



“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

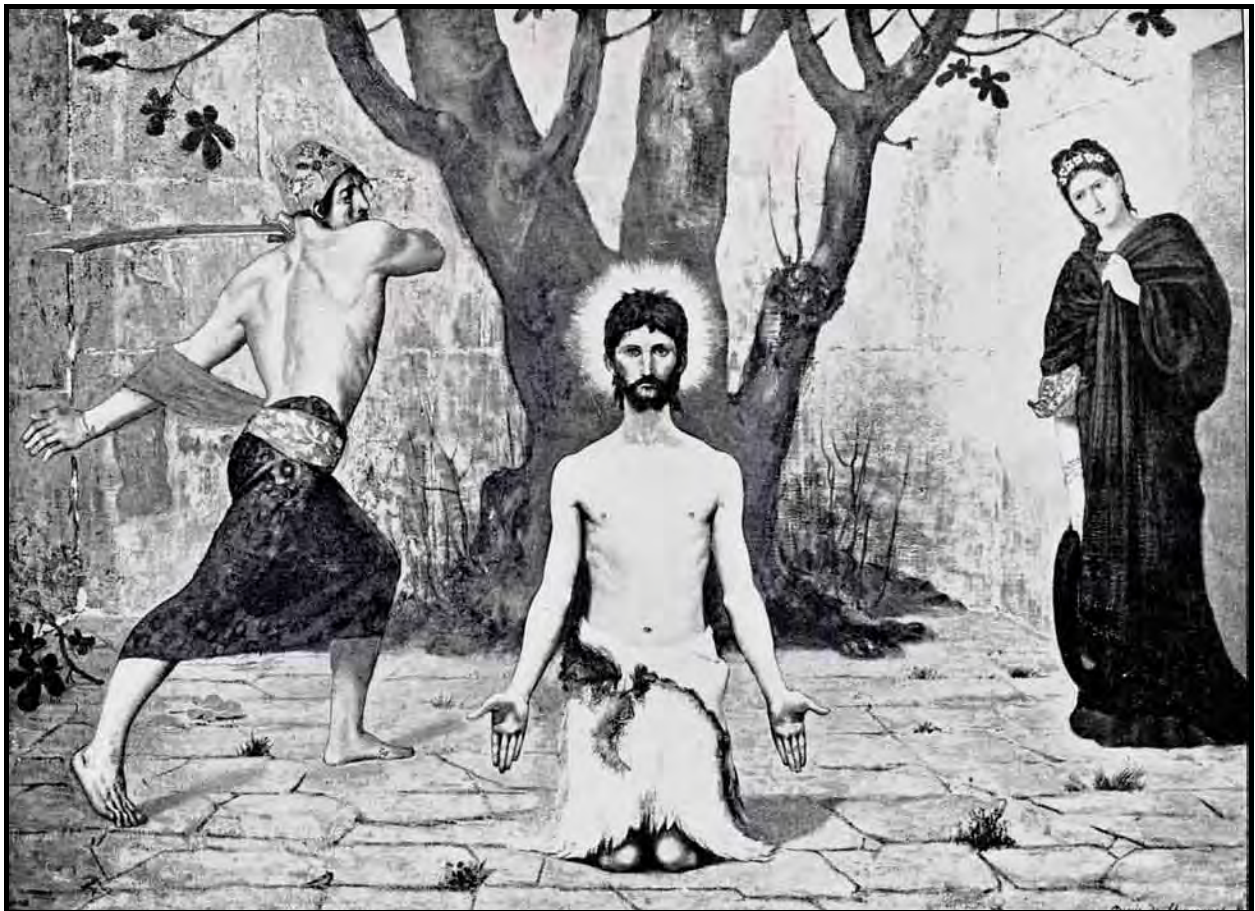


“To The Eternal Home” by Wilhelm von Kaulbach

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

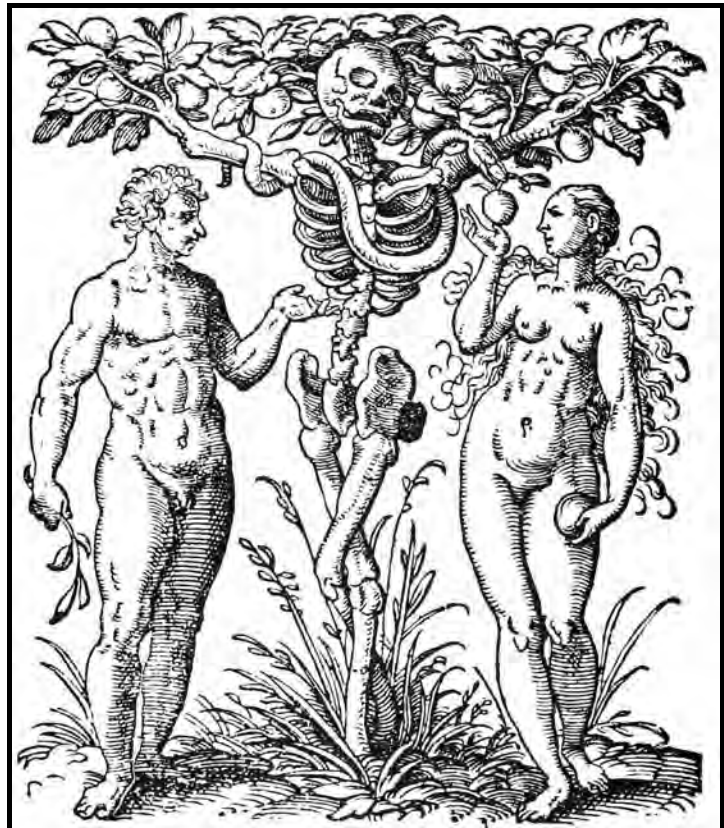
A magnificent woodcut entitled *“The Death of the Just and the Unjust”* by Reformation era artist Heinrich Vogtherr presents the transformation of death’s significance for those who die in a faith relationship with the Savior Jesus Christ. Holbein conveys the stark contrast between the meaning of death 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 (*“Glucksagung”*) 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.

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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*



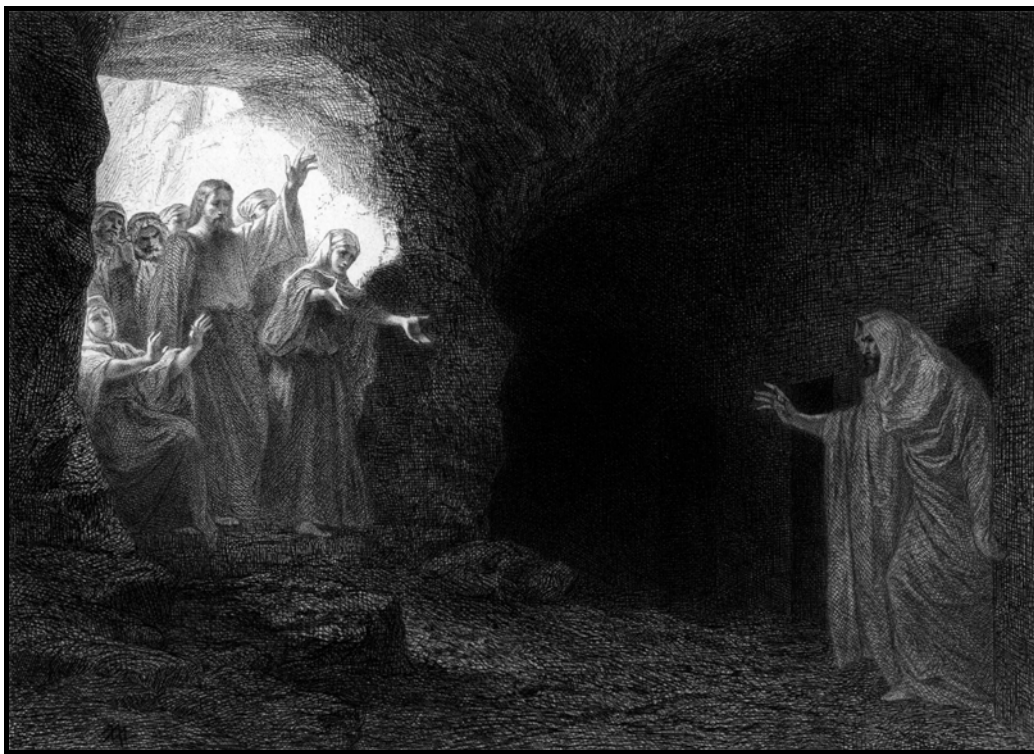
“Medieval Woodcut Depicting The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as the Skeletal Figure of Death”



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)

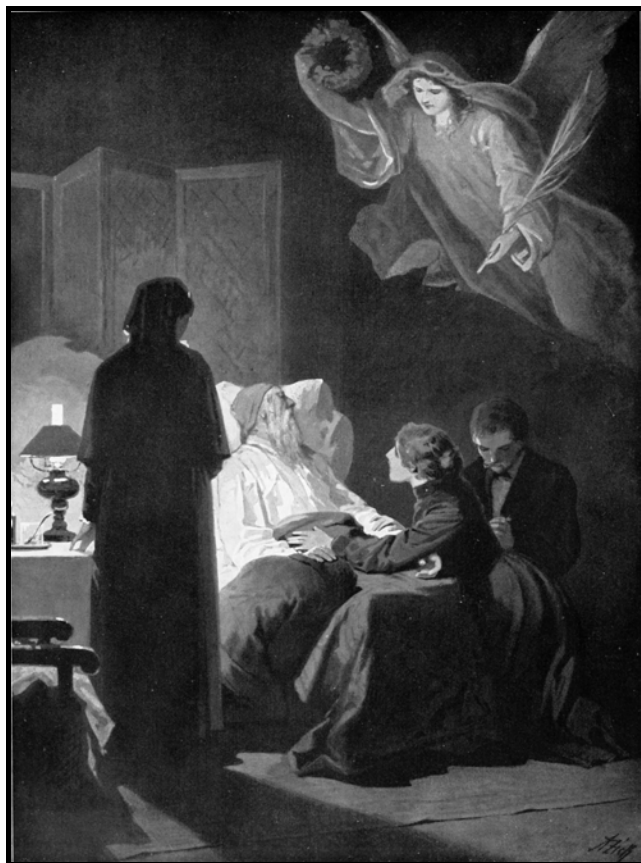
“The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” - The text goes on to define the blessedness of those who participate in the first resurrection. The blessedness of those who have experienced the ***“first resurrection”*** 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:



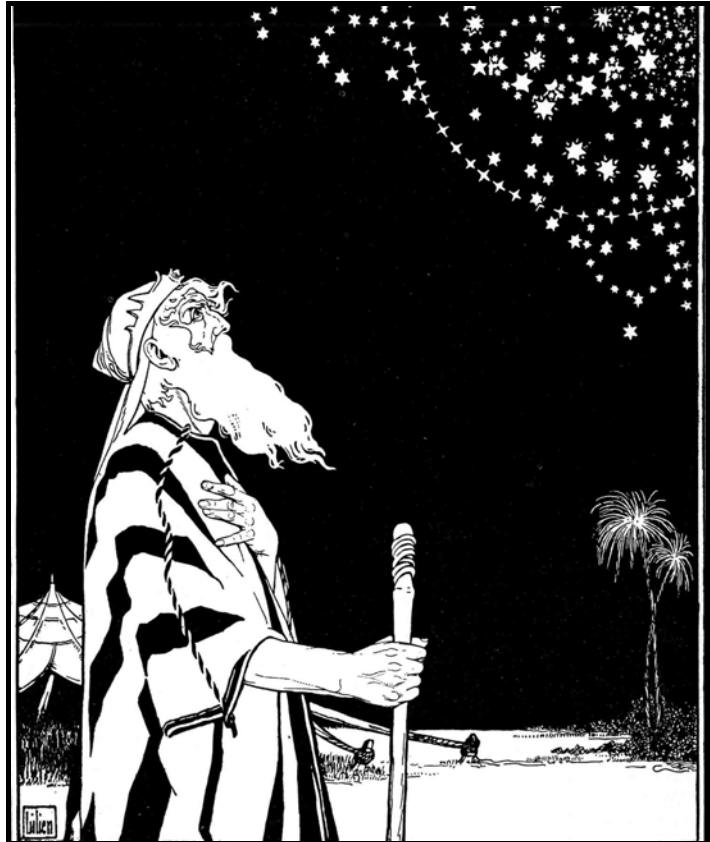
John Nelson Darby
Founder of Dispensational Premillennialism

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)

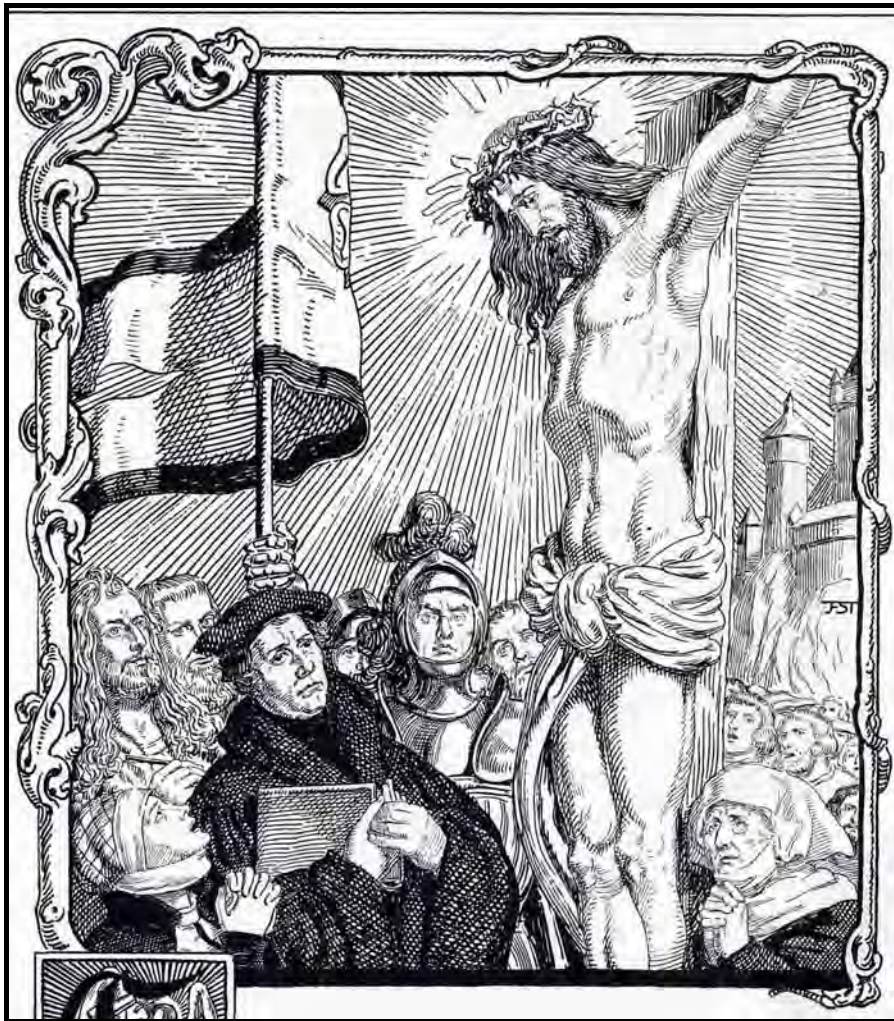
Dispensationalists believe that God promised ethnic Israel a glorious earthly kingdom, a restoration of the Kingdom of David and Solomon, ruled by the Messiah. They further believe that when the Jews of Christ’s time rejected His offer of that kingdom it was postponed until some point in the future. 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:

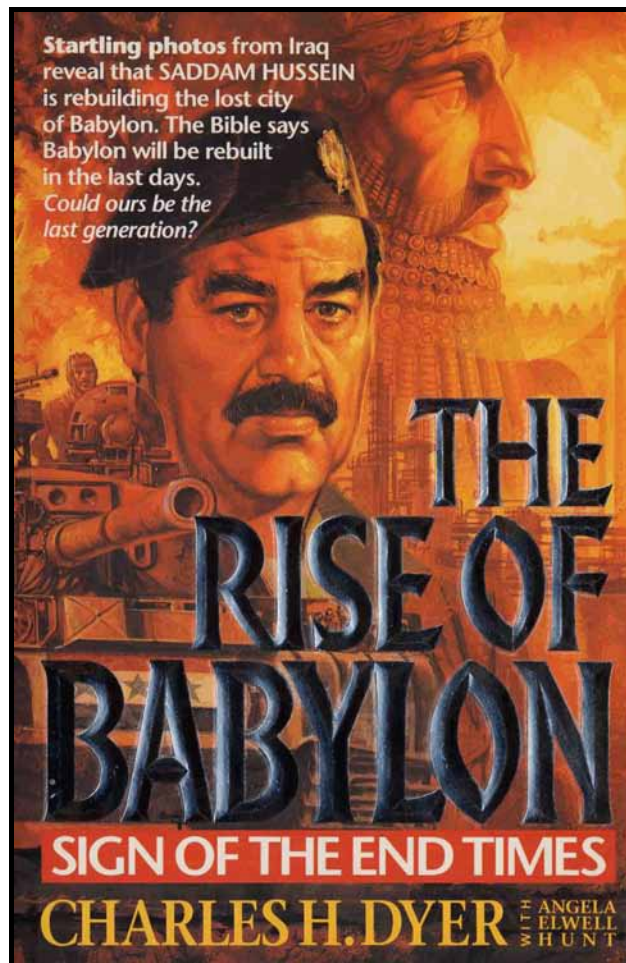


“Luther’s Theology of the Cross” by Franz Stassen

“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 equaled 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,

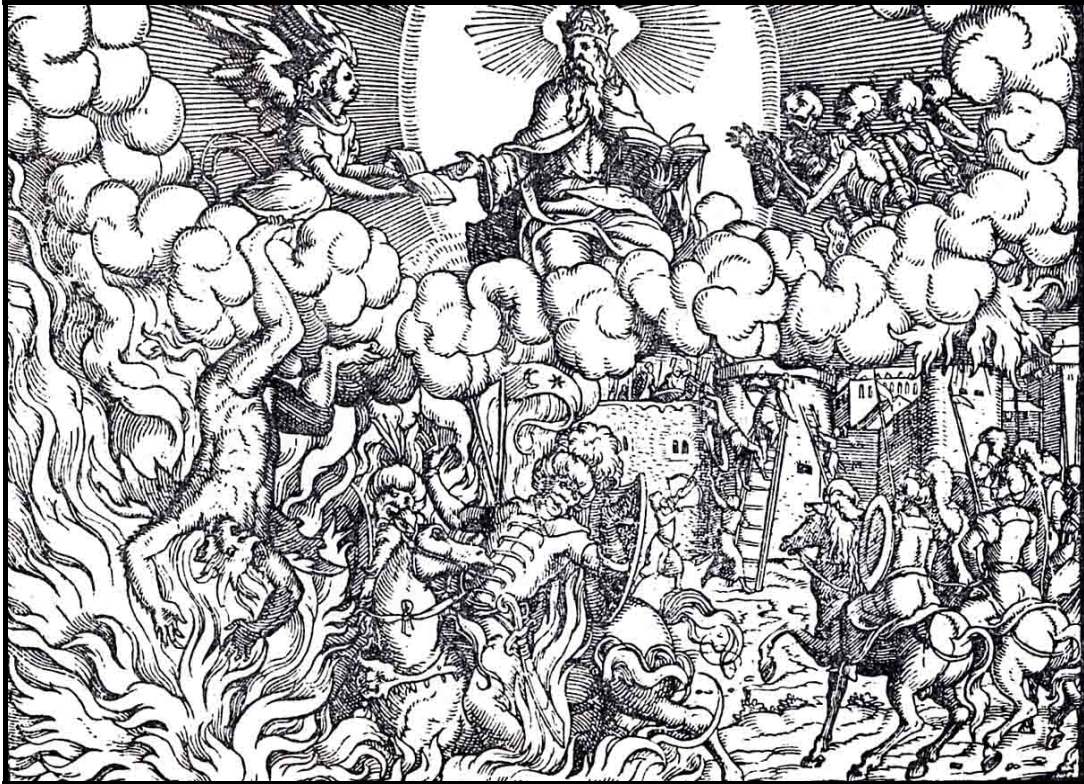


“The Vandals Sack Rome”

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

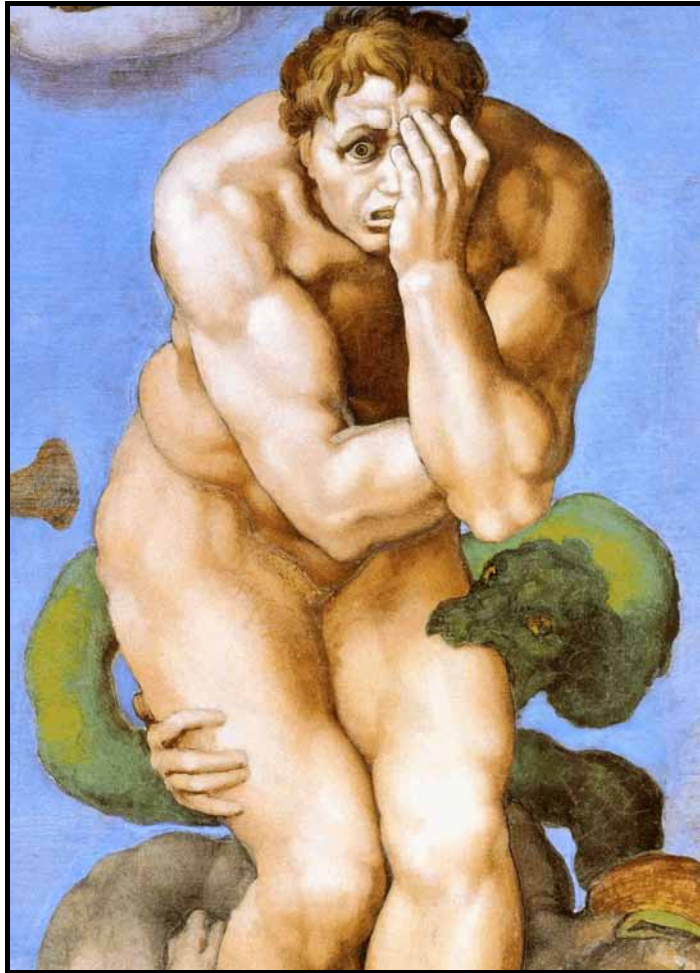


“The Downfall of Satan and His Angels” by Jean-Marc Nattier

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.

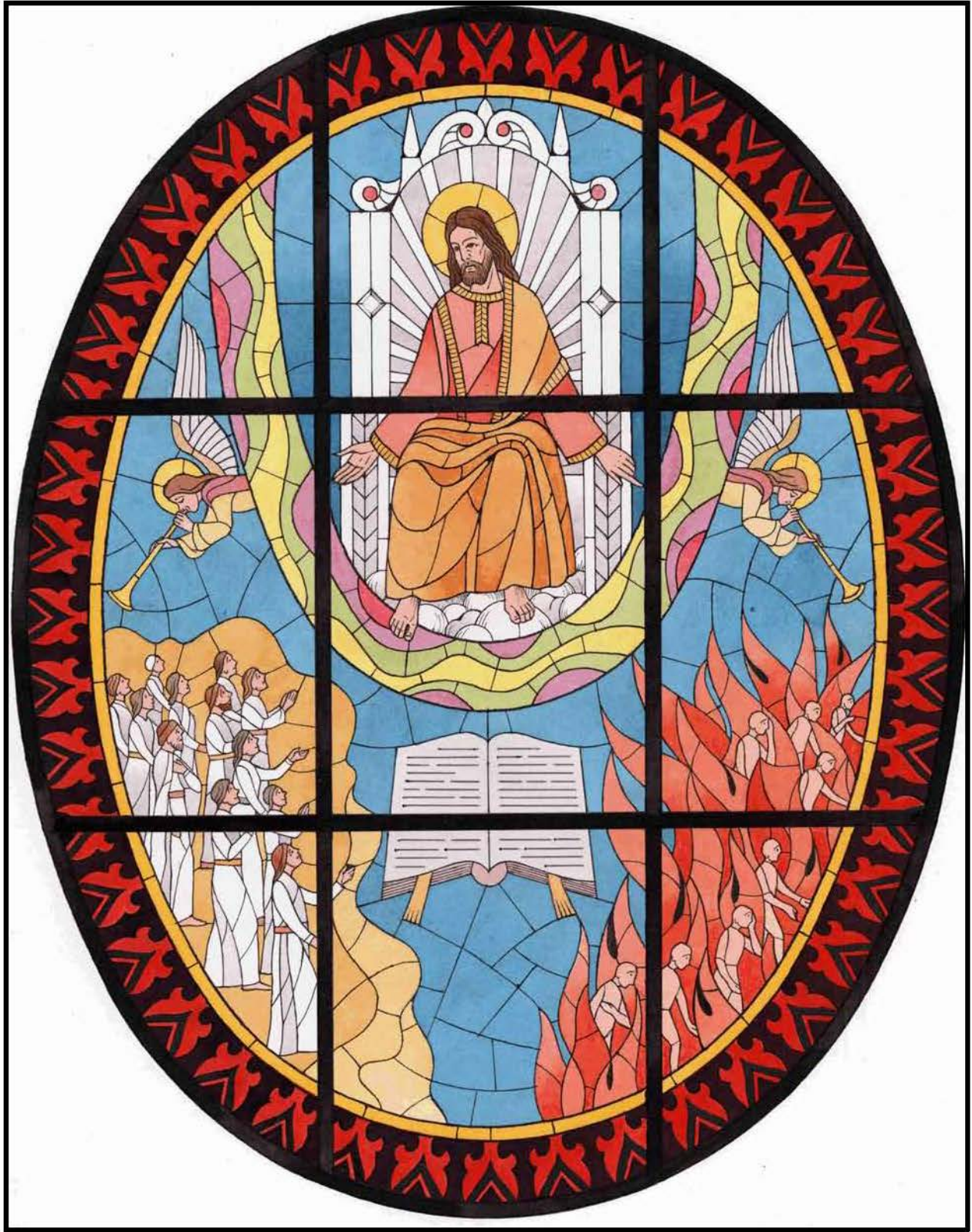
“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them.” - The shift to a new scene is the vision is signaled by the customary phrase ***“Then I saw”*** (Greek - *“kai eidon”*). The devil and his kingdom have been destroyed. 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

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

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)



“The Last Judgement” - Our Savior Lutheran Church



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

“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.”*

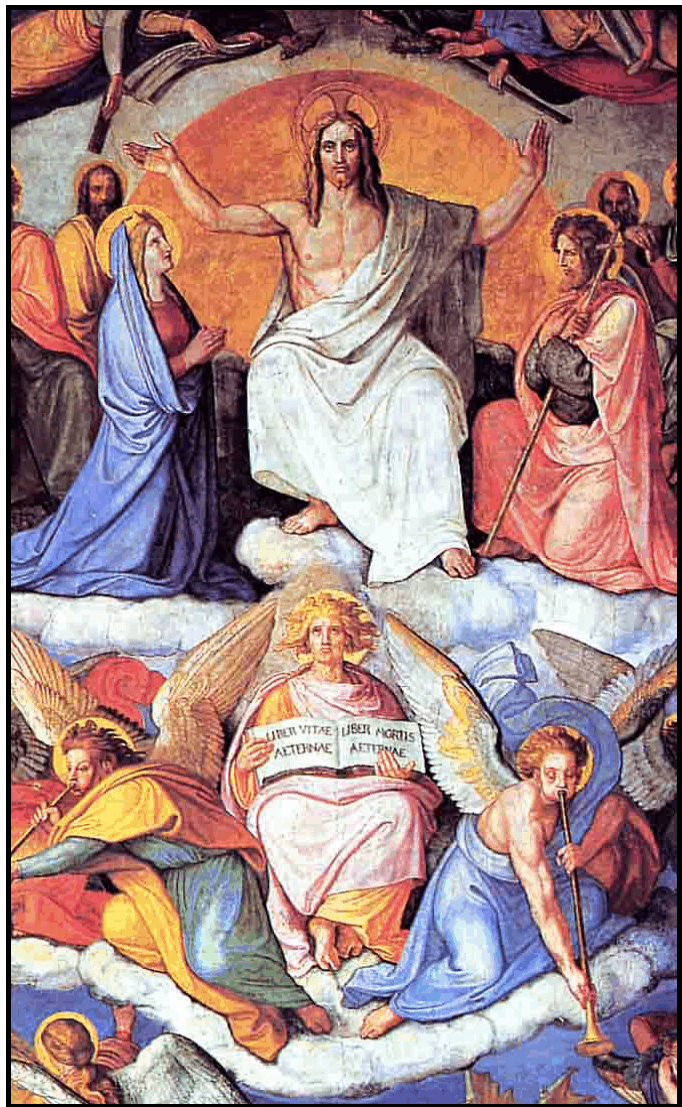


“Dies Domini” (“The Day of the Lord”) by Edward Burne-Jones

“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)

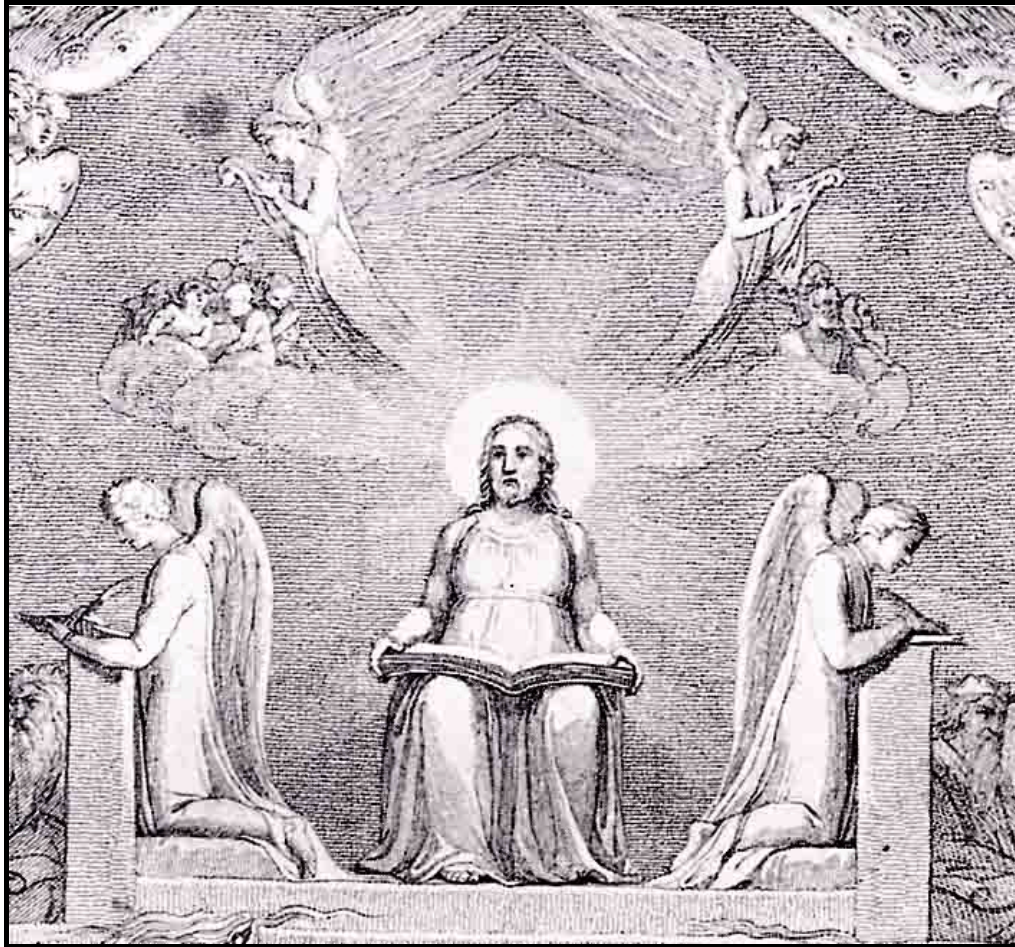
“Enoch, look at the tablets of heaven; read what is written upon them and understand each element of them one by one. So I looked at the tablets of heaven, read all the writing on them, and came to understand everything. I read that book and all the deeds of humanity and all the children of the flesh 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

