthew 2:1-12). The language stresses the worldwide scope of the plan of salvation. This emphasis is consistent throughout Revelation. *“The nations”* and *“the kings of the earth”* are *“the glorified saints”* (Lenski, p. 644) from every place and time. In Revelation 5:9 the 24 elders had rejoiced before the Lamb because *“You were slain and with Your blood You have purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”* The countless host before the throne and the Lamb included men *“from every nation, tribe, people and language.”* (Revelation 7:9) These victorious saints *“will reign forever and ever”* (Revelation 22:5; cf. also 5:10; 20:4,6) and are thus rightly referred to as *“the kings of the earth.”* The

phrase *“The kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it”* does not refer to physical wealth or earthly treasure. Such a view would be completely inconsistent with the symbolic nature of the text. What earthly treasure could even remotely compare to the grandeur of this golden city? Lenski seems to be on the right track when he argues: *“This is saying in symbolical language what is expressed literally in 14:13: “For their works follow with them.” The glory and the honor of the nations and of the kings are all that they wrought for the Lamb while they were here on the old earth.”* (Lenski, p. 645) The concept is repeated in Verse 26 - *“The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.”*

“On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night there.” - The splendor and joy of New Jerusalem are eternal. No enemies remain to threaten or

oppose. The gates of this great city need never be closed to insure the security of its blessed inhabitants. Their security is absolute for it rests in the constant presence of God. Once again, this symbolic language should not be understood to indicate that the cycle of day and night will not exist in heaven. *“Night”* in this context represents the perils and terrors of sin. In New Jerusalem these will no longer exist.

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does whatever is shameful or deceitful...” - The text defines the nature of the threat that has been eliminated to achieve the perfect security of the saints. Neither taint of evil nor corruption of sin shall mar or imperil the eternal glory of the saints. Those who have indulged in such things are gone forever, banished to the torments of unending hellfire. Only those who have been forgiven and cleansed, *“whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* shall dwell within this glorious city. This glorious scene is captured beautifully in Phillip Nicolai’s magnificent chorale *“Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying!”* -



*“The Watchmen on the Heights Are Crying”
by Rudolf Schüfer*

*“Wake, awake, for night is flying.
The watchmen on the heights are crying,
“Awake Jerusalem, arise.”*

Midnight hears the welcome voices,

And at their thrilling cry rejoices. O where are you, ye virgins wise?

The bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take.

Alleluia! With joyful care, yourselves prepare. To greet the Bridegroom who is near.

*“Now let all the heavens adore Thee, let men and angels sing before Thee,
With harp and cymbal’s clearest tone.*

*Of one pearl each shining portal, where, singing with the choir immortal,
We gather round Thy radiant throne.*

*No vision ever brought, no ear hath ever caught, such great glory;
Therefore will we, eternally, sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee.”*



“The River of the Water of Life” by Jean Duvet



“The River of the Water of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

Paradise Restored

Revelation 22:1-5

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. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.

“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. - The history of humanity comes full circle in the seventh scene of Revelation’s seventh vision. Man was created to live forever in the complete happiness of God’s presence. The Garden of Eden was prepared as the perfect home for the unique creature fashioned in the image and after the likeness of God. Man’s sin shattered the harmony of the original creation. Fallen Adam was banished from the presence of

God and expelled from the perfection of Eden. The fiery swords of the cherubim barred the way to the Garden, lest man return in search of the tree of life (cf. Genesis 3:23-24). In the immediate aftermath of the Fall, God promised that He Himself would act to undo the damage that had been done. Through the “*Descendant*” of the woman He would crush the satanic serpent’s head and destroy the dominion of sin, death, and the devil once and for all (cf. Genesis 3:15). That first Gospel promise was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John’s final vision anticipates the ultimate fulfillment of that ancient promise with the restoration of the immortality and harmony of Eden. At the end of time, we return again to time’s beginning. It is as Jesus promised in words recorded by Barnabas, St. Paul’s missionary companion: “*The Lord says, “Behold I will make the last like the first.”*” (The Epistle of Barnabas 6:13). The theme of Eden’s restoration is also present in the



“Adam and Eve in Paradise” by Lucas Cranach



“Mankind Barred from the Garden of Eden” by J. James Tissot

Old Testament Apocrypha. The *“Testament of Dan”* (c. 110 B.C.) declares: *“And the saints shall rest in Eden, and in the New Jerusalem shall the righteous rejoice, and it shall be unto the glory of God forever.”* (Testament of Dan 2:12).

The specific imagery of John’s vision - the river of the water of life flowing from the heart of New Jerusalem and the Tree of Life with its healing fruit - is derived from the prophecy of Ezekiel and Zechariah. Ezekiel reports:

“And I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced the east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar...Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river...Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows...Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear because the water from the sanctuary flows from them. Their fruit will serve for food and their



“Ezekiel’s Vision of the River of the Water of Life Flowing from the Temple” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

leaves for healing.” (Ezekiel 47:1-12)

Zechariah foretells the worldwide continuous flow of a great stream of *“living water”* from Jerusalem: *“On that day living water will flow from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.”* (Zechariah 4:8; cf. also Joel 3:2). John’s imagery recalls the abundant water supply of the Garden of Eden which is carefully described in the Book of Genesis:

“A river watering the garden flowed from Eden and from there it divided; it had four headstreams. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; pearls and onyx are also found there.) The

name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the name of the fourth river is the Euphrates.” (Genesis 2:10-14)

The mention of gold and jewels in the region of Eden further reinforces the link between John’s vision of New Jerusalem and the lost Paradise of man’s beginning. Ezekiel also describes Eden in the context of precious stones and gold: *“You were in Eden the Garden of God; every precious stone adorned you; ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold.”* (Ezekiel 28:13).



“The Water and the Tree of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

“The water of life” which flows in this magnificent stream represents the abundant eternal life which God bestows upon His saints in Christ (Cf. John 4:10-14; Revelation 7:17; 21:6). *“What is shown to John is the whole tide of eternal life going out from the throne, or the eternal power of God and the Lamb. It is the life of glory for the blest who are now in eternal glorious union with God and the Lamb.”*



“Adam and Eve With God in Paradise” by E.M. Lilien

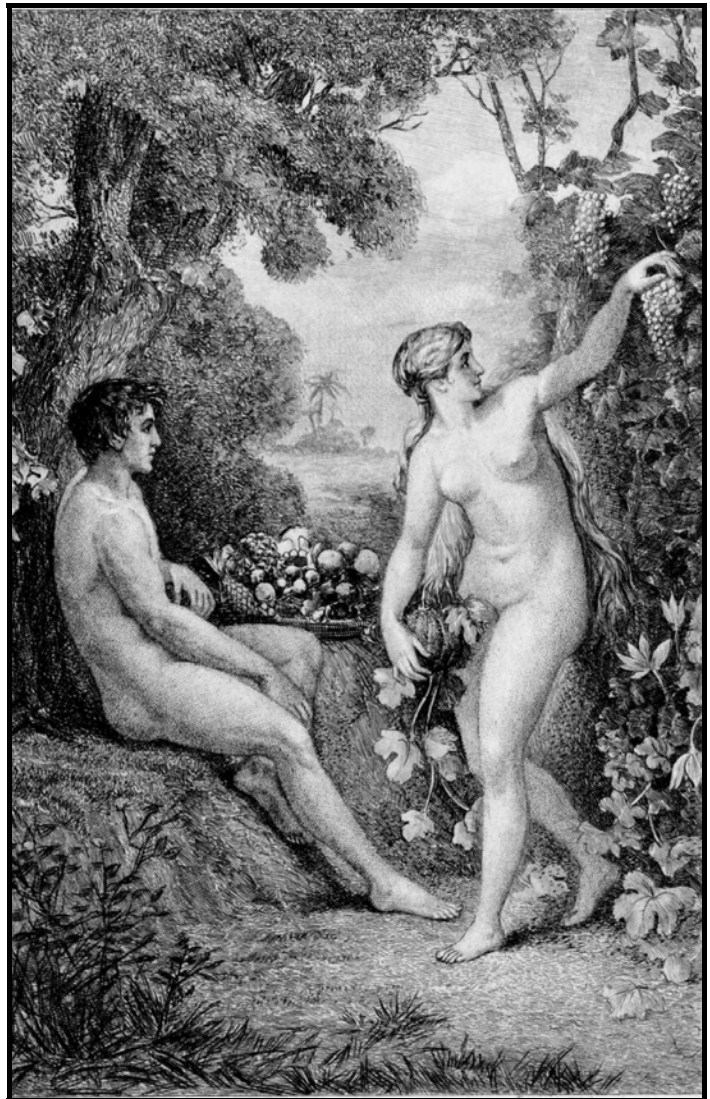
(Lenski, p. 649) The water of this river is completely pure, free from pollution or contamination of any kind - *“as clear as crystal.”* The Greek text literally reads *“as bright as a crystal.”* (*“lampron hos krystallon”*). *“Together they envision the river as a sort of shimmering and sparkling stream of water as it passes over mountain rocks.”* (Thomas, p. 482) The glistening beauty of the water reflects the diamond brilliance of the entire city (cf. Revelation 21:11).

“Down the middle of the great street of the city.” - The river of the water of life is the focal point of New Jerusalem. Its course follows that of the city’s major street. If the text is to be understood as the NIV’s translation suggests, then the grammar of the Greek text is somewhat awkward. It is grammatically preferable to follow the translation suggested by Lenski and Brighton which connects this phrase with the next sentence as the beginning of Verse 2 - *“In between her main street and the river, on this side and on that, is the tree of life...”* Dr. Lenski describes the scene in this

way: *“In other words there is a beautiful park running through the entire city with the avenue on one side and the crystalline river on the other.”* (Lenski p. 650)

“On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” - The NIV’s translation is not only grammatically awkward, as noted above, it also necessitates the division of the Tree of Life to enable it to stand on both sides of the river. While this arrangement would be consistent with Ezekiel’s vision in which a forest of trees blankets both sides of the river (cf. Ezekiel 47:7), it tends to obscure John’s clear reference to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis tells the history of the creation of humanity and the placement of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Among all of the magnificent trees of the Garden two stand out for particular attention. These two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - evidently standing side by side - are strategically located ***“in the middle of the garden”*** (Genesis 2:9), its focus and its heart. Together, they define the nature of man and his existence. God created man to live forever in the perfect happiness of His presence. The Tree of Life was the physical sign of that blessed immortality. It was certainly not some magical property inherent in the tree itself which enabled it to convey the gift of eternal life, but the power and the promise of God which offered the gift in the fruit of the tree. In the letter to the church in Ephesus, Christ, as the Lord of Life, asserts His prerogative to grant the gift of eternal life with reference to Eden’s tree: ***“To him who***



“In the Garden of Eden” by Thomas Stothard

overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7) In this sense, the function of the fruit of the Tree of Life was very much like that of the sacraments of the New Testament church. This insight was first expressed by St. Augustine:

“And though they decayed not with years nor drew nearer death - a condition secured to them by God’s marvelous grace by the tree of life in the midst of paradise - yet they took other nourishment...They were nourished then by other fruit which they took that their animal bodies might not suffer the discomfort of hunger and thirst; but they tasted the tree of life that death might not steal upon them from any quarter, and that they might not, spent with age, decay. Other fruits were, so to speak, their nourishment, but this, their sacrament.” (Augustine, *The City of God*, XII, 20, p. 430)

H.C. Leupold draws the comparison between the Tree of Life and the sacraments in greater detail:



***“The Temptation in the Garden of Eden”
by Rudolf Schäfer***

“We have an analogy to these cases in the matter of the sacraments. As in the sacraments by virtue of the divine Word the visible means become the vehicles of divine grace, so here, by virtue of the divine Word, which designates the one tree as the tree of life, life can in reality be imparted by its use when and under whatever circumstances God decrees...This sinless state would have received fuller confirmation in man’s physical being by the use of the tree of life, the eating of whose fruit would have communicated to those using it in faith rare benefits even for the body. So the tree is rightly regarded as sacramental in a sense.” (Leupold, pp. 120-121)

There have always been those who dismiss the Tree of Life as the stuff of myth and legend. They reject the very idea of a tree whose fruit bestows eternal life as a blatant example of primitive superstition in Scripture, borrowed, no doubt, from the pagan myths of ancient

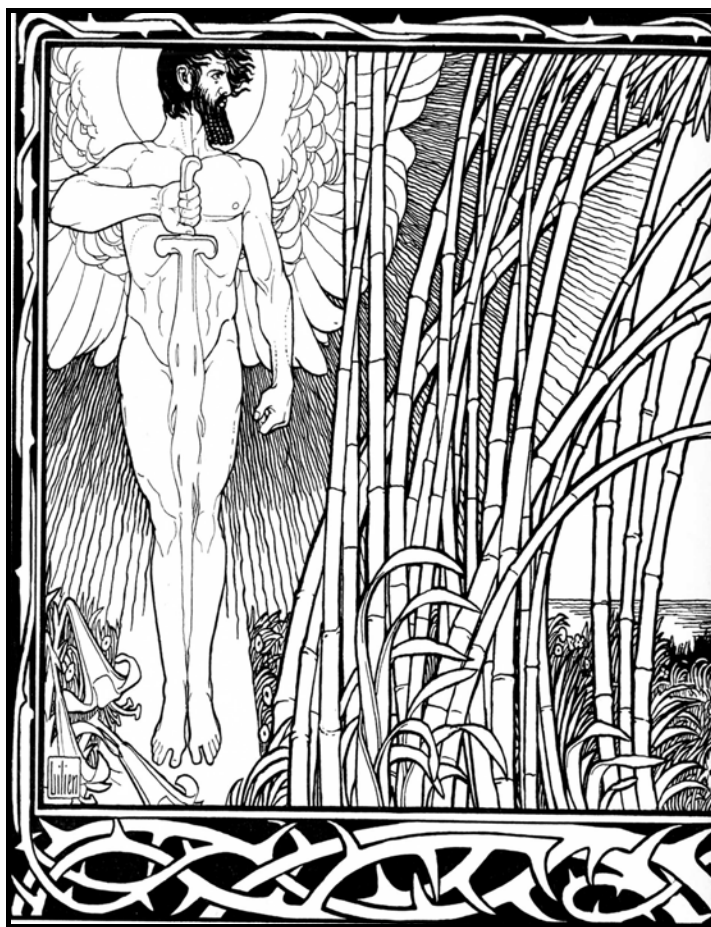
Mesopotamia. To such sceptics Martin Luther asserts the power of the Word of God:

*“How did a physical food or fruit have the power to preserve a body in this way that in the course of time it did not become inactive or sickly? But the answer is easy (Psalm 33:9): **“He spoke, and it was done.”** For if God can make bread out of stone, why couldn’t He also preserve our powers by means of a fruit?”* (Luther, AE, p. 92)

The use of the Tree of Life as an image of the eternal reward of the saints can also be observed in the apocryphal writings of the inter-testamental period and the first century. In 2 Esdras, God promises Ezra: *“The tree of life shall give them fragrant perfume and they shall neither toil nor become weary...It is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided and a rest is appointed.”* (2 Esdras 2:12; 8:52; cf. also 2 Maccabees 18:16). 1 Enoch describes the Tree of Life as *“a fragrant tree”* which, because of sin, has been set aside until the time of judgment. When the Lord returns the Tree of Life will be restored to the people of God again:

“And as for this fragrant tree, not a single human being has the authority to touch it until the great judgment..this is for the righteous and the pious and the elect who will be presented with its fruit for life. He will plant it in the direction of the northeast upon the holy place - in the direction of the house of the Lord, the eternal King.” (1 Enoch 25:4-5)

There is a deliberate linguistic anomaly in the Greek text of this verse. John uses the noun *“xulon”* four times in this chapter to refer to the *“tree”* of life. The same noun is used in Revelation 2:7, Revelation’s only other reference to the Tree of Life. Ordinarily, this word is not used in reference to living wood or trees. That is the



“The Guardian of the Tree of Life” by E.M. Lilien



“The Cross as the Tree of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

Greek noun “*dendron*.” “*Xulon*,” on the other hand, is characteristically used to describe dead wood, that is, trees that have been cut down and converted into lumber. “*Xulon*” is the word consistently used in the Gospels in reference to the cross (i.e. Matthew 26:47; Mark 14:43; cf. also Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24). John’s use of the term here, to describe the Tree of Life, is clearly designed to link the cross with the Tree of Life thereby making the theological point that the cross of Christ, the tree upon which the Savior offered His life for the sins of the world, has become the new Tree of Life for fallen humanity. Gregory of Nazianzus, a fourth century teacher of the church, asserts the same connection: “*Christ is brought up to the tree and nailed to it - yet by this tree of life He restores us.*” (NPNF,7, p. 309) Stephan Starke, a contemporary hymn writer, expresses this concept in his 1993 hymn “*The Tree of Life.*”

*“The tree of life with every good in Eden’s holy orchard stood,
And of its fruit, so pure and sweet, God let the man and woman eat.
Yet in this garden also grew another tree of which they knew;
Its lovely limbs with fruit adorned against whose eating God had warned.*

*The stillness of that sacred grove was broken as the serpent strove
With tempting voice to Eve beguile, and Adam too by sin defile.
O day of sadness when the breath of fear and darkness, doubt and death,
Its awful poison first displayed within the world so newly made.*

What mercy God showed to our race, a plan of rescue by His grace:

*In sending One from woman's seed, the One to fill our greatest need -
For on a tree uplifted high, His only Son for sin would die,
Would drink the cup of scorn and dread to crush the ancient serpent's head.*

*Now from that tree of Jesus' shame flows life eternal in His Name;
For all who trust and will believe, salvation's living fruit receive.
And of this fruit so pure and sweet the Lord invites the world to eat,
To find within this cross of wood the tree of life with every good.*

The dual symbolism of the river of ***“the water of life”*** and ***“the tree of life”*** serves to emphasize the rich abundance of this eternal life as the defining characteristic of the existence of the saints in New Jerusalem (cf. Revelation 22:14,19).

