

# **15. COMMENTARY ON REVELATION**

## **PART 3**

### **Chapters 19 – 22**

#### **The Messiah's arrival and reign**

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#### **The hallelujah chorus (19:1-6)**

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great crowd in heaven shouting: Hallelujah! Our God saves. Glory and power belong to him, for his judgments are true and just. He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the Earth with her immorality. He has avenged on her the slaughter of his servants. And a second time they shouted: Hallelujah! Her smoke rises forever and ever. The twenty-four elders and the four creatures prostrated themselves and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne, saying: Amen! Hallelujah! Then a voice came from the throne, saying: Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small! Then I heard what sounded like a great crowd, like the roar of rushing water, and like loud peals of thunder, saying: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty has begun to reign.

This chapter is the only one in the NT where you'll find the word 'hallelujah,' which means: Praise the Lord! The hosts of heaven sing hallelujah because the great city, the center of the world empire, has been destroyed, together with all her evil: corruption, greed, vice, crime, robberies, murders, prostitution, drugs, slavery, oppression, blasphemy, and the rejection of God's word. City life can be rough, but in the days of the Antichrist, it'll be many times worse. Revelation 12:7-12 tells us that there was war in heaven, resulting in Satan being hurled down to Earth, and his (malevolent) angels with him. This will mean trouble for the world because the devil has come down. He has always been influential, but from a distance.

However, the hallelujahs ring out, not only for the punishment and vengeance taken on the great city but because the Lord God Almighty has begun his reign on Earth. This was already anticipated (Re 11:15), but now has come to pass. We've now arrived at the most exciting part of the Revelation: the last four chapters, which describe the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this Earth to reign. This is our great hope for ourselves and our planet. It'll be a time of restoration, and the saints will reign with Christ with justice and righteousness.

The Trinity is a compact unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When it says: Our Lord God Almighty reigns, we think about the Father, because it's he who's usually referred to as the Almighty, and he's the sovereign Ruler over heaven and Earth. But here it refers to Jesus. John hasn't seen a vision of Jesus returning yet, but the hallelujahs announce the beginning of the Messianic reign on Earth. This is the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about so often during his ministry.

### **The Messiah's wedding reception (19:7-10)**

Let us rejoice and be glad and praise him! For the Lamb's wedding day has arrived, and his bride's preparations are done. She has been given fine linen to wear, bright and clean. (Fine linen stands for the saints' good deeds.) Then the angel said to me: Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the Lamb's wedding reception! And he added: These are God's true words. I lay prostrate at his feet to worship him, but he said to me: Don't do that! I'm a fellow servant with you and your brothers

who bear witness to Jesus. Worship God! Bearing witness to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

**Is 54:5** *For your Maker is your husband; his name is the Lord Almighty. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he's called the God of the entire Earth.*

**Is 62:5** *As a youth marries a girl, so will your Builder marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*

**Ho 2:19-20** *I'll promise to marry you forever; I'll promise you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I'll promise you in faithfulness, and you'll know me as the Lord.*

The wedding of the Lamb has come. In the parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22:1-14), Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son. The king is God, the son is Jesus, and the bride is the Church, otherwise known as the elect, the righteous, the saints, or God's servants; those who have accepted the invitation during their lifetimes.

In Paul's teaching on marriage (Eph 5:25-27), he commands husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Christ has purified us by his shed blood, and he's united us to himself in love. We are already betrothed to him, but at his return, there's the wedding, whereby he formally binds us to himself for eternity. Different metaphors explain our relationship with God. We're children of God, and we're Christ's brothers, but the marriage union is the closest of them all, because the two become one flesh (Gn 2:24). Paul spoke of a profound mystery, the union of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31b-32). Metaphors aren't to be taken literally; they guide our imagination. We'll never be separated; whatever Christ does, we'll be there doing it with him.

As for the bride, she has prepared herself in bright, white linen, which contrasts with the purple and scarlet attire of the prostitute. It has a different symbolism to the white robes of those who come out of the great tribulation. Those robes are white because they are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Here the white linen stands for the saints' good deeds, things that God prepared in advance for them to do (Eph 2:10).

We aren't given any details of the marriage ceremony; there are too many things happening at once, but Revelation 21:2 - 22:5 gives a symbolic description of New Jerusalem; a truly divine community where God and man live together forever.