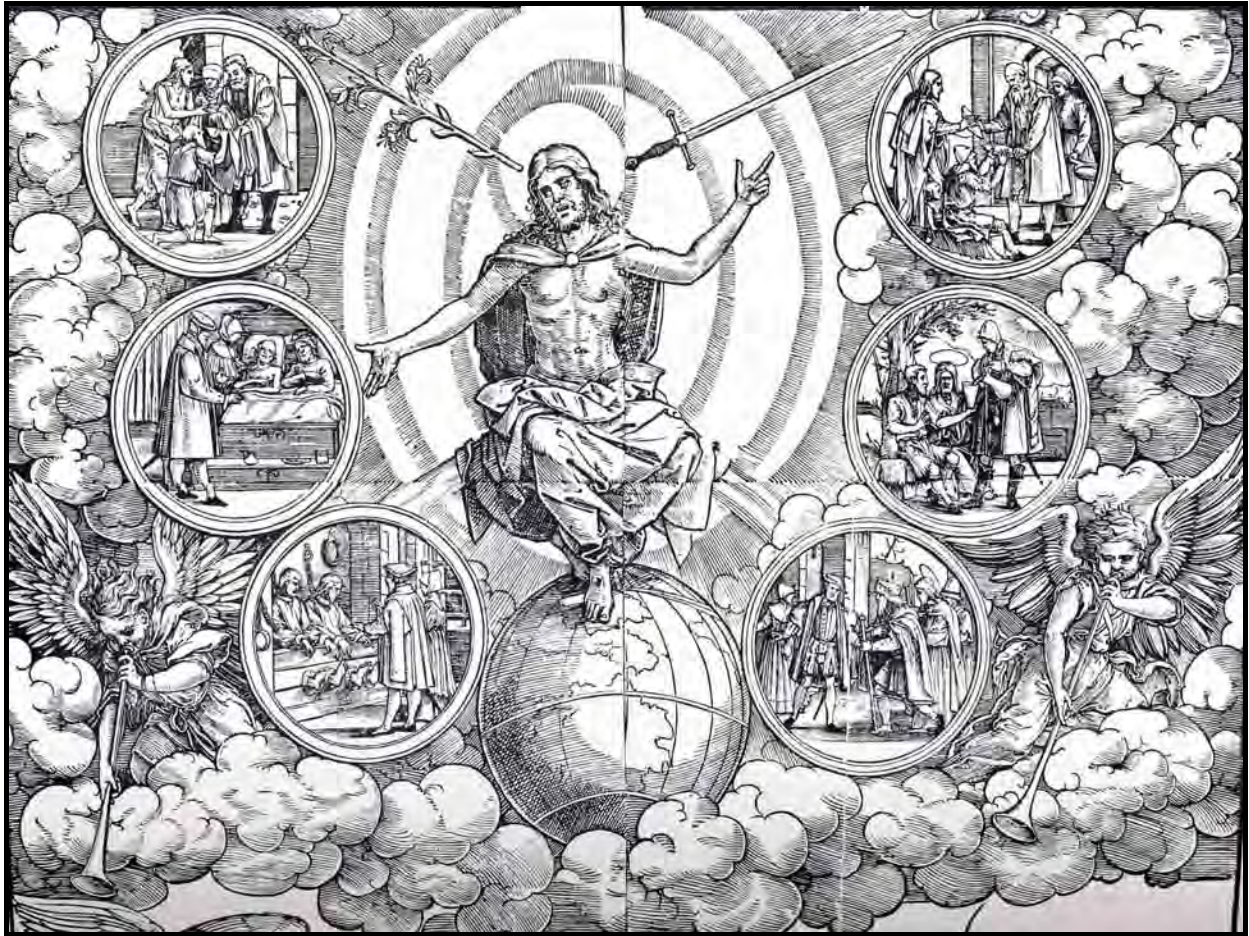


“Christ the Judge with the Book of Life” - Detail from “The Last Judgement” by William Blake

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)

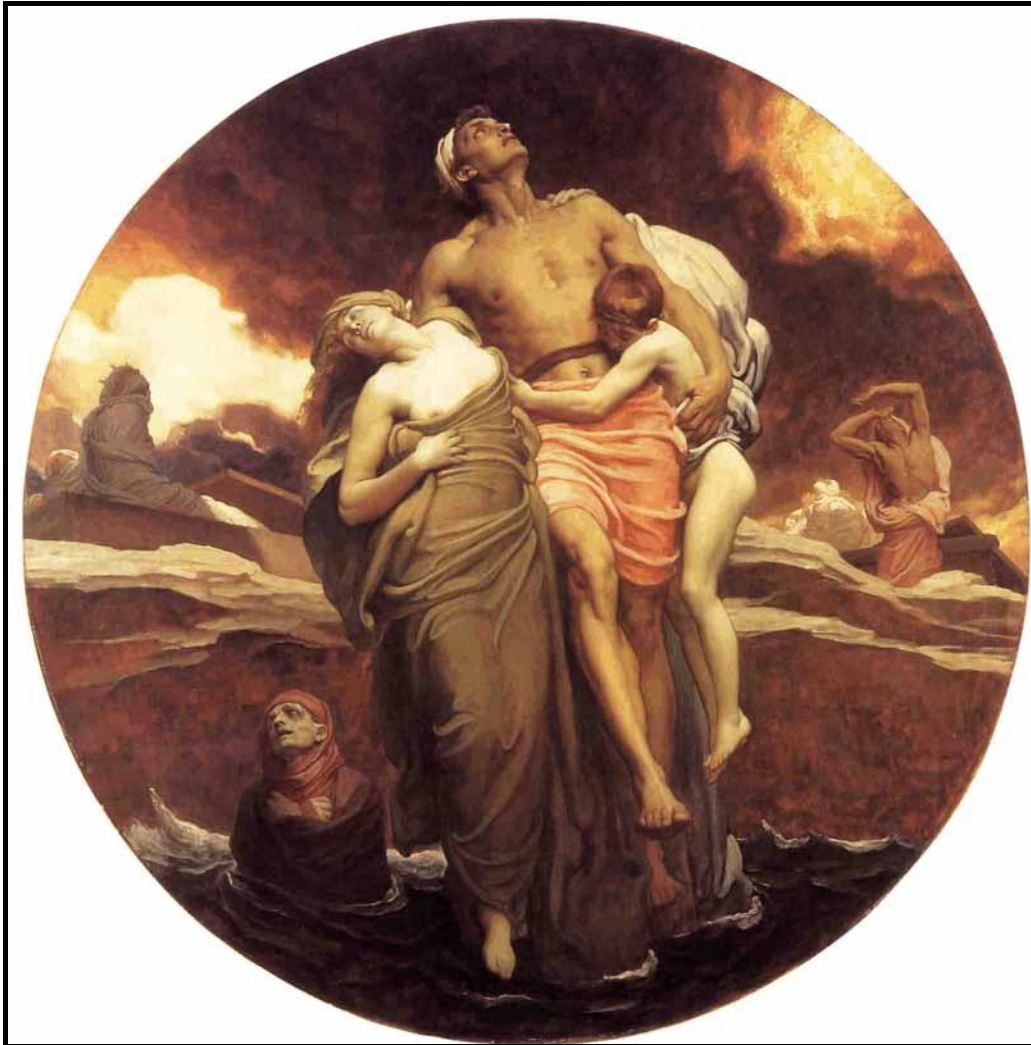


“The Last Judgement” -13th Century French Illumination

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

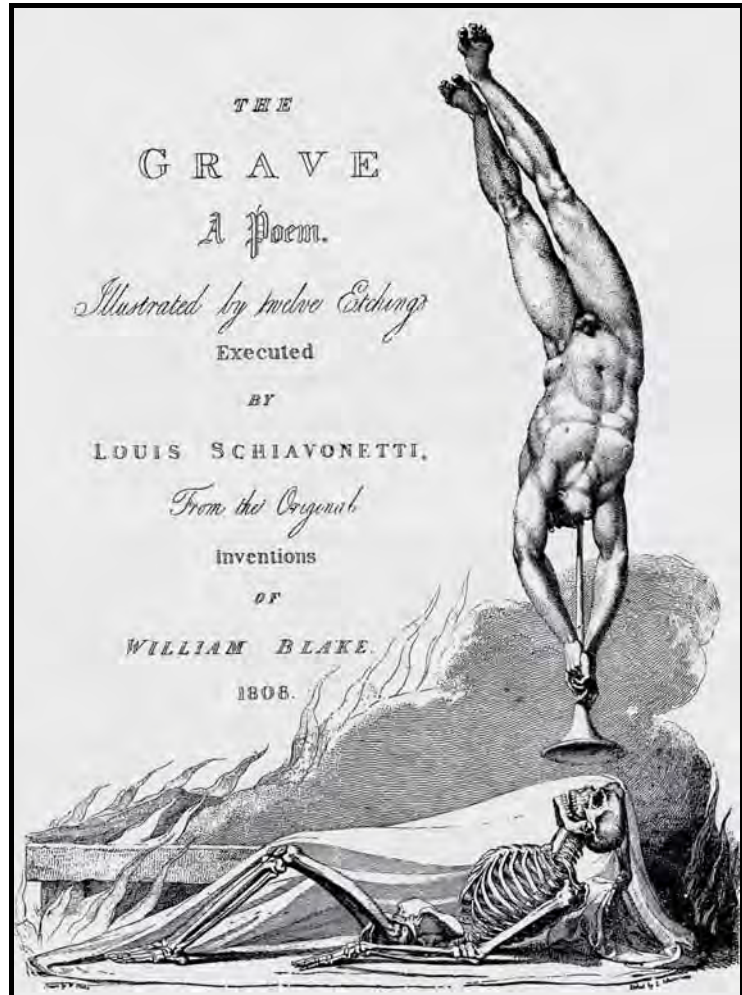
forgiveness of sins, all the wrong deeds that might have been recorded in the books have been erased and blotted out (Isaiah 43:25). While God says He will remember the sins of Babylon (Revelation 18:5), He also promises to forget the sins of His people (Jeremiah 31:34; Isaiah 43:25). The only works 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

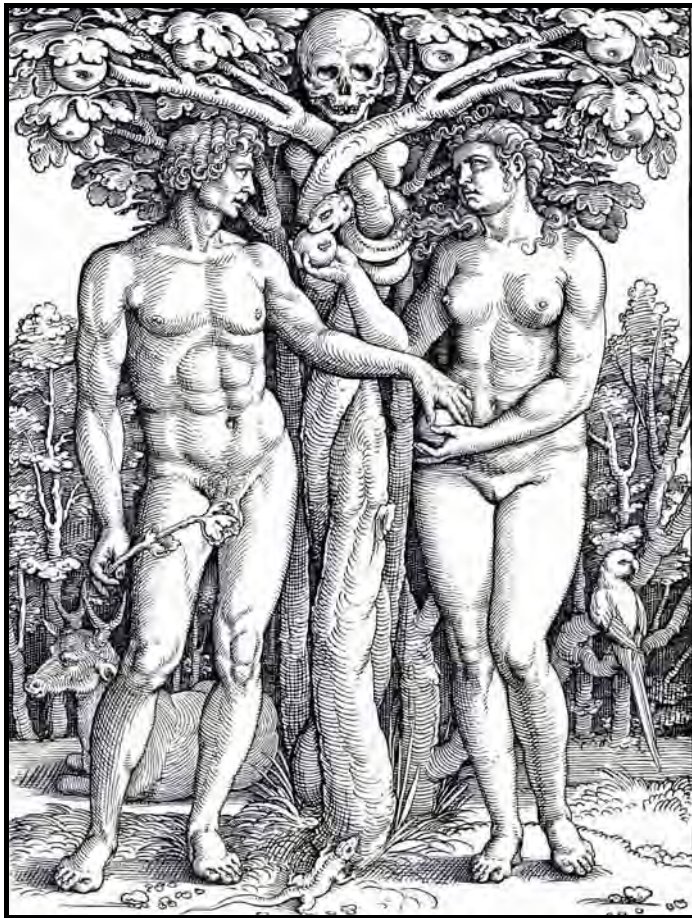


“The Trumpet Shall Sound” - 19th Century Engraving

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.