“Bearing twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit every month.” - The message of abundance is reinforced by the fruitful variety and fertility of the Tree of Life. The text literally says that the Tree will bear ***“twelve fruit.”*** This could refer to an ongoing harvest of fruit throughout the year, as in the NIV's translation ***“twelve crops of fruit.”*** It is more likely, since the phrase which follows already makes that assertion - (***“bearing its fruit every month”***) that the Tree's twelve fruit refers to a rich and diverse variety of fruit, produced on a continuous basis throughout the year. The image parallels Ezekiel 47:12 -

“Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

In any case, the dual use of ***“twelve”*** - the number of the Church - further reinforces the



“The History of Paradise” by Hartman Schedel



“The History of Paradise” by Jost Amman

identification of New Jerusalem with the people of God. *“Twelve fruits is again the symbolical number twelve referring to the Una Sancta.”* (Lenski, p. 651)

“And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

- John follows the imagery of Ezekiel in designating the leaves of the Tree of Life as the source of *“the healing of the nations.”* The Greek word used to describe the medicinal effect is *“therapeian”* from which the English word *“therapy”* is derived. Clearly, in this instance, the activity described is not ongoing throughout eternity. There will be no sickness or pain which require healing in New Jerusalem. Instead, the image refers to the permanent absence of such things in a manner similar to the

wiping away of tears (Revelation 21:4) which indicates the permanent absence of grief and sorrow. *“The nations”* are the beneficiaries of this healing effect. This is the same phrase used to describe believers in 21:26 - *“The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.”* All the people of God from every place and time are included in this magnificent vision of the blessedness which The Savior has won for His own.

“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will

reign forever and ever.” - The curse of God rested upon Adam and his descendants because of their sinful disobedience (cf. Genesis 3:14-19). God sent His only-begotten Son into this sin cursed world to lift that deadly curse and its consequences. St. Paul uses similar language in describing the Savior’s work of salvation: **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us., for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on the tree.”** (Galatians 3:13). It is significant to note that this passage uses the Greek word “*xulon*” in reference to the cross. Now through the cross of Christ mankind’s access to the “*xulon*” of life is restored forever in New Jerusalem. The removal of sin’s curse is indicated most importantly by the presence of **“the throne of God and of the Lamb”** in the midst of the city. The barrier wall of separation has been removed and the redeemed are restored to the harmony with God for which humanity was created in the beginning. All who dwell within this place have constant and immediate access to the divine presence. The unity of the Father and the Son and the full divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God



“Adam and Eve Driven Forth From Paradise” - Auguste Zwiller

are affirmed by the joint presence of “*God and of the Lamb*” upon a single throne. They rule and reign together as one. The same truth is reinforced by the use of singular pronouns in reference to the Father and the Lamb in the phrases which follow - “*His servants will serve Him. They will see His face and His name...*”.

Those who will enjoy the wonder of God’s presence are called “*His servants.*” The English translation mitigates the force of the original “*hoi douloi autou*” - literally “*His slaves.*” Every believer is a “*slave*” of Jesus Christ. We are no longer our own. We belong to Him, having been bought and paid for with His holy precious blood and



“*The Throne of God and of the Lamb with the Fountain of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life*” - *Flemish Apocalypse*

with His innocent suffering and death. This is the same term with which John identified himself in Revelation 1:1. While the world may scorn such slavery, the believer joyfully acknowledges that being a slave of the Creator God is the greatest blessing and the only possible way to experience genuine freedom. Those who are not slaves of God in Christ must remain in fatal bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. The Greek verb which describes the service of Christ’s slaves is “*latreuo*” which can refer to the priestly service of the temple. Thus the ancient promise of Isaiah is fulfilled: “*And you will be called the priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God*” (Isaiah 61:6).

“*They will see His face and His Name will be on their foreheads.*” - No sinful man can

behold the face of God and live (cf. Notes, p. 564). And yet the text specifically declares that the saints in heaven will “*see His face.*” The reality of the “*beatific vision*” - the sight which causes happiness - indicates the residents of New Jerusalem have been cleansed from sin and its guilt. David had joyfully anticipated this glorious sight: “*And I - in righteousness I will see Your face: when I awake I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness.*” (Psalm 17:15). Note the connection between “*righteousness*” and the sight of God’s face. Only those who have been justified by grace through faith in Christ will be able to stand in the immediate presence of God. Thus, at the moment of Christ’s death upon the cross, the great curtain of the Temple, the symbol of sinful man’s separation from the holy God, was torn apart, signifying that our access to the Father had been restored (cf. Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 6:19) This vision of New Jerusalem promises the perfect realization of that dream in the eternal Paradise of God.

In the vision of the seven seals, the angel placed the seal of God upon the 144,000 to set them apart and protect them as a people belonging to God (Revelation 7:1-4). Later the saints are described as those “*who had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.*” (Revelation 14:1) In brutal parody of that relationship, the Antichrist had branded his slaves with the mark of the beast - the name of the beast or 666, the number of his name, on their foreheads or their



*“The Rending of the Temple Veil”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

hands (cf. Revelation 13:16-18). Christ promised the church in Philadelphia that those who overcame would be blessed to bear the name of God: ***“I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven from My God; and I will also write on him My new name.”*** (Revelation 3:12) Now, once again, the intimate fellowship between God with His people is signified by the inscription of His name upon their foreheads - ***“His name will be on their foreheads.”***

“There will be no more night. They will not need the light...” - This verse restates and amplifies the assertion of the preceding chapter - ***“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp...for there will be no night there.”*** (Revelation 21:23,25). That which was previously asserted as the general condition of the holy city is now more directly applied to those who dwell within the new Jerusalem. There will be no need for artificial (***“the light of a lamp”***) or planetary (***“the light of the sun”***) illumination in the new heaven and earth. They will have been rendered obsolete and superfluous by the glorious presence of ***“the Lord God.”*** Once again, this is not a literal description of the physical conditions that will prevail in the Paradise of God. This is imagery designed to stress the blessings of the redeemed who will dwell forever in the immediate presence of God. ***“This does not necessarily mean that there will be no physical sun and moon in the new heaven and earth, but rather that God and the Lamb would be the true light that would enlighten and inspire His people.”*** (Brighton, p. 630) The prophet Zechariah had used similar language to describe the wonder of eternity with God: ***“On that day there will be no light, no cold nor frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime - a day known to the Lord. When evening comes there will be light.”*** (Zechariah 14:6-7)

“And they will reign forever and ever.” - The culmination of God’s blessing upon the glorified saints in heaven is the privilege of participation in the eternal reign of Christ the King. Those who are the servant/slaves of the Lamb (cf. vs. 3) shall rule as kings. The Greek verb ***“basileusousin”*** literally reads ***“they will be kings.”*** The dramatic contrast between slave and king in this context is clear and deliberate. Those who ask, ***“Over whom shall these kings reign?”*** are too caught up in the ways of the old order to imagine the magnificence of the new. ***“In this kingdom where god is King, where the Lamb is King, we shall be kings with Them, a kingdom of kings unlike any that ever existed on the old earth (with only a king and subjects)...a kingdom made up entirely of kings with a King of kings.”*** (Lenski, p. 655)



“The New Jerusalem in Heaven” by Rudolf Schäfer

Excursus - The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven

1. Introduction - Eternal Life in Three Modes

The breathtaking scenes of Revelation’s final vision form an appropriately magnificent climax to the Biblical doctrine of heaven. Scripture’s assertion of a blessed eternal life in heaven for all who persevere in the faith to the end and are acknowledged by Christ at the last judgment as His own is emphatic and consistent. ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16; cf. also Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; John 5:24; 6:27,40,54; 11:25-26; 17:3; Acts 13:48;



"The Soul Carried to Heaven" by Adolphe William Bouguereau

Romans 6:23; 1 Timothy 6:12). The Bible contends that the believer receives the gift of eternal life here in time by faith (John 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26; 1 John 5:10-12) and has thus already become a citizen of the **"kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 13:24-50; 18:1-4; 19:14). Furthermore, every believer has the assurance that at the moment of physical death the soul immediately enters the presence of God in heaven there to joyfully await the great day of resurrection (Matthew 25:34; Luke 16:22; 23:43; Acts 7:59; Philippians 1:23; Revelation 6:9-11; 20:4-6). Finally, the Word of God promises that when Jesus returns in glory and power we will live with God forever in the new heaven and earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21,22). In this context, Dr. Brighton offers the helpful insight that eternal life is experienced in three modes. He defines a *"mode"* as *"a way of experiencing something, a particular form or manifestation of reality."*

"There is one eternal life which is a gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ. But the Scriptures testify that we experience this life everlasting in three different modes. That is, we experience eternal life in three different stages or periods of time and reality. The first mode of experiencing the gift of eternal life is in this mortal life

here on earth, but we experience it only by faith. The second mode or manner in which the same gift of eternal life is experienced is from our death until the end of the world as our souls are in heaven before God while our bodies lie in the graves. The third mode will commence at the resurrection of our bodies when in body and soul we will live forever with God in the new heaven and the new earth. However, there are not three different eternal lives, for it is the same life that is received and experienced in three ways, three modes.” (Brighton, *CTQ*, p. 300)



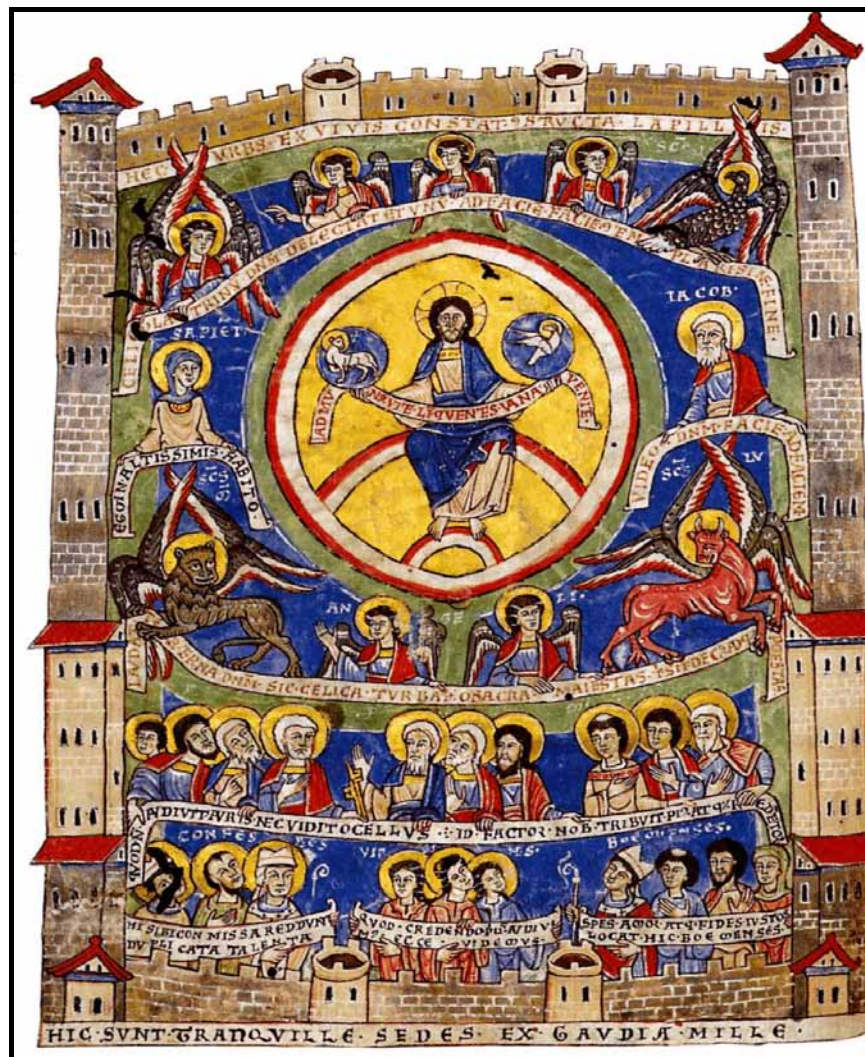
“The Courts of Heaven” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

2. The Linguistic Usage of the Word “Heaven”

The linguistic usage of the term “heaven” is similar in Hebrew (“*shemayim*”) and Greek (“*ouranos*”). In both instances, its etymology refers to height, that which is above or exalted. It can refer to the earth’s atmosphere (cf. 1 Kings 21:24; Deuteronomy 11:11; Acts 14:17; Isaiah 55:10; Daniel 4:23; Job 38:29; Psalm 135:7); to the celestial reaches of space occupied by the sun, the moon, and the stars (cf. Genesis 1;14-16; 22:17; Exodus 32:13; Psalm 19:1; Nehemiah 9:23; Jeremiah 33:25; Nahum 3:16); and, to the dwelling place of God and His angels (cf. Deuteronomy 26:15; Joshua 2:11; 1 Kings 8:30,39,43,49; Ezra 1:2; Isaiah 66:1; Daniel 2:28; Matthew 18:10; 22:30; 24:36; Mark 12:25; 13:32; Luke 2:15; 15:7,10; John 14:2; Acts 7:48). This threefold usage is reflected in St. Paul’s reference to God’s dwelling

place as *“the third heaven.”* (2 Corinthians 12:2; cf. also the Old Testament phrase - *“the highest heaven”* Deuteronomy 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 148:4). In this connection the Bible acknowledges the logical contradiction between the concept of divine omnipresence and a particular spatial location without attempting the logical reconciliation of the two ideas. For example, in his eloquent prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, wise King Solomon pleads:

“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple that I have built...Hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.” (1 Kings 8:27,30)



*“The New Jerusalem With the Trinity at Its Center”
12th Century Bohemian Apocalypse*

3. Heaven - The Promise of Life Eternal

As the dwelling place of God and His angels, heaven is also the focus of Scripture's promise of eternal life for believers both before and after Christ's second coming. The promises of God's Word assure believers that not even death itself can separate us from His love (Psalm 23:4; Romans 8:38) and that we will live with Him forever in heaven. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus urges those who endure hardship and persecution here on earth: ***"Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven."*** (Matthew 5:12). The Savior urges the rich young man who sought to inherit eternal life: ***"Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."*** (Mark 10:21; cf. Matthew 6:20; 19:21; Hebrews 10:34). St. Paul encourages the Colossians to anticipate ***"the hope that is stored up for you in heaven"*** (Colossians 1:5) and St. Peter praises God for His great gift of ***"an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade - kept in heaven for you."*** (1 Peter 1:4). The temporary earthly bodies in which we now dwell are contrasted with our eternal heavenly dwelling as Paul admonished the Corinthians to live confidently in Christ:

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling....we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (2 Corinthians 5:1-2,4)

The apostle also asserts his personal confidence that the joy of heaven awaits at the



"We Are Looking for the City That Is to Come"
by Rudolf Schäfer

end of all earthly suffering and persecution: ***“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom.”*** (2 Timothy 4:18)



“The Lord Upon His Throne” by William Blake

4. Heaven - To Live in the Presence of God

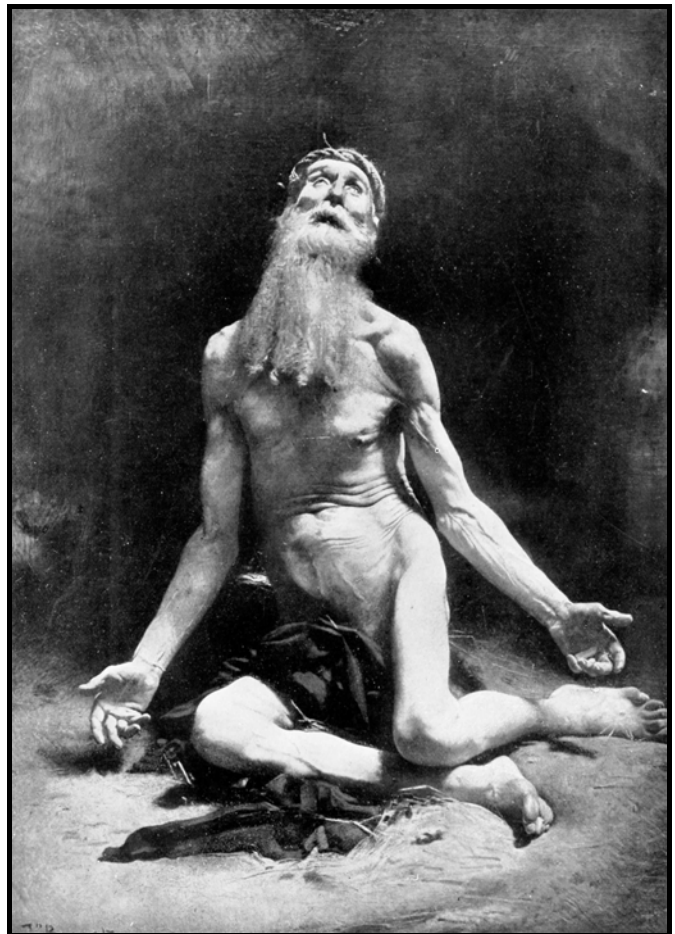
The nature of heaven as God’s dwelling place serves to define the essence of heavenly joy for the believer is the experience of God’s immediate presence. Christ, who has ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, promised His disciples:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father’s house there are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go an prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1-3)

So also the Psalmist anticipates: ***“You have made known to me the path of life; you***

will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand.” (Psalm 16:11). St. Paul concludes his description of our Lord’s triumphant judgment return with the same affirmation: *“We who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Revelation’s imagery conveys the same truth. The joy of the countless multitude arrayed in white before the throne of the Lamb is expressed in terms of their proximity to Christ: *“Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.”* (Revelation 7:15) The same intimate presence is conveyed in the vision of the New Jerusalem: *“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God.”* (Revelation 21:3-4). That which makes heaven “heaven” is the fact that it is the dwelling place of God.

Scripture often describes the blessing of God’s presence in terms of “*seeing God*” (Latin - “*visio dei*”). The patriarch Job declares: *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh will I see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes - I, and not another.”* (Job 19:25-27). Jesus promises *“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”* (Matthew 5:8). John assures us that in contrast to this era of faith, the day is coming when *“We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.”* (1 John 3:2) The Revelator reasserts that promise in his final vision: *“They will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads.”* (Revelation 22:4) Accordingly, the theologians speak of the believer’s experience of God’s



*“I Know That My Redeemer Lives”
The Confession of Job by Leon Bonnat*

presence as the *“beatific vision,”* that is, the *“sight which causes happiness.”* The great Lutheran theologian John Gerhard defines the blessedness of heaven with characteristic precision:

“Because God is the highest good, seeing Him is the means by which He communicates to the elect His goodness, His joy, and His sweetness in the highest degree...He is the fountain of every good and therefore of all bliss...All of the good things that belong to the blessed uniquely arise from and depend upon seeing God.”
(Hoenecke, p. 336)



*“Christ Victorious Over Death and the Grave”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

5. Heaven - Life Free from Sin and Its Curse

Given the limitations of our comprehension, the Bible tends to describe the blessedness of the saints in heaven negatively, that is, in terms of the total absence of sin, its causes, and its consequences. Isaiah eagerly anticipates the fulfillment of God’s purpose for His own and the ultimate demise of death, man’s ancient enemy:

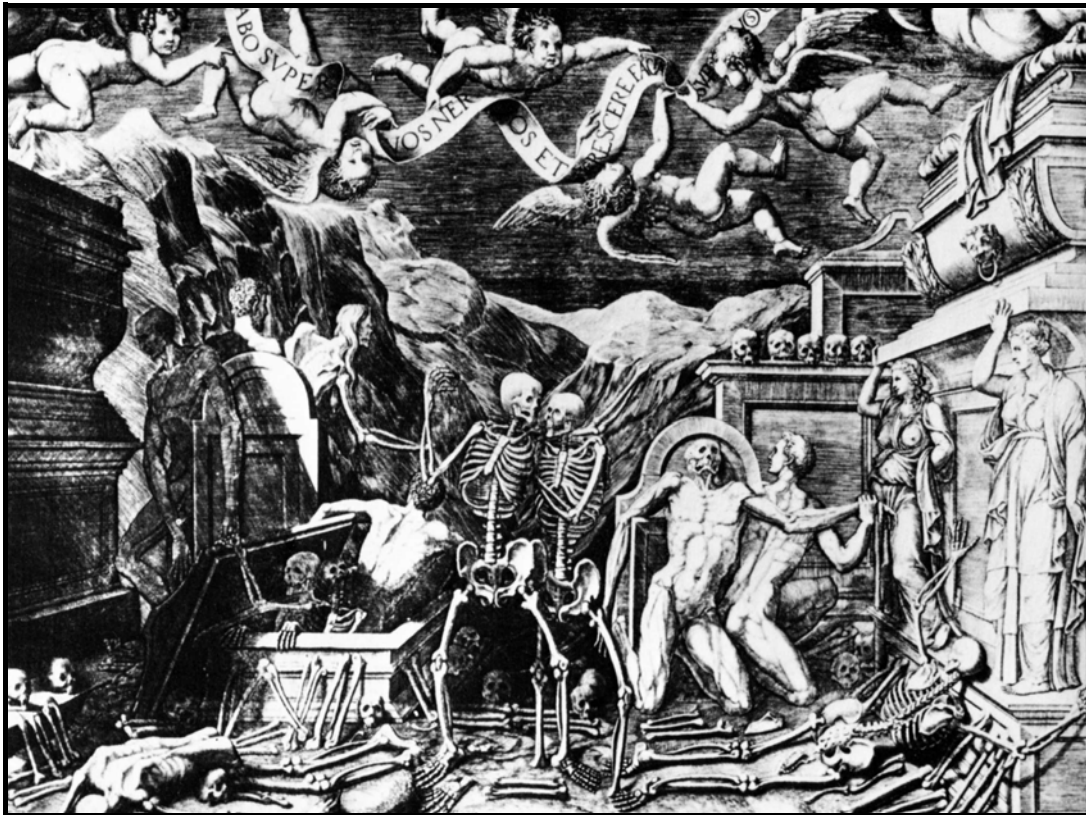
“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces, He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 25: 6-8)

St. Paul proclaims the glorious victory which God in Christ has won for all of His people in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter of the New Testament:

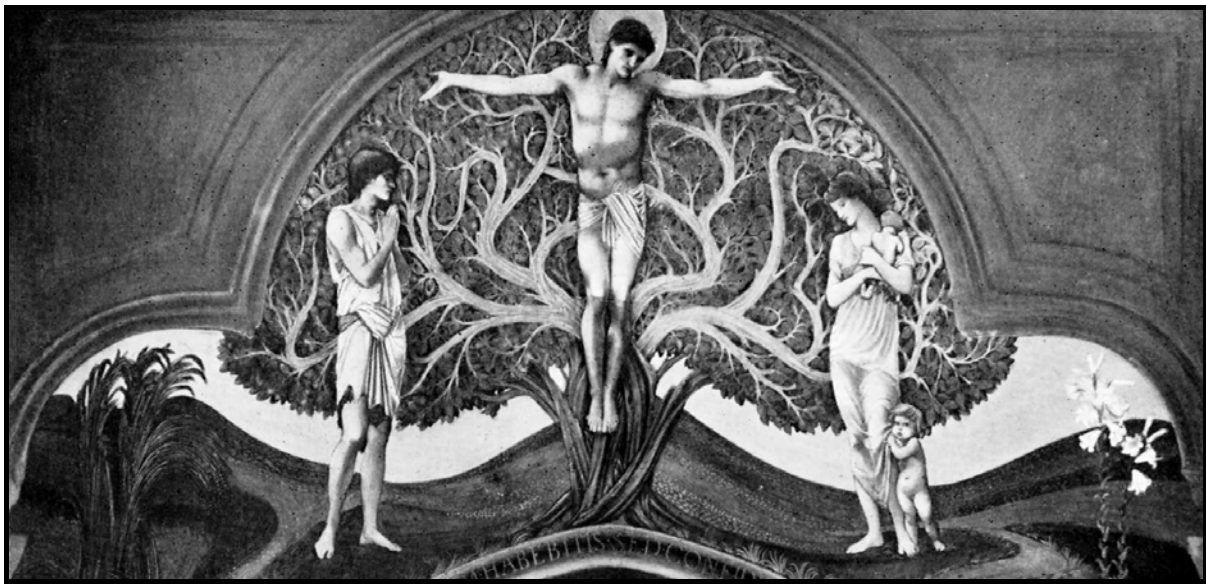
“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has clothed itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15: 51-57)

Revelation depicts death’s destruction in this graphic imagery:

“The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.” (Revelation 20:13-14).



“The Resurrection of the Dead” by Giorgio Ghisi



“The Tree of Life as the Cross Before Adam and Eve” by Edward Burne Jones

With death’s final termination, grief, suffering and sorrow will also come to an end. There will be no more hunger, thirst, or physical discomfort of any form. The curse will have been lifted. The *“bondage to decay”* (Romans 8:21) to which man and the entire physical universe had been subjected in the aftermath of the fall will have been removed forever. This glad refrain sounds throughout the Book of Revelation:

“Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:15-17; cf. Isaiah 49:10)

“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4)

“On either side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.” (Revelation 22:2-3)

6. Biblical Images of Heaven

The Bible uses a variety of earthly metaphors and images to depict the perfect joy and blessedness of heaven. Heaven is presented as a marriage feast in the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins and God's people are called to live in a state of constant readiness for Christ's return(Matthew 25:1-15). John celebrates the coming of ***“the wedding of the Lamb”*** and describes the church as a beautiful bride arrayed in ***“fine linen, bright and clean.”*** (Revelation 19:6-9). The rejoicing of heaven is often presented as a sumptuous banquet spread out before the people of God: ***“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my***



“Behold, the Bridegroom Comes!”
19th Century Bible Illustration

cup overflows.” (Psalm 23:5 cf. Isaiah 25:6-8). Jesus warns that apostate Israel will forfeit its place at this great banqueting table:

“I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:11-12; cf. Luke 14:16-24)



“The Heavens Rejoice at the Savior’s Birth” by Karl Gutherz

Revelation presents heaven as a magnificent royal throne room:

“Before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the One who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow resembling an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the

throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” (Revelation 4:2-6; cf. also 5:6-14; 7:9-17).

Heaven is also represented in Revelation’s visions as the inner sanctuary of a holy temple or tabernacle with an altar and the ark of the covenant in its midst: *“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within His temple was seen the ark of His covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”* (Revelation 11:19; cf. also 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 11:1-2).

In other passage, the Bible describes heaven as the *“Father’s house”* (John 14:1), the true home of all God’s people. The Corinthians are assured: *“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, not built by human hands...we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* (2 Corinthians 5:1,8). The Book of Hebrews defines the heroes of faith as those who recognize that they are *“aliens and strangers on earth”* who are *“looking for a country of their own...a better country, a heavenly one.”* (Hebrews 11:13-16). Our classic hymn says it well:

*“I am but a stranger here, heaven is my home.
Earth is a desert drear, heaven is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand, round me on every hand.
Heaven is my fatherland, heaven is my home.”*



*“Christ the Almighty Judge”
by Roger van der Weyden*

*What though the tempest rage, heaven is my home.
Short is my pilgrimage, heaven is my home.
And time's wild, wintry blast, soon shall be over-past;
I shall reach home at last, heaven is my home.”*
(TLH # 660)

One of the most common Biblical images of heaven is that of the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. Isaiah predicts the coming of a liberated and purified holy city: ***“Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city.”*** (Isaiah 52:1) Paul contrasts ***“the present city of Jerusalem”*** which is ***“in slavery with her children”*** with ***“the Jerusalem that is above that is free, and she is our mother.”*** (Galatians 4:25-26). The heavenly Jerusalem is the city of which the writer to the Hebrews speaks ***“with foundations whose architect and builder is God.”*** (Hebrews 11:10) To those Jews who believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah he declared: ***“But you have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven.”*** (Hebrews 12:22-23) The image of a heavenly new Jerusalem comes to its triumphant culmination in the Book of Revelation with John's awesome description of the golden, jeweled city which comes down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21: 1-27). This vision has enthralled hymn writers throughout history. The Reformation era chorale ***“Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High”*** by Johann Meyfart (1626) is but one outstanding example of this genre.

*“Jerusalem, thou city fair and high, would God I were in thee.
My longing heart fain, fain to thee would fly. It will not stay with me.
Far over vale and mountain, far over field and plain.
It hastes to seek its Fountain, and leave this world of pain.”*

*O Zion hail! Bright city now unfold the gates of grace to me.
How many a time I longed for thee of old, Ere yet I was set free.
From yon dark life of sadness, yon world of shadowy naught,
And God had given the gladness, the heritage I sought!*

*And when within that lovely Paradise at last I safely dwell,
What songs of bliss shall from my lips arise, what joy my tongue shall tell.
While all the saints are singing Hosannas o'er and o'er
Pure Hallelujahs ringing around me evermore.”* (TLH # 619)

The noted 19th century Bible illustrator, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's is said to have



“Blessed Are All Those Who Are Called to The Marriage Feast of the Lamb” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

based his last work upon this hymn. The drawing was completed shortly before his death. Meyfart’s great hymn was sung at the artist’s funeral service.

In the beginning, God created the Garden of Eden as the perfect home for humankind. Man’s fall into sin destroyed God’s design and caused him to be expelled from Eden. The intent of God’s plan of salvation is to restore man to the perfect harmony with God for which he was first created. Thus, on occasion, the Bible refers to heaven as *“paradise,”* a Persian word which alludes to the Garden of Eden. Jesus promises the dying thief on the cross, *“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:43). Paul uses the same term to describe his heavenly visitation in 2 Corinthians 12:4) - *“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven...this man...was caught up to Paradise.”* *“Paradise”* occurs once more in the letter to the church in Ephesus in Revelation’s first vision: *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.”* (Revelation 2:7). The final scene in Revelation’s seventh vision completes

the theme of Eden's restoration with its depiction of the river of the water of life and the tree of life at the heart of New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:1-5). The new heaven and earth will be the restoration of the perfect home for humanity which God fashioned in the beginning.