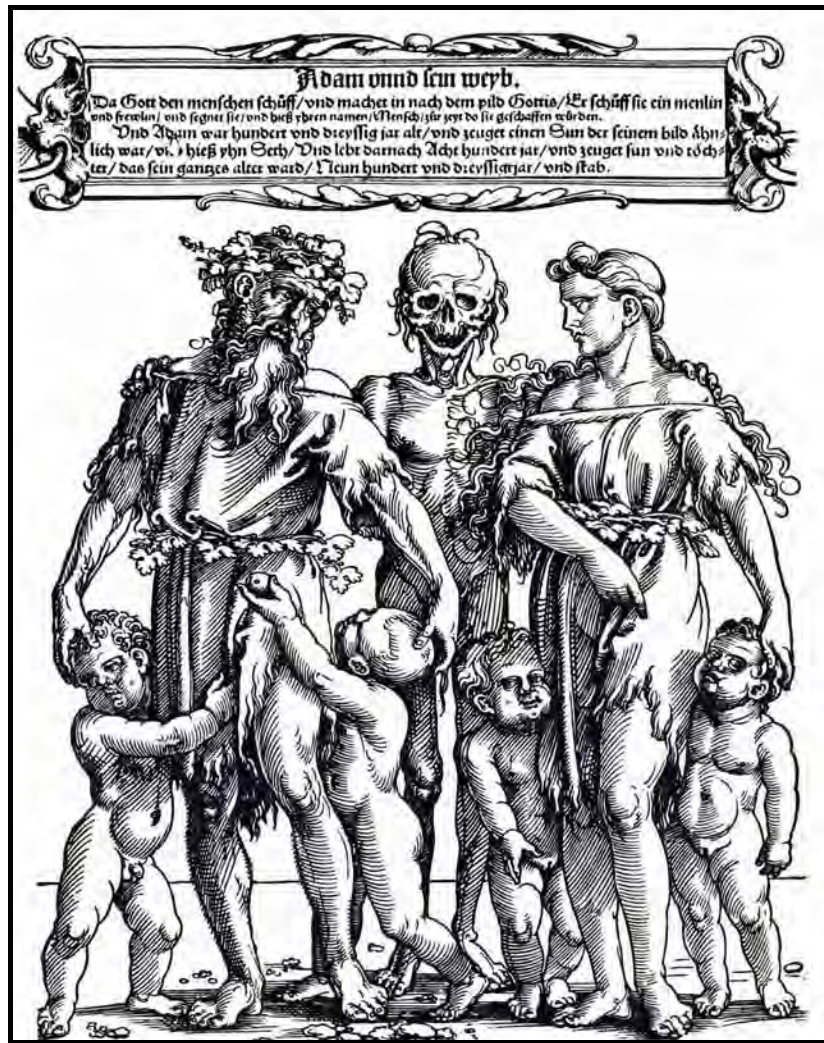


“The Wages of Sin Is Death”
Woodcut by Hans Sebald Beham - 1535

“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

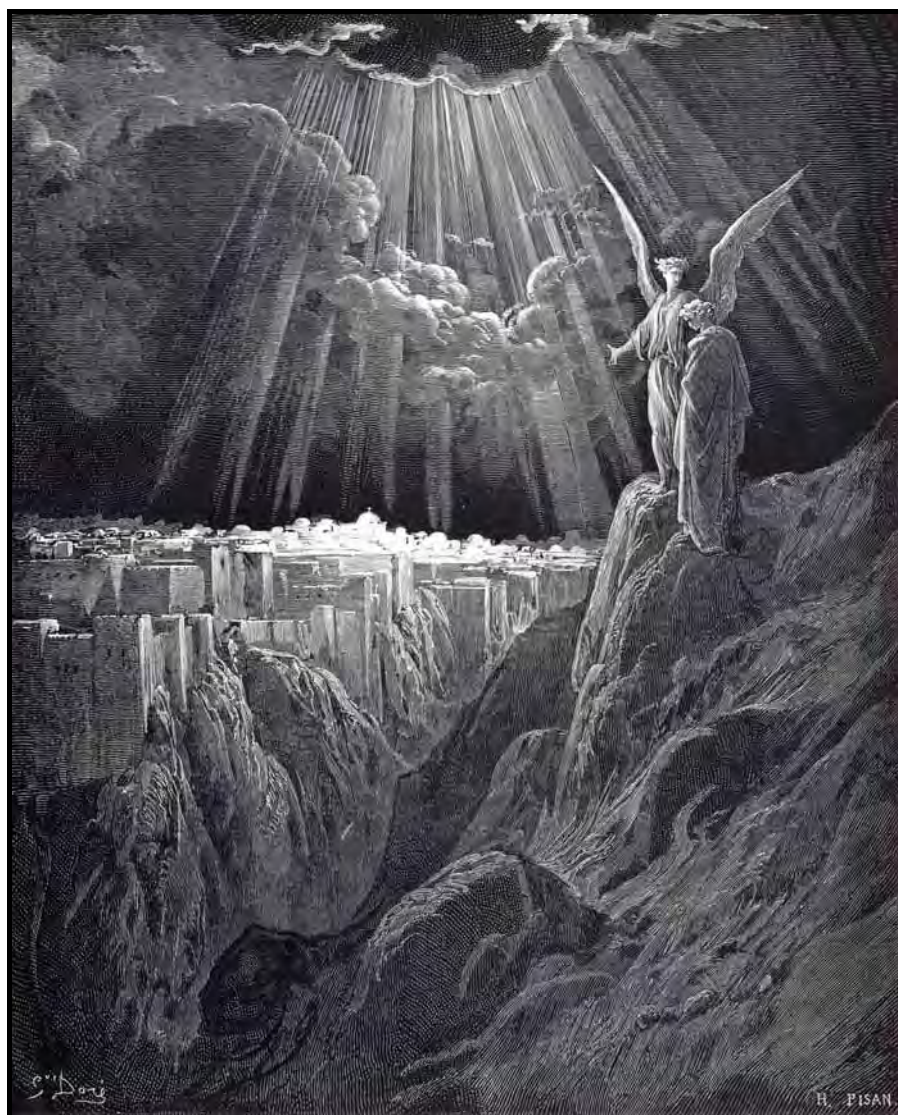


“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” by Lucas Cranach

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

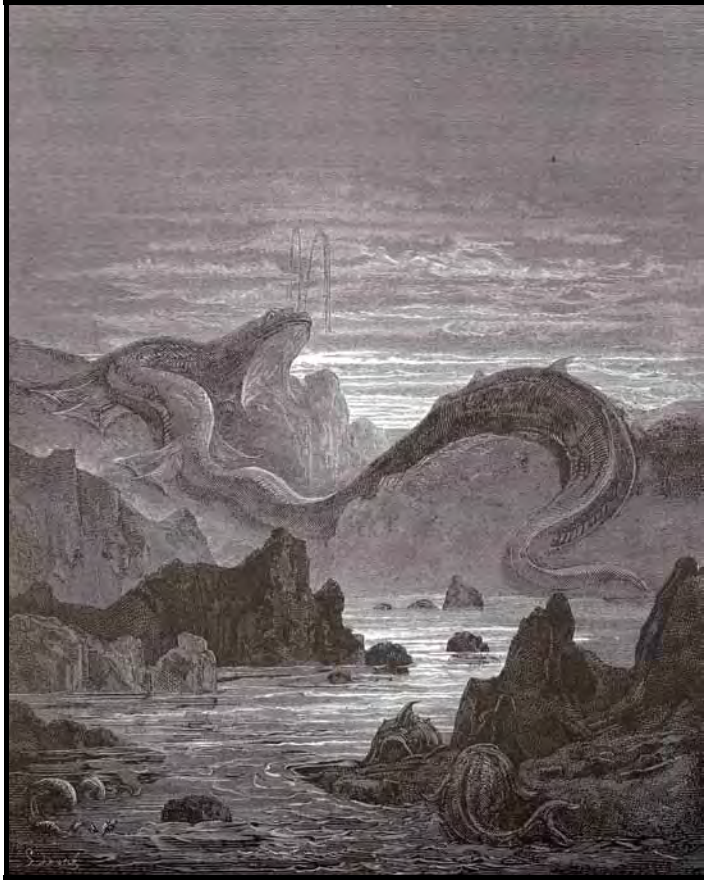


“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” - Luther Bible Woodcut

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 Dore*

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)*

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

“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

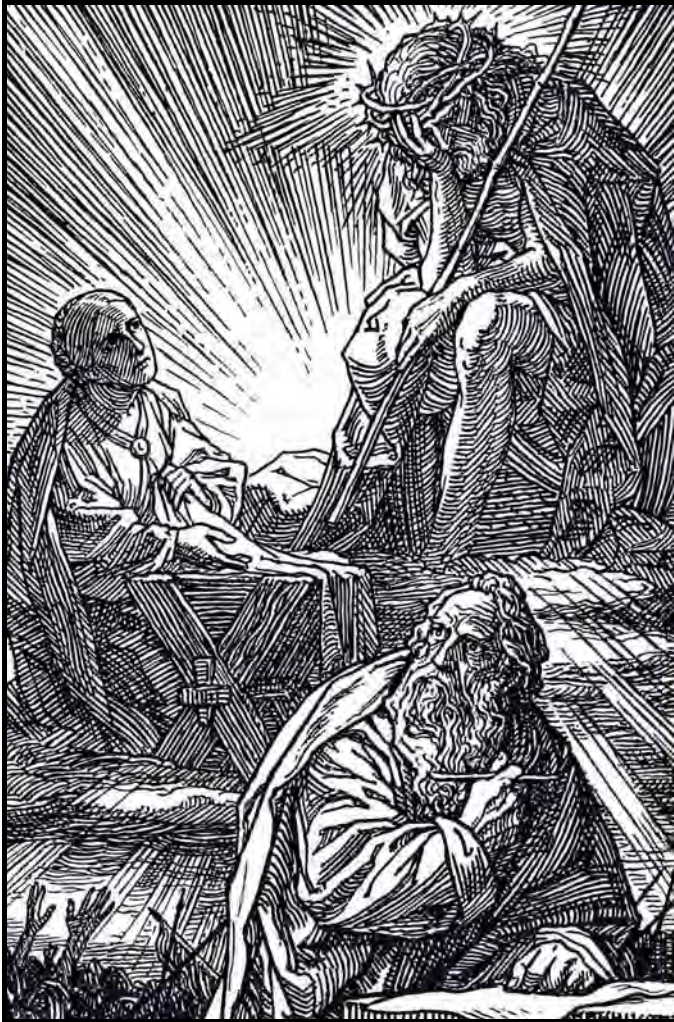
the Lord in that day and will become My people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent Me to you.”
(Zechariah 2:10-11)



“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)

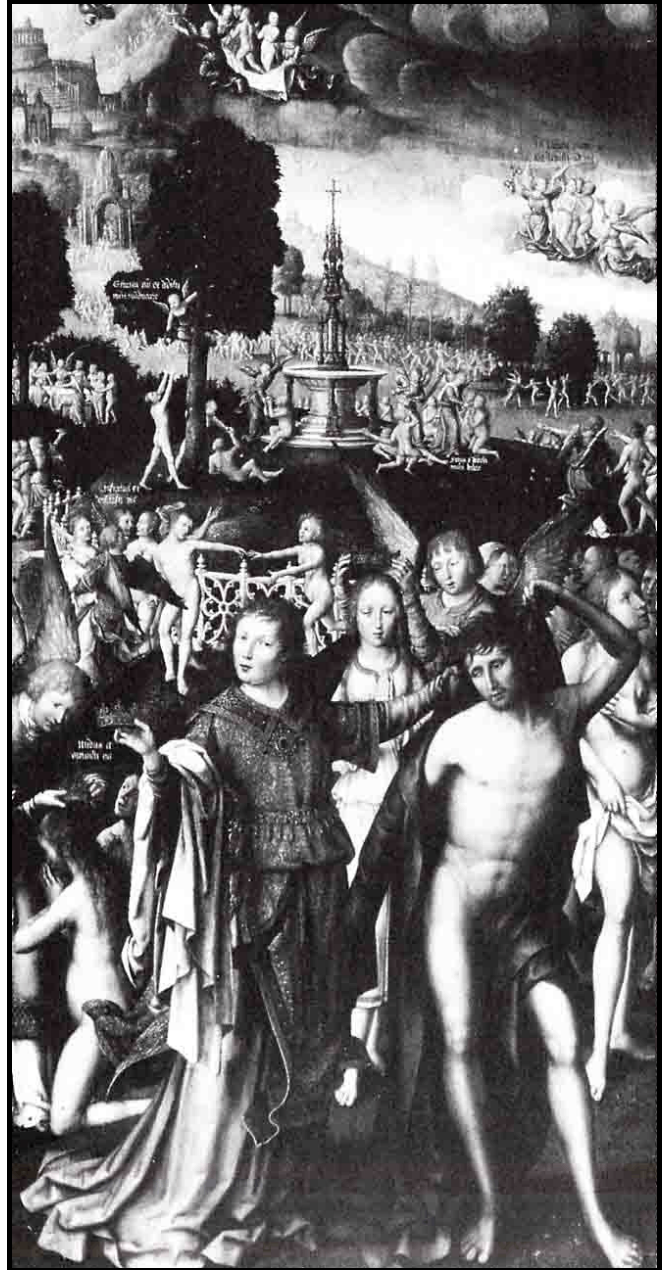
“He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” That which God declares will surely come to pass. The verb *“gegonan”* is a perfect indicative active third person plural form. It is literally translated - *“they have come into being.”* The verb’s plural subject 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)

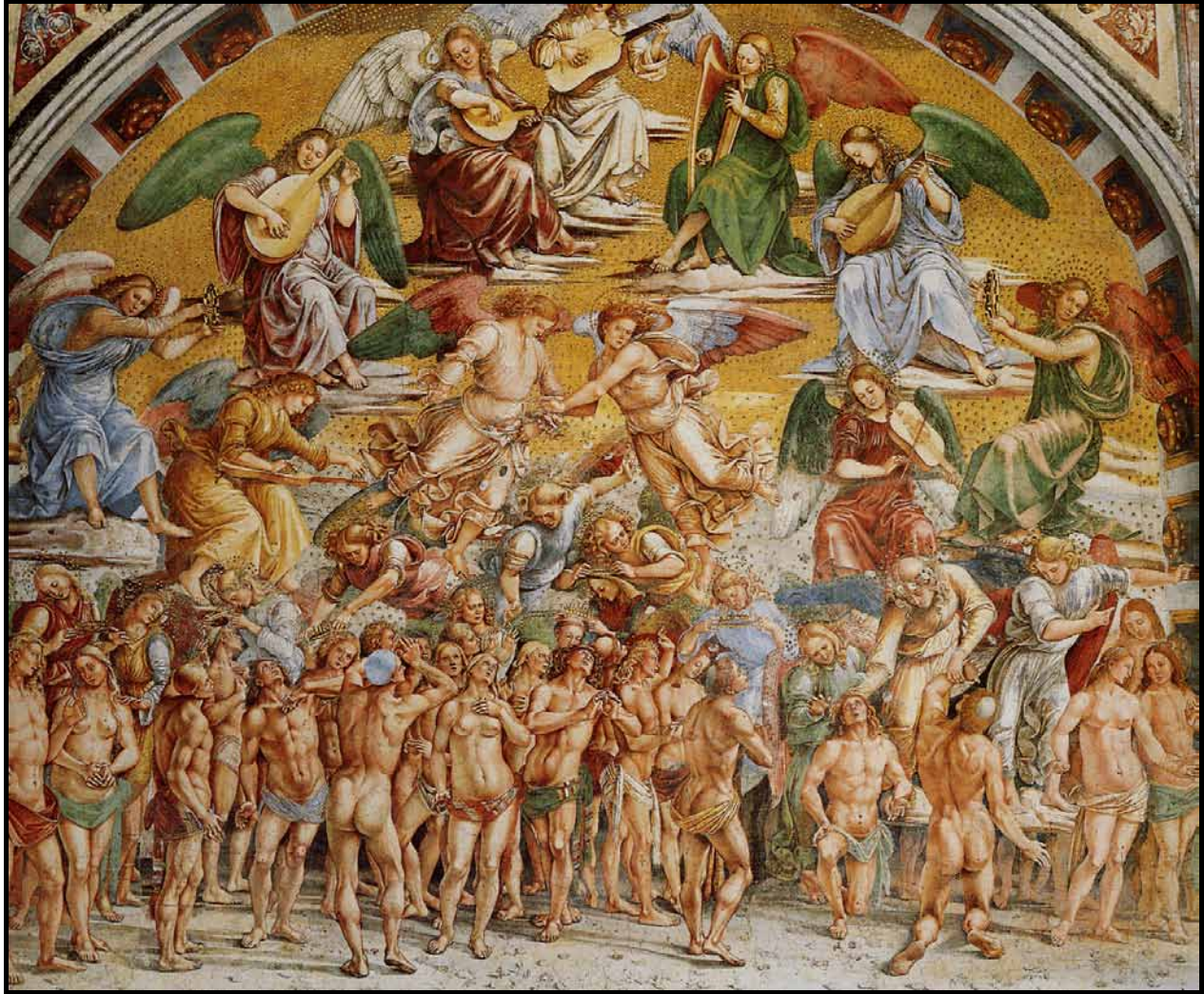
“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels.” (Revelation 3:5)

“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)

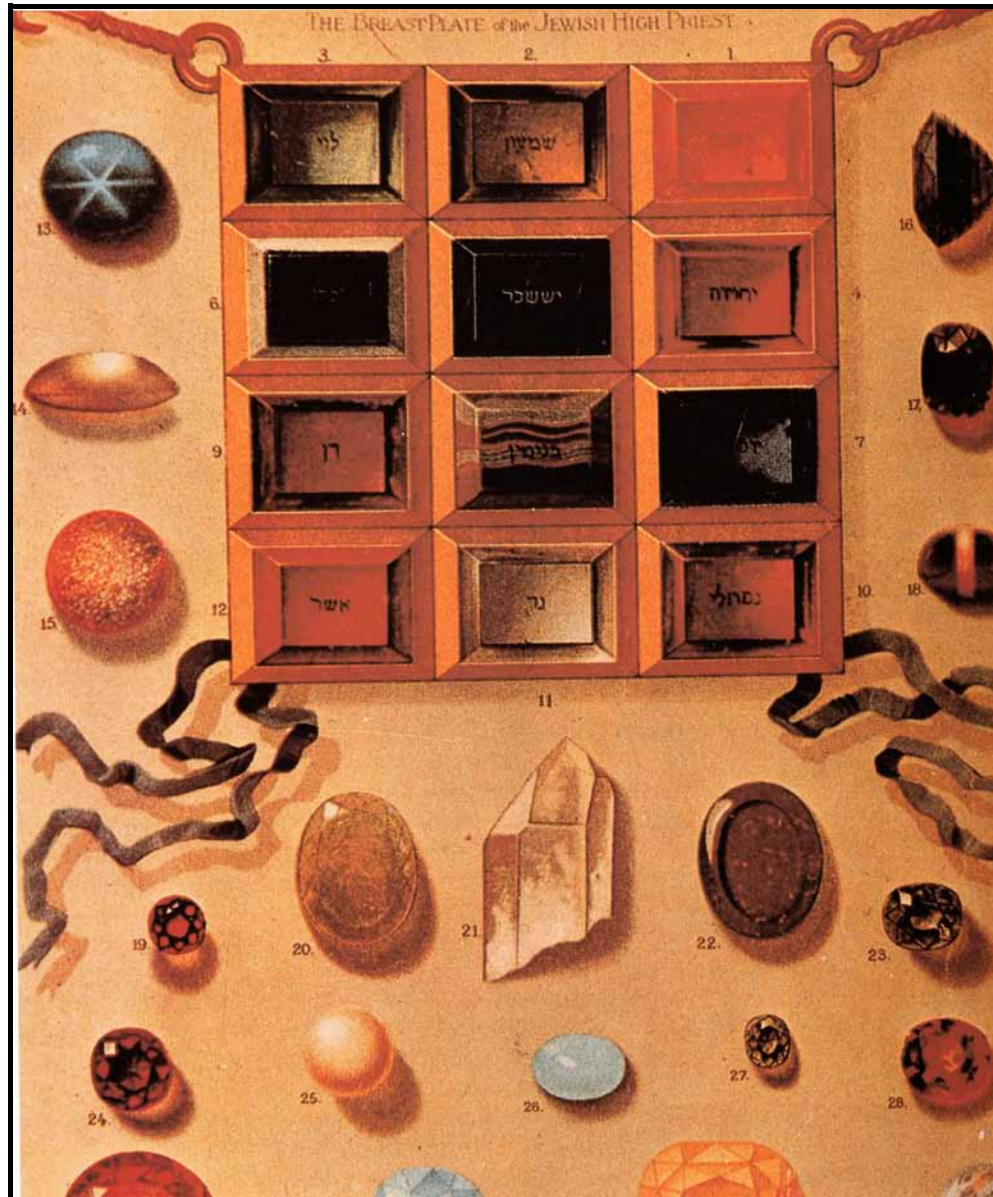
In the visions of both Ezekiel and John the essence of the heavenly Jerusalem's glory and the blessedness of the saints who will dwell therein is the immediate presence of God. Through Ezekiel God promises: ***“My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then 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)



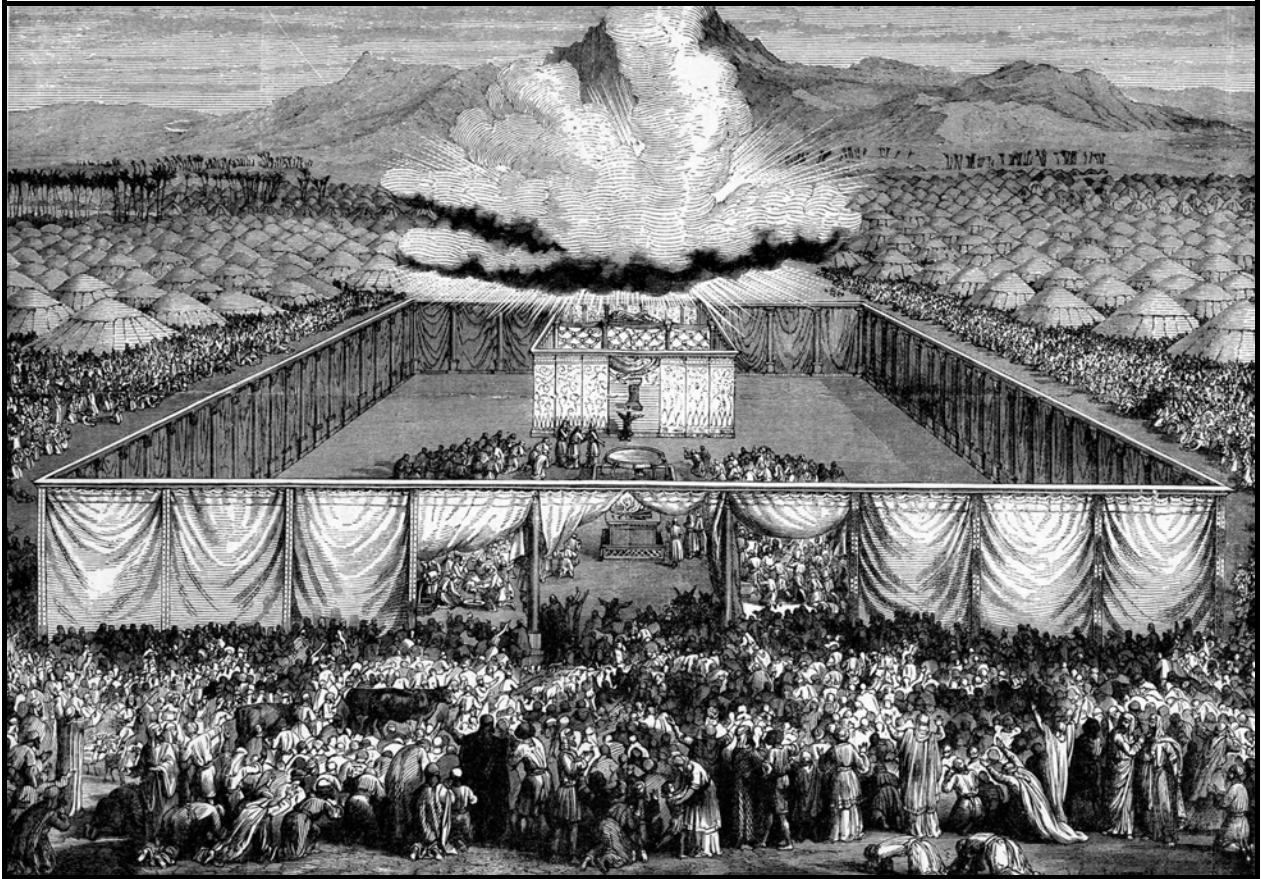
“The Temple of Solomon” Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut - 1534

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

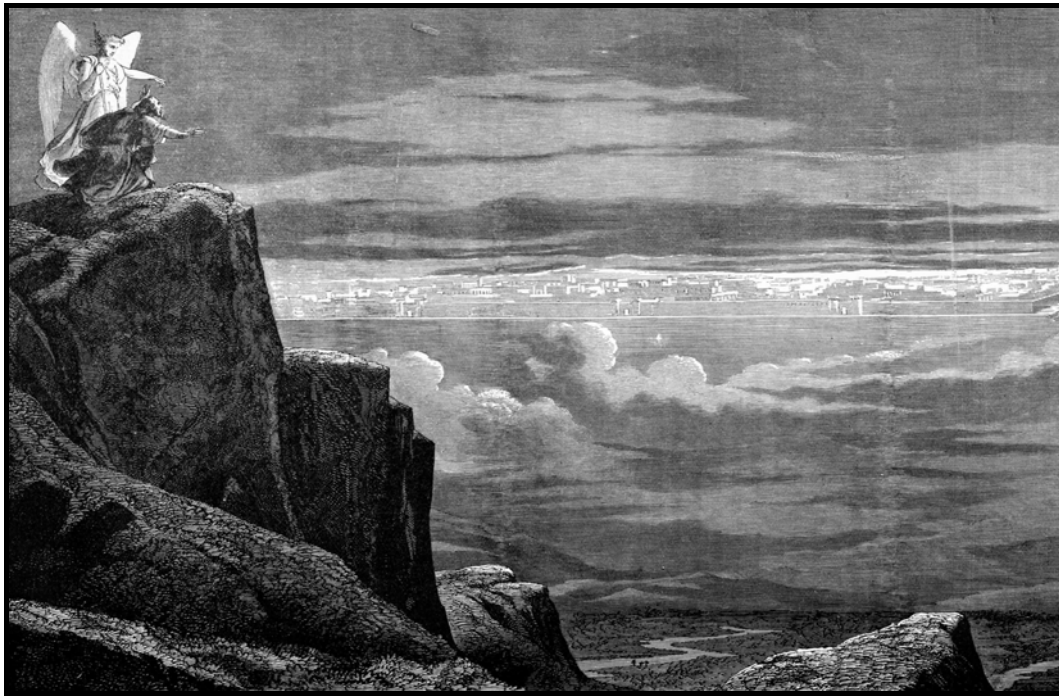


“The Shekinah Over the Ark Within the Tabernacle” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“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

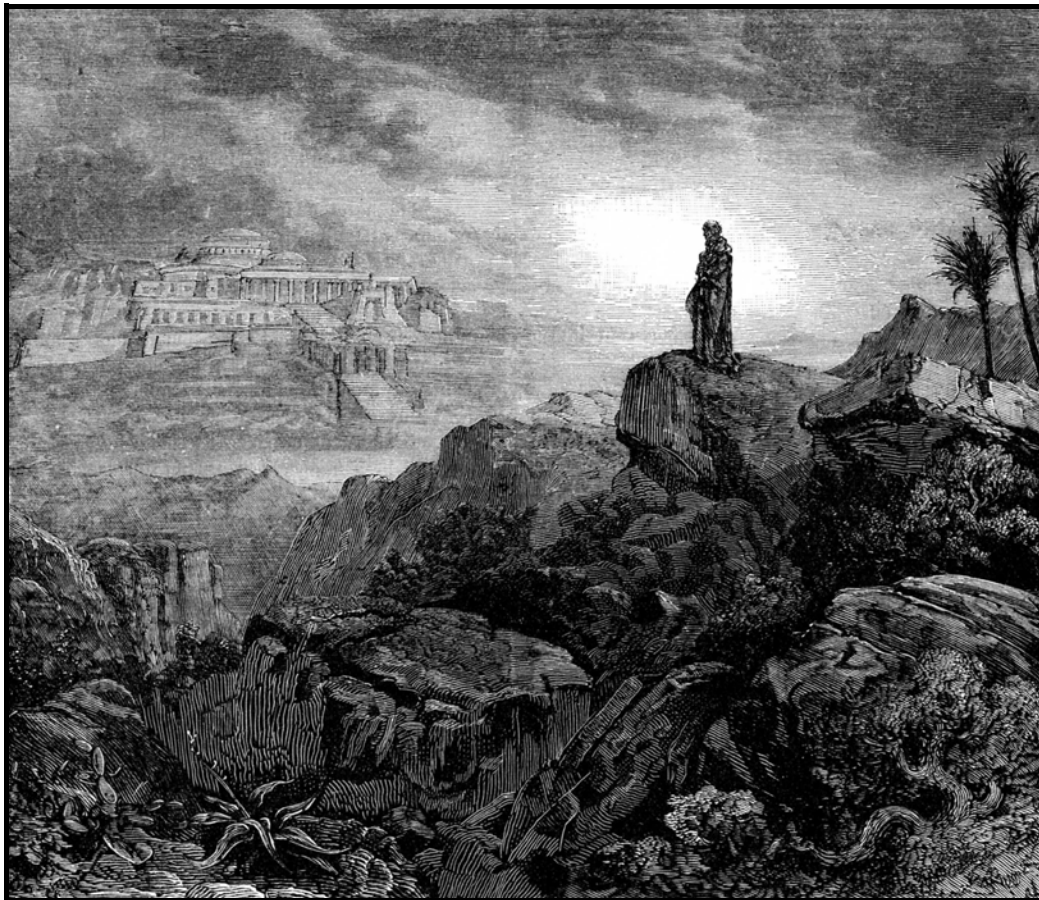
The repeated emphasis upon the number “*twelve*” (12 gates - 12 angels - 12 tribes - 12 foundations - 12 apostles, etc.) signals the identity of the Holy City as a symbol of the Christian Church. In Biblical numerology generally, and throughout Revelation particularly, twelve is the “*church number*” 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*

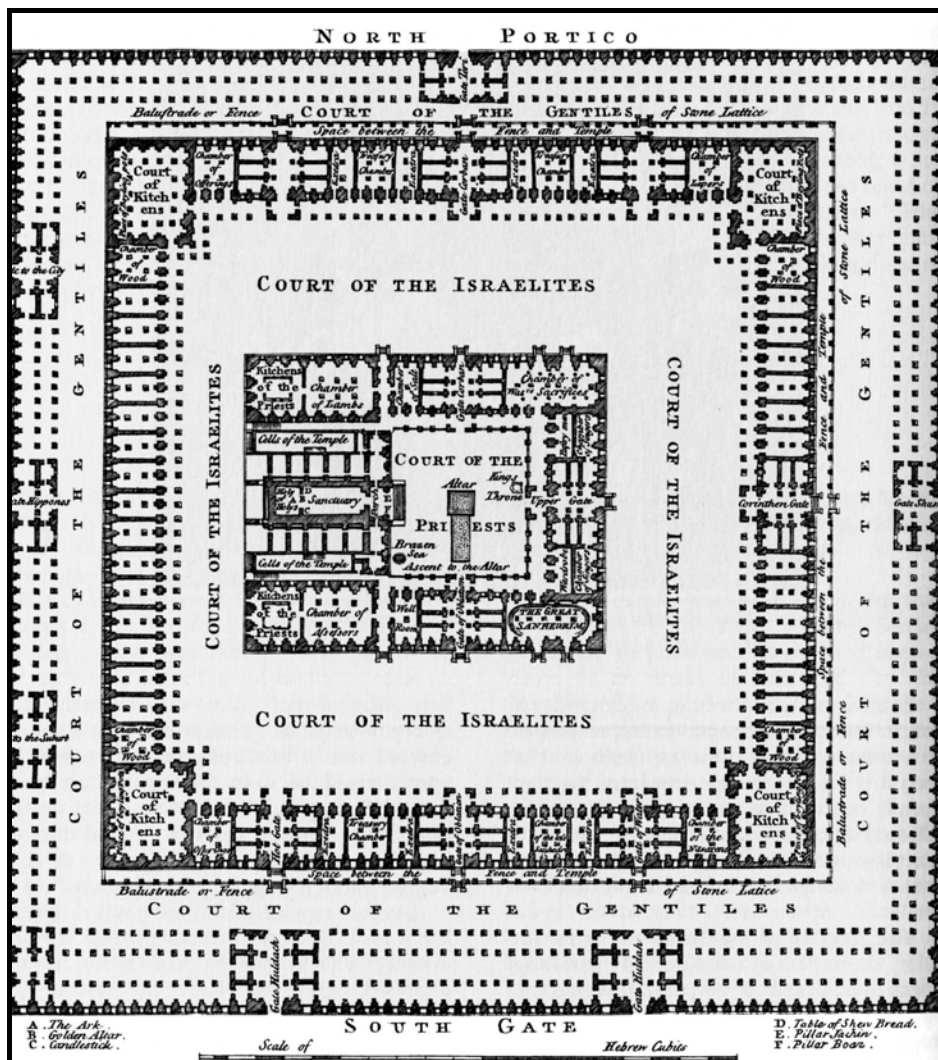


*“The Prophet Ezekiel's Vision of a Perfect New Temple”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

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

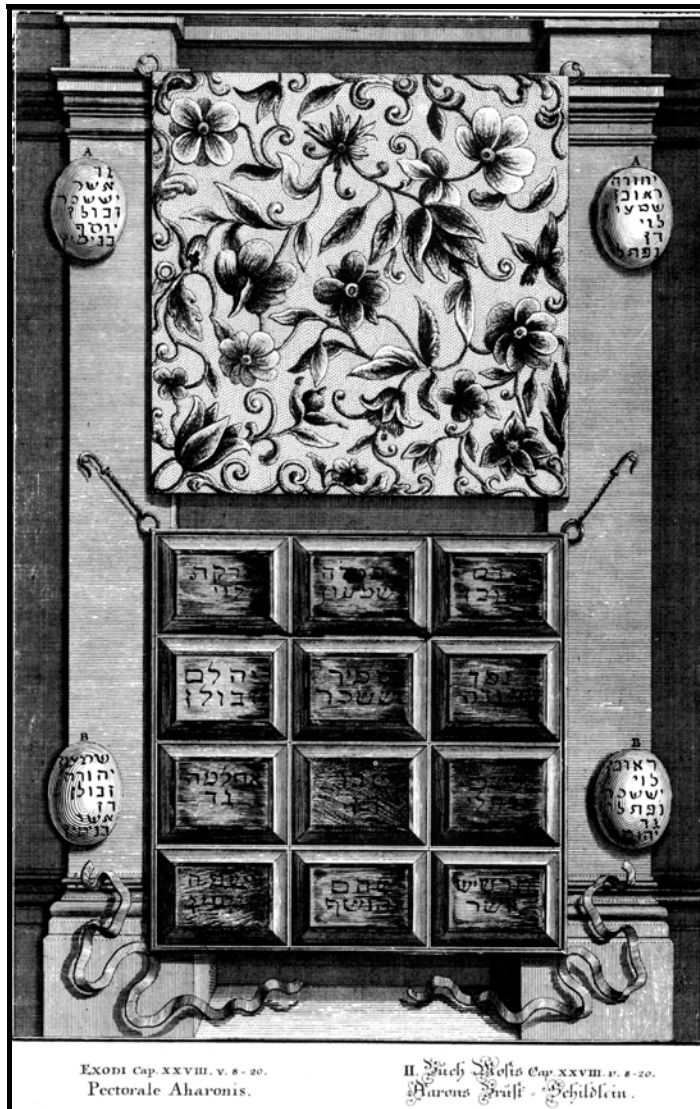
(Job xl,16), but a rod of gold, such as befitted an instrument used in the service of God; cf. Rev. 12:8; 8:3;9:13; 15:7. (Swete, p. 287)