“Paradise Restored” by Lucas Cranach

7. Heavenly Truth and Earthly Language

These images are not actual descriptions of the heavenly dwelling place of God and His saints nor of the new heaven and earth which God will fashion at the end of time. Each image serves to represent and convey a dimension of heaven's glory and bliss, but none are literal or comprehensive. The reality of heaven is beyond human comprehension and therefore cannot be expressed in human language. This is the explicit testimony of Scripture. St. Paul, quoting Isaiah 64:4, declares: ***“However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.”*** (1 Corinthians 2:9). The apostle's own brief visit to Paradise remains undetailed and indescribable:

“Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows. And I know that this man - whether in the body or out of the

body I do not know, but God knows - was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.” (2 Corinthians 12:3-4)

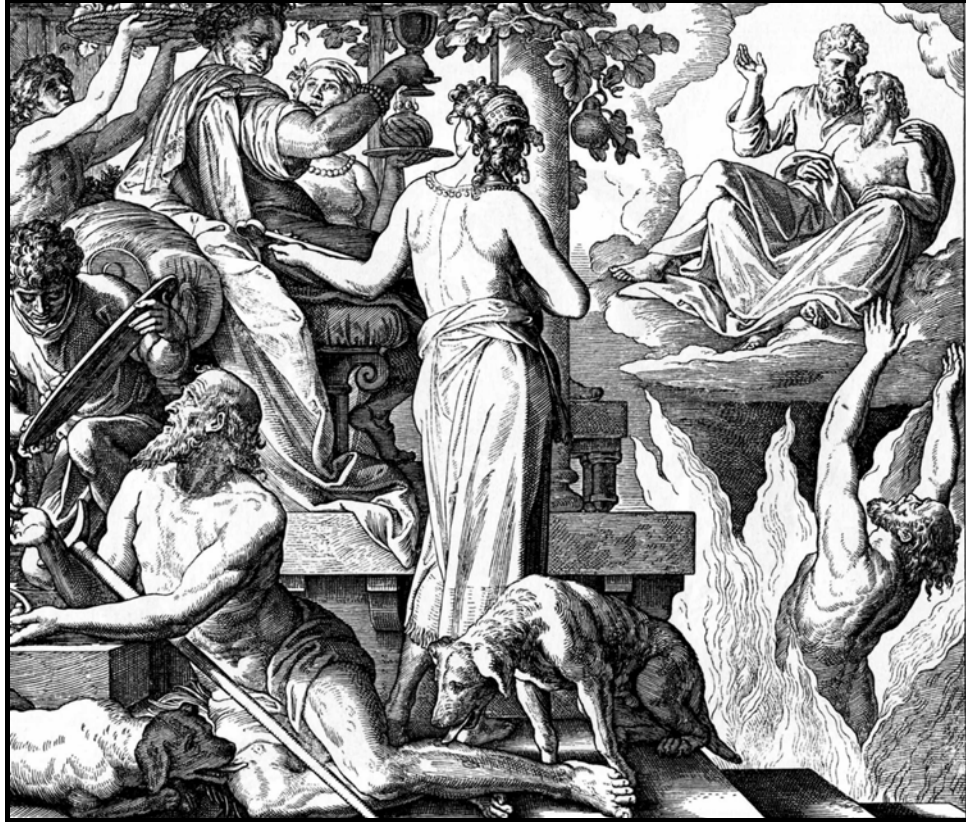
If the believer’s joy in Christ, whom we have not yet seen, is presently **“inexpressible and glorious”** (1 Peter 1:8), how much more unspeakable must heaven’s perfect bliss be? Accordingly, the Biblical doctrine of heaven must be approached with an appropriate of sense of humility and caution.

“Every Scripturally grounded truth we utter concerning the future life will be dwarfed by the splendors of the coming world. The sheer indescribable quality of man’s heavenly fulfillment in His Maker is ultimately rooted in the transcendence of God Himself. Just as Almighty God cannot be reduced to observable immanence, so likewise, the joys of heaven cannot be considered neatly in brochure form.” (Stephenson, p. 125)

Our consideration of this very important topic must be characterized by a readiness to affirm that which Scripture teaches and to refrain from speculation which goes beyond the Biblical text.



“Lazarus at the Rich Man’s Gate” by Briton Riviere



“The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Some seek to evade the difficulty altogether by dismissing heaven as nothing more than a condition or state of mind. That view is contrary to Scripture. The Bible explicitly asserts that heaven is a *“place.”* Jesus assures His disciples:

“In My Father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:2-4)

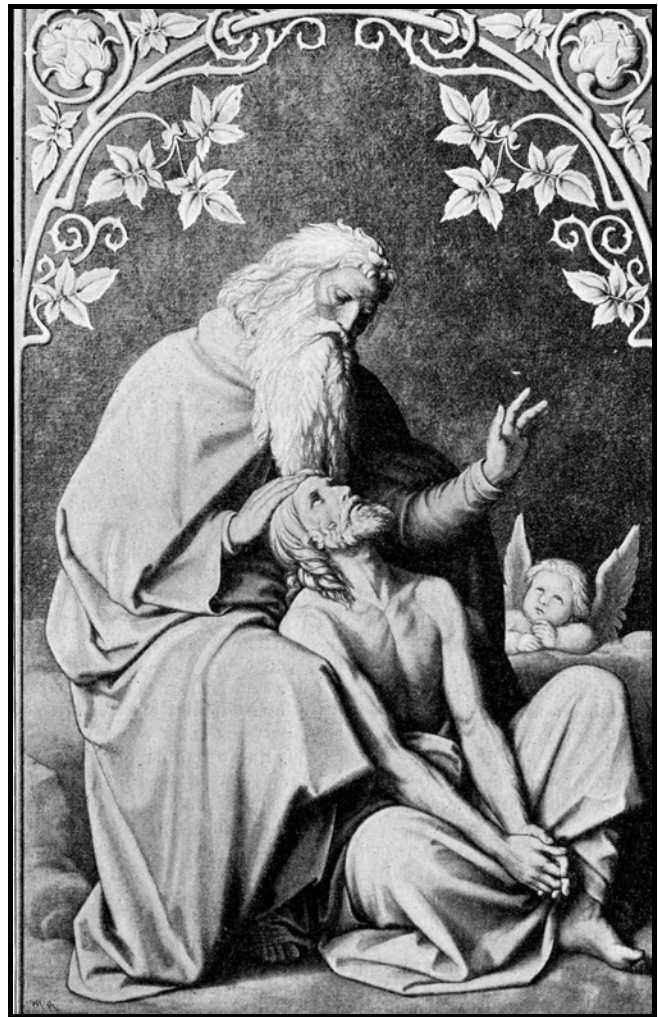
Jesus uses the same *“place”* language to describe both heaven and hell in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. The beggar dies and is carried by the angels to Abraham’s side in heaven. Dives also perishes and is condemned to eternal torment in Hell. He gazes across the vast chasm that separates heaven and hell and pleads with father Abraham: *“Send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them that they will not also come to this place of torment.”* (Luke 16:27-28)

28). Historic Lutheran theology has consistently affirmed this Biblical truth while cautiously refraining from attempts at definition or location which exceed that which is revealed in Holy Writ. For example, John Quenstedt, one of the great theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy writes these carefully chosen words:

“Beyond a doubt this blessed enjoyment occurs in some definite place (Greek - “pou”) but what sort of place that “pou” is and precisely where it is, whether inside this world or outside it, is not apparent. In other words, with the mental dullness of our present nature we cannot penetrate or explain its essence or quality or location.” (Hoenecke, IV, p. 359)

The need for caution in defining the nature of heavenly space and place is emphasized by Christ’s assertion that those angels whom God has appointed as guardians of His *“little ones”* here on earth *“always see the face of My Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 18:10). Dr. Siegbert Becker points out the logical impossibility of our Lord’s statement: *“Wherever an angel goes, he can still see the face of God; the beatific vision never comes to an end for him. He is always in heaven, even when he is here with us on earth.”* (Becker, OGH III, p. 667). Such presence is clearly beyond human comprehension.

The peril of restricting heavenly realities within the confines of earthly categories is well illustrated by the Reformation debate over the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament. The fact that Christ’s body is seated at God’s right hand in heaven was one of the reasons for the Calvinist insistence that the Lord’s body and blood could not be present upon the altars of Christendom. Luther



“The Soul of Lazarus in Heaven in the Bosom of Abraham” - 19th Century Bible Illustration



“Heaven Is My Home” by Walter Firle

replied that we dare not confine the mode of Christ’s presence in heaven to the limits of our own human understanding. Instead, we must trust and believe Christ’s word of institution although its promise is beyond our comprehension. The realities of heaven cannot be judged by *“the measuring rod of thought and reason.”* Scripture not only teaches that the Body and Blood of the Christ who reigns at God’s right hand in heaven are present in the Sacrament also that this same Christ dwells within the heart of every believer.

“But what happens when I bring Christ into my heart? Does it come about, as the fanatics imagine, that Christ descends on a ladder and climbs back up again? Christ still sits on the right hand of the Father, and also in your heart, the one Christ who fills heaven and earth. I preach that He sits on the right hand of God and rules over all creatures, sin, death, life, world, devils and angels; if you believe this you already have Him in your heart. Therefore, your heart is in heaven, not in an apparition or dream, but truly. For where He is, there you are also. So He sits and dwells in your heart, yet He does not fall from the right hand of God. Therefore, whoever can believe this does not find it difficult to believe that His Body and Blood are in the Sacrament...Just as little as you are able to say how it comes about that Christ is in so many thousands of hearts and dwells in them - Christ as He died and rose again - and yet no man knows how He gets in, so also here in the Sacrament it is incomprehensible how this comes about.” (LW, AE, 36, pp. 340-341)

8. The Present Dwelling of the Saints in Heaven

Physical death is the unnatural separation of the body and the soul - ***“The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the Spirit returns to God who gave it.”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Scripture teaches that at the moment of physical death, the soul of the believer is with Christ in heaven. Jesus warns His disciples: ***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** (Matthew 10:28) There is no pause or interruption in the Christian’s relationship with the Lord Jesus. ***“For I am convinced that neither death nor life...can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:37-39) The apocryphal *“Wisdom of Solomon”* affirms this same confident hope:

“The souls of the upright are in the hand of God, and no torment can reach them. In the eyes of foolish people they seemed to die, and their decease was thought an affliction, and their departure from us their ruin, but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they are punished, their hope is full of immortality.” (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-4)

Theologians often describe this interim between physical death and the resurrection of the body on the Last Day as the *“Intermediate State.”* Individual identity and an awareness of personal circumstances and situation continue throughout the Intermediate State. This is clearly indicated in the parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus. Both Lazarus in Heaven and Dives in Hell know who they are and where they are. They are also definitely conscious of



“The Soul Carried Home to Heaven”
19th Century Bible Illustration



“The Soul of the Penitent thief Carried to Paradise” by J. James Tissot

the fact that the Final Judgement has not yet come and that life on earth continues (cf. Luke 16:19-31). To the dying thief upon the cross Jesus promised - *“I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:43). St. Paul expresses the same joyful expectation:

“For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet, what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two; I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” (Philippians 1: 21-24)

The apocalyptic visions of St. John also affirm the blessedness of the redeemed in heaven during the interval between physical death and resurrection. While summoning the

saints to patient endurance under earthly tribulation, the heavenly voice declares: *“Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.”* (Revelation 14:13). The blessedness of those *“who die in the Lord”* is not merely a promise to be fulfilled in the future. It is a reality in the present. In the vision of the seven seals, the revelator observes *“the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”* They are *“under the altar”* within the heavenly sanctuary of God. These martyred saints know who they are and where they are. They earnestly pray for the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation and the vindication of His justice with the coming of the final judgment. God bestows upon them the pure white robe of His righteousness as they eagerly await the

completion of the roll of the redeemed (Revelation 6:9-11). The heavenly triumph of the saints throughout the New Testament age is also depicted in Revelation 20 with the glorious promise: ***“They will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”*** (Revelation 20:6).

The relationship between the present dwelling place of the saints with God in heaven and the new heaven and earth which God will fashion at the end of time is not clearly detailed in Scripture. Lutheran theologian Gottfried Hoffmann notes:

“But since this is our opinion about the future creation of a new heaven and a new earth, we will perhaps have to say that in their present state, the souls of the blessed are in the hands of God and are still waiting for that habitation that is to be newly created, in which all the elect are to be gathered after the consummation of the age. This is a matter in which we allow each person the freedom to form his own opinion.” (Hoenecke, IV, pp.357-358)

This much is clear: the defining characteristic of the new heaven and earth - what ever their *“geophysical dimensions and character”* (Brighton, p. 631) may be - will be the actual and personal presence of God among His people. This would appear to



“The Martyrs Beneath the Altar in Heaven, the Four Horsemen, and the Rain of Stars” Luther Bible Woodcut by Matthias Merian - 1630

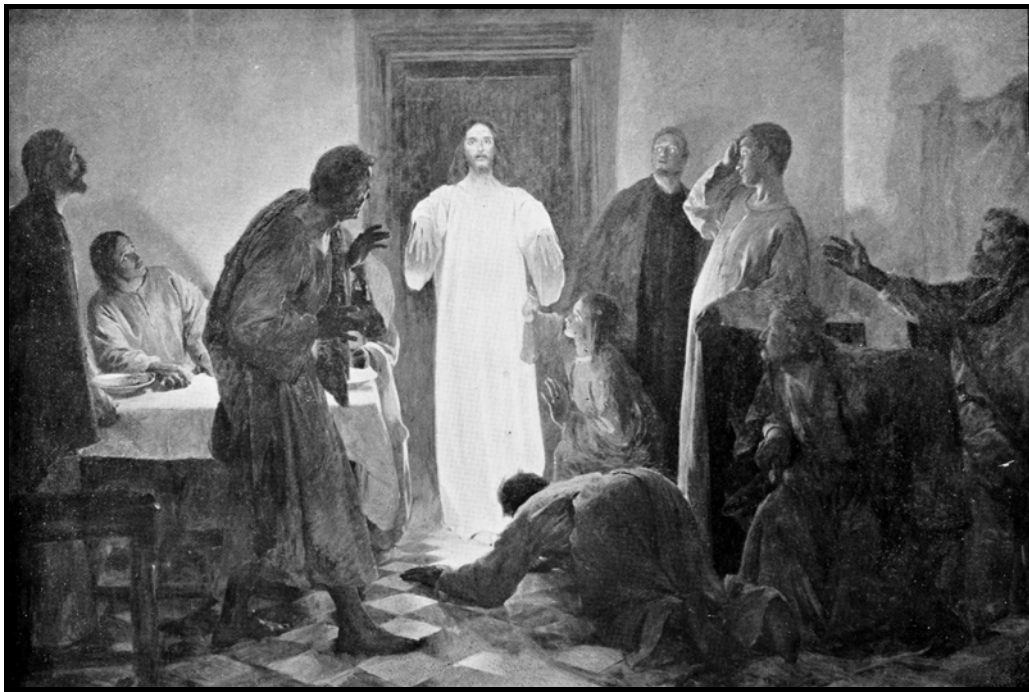


*“The Perfect Harmony of Eden”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Bocksperger-Amman*

have been the case in the original perfect creation where God *“walked in the garden in the cool of the evening”* (Genesis 3:8). Sin’s intrusion disrupted that intimacy. Fallen mankind was banished from the Garden and from God’s presence. Under this old, sinful order of things, only the souls of those whom God has redeemed from sin and who now live with Him in heaven experience His immediate presence. When the old order passes away God will restore the universe to its original condition. He will dwell forever in the midst of His people. That which now exists only in heaven will exist throughout the new heaven and earth. That is precisely the message of Revelation’s closing scenes with their breath-taking imagery of the glorious New Jerusalem without tabernacle or temple (Revelation 21:1-27) and the Garden of Eden restored with the river of the water of life and the tree of life (Revelation 22:1-6). As it was in the beginning so shall it be again at the end. *“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God.”* (Revelation 21:3)

9. The Characteristics of the Glorified Life in Heaven

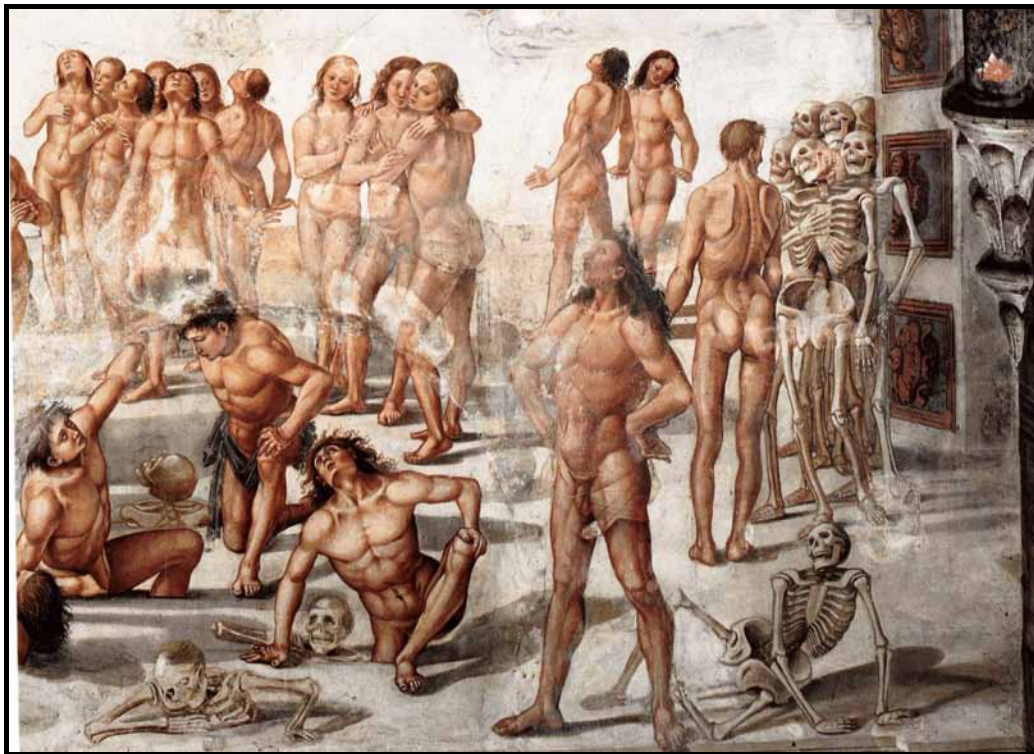
Scripture provides few specific details of life in the new heaven and earth. Brighton asserts: “*God did not reveal to John how the newly restored creation in its geophysical dimensions and character will appear.*” (Brighton, p. 631). As previously noted, however, the Biblical text clearly indicates that the immediate presence of God will be the defining characteristic of eternal life. The abundance and perfection of the original creation will be fully restored - “*Whatever kind of physical life His people will live in their resurrected bodies, God will richly supply their earthly needs as He did with Adam and Eve before the fall.*” (Brighton, p. 631). The ideal conditions and natural abundance of the Garden of Eden (cf. Genesis 2:4-25) will prevail throughout the world eliminating the possibility of hunger, thirst, or any form of physical discomfort or suffering (cf. Revelation 7:16-17; 21:4; 22:1-5). The restoration of heaven and earth to their pristine condition would also suggest the recreation of the rich profusion of animal life which characterized the original creation. The presence of animals in the new heaven and earth does not, however, imply that some or all of the countless animal life forms that perished during creation’s subjection to the bondage of decay will be physically resurrected and restored to life. There is no hint or suggestion of such a resurrection in the Bible.



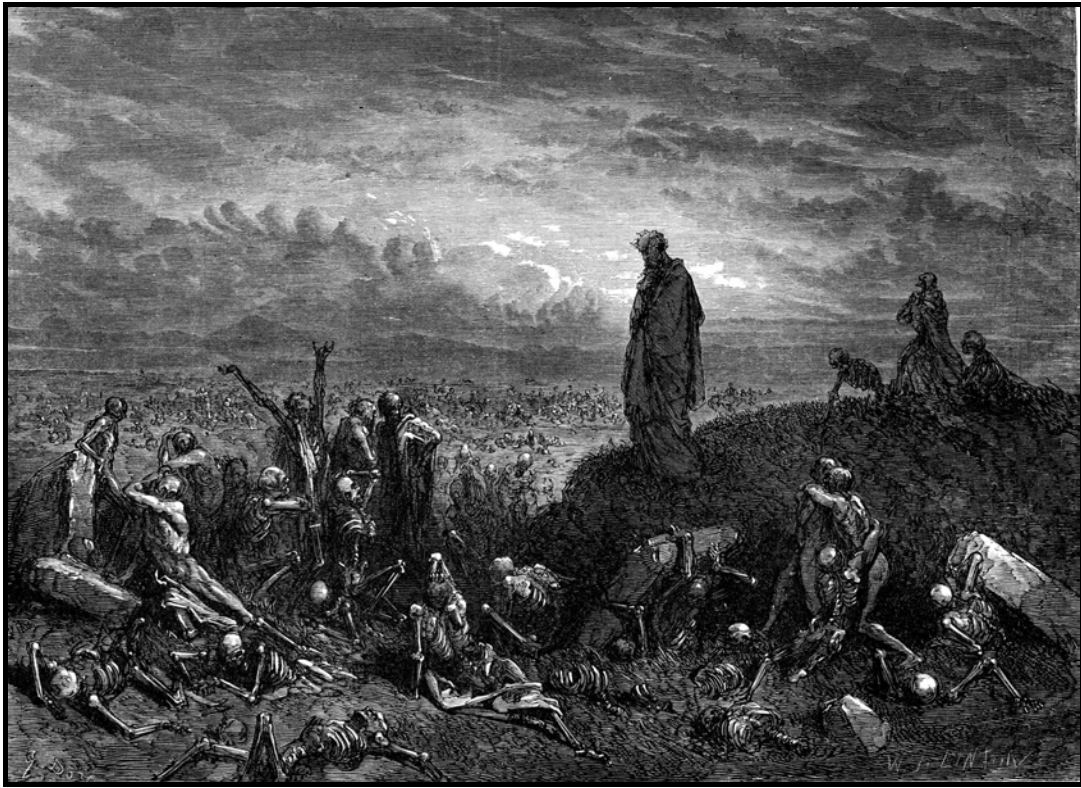
*“The Risen Christ Appears to the Disciples Inside the Upper Room”
by J. H. F. Bacon*

After the resurrection, the saints in heaven will live with *“glorified bodies.”* Scripture promises that the Lord Jesus Christ will *“transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”* (Philippians 3:21). The most detailed description of these heavenly bodies is provided in the New Testament’s great *“Resurrection Chapter,”* 1 Corinthians 15. Paul’s inspired discussion of the issue indicates both continuity and transformation. He uses a series of contrasts to make his point:

“But someone may ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies...There are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is of one kind and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another...So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” (1 Corinthians 15: 35-44)



“The Resurrection of the Dead” by Luca Signorelli



*“Ezekiel’s Vision of the Resurrection in the Valley of the Dry Bones”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

The glorified bodies of the risen saints will be the very bodies in which they lived and died here on earth (cf. Job 19:26) and yet those bodies will have been radically transformed. *“While the risen bodies of the glorified will indeed be composed of matter, we must prepare ourselves to register the as yet unimaginable perfection of the resurrection body in comparison with this worldly corporeity.”* (Stephenson, p. 130). Paul indicates that *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does the imperishable inherit the perishable.”* Therefore, in order to prepare us for the wonder of life eternal, *“We will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. For this perishable must clothe itself in the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.”* (1 Corinthians 15:50-53). This miraculous transformation will enable our risen bodies to experience eternal life in the new heaven and earth.

Paul indicates that the glorified bodies of the saints will be like that of the risen Christ - *“the Lord Jesus Christ...will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”* (Philippians 3: 21). The post-resurrection appearances of Christ

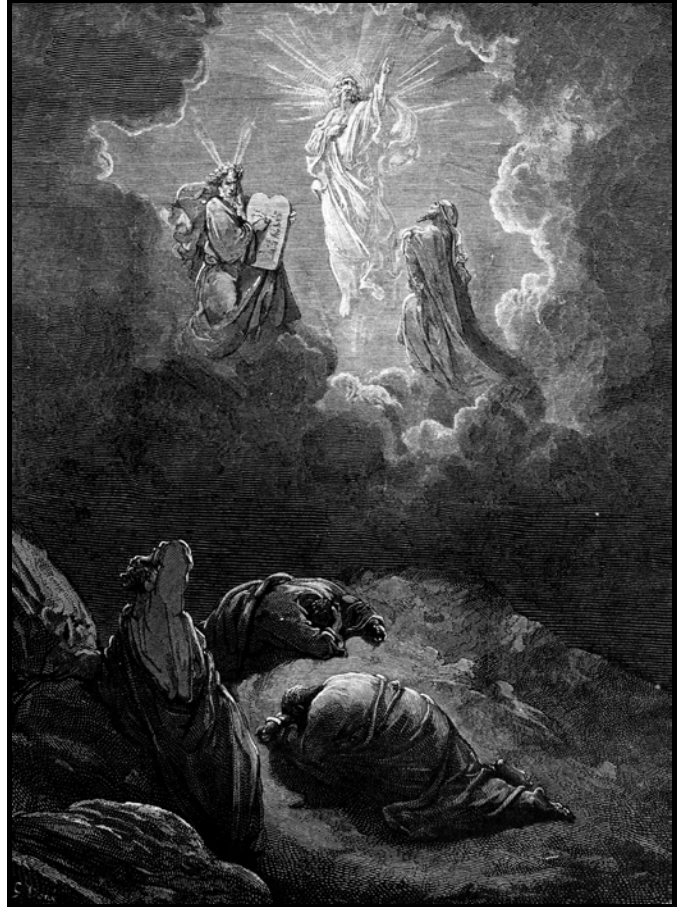
suggest significant changes in the nature of our Lord's presence. Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the eleven disciples on the Sea of Galilee all initially failed to recognize Him (John 20: 10-18; Luke 24: 13-35; John 21:1-14). He appears and disappears at will, unconfined by the sealed tomb or locked doors (Luke 24: 31,36; John 20:26). And yet at times He moves from place to place in an ordinary manner ((Luke 24:50-53). He is visible and tangible - the disciples see and hear Him and are able to feel His breath upon them (John 20:19-23) Doubting Thomas is able to touch His wounds (John 20:24-30). He repeatedly eats and drinks with His disciples (Luke 24: 30-31;40-42). This startling combination of continuity and change will also characterize the resurrection bodies of believers. The glorified bodies of the saints will be the same bodies in which they lived here on earth cleansed and set free from all of the consequences of sin - aging, disfigurement, disease, etc.



*“The Resurrection of the Dead”
Detail from “The Last Judgement” by Michelangelo*

Jesus asserts that the saints in the new heaven and earth ***“will be like the angels in heaven.”*** ***“At the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they will be like the angels in heaven.”*** (Matthew 22:30; cf. also Luke 20:35-36) The distinctions in relational priority which are necessitated here on earth will be swept away and all the people of God will live together in perfect harmony and love

with one another, enjoying a degree of fellowship unimaginable under present circumstances. Thus Christ's comment in Matthew 22 does not indicate that those who lived as husband and wife here on earth will not know or love one another in heaven. They will, in fact, love one another more fully and completely that could ever have been possible here. But they will also love all the rest of God's people to the same unprecedented degree. The perfect love will be the natural result and consequence of their perfect experience of the love of God. *"When love for God is consummated, the brotherly love inseparably joined to it and flowing from it must also be consummated."* (Hoenecke, IV, p. 345)



"The Transfiguration" by Dore

In the beginning, Adam's intellect was perfect without the taint and distortion of sin. His knowledge was complete. That perfect enlightenment of the intellect will be restored in heaven. Paul contrasts man's present state with that which is to come: *"Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."* (1 Corinthians 13:12). That perfection of knowledge will extend to our ability to recognize and identify one another. The saints in heaven shall all be known to one another irrespective of their acquaintance or lack thereof on earth. A glimmer of this heavenly recognition can be seen upon the Mount of Transfiguration where Moses and Elijah are clearly recognizable to Peter, James and John although they had never seen them before (Matthew 17:1-4). The same is true in the parable of the Rich Man and poor Lazarus where both Dives and Lazarus are able to recognize father Abraham (Luke 16:23).

Martin Luther's answer to this question cited the parallel of Adam's recognition of

Eve in Eden:



“The Creation of Eve” by Lucas Cranach

“On that same last evening at the table, the doctor also mentioned the question whether we would know one another in that blessed, future, eternal assembly and church. When asked repeatedly for his answer, he said, “What did Adam do? He had never seen Eve in all his life; he lay there and slept. But when he woke up he did not say to her, “Where did you come from? Who are you?” He said, “This flesh is taken from my flesh and this bone is taken from my bone.” How did he know that this woman did not come from a stone? It was because he was full of the Holy Spirit and had a true knowledge of God. In that life we will be restored to that knowledge and image of Christ, so that we will know father and mother and each other by sight better than Adam knew Eve.” (Hoenecke, IV, p. 344)

The essence of heaven’s joy is its permanence. Our heavenly life in the presence of God will be eternal, that is, without end. The concept of permanence is essential to both the joy of heaven and the torment of hell - *“They will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”* (Matthew 25:46; cf. also John 3:16; Luke 16:9; Hebrews 5:9; 9:15; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 5:1;

Revelation 2:11; Romans 8:38). The theologians use the phrase *“confirmed in their bliss”* to describe the truth that heaven’s joy cannot be lost. It will continue forever. St. Paul promises: *“And so we will be with the Lord forever.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17. Jesus assures us: *“Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.”* (John 16:22) The salvation which Christ has won for us is *“an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you.”* (1 Peter 1:4)

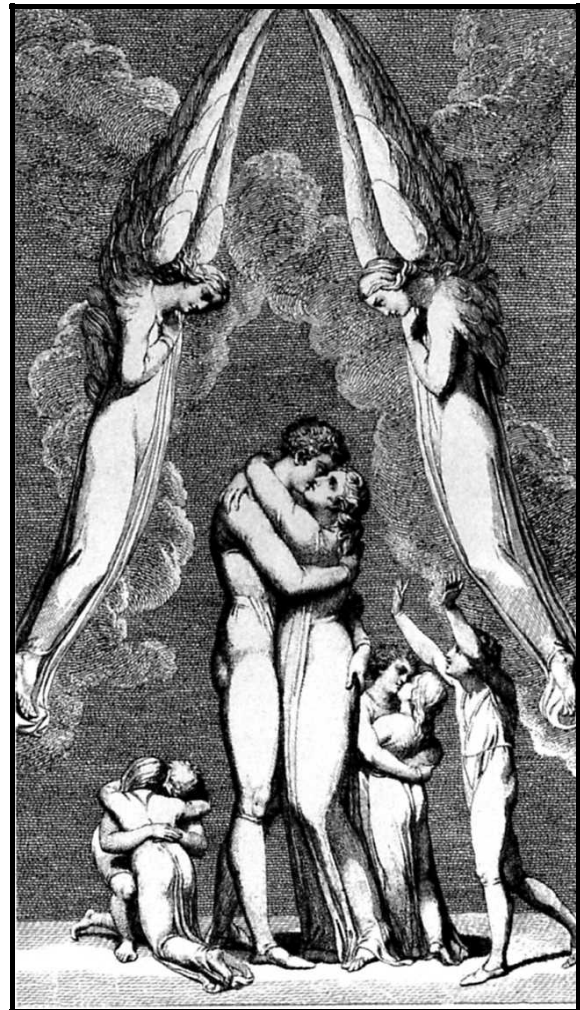
The joy of every saint in heaven will be perfect and complete. Thus there will be no

degrees of bliss in heaven. However, Scripture does teach that there will be degrees of glory in heaven corresponding to differences of work and fidelity here on earth. The prophet Daniel uses the simile of the varying splendor of the stars to teach this truth: ***“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”*** (Daniel 12:3). St. Paul uses the same analogy:

“There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies: but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.”
(1 Corinthians 15:40-41)

To the faithful who patiently endure persecution here on earth Jesus promises: ***“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:12; cf. also Matthew 6:1-6,21; 10:41; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23; 2 John 8; Revelation 11:18) Dr. John Stephenson offers this helpful explanation of the concept of degrees of glory in heaven:

“The degrees of glory are rooted ultimately in God’s good pleasure and are inseparable from His freedom to distribute varying gifts to His creatures. Just as a gardener may take equal delight in the flowers adorning his garden, while relishing the differences between roses, lilies, and carnations, so likewise, Almighty God is at liberty to create persons of differing capacity who will reach different levels of achievement in the order of grace. All the glorified saints will be equally fulfilled when conformed to the likeness of Christ, just as a thimble and a tumbler can be equally filled with water. No creature may gainsay the Creator’s right to apportion different capacities to the vessels made and restored in His image.” (Stephenson, pp. 131-132)



***“The Reunion of a Family in Heaven”
by William Blake***

The crucial difference in this heavenly distinction will be the absolute absence of the jealousy, envy and discontent which so often have characterized recognition here on earth. All will celebrate and applaud degrees of glory as a fitting reflection of the glory of God who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 15, Martin Luther affirms both the appropriateness of distinctions in heavenly glory and the equality of heavenly bliss:

“It is true, there will be a difference in yonder life, according as they have labored and lived here. For example, St. Paul was an Apostle, Samuel or Isaiah a Prophet, etc. One will have greater brightness than the other because he worked or suffered more in his office. In the same way, pious Sarah or Rachel will receive something special in distinction to other women, and yet they will not receive an essentially different life. Yet everyone will have his own distinction and glory according to his office, and still one God and Lord will be in all, and one and the same joy and bliss. In his person, none shall be more or have more than the other, St. Peter no more than you and I. Nonetheless, there must be a difference because of the works. For God did not do through Paul what He did through Isaiah, and vice versa. For that reason everyone will bring along his works, through which he will shine and praise God so that people will say: St. Peter has done more than I or another. This man or this woman has led such a fine life and has done such great things. In short, all are to be alike before God in faith and grace and celestial bliss, but they are to differ in their works and their honor.” (Martin Luther, SL, VIII, pp. 1223-1224)

The purpose of the Biblical doctrine of heaven is to encourage and strengthen God’s people in steadfast perseverance in the faith so that they may obtain the eternal life which God has promised and prepared. The great Lutheran theologian John Gerhard offers this most practical advice:

“The doctrine concerning the heaven of the blessed and eternal life is set forth in Holy Scripture, not that we may idly dispute as theorists, concerning the location of heaven, the beatific vision, or the properties of glorified bodies; but that, as practical men, considering the promised joys of eternal life every day, yes, every hour, yes, every moment, we may keep closely to the way leading there, and carefully avoid all that can cause delay or recall us from the entrance into life eternal. One of the ancients, who was asked what books he used in his daily studies, answered that he studied every day a book with three pages: one red, one black, one white. On the red page he read of our Lord’s passion. On the black page he read of the torments of hell. On the white page he read of the joys of the glorified. From this study he derived more profit than if he were to ponder all the works of the philosophers.” (Schmid, p. 663)



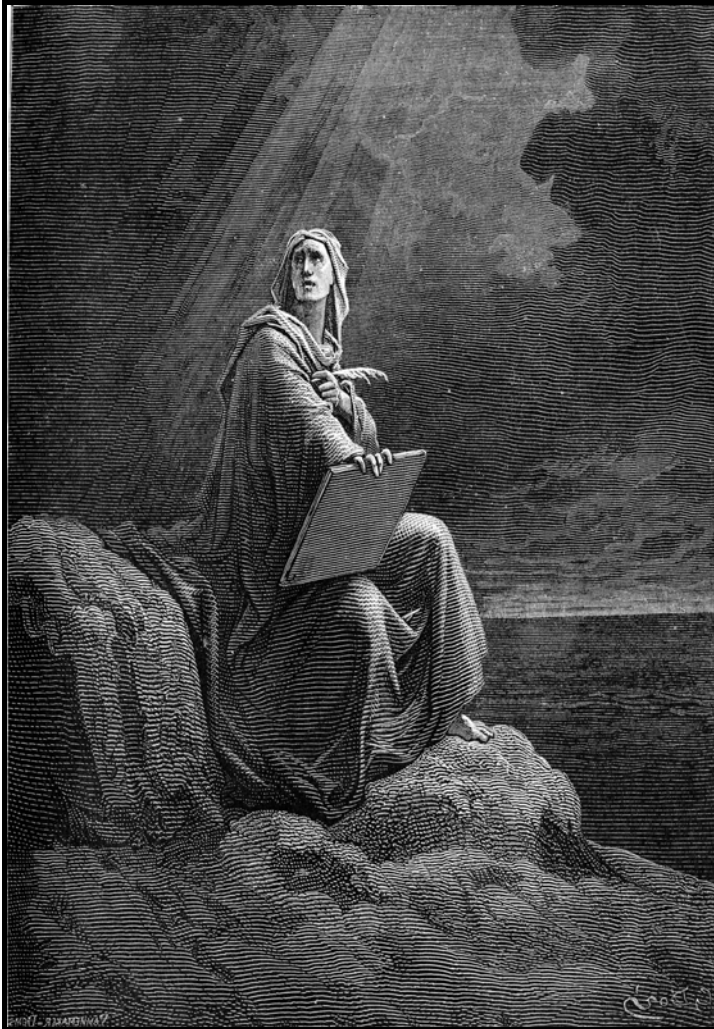
*“Then the Angel Showed Me the River of the Water of Life”
Illumination from the “Bamberg Apocalypse”*

The Conclusion

Revelation 22: 6-21

The angel said to me, “These things are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place.” “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who

keep the words of this book. Worship God!” Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they



“St. John on the Island of Patmos” by Gustav Dore

may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star.” The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this

book. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

“The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God

of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place.

“The angel said to me...” - In a manner very similar to that of the prologue and the salutation (Revelation 1:1-8) the epilog now concludes and affirms the prophetic message of Revelation. Lenski suggests that the unique nature and character of John’s visions necessitate such a concluding affirmation:

“If it be asked why these visions receive such an attestation at the end, their very character and their nature are the answer. Here is prophecy regarding the things which must occur couched in visions, many of them portrayed in strange symbolical actions and language. Are these human inventions? We meet commentators that think so and yet cannot discover the man who did the inventing. Many men smile at these visions and scorn them as the vaporings of a diseased mind. The solemn, even legal attestation is needed for our sake so that we may be most completely assured.” (Lenski, pp.655-656)

Lutheran scholar Joseph Seiss notes: *No book in the Bible has a more pointed attestation, a stronger safeguard against tampering, or a more urgent recommendation for study and observance than does the Apocalypse, especially in its Epilogue.”* (Seiss, 3:, pp. 449-450)

The original text does not identify the speaker in this instance. It simply reads - *“And he said to me.”* The NIV’s interpretive insertion of the noun **“angel”** is, in all probability, correct, given the similarly worded assertion of the prolog that **“He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John.”** (Revelation 1:1). The same wording recurs later in this verse - **“sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place.”** This angel is designated with the definite article -



“The Revelation of John” by Hans Klim

literally in the Greek , “*the angel of Him*” serves to identify a particular, well-known angel. Some commentators refer to this heavenly messenger as “*Angelus Interpretans*,” the Interpreter Angel, who conveys God’s revelation to the apostle and explains or interprets that revelation when necessary.

The angel’s message is an emphatic assertion of the reliability and the accuracy of the visions which John has received and recorded - “*These words are trustworthy and true.*” Similar assurances have been previously offered in reference to the content of specific visions (cf. Revelation 19:9; 21:5). The attestation is broadened here to include all of the revelator’s message. One does not exceed the scope of the text to broaden its application to all of sacred Scripture, the inspired and inerrant Word of God. “*Here they are an explicit affirmation of the entire prophetic message of Revelation...these words also apply to all of Scripture, with Revelation, the final book of the canon, serving as the Amen to the entire Word of God.*” (Brighton, p. 640)



*“Christ the Alpha and the Omega”
12th Century Spanish Fresco*

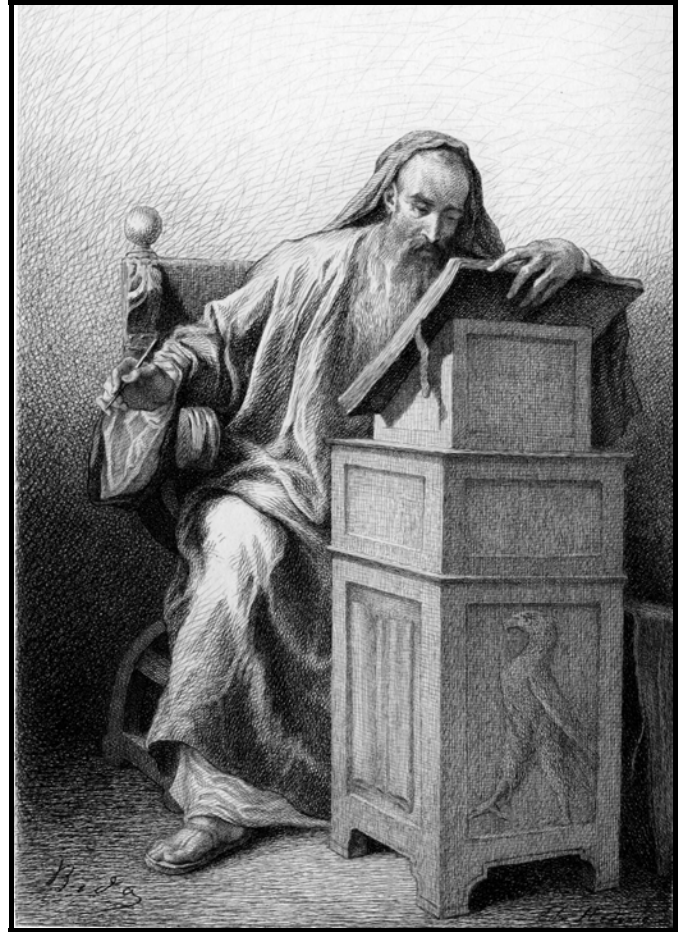
These same adjectives are elsewhere applied to Christ Himself - ***“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.”*** (Revelation 3:14; cf. also 19:11) Dr. Brighton properly notes:

“These statements that God is righteous and true declare that there is an absolute truth, a truth that is righteous and so never changes, a truth that is faithful in its intent. God is the source of this truth and the Lord Christ is the faithful witness to it.” (Brighton, p. 640)

“The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets...” - The phrase which follows explains the basis for the trustworthiness and truth which has been attested. This is a message from ***“the Lord*** (Greek - *“ho kyrios”*), ***the God of the spirits of the prophets.”*** The language recalls that of Revelation 19:10 - ***“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”***

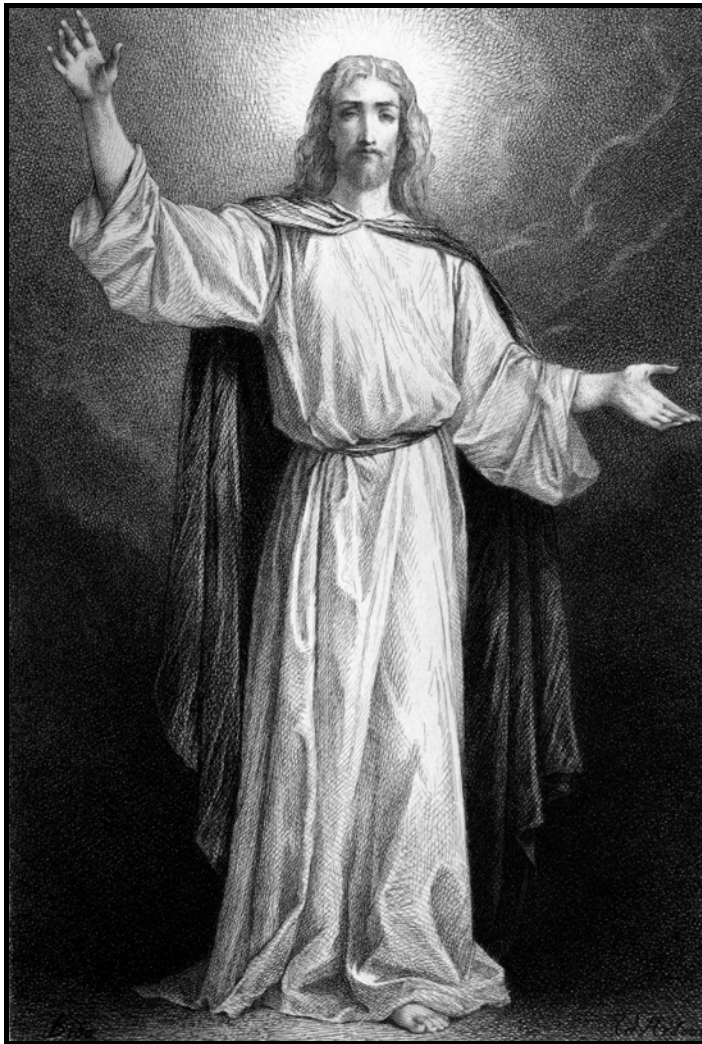
Although the term ***“spirits”*** is often used in Scripture in reference to human life in general (i.e. Numbers 16:22; 27:16), in this context the reference is most probably to the natural intellectual faculties of the prophets ***“raised and quickened by the Holy Spirit”*** (Swete, p. 303) ***“subjected to God, enlightened and inspired by the Holy Spirit”*** (Thomas, p. 496). In this manner, the text clearly identifies John with the long stream of prophetic revelation which has poured forth from the spirit of God across the centuries, beginning with Moses and now reaching its triumphant culmination. ***“The Lord who inspired His prophets of old to see the invisible and to speak the ineffable is the Author of visions of John in the last urgent days before His return.”*** (Franzmann, p. 144)

“To show His servants the things that must soon take place.” - The language directly and deliberately reflects that of Revelation 1:1- ***“The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show His servants what must soon take place.”*** The



“St. John the Revelator”
19th Century Bible Illustration

parallel is designed to mark the completion and conclusion of that which God has disclosed to His inspired prophet. The people of God in Christ are again designated as “*douloi*,” that is, “*slaves*.” We are men and women who have been bought and paid for in the precious blood of the Redeemer shed for us upon the cross. Now we belong to Him and are called to serve and obey Him. The verb “*must take place*” (Greek - “*dei genesthai*”) is the word commonly used in revelation to express the sovereign control of God in accomplishing His purpose and plan for mankind. These things “*must take place*” because all things are under God’s control and they are necessary for the fulfillment of His divine plan. The text breathes a definite sense of urgency and imminence. All this is going to happen “*soon*.” As John writes, the apostolic age is drawing to its conclusion. The latter days have come and the time of Christ’s return is drawing near.