“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***

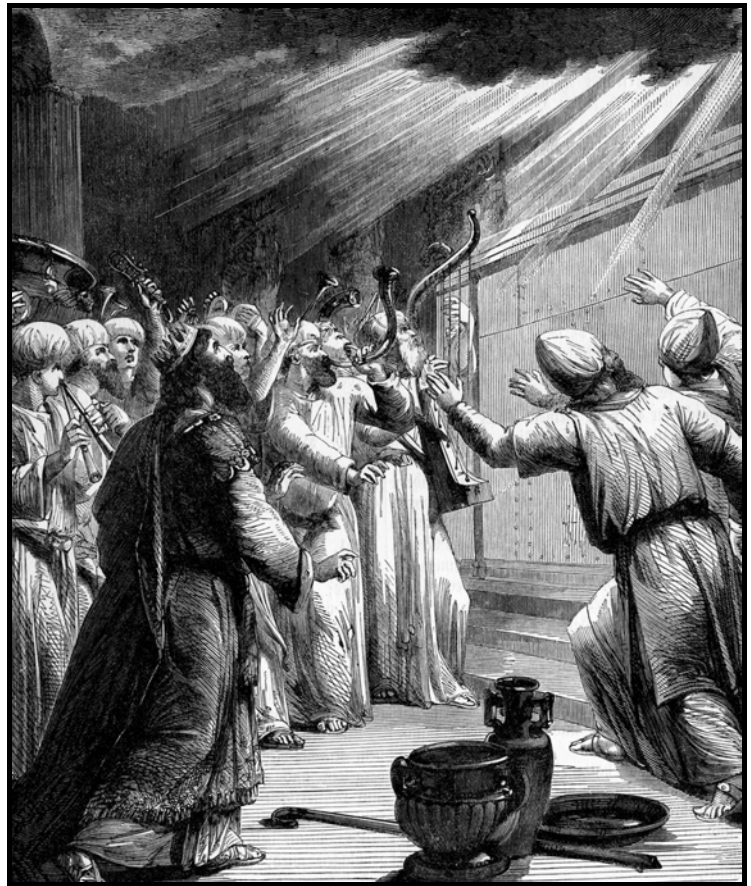
“The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh 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:

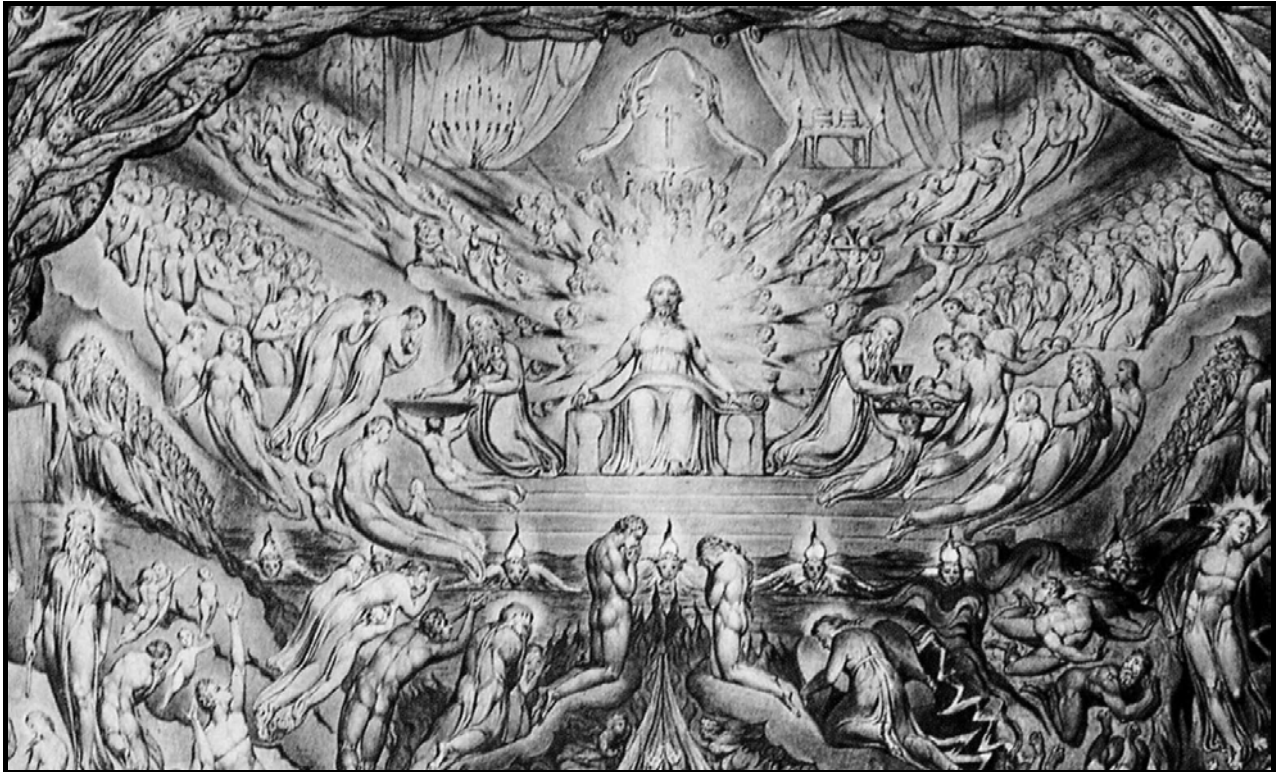
"Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your presence. May Your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which You said You would put Your name there. May You



"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

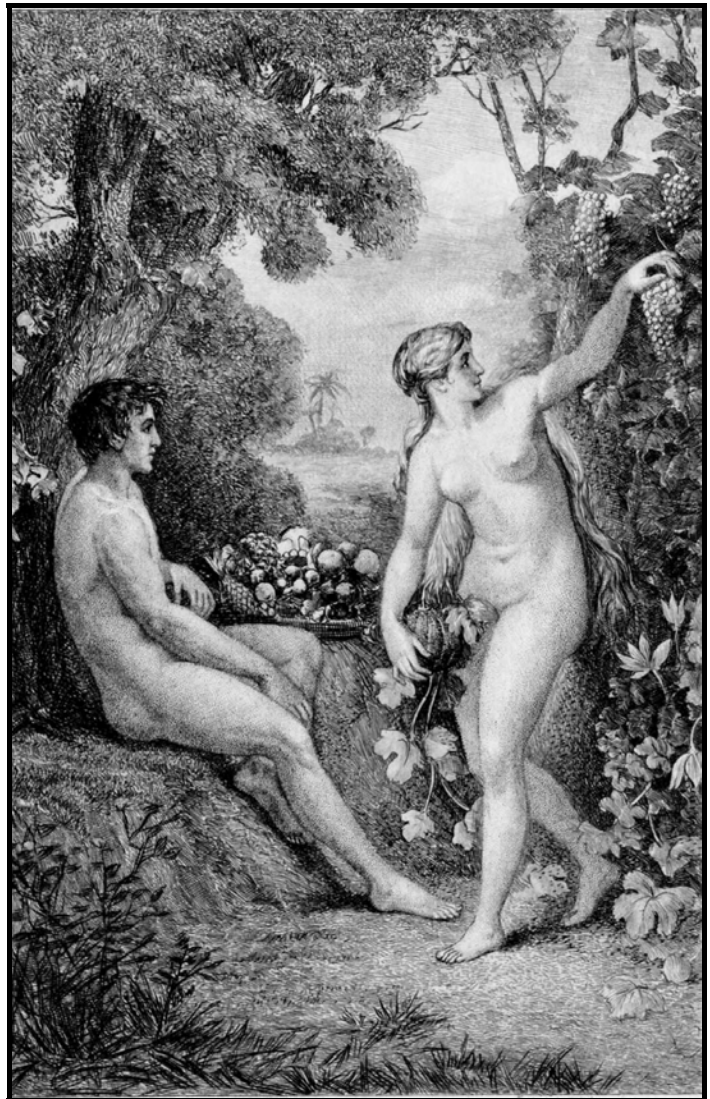
(Lenski, p. 649) The water of this river is completely pure, free from pollution or contamination of any kind - **“as clear as crystal.”** The Greek text literally reads *“as bright as a crystal.”* (*“lampron hos krystallon”*). *“Together they envision the river as a sort of shimmering and sparkling 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

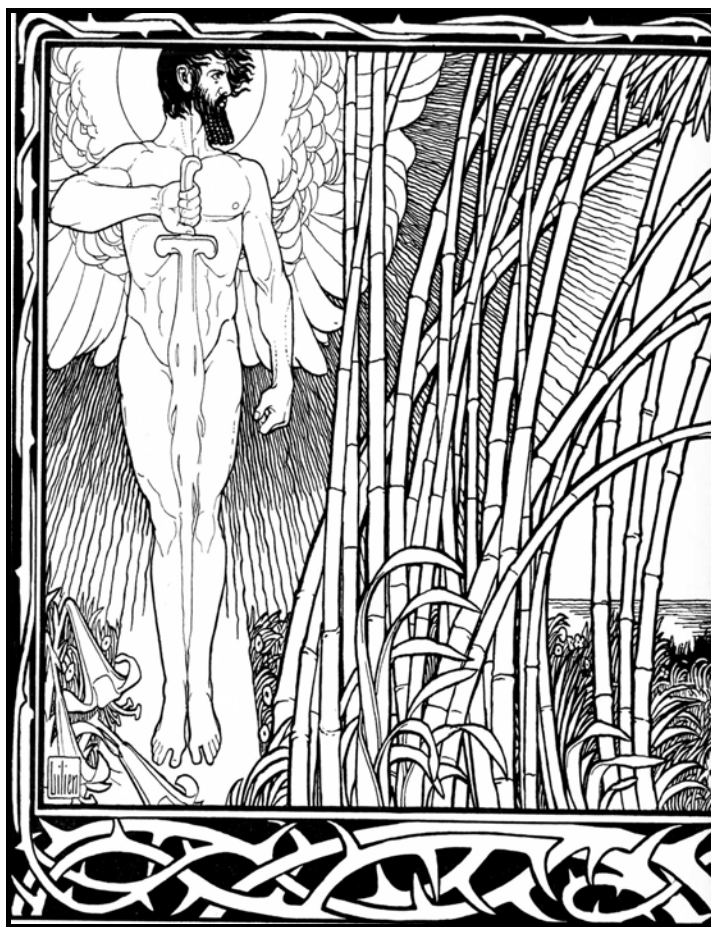
Mesopotamia. To such sceptics Martin Luther asserts the power of the Word of God:

*“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)



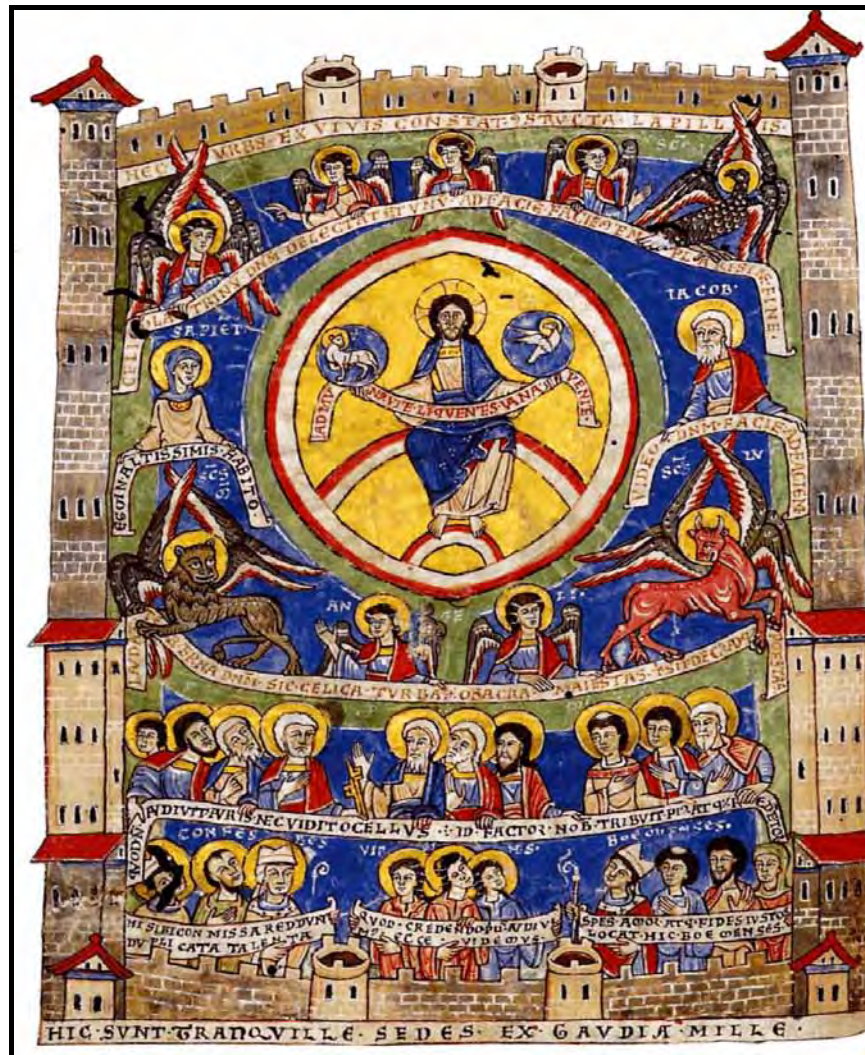
“The Courts of Heaven” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

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

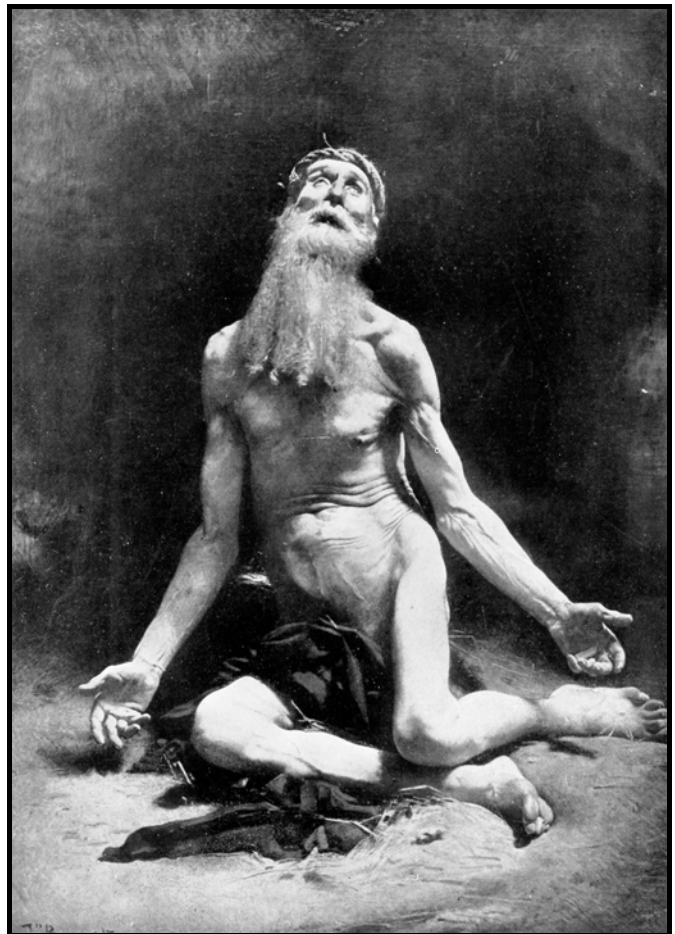
The nature of heaven as God’s dwelling place serves to define the essence of heavenly joy for the believer is the experience of God’s immediate presence. Christ, who has ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, promised His disciples:

“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:

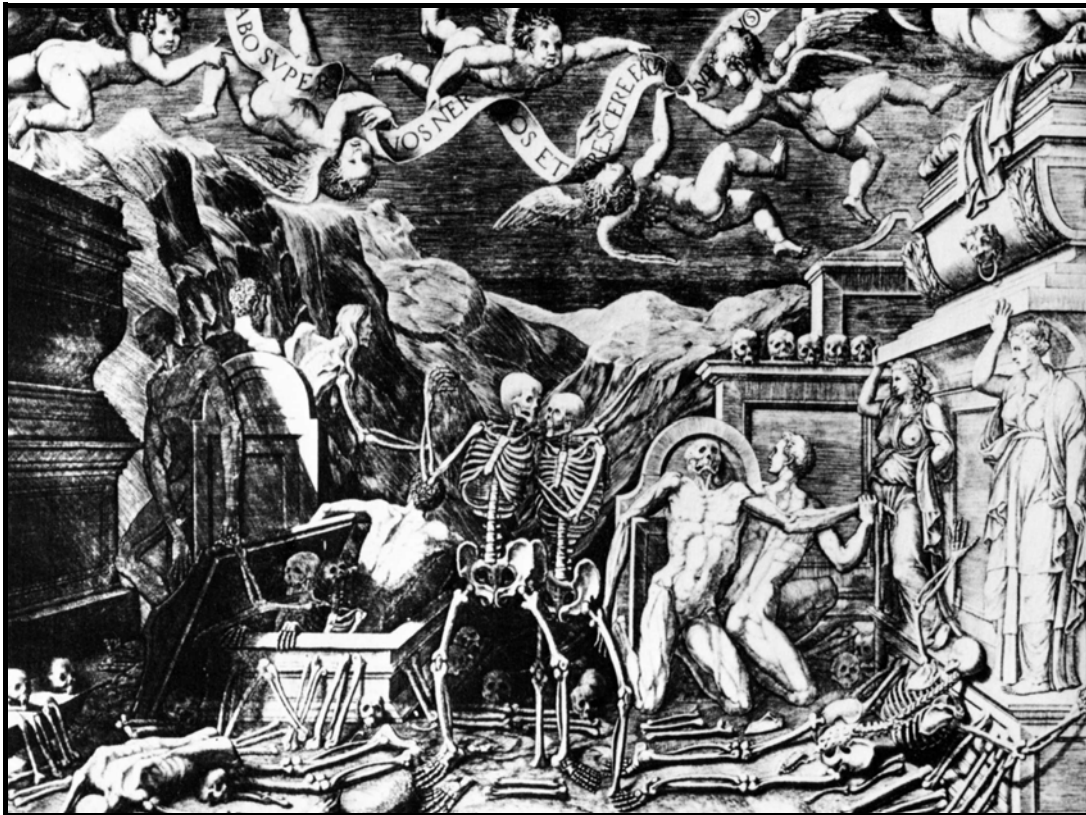
“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign 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:

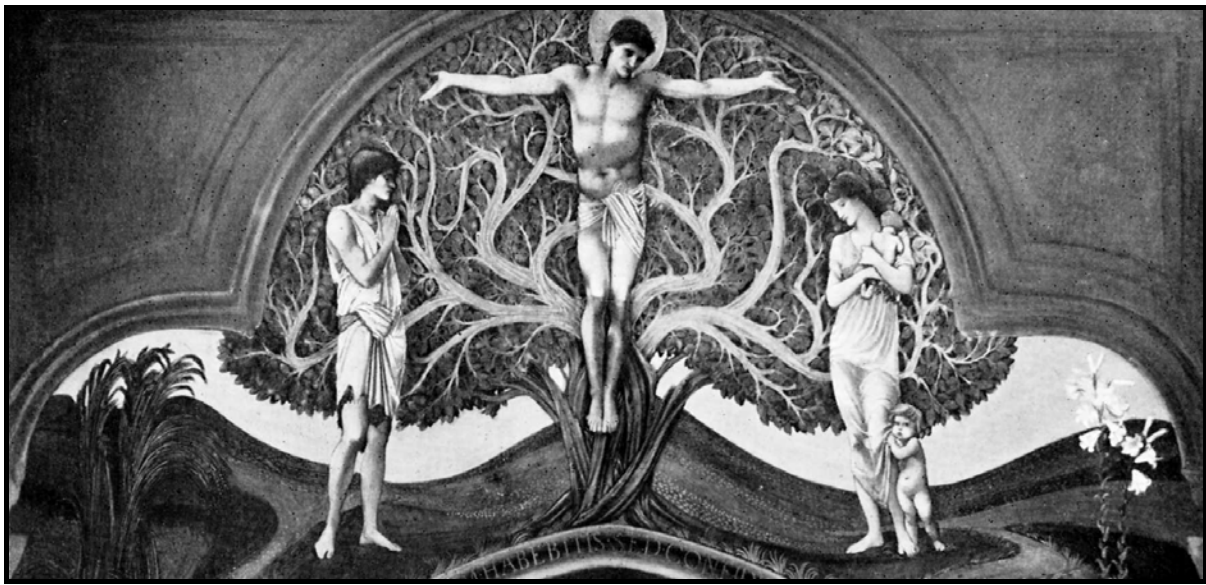
“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the 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)

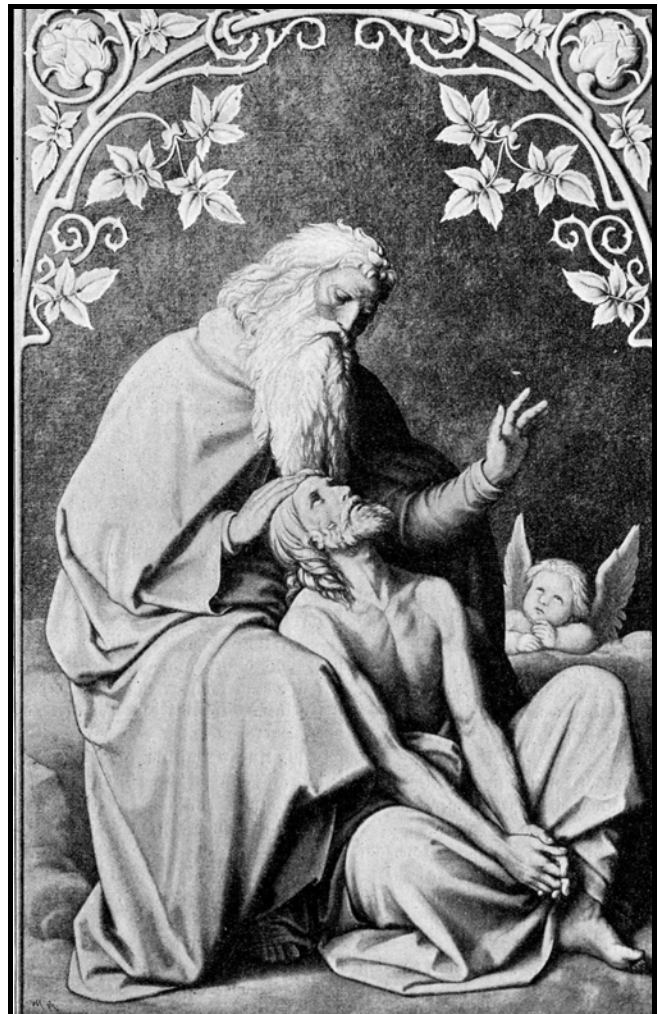
Jesus uses the same *“place”* language to describe both heaven and hell in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. The beggar dies and is carried by the angels to Abraham’s side in heaven. Dives also perishes and is condemned to eternal torment in Hell. He gazes across the vast chasm that separates 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

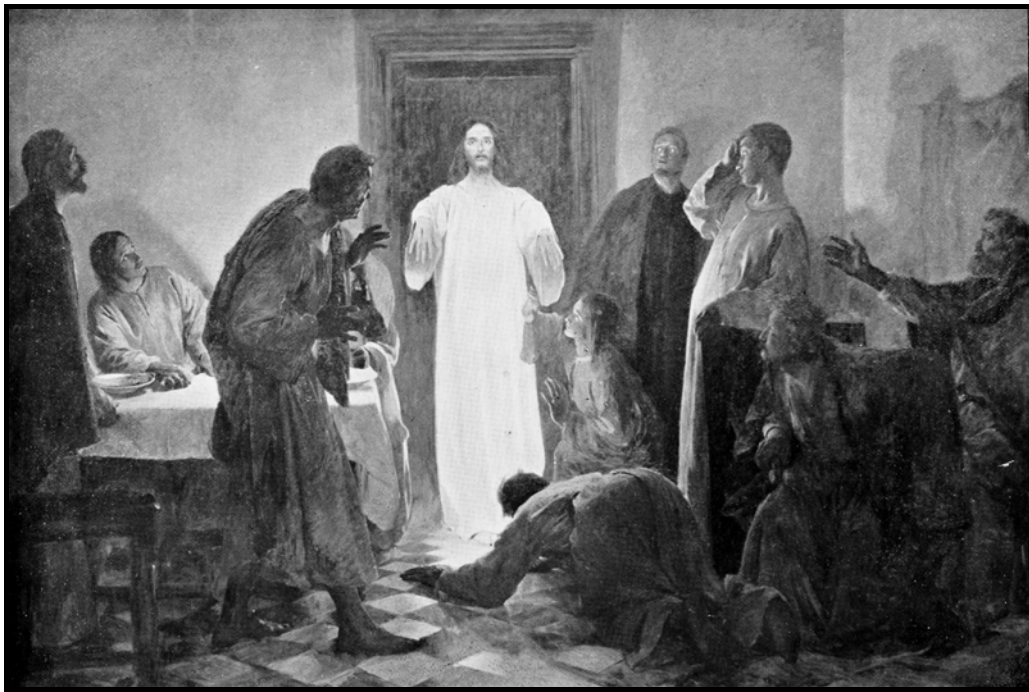


*“The Perfect Harmony of Eden”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Bocksperger-Amman*

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.



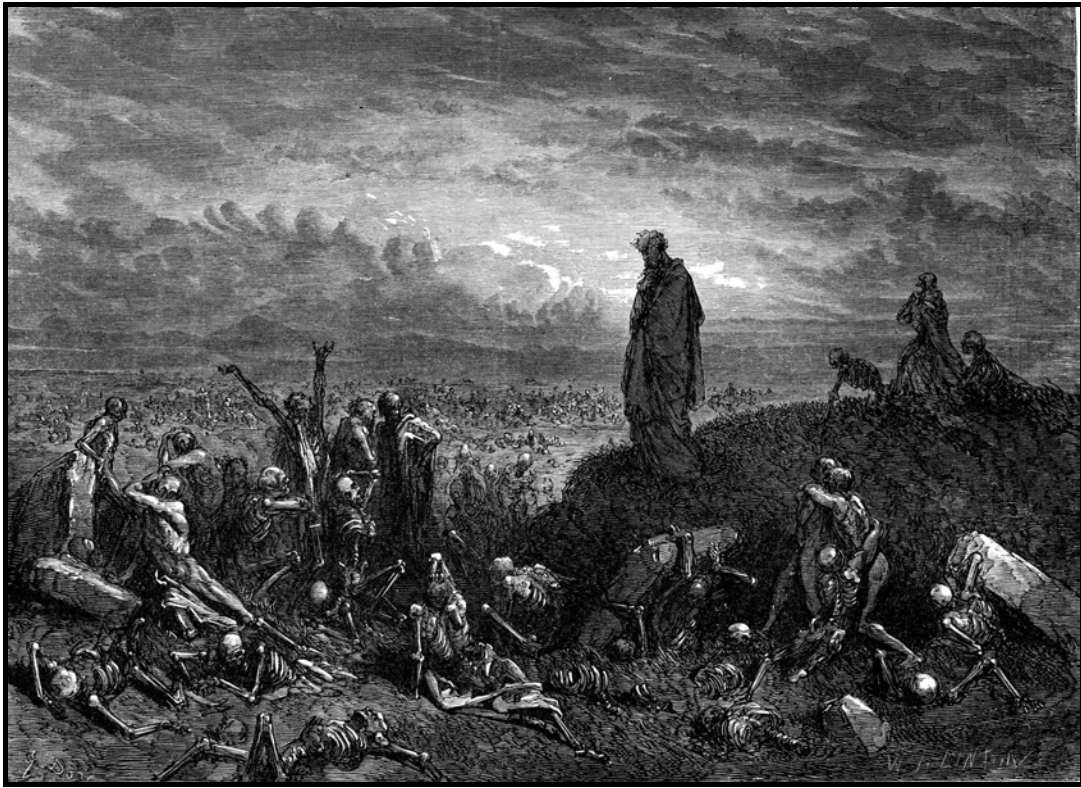
*“The Risen Christ Appears to the Disciples Inside the Upper Room”
by J. H. F. Bacon*

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

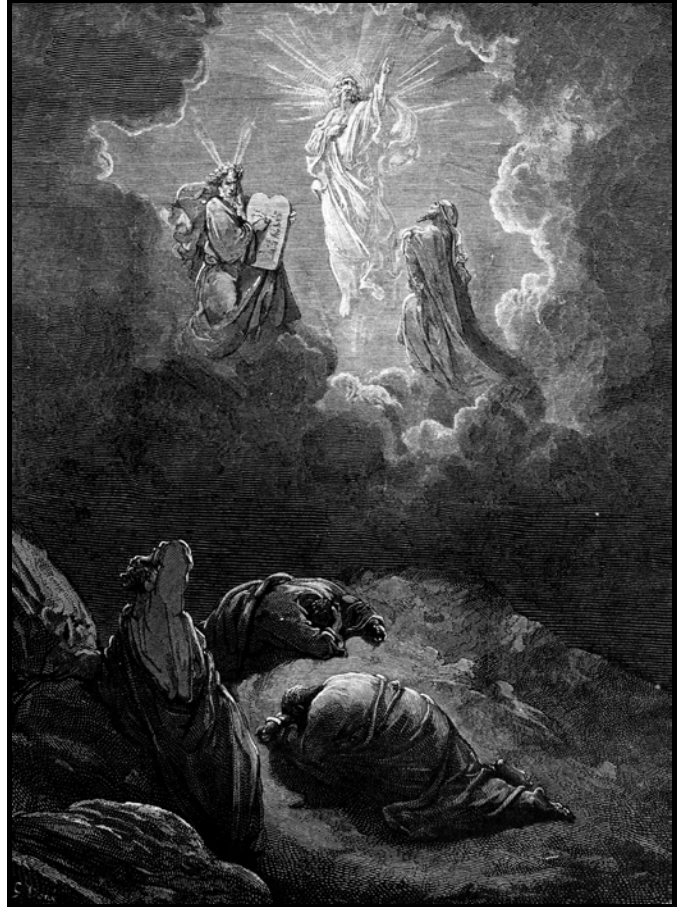
suggest significant changes in the nature of our Lord's presence. Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the eleven disciples on the Sea of Galilee all initially failed to recognize Him (John 20: 10-18; Luke 24: 13-35; John 21:1-14). He appears and disappears at will, unconfined by 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)

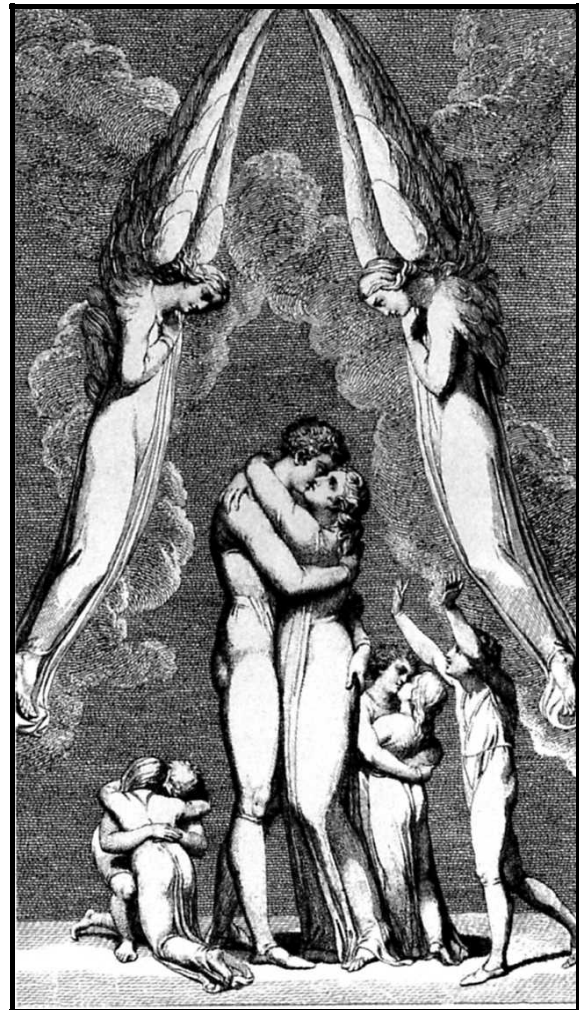
The joy of every saint in heaven will be perfect and complete. Thus there will be no

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)