*“Behold! I Am Coming Soon!”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

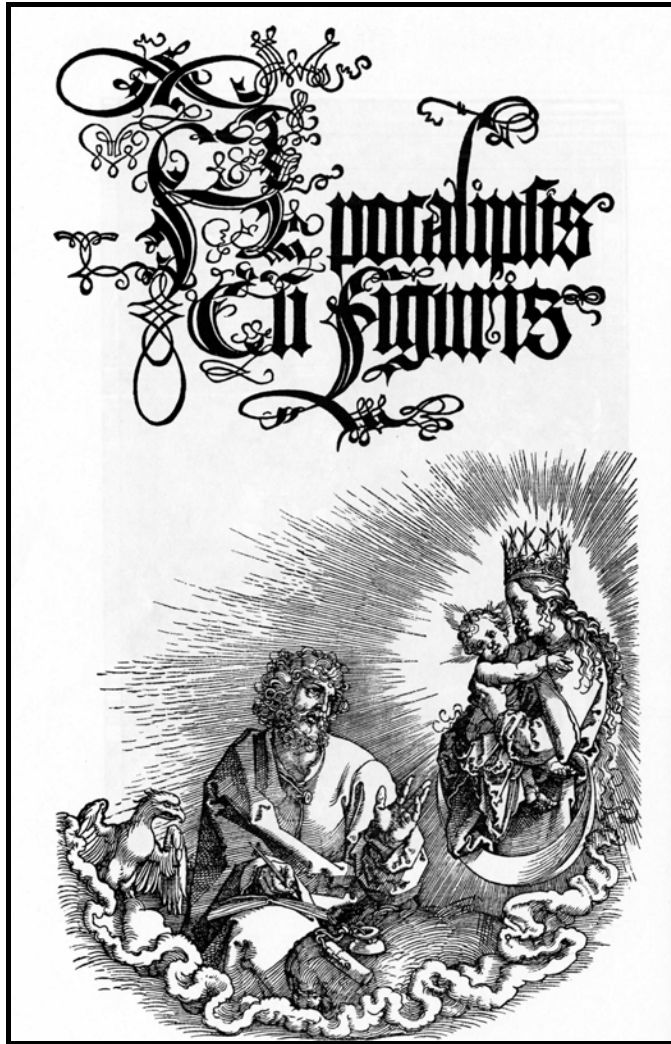
“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of prophecy in this book.” - The voice of our Lord Himself interrupts to express the profound urgency of the situation. The interjection unmistakably refers to the Second Coming of Christ. In Chapter 1, Christ had designated Himself as “*The Alpha and the Omega...Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty.*” (Revelation 1:8) Jesus had proclaimed virtually the same message repeatedly in the letters to the seven churches: “*I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown.*” (Revelation 3:11; cf. also 2:16). The beatitude of the prologue (Revelation 1:3) is reiterated here at the conclusion: “*Blessed is he who keeps the words of prophecy in this book.*”

In this instance that which is commended to the attention of the reader is *“the words of prophecy in this book.”* In the prologue the more general phrase - *“the words of this prophecy”* is used. The variation may indicate the virtual completion of the scroll which is now in hand. The identification of the writing as *“prophecy”* in conjunction with specific reference to *“the words”* reinforces the message that this book is the product of the plenary verbal inspiration of God. This is the sixth of Revelation’s seven beatitudes. He who would receive the promised blessing is instructed *“to keep the words of prophecy in this book”* - that is, to believe them as faithful and true and live according to them.



“I Fell Down to Worship at the Feet of the Angel” by Jean Duvet

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and all of you who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”



*“Apocalypse With Illustrations”
Title Page to the 1511 Edition by Albrecht Dürer*

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.” - John addresses the reader directly for the first time since the opening chapter of the book. In Revelation 1, John had identified himself as the human author of this book three times (cf. Revelation 1: 1,4,9). He repeated assertion of authorship at the book’s conclusion is his own personal attestation of the works reliability and authenticity. *“The writer adds his human guarantee to the superhuman words scattered through vv.6-17.”* (Thomas, p. 499) In the original this statement takes the form of an emphatic exclamation. This was not some flight of fancy, the product of personal imagination. St. John actually ***“heard and saw these things.”*** The words are reminiscent of Peter’s affirmation of the historicity of the apostolic gospel of Jesus: ***“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were***

eyewitnesses of His majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16)

“And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship...” - The prophet’s re-action to these awesome visions is completely understandable. He is overcome, literally swept off his feet. He falls to the ground before the angelic messenger in adoration and awe. This is the second time John has fallen to the ground in worship before an angel in Revelation. He did the same in Revelation 19:10 after having witnessed the resplendent Bride of Christ, prepared for the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (cf. Revelation 19:10). The repetition of his action here is perplexing to some, given the admonition which he had received in the former instance to worship God

alone. No doubt his action in both instances was completely spontaneous, an unconsidered, automatic response by a man who was completely overwhelmed by that which had been revealed to him. Dr. Swete correctly suggests: *“So astounding was this whole vision, the crowning glory of the Book, that the Seer forgets the warning he has recently received and again prostrates himself before the angel.”* (Swete, p. 304)

“But he said to me, “Do not do it!...” - The angel quickly and categorically rejects John’s worship, as in the previous instance. Worship is the prerogative of God alone. The worship of any other being, no matter how well intentioned or sincere, detracts from the unique majesty of God and must be firmly rejected. *“The bewildered prophet for the moment had lost his bearings, and needs this reminder of something that he already knew quite well.”* (Thomas, p. 501) The angel identifies himself with three groups in describing himself and his role. First of all he declares, ***“I am a fellow servant with you”*** (Greek - *“syndoulous sou emi”*). What thrilling words these must have been for St. John, if not immediately in the intensity of this moment, at least in retrospect! This glorious heavenly angel who has conveyed the most incredible wonders of God in heaven declares that he and John, Christ’s apostle are the same. That is to say they perform the same function in revealing and conveying

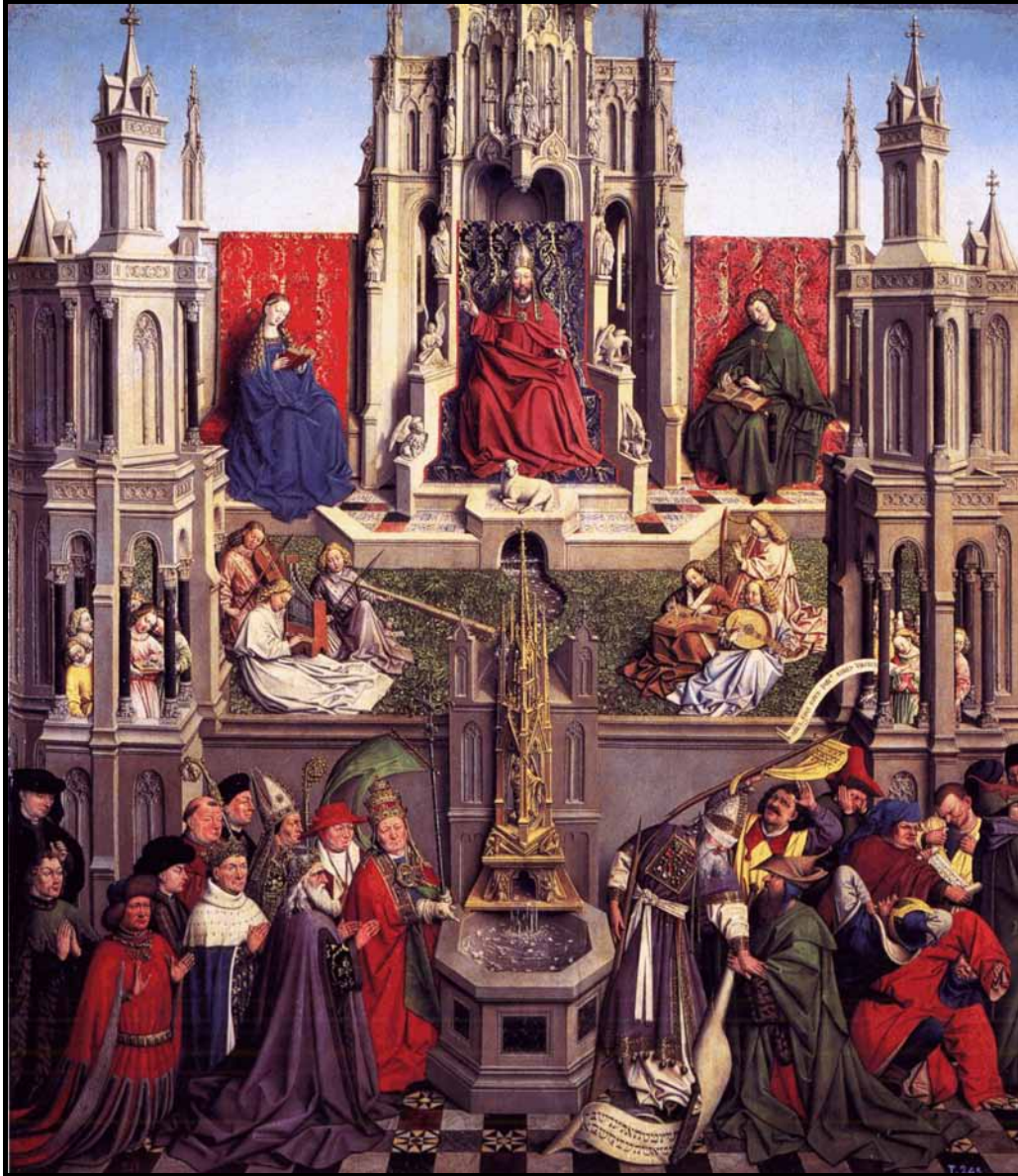


“The Prophets and Apostles” by Jan van Eyck

God's Word to His people. They are literally slaves together ("*syndoulous*") in the same great task. The angel next extends the brotherhood of that service beyond St. John himself to "***your brothers the prophets.***" In this way, not only is St. John exalted, but the prophetic office in general. The phrase also serves, once again, to endorse that which John has revealed by including him in the company of God's inspired spokesmen, the prophets. John's Apocalypse is a writing of divine prophecy as surely as the writings of Moses, Isaiah, or any of God's other inspired spokesmen. Finally, one more group is included in the angel's declaration of solidarity - "***and of all who keep the words of this book.***" This would reach out to include every faithful Christian who strives to live in a manner consistent with the will of God as it is defined by the written Word of God.

"Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy." - The angel continues his concluding instructions following the worship interruption. The message of Revelation is not secret, nor should it be concealed. The book must remain open for all to read and obey. Many centuries before, Daniel was given the opposite instruction - "***The vision concerning the evenings and the mornings is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.***" (Daniel 8:26; cf. 12:4,9-10) But now the decisive moment in human history has already occurred. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the crucial turning point of all history and they have already occurred. Now, in the aftermath of Christ's first coming, the end times, the latter days are already at hand. The church, the people of God in Christ, urgently need to hear, believe and obey this word of prophecy.

"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong..." - The theme of urgency and imminence continues. Judgment is at hand. Those who stubbornly spurn and scorn the warnings of God's Word will surely continue in their evil ways. The grammarians style the imperative verbs here as "*imperatives of permission*" rather than the typical imperatives of command (Thomas, pp. 502-503). Throughout the end times, God will allow and tolerate, for now, the wickedness and corruption of men. Lenski cites the parallel of the our Lord's parable of the tares and the wheat - "***Let both grow together until the harvest.***" By contrast, those who "***do right***" and are "***holy***" are encouraged to persevere in the faith and faithfulness until the Lord's imminent return. The words of the prophecy are to remain open and available throughout this time so that sinners



*“The Lamb’s Fountain of the Water of Life”
From the School of Jan van Eyck*

may hear and repent and believers may hear and obey. Brighton summarizes:

“The possibility is still present right now for change of status before God - from unrighteous and filthy to righteous and holy - through hearing the warnings of God and the gracious invitation of His mercy in Christ. But now is the time, not tomorrow, for the hour is late. This passage underlines the extreme urgency of the church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel and to persevere in the righteousness and holiness that are hers by grace.” (Brighton, p. 646)



“The Final Judgement” by Peter Cornelius

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” - Again the Lord Jesus sounds the clarion call of imminent return. The language reflects the prophecy of Isaiah 40: ***“See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and His arm rules for Him. See, His reward is with Him and His recompense accompanies Him.”*** (Isaiah 40:10; cf. 62:11)

The ***“reward”*** (Greek - *“misthos”*) terminology highlights the role of Judgment Day as the final demonstration before all of humanity assembled together of the perfect righteousness and justice of God. The purpose of the Last Judgement is not to determine the eternal fate of anyone. The souls of the great majority of humanity will have already been in heaven or hell. Judgment Day is the irrefutable public demonstration of the justice of God’s judgement. In secular Greek *“misthos”* monetary compensation in the form of salary or wages. In the Bible, the word is characteristically used in a spiritual sense to refer to the gift of eternal life in heaven. For example, in His Sermon on the Mount Jesus promises those who endure persecution: ***“Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:12) The evidentiary role of works in the final judgment is the necessary result of the purpose of the judgment in incontrovertibly demonstrating the justice of God. Works here serve as the objective evidence of faith (cf. Matthew 25:31-40). Brighton properly highlights the significance of the first person pronoun in the phrase ***“My reward is with me.”***

*“Christ calls it **“my reward,”** not their reward; it is the reward which Christ Himself earned, and which He freely gives to all believers by grace. The **“reward”** itself is the gift of eternal life in God’s holy presence, earned for God’s people by the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God.”* (Brighton, p. 647)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” - Christ’s promise of imminent return is *“signed by the Lord’s own threefold signature.”*(Lenski, p. 666) These titles unmistakably assert the divinity of Christ. In Scripture, God is the only independent existence. He does not have a source. He is the source of all things. He is without beginning and without end, *“Jahweh,”* the great *“I AM.”* (cf. Exodus 3:14) God is both the point of origin and the destination for all that which He has made, our source and our destination. Our origin from Him and our absolute dependance upon Him is the essential difference between the Creator and the creature. The use of the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet effectively express this truth and serve to identify Jesus as true God.



“The Redeemed in Paradise” by Giotto, 1431

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” - This is the seventh beatitude of Revelation, the final benediction of the book, as it were. The imagery of the blessing is drawn from throughout the earlier visions. The washing of robes refers to the great multitude before the throne of the Lamb in Revelation 7:14 - *“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* This is a powerful image for the forgiveness of sins won for us in the precious blood of Christ poured out upon the cross. Those who have been forgiven now have the right to stand before God’s heavenly throne. The *“tree of life”* is drawn from the vision of paradise restored which was presented earlier in this chapter: *“On each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing*

of the nations.” (Revelation 22:2) Life in the new Eden will be as God intended in the beginning and the curse of death will have been banished forever. The text here literally describes the right of access to the tree’s life-giving fruit as “*authority over the tree of life.*” The right of passage “*through the gates into the city*” alludes to the vision of the glorious Holy City, the New Jerusalem which John had observed “*coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*” (Revelation 21:2)

“*Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts...*” - In stark contrast to the eternal blessedness of the redeemed, the status of the damned is presented as eternal exclusion from the presence of God and the blessings thereof. Those who have chosen to remain clad in the filthy rags of their own unrighteous must remain forever outside in “*the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” (Matthew 8:12). “*The dogs*” (Greek - “*hoi kunes*”) is a metaphor for those who are wicked and



“Idol Worshipers” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

morally corrupt throughout Scripture (cf. Deuteronomy 23:18; 2 Kings 8:13; Psalm 22:16,20; Isaiah 56:10; Matthew 7:16; 15:26; Mark 7:27; Philippians 3:2-3). *“In the Orient dogs are scavengers and objects of great contempt. In this verse they are perhaps not just impure persons but the impudently impure, those addicted to unnatural vices.”* (Thomas, p. 507) The list of those excluded is very similar to the list of those consigned to the lake of fire and brimstone in Revelation 21:8.