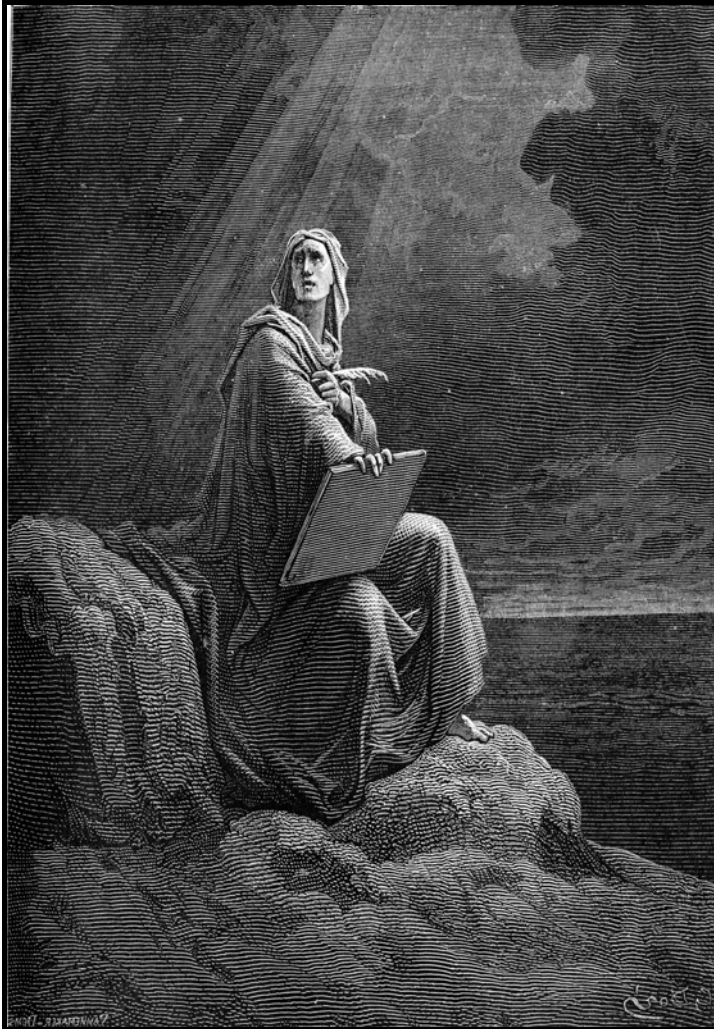
*“Then the Angel Showed Me the River of the Water of Life”
Illumination from the “Bamberg Apocalypse”*

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***

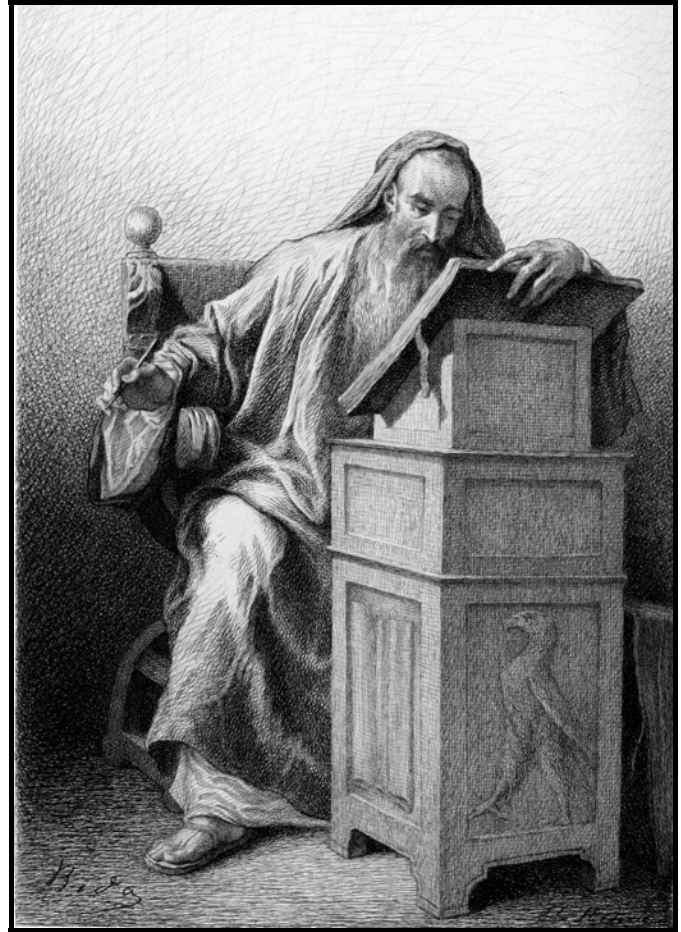
These same adjectives are elsewhere applied to Christ Himself - ***“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.”*** (Revelation 3:14; cf. also 19:11) Dr. Brighton properly notes:

“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.”***

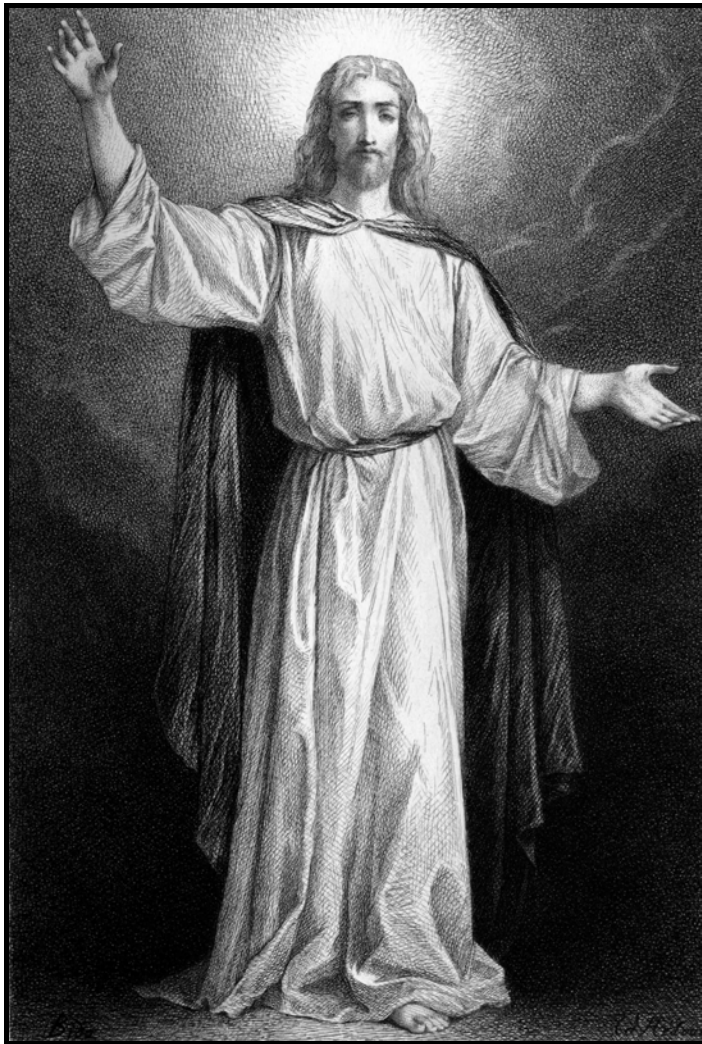
Although the term ***“spirits”*** is often used in Scripture in reference to human life in general (i.e. Numbers 16:22; 27:16), in this context the reference is most probably to the natural intellectual faculties of the prophets ***“raised and quickened by the Holy Spirit”*** (Swete, p. 303) ***“subjected 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*

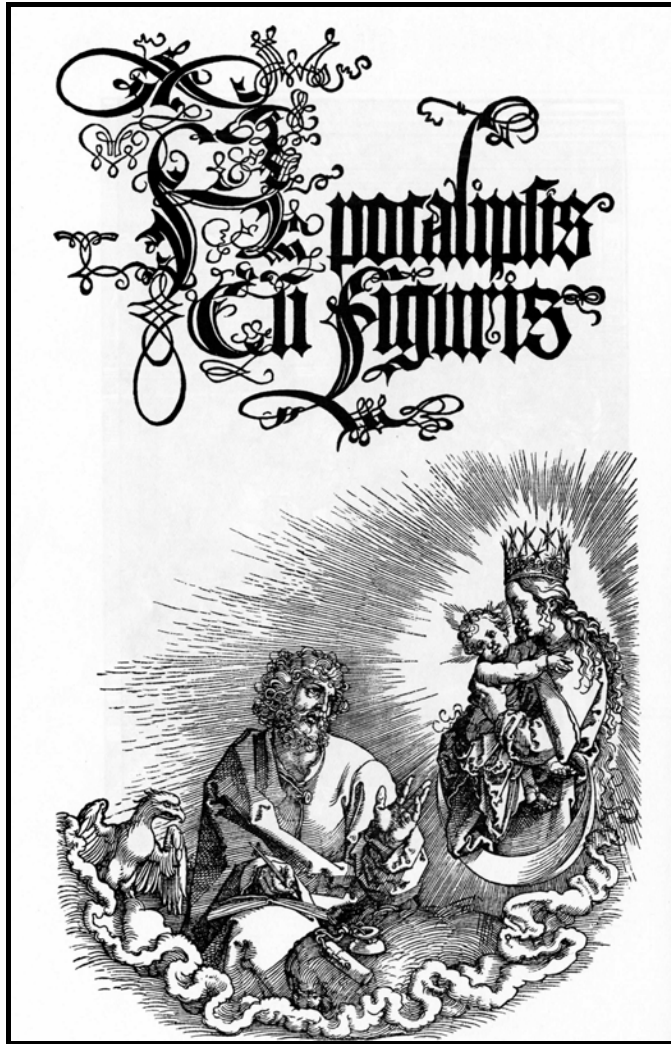
“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of prophecy in this book.” - The voice of our Lord Himself interrupts to express the profound urgency of the situation. The interjection unmistakably refers to the Second Coming of Christ. In Chapter 1, Christ had designated Himself as “*The 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

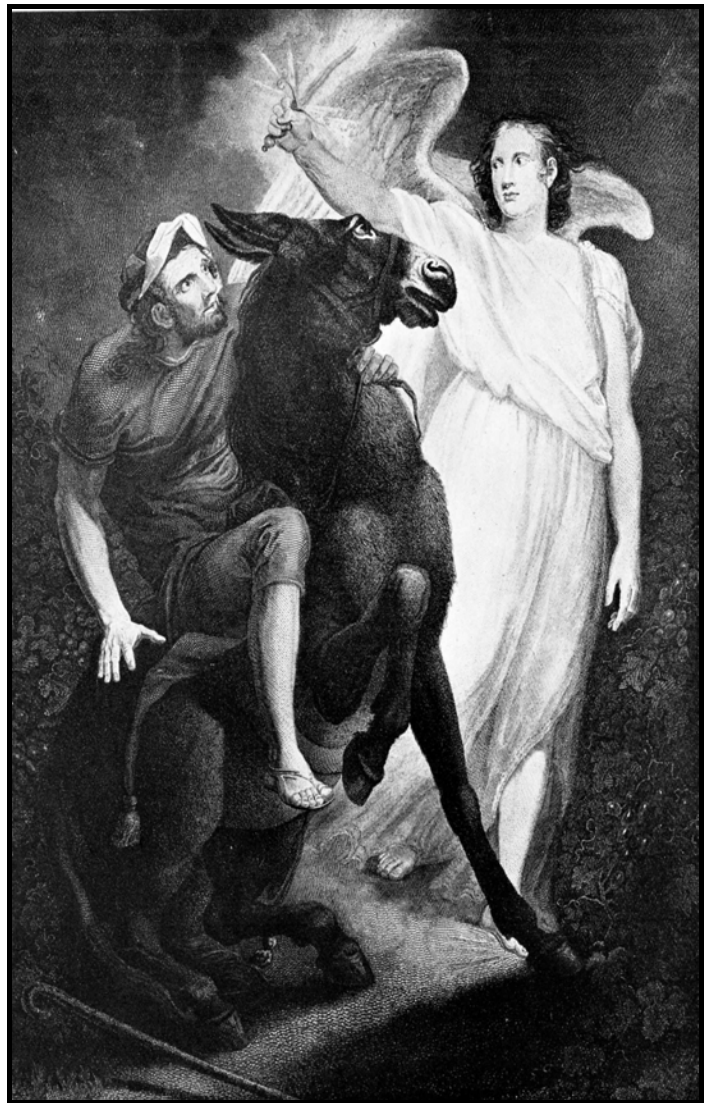
“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” - A third attestation of the divine inspiration of this Revelation’s prophecy is offered by the Lord Jesus Himself. That which the angel and John have already 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:

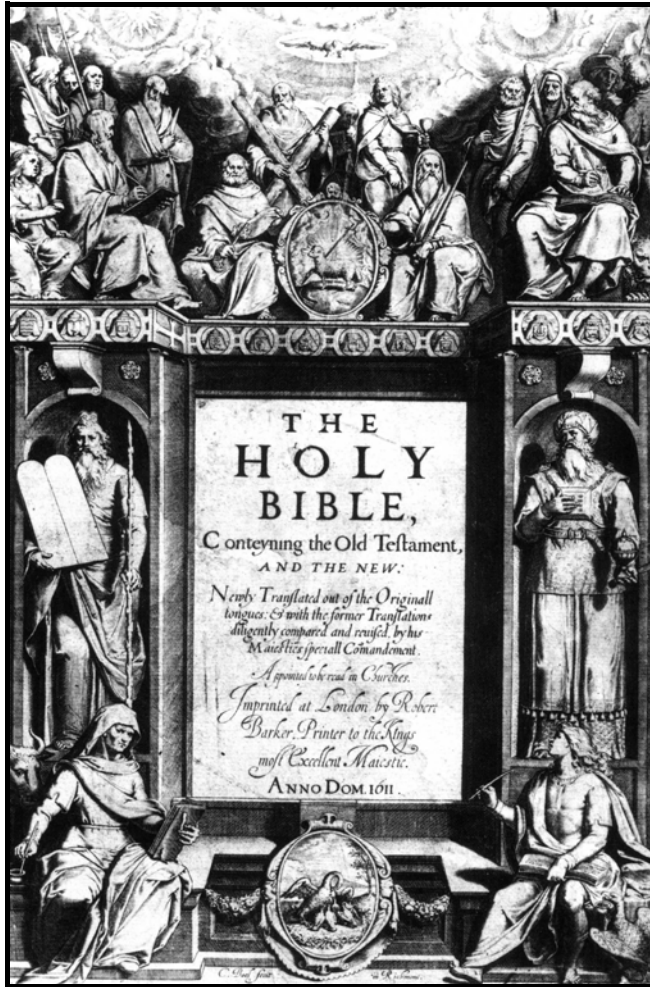
“Thus Paul now cries to the Lord from his heart using the language of his heart, his mother tongue, Aramaic: “Marana tha! Our Lord, Come!”...Like other Aramaic or Jewish words that became common coin in the early church (“amen,” “hallelujah,” “hosanna”), “marana tha” seems to have been a beloved expression 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)

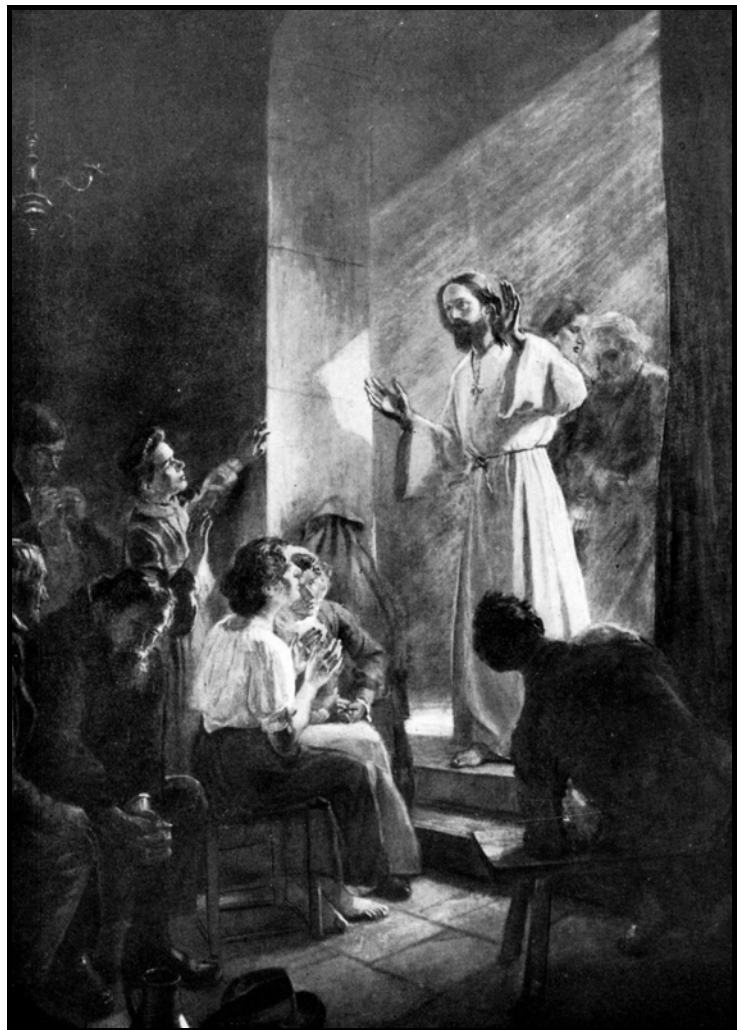


"King of Kings and Lord of Lords" by Rudolf Schäfer

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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