“King David, the Sweet Singer of Israel” by Jan Debray

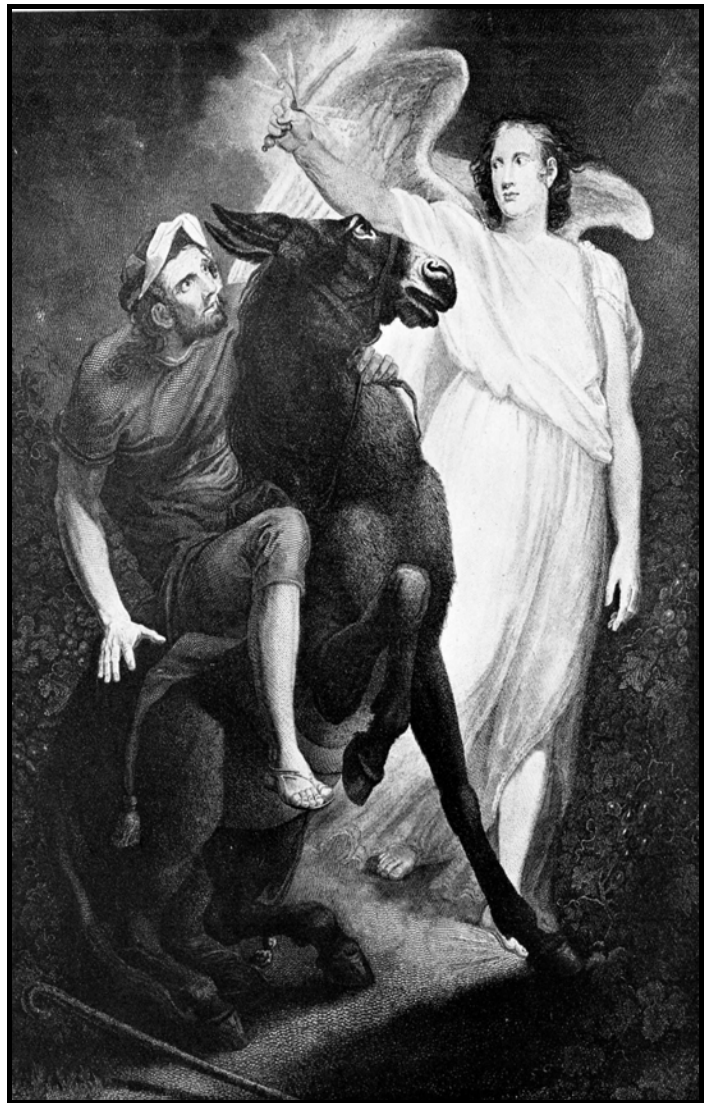
“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” - A third attestation of the divine inspiration of this Revelation’s prophecy is offered by the Lord Jesus Himself. That which the angel and John have already attested is now affirmed by Christ. Special attention is drawn to this personal assertion by the unique combination of the words ***“I, Jesus”*** (Greek - *“ego Iesous”*). Brighton notes that this is the only instance in the entire New Testament where our Lord refers to Himself by His personal name. *“His personal name, Jesus, points to His humanity and to His intimate relationship with John and with all of God’s people. He is John’s personal and loving*

Savior and friend.” (Brighton, 653) The Lord endorses the angel as his personal messenger. The same language is used in John 20:21 to describe the sending of the apostles as the personal representatives of Christ. Jesus specifically claims the content of the angel’s message in the seven visions (*“this testimony”* - literally *“these things”* - Greek - *“tauta”*) as His own. The information is intended for all the people of God - *“for the churches.”*

“I am the Root and the Offspring of David...” - Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah promised in the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the *“Root and Offspring of David.”* In Revelation 5:5 the Lamb is presented as *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.”* As Jesus indicated, quoting Psalm 110:1, the Messiah would be both David’s Son and Lord:

“When Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, He asked, “How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit declared: “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet.” David calls Him “Lord.” How then can He be his son?” (Mark 12:35-37)

Jesus is both the ancestor and the descendent of David, the source of his royal dynasty and the Messianic King who would come to fulfill his line. *“The bright Morning Star”* is the star whose appearance in the heavens signals the end of the night and the imminent coming of the day. Ancient Balaam had foretold: *“I see Him, but*



*“The Prophet Balaam Before the Angel of the Lord”
by James Northcote*



*“The Star of Bethlehem”
by Frederic Leighton, 1862*

not now; I behold Him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a Scepter will rise out of Israel.” (Numbers 24:17) That prophecy led the wise men from the East to Bethlehem. *“The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn.”* (Mounce, p. 395)

“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” - Christ Himself remains the speaker in these verses. Lenski is correct when he notes *“It is Jesus who adds “And the Spirit and the bride are saying...”* (Lenski, p. 669) Our Lord describes the immediate and emphatic response of all the people of God, *“the bride,”* (Ephesians 5: 23-32; Revelation 21:2,9) and *“him who hears”* to His announcement of His imminent return. That response is prompted and empowered by the Holy Spirit. All God’s people cry *“Come!”* This earnest eagerness for the Lord’s return must characterize the Church in every place and time. Christians are by definition those *“who have longed for His appearing.”* (2 Timothy 4:8). At the conclusion of his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul expresses this ardent yearning in the Aramaic words *“marana tha”* - *“Come, Our Lord.”* (1 Corinthians 16:22) This ancient prayer may well have



“Christ and His Bride the Church” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

been one of the oldest components of the liturgy of Holy Communion in which, ***“whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until He come.”*** (1 Corinthians 11:26). Dr. Gregory J. Lockwood writes:

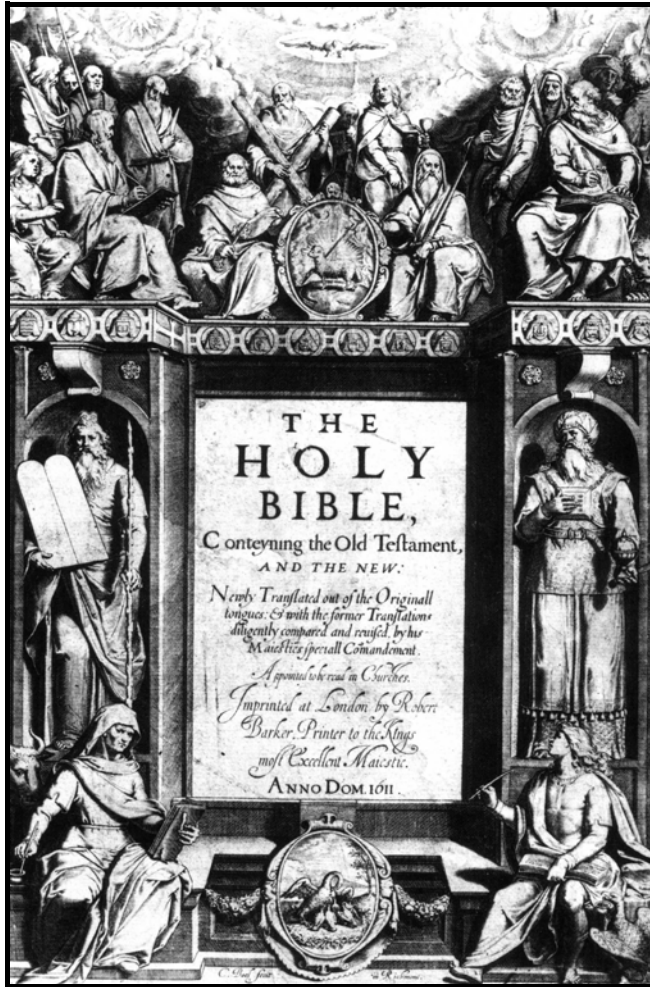
“Thus Paul now cries to the Lord from his heart using the language of his heart, his mother tongue, Aramaic: “Marana tha! Our Lord, Come!”...Like other Aramaic or Jewish words that became common coin in the early church (“amen,” “hallelujah,” “hosanna”), “marana tha” seems to have been a beloved expression because of the way in which it gave voice to the Christian expectation and hope.” (Lockwood, p. 632)

“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever...” - The text abruptly shifts to exhortation as the knowledge of Christ’s imminent return serves to remind us of the urgency of our evangelistic task. The time is short. Judgment is coming. Now is the acceptable time, today is the day of salvation. Jesus urges those who have not yet tasted the sweet waters of the river of the water of life to come forward now before it is too late. The language parallels the appeal of Isaiah 55: ***“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come,***

buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” (Isaiah 55:1-2)

“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book.” -

A stern word of warning is added as the Book of Revelation draws to its magnificent



Title Page to a 1611 English Bible Depicting the Prophets and Apostles

“logoi” or any part of one of them. Here and now I fervently pray, that if in any “logos” I have gone amiss, He may pardon me, bring the correction to me, and prevent damage as a result of my error. I count every sentence in Scripture holy, to be touched only with sanctified heart and pen.” (Lenski, pp. 673-674)

conclusion. Once more, the words are spoken by our Lord Himself. The Greek text stresses the personal nature of the admonition - literally “*I myself testify*” (Greek - “*martyro ego*”). No one dare alter the words of this writing either by addition or subtraction, for it is a book of “**prophecy**,” that is, a book written by the plenary verbal inspiration of God. A similar warning from the prophet Moses concludes the Old Testament Torah: “**See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.**” (Deuteronomy 12:32; cf. 4:2) The warning prohibits not only literal addition or subtraction but also misinterpretation and distortion. R.C.H. Lenski, one of Lutheranism’s most prolific Bible commentators, offers this profoundly personal response to our Lord’s warning:

“Let me say for myself that I have kept the Lord’s warning before my eyes so that I might not add or take away any of these

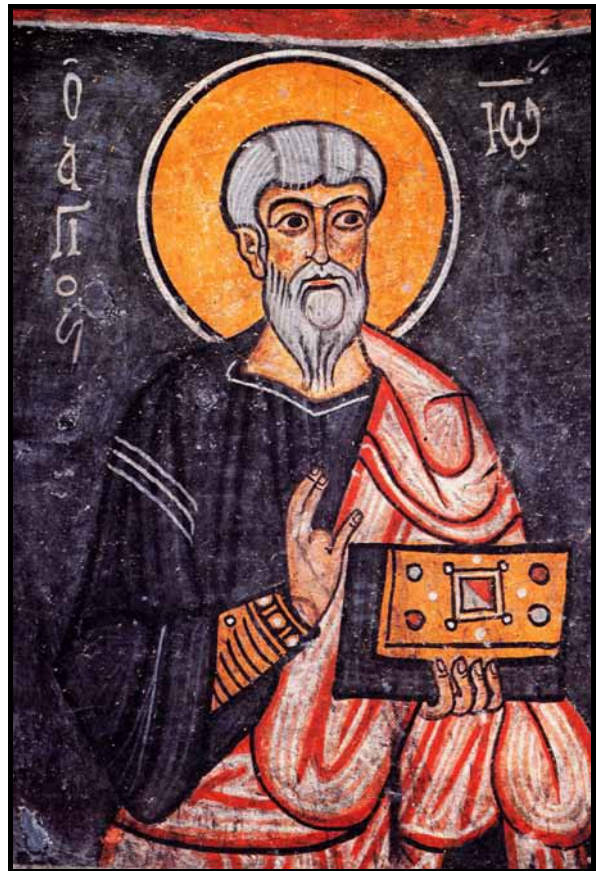
Such an attitude of humble awe and prayerful submission before the Sacred Scriptures must be the perspective of every genuine scholar of the Bible.

This stern admonition against addition, subtraction or distortion, while specifically stated in reference to the Book of Revelation is correctly applied more broadly to all sixty-six books of the Bible. Dr. Brighton is completely correct in his assertion:

“The warning that Jesus gives here in Revelation 22:18-19, while directly applying to the Book of Revelation, should also be applied by inference to the entire Bible, since Revelation is the climax and conclusion to the entire canon, both the OT and the NT. For the writings of the entire Bible are also so to be received as the very words of God and thus not to be altered.” (Brighton, p. 656)

Those who would challenge this more general application to all of Scripture ignore the unique circumstances in which these words were spoken. St. John, the last of the apostles, is recording the closing words of his final book near the end of his own life. The great company of the prophets and the apostles dies with him. Surely it is no mere co-incidence that as the Revelation of St. John comes to an end, and with it the sixty-six books of the Bible, this solemn word of warning is spoken. Walter Chantry says it exceedingly well:

“Some men have ridiculed an appeal to Revelation 22:18,19 when discussing the close of the canon (the end to divine messages from the Lord). However, in the context of all that the Bible says about Jesus being the final prophet, the climax of revelation, the words are most significant. It is the same Jesus Christ who speaks in this last chapter of the Bible...Our Lord makes this comment in the closing verses of the last confirming witness to his revelation. The Savior gave his warning through the last living apostle at the conclusion of his ministry. Some would prefer to weaken our Lord’s warning signal by saying that it applies only to the Book of Revelation. But such strong and unusual language must be more than a prohibition to tamper with that one writing. We must see it as did



*St. John, the Last Apostle
12th Century Byzantine Fresco*

Matthew Henry. He wrote, "This sanction is like a flaming sword to guard the canon of Scripture from profane hands." Revelation is no usual book. It is a sweeping analysis of history from the first advent of Christ to the second. Jesus had promised that the Spirit would teach his apostles "all things" (John 14:26). The Spirit had come and fulfilled the promise. Apostles had communicated the authoritative Word. The task of revelation was finished. The Book of Revelation was the last apostolic word to the church. The almighty Savior, seated at God's right hand, opens his sovereign lips personally to declare that nothing is to be added to what has been recorded." (Chantry, pp. 36-37)

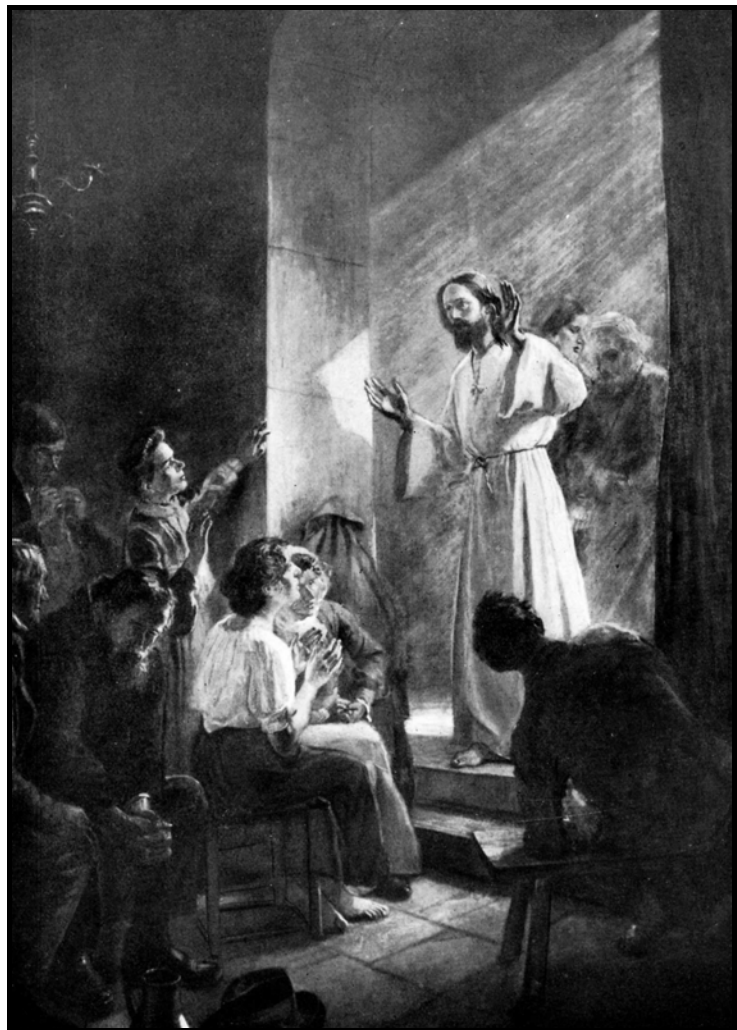


"King of Kings and Lord of Lords" by Rudolf Schäfer

The penalties specified in the warning are couched in the language of Revelation's awesome visions - the addition of the plagues, the loss of the tree of life and the loss of the holy city.

“He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” - Revelation ends with *“a promise, a prayer, and a blessing.”* (Brighton, p. 657) The promise is spoken by the Lord Jesus. Having heard the expression of His people’s yearning hearts, He affirms one final time ***“Yes, I am coming soon!”*** This is Christ’s last word to His Church before He actual return. He is on the way. His arrival is imminent. Do not despair. Do not grow weary. Jesus is coming soon.

“Amen. Come Lord Jesus.” - The Revelator’s response is immediate and enthusiastic. His words, as noted in the commentary on Verse 17, are drawn from the ancient liturgies of the church. The Aramaic transliteration ***“Amen”*** - *“so be it!”* and a Greek translation of the Aramaic prayer *“marana tha”* - ***“Come, Lord Jesus.”*** This is the heartfelt desire and urgent prayer of every Christian, at every place, in every time. The Advent Hymn, *“The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns”* concludes with the same urgent petition: *“The King shall come when morning dawns and light and beauty brings. Hail, Christ the Lord! Thy people pray: Come quickly, King of Kings.”* (ELH # 101)



“Come Lord Jesus!” by Fritz von Uhde

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” - The letter concludes with an apostolic benediction. Until the great day of the Lord’s triumphant return, we who are His own live by His grace. That undeserved love is His gift to us for every day of the meantime. He sustains and strengthens us as His people. In Him, that is, in His grace, we live and move, and have our being.



“Amen! Come Lord Jesus!” by F.W. Shadow

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