### **The Messiah arrives to defeat the nations (19:11-16)**

I saw heaven standing open and look, a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like flames fire, and he wears many crowns. He has a name written on him that only he knows. He's dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is God's Word. The Heaven's armies followed him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. A sharp sword comes out of his mouth to strike down the nations, and he'll rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the grapes in the winepress, symbolizing the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. This name is written on his robe and his thigh:

King of kings and Lord of lords

**Ex 15:3** The Lord is a warrior, his name is the Lord.

**Ps 2:9** *You'll rule them with a rod of iron; you'll dash them to pieces like pottery.*

**Is 63:2-3** Why are your robe and clothes red, like some one treading in the winepress? *I trampled the grapes in the press alone.* No nation sided with me, so I trampled them in my anger and trod them down *in my wrath*. Their blood spattered my clothes and stained my robe.

**Is 66:15-16** Look, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind. He'll descend upon them with fury, and rebuke them with flames of fire. For the Lord will execute judgment on all mankind with fire and sword, and many will be slain by him.

**Jn 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

There's a pressing matter that Jesus must attend to at the beginning of his reign: the defeat of his enemies. The chronology seems to be like this. Jesus descends from heaven in glory with the angels and the spirits of deceased saints (1 Th 3:13, 4:14). Arriving in Earth's atmosphere, the righteous dead are resurrected, and the living saints are raptured and they meet the Lord in the air. The Messiah descends to the Mount of Olives and all the saints with him (Zec 14:4-5). It's the Day of the Lord, the Mount of Olives splits in two and earthquakes and destruction spread worldwide following Jesus' descent, as the Lord pours out his wrath on a rebellious world. The Messiah is enthroned in Jerusalem (Ez 43:6-7, Zec 14:9). It's from Zion that the deliverer comes and turns godlessness away from Jacob. All Israel are saved as they see the Messiah returning to Earth and delivering them from the nations who are laying siege to their land.

Zechariah tells us that the survivors of all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty (Zec 14:16). They'll be the subjects during the Messianic reign, while the saints constitute the royal family who rule with the Messiah for a thousand years.

Back to our text. Heaven is open and God is intervening dramatically in the history of the world. The Lord Jesus is descending to Earth; not on a literal white horse, but as conqueror, and as the awaited Messiah. He's the way, the truth, and the life, and he's ever faithful. He's a warrior, and he'll defeat his enemies. Paul used a different metaphor in 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9, but it's the same occasion. He says, the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He'll punish those who don't know God with everlasting destruction. They'll be shut out from the presence of the Lord and the majesty of his power. The slaughter of men here isn't a metaphor (Isa 66:15-16). He'll tread the winepress alone. No nation will support him, not even the US.

God is a just God, and what Jesus does when he returns is done in strict justice, following what is right. His blazing eyes symbolize judgment, while the many crowns express the universality of his royal status. The name written on him, which is known only to himself, may be compared to the white stone with a new name written on it, which

Jesus will give to the overcomers. The names will be known only to those who receive them (Re 2:17).

Jesus' robe is dipped in blood, not because of the crucifixion; it's the blood of his slaughtered enemies. He's coming to be King of kings and Lord of lords. The sharp sword coming out of his mouth is a metaphor; there's no sword. It's symbolic of the dynamic word which he speaks, and which always accomplishes what is expressed (Heb 4:12). Jesus will only need to say the word and his enemies will be defeated. Similarly, the rod of iron with which he'll rule the nations expresses his severe rule.

The armies of heaven follow him. These are the angels (2 Th 1:7) together with the saints who have just been resurrected and raptured. They ride white horses because they are conquerors, and they wear fine linen because they are his called, chosen, and faithful followers (Re 17:14, 19:8). They are made righteous through their faith in the blood of Christ, and their mission is righteous and just.

The resurrection of the righteous dead and the rapture of the living saints takes place simultaneously with Jesus' descent from heaven. The rapture isn't explicitly referred to in Revelation, but 14:14-16 may be interpreted as such. It's assumed everywhere that the saints pass through the Great Tribulation and are the objects of the Antichrist's persecution (Dn 7:25, Re 12:17, 13:7). They are counseled to endure and be faithful (Re 13:10, 14:12).

Jesus said when he comes, he'll send his angels with a loud trumpet call to gather his elect from one end of the Earth to another (Mt 24:30-31). Paul adds that when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised imperishable, and the living will be changed (1 Co 15:52). The dead in Christ rise first, then those who are alive are caught up together with them in the air, and they'll be with the Lord forever (1 Th 4:16b-17).

Angels told Jesus' disciples that Jesus would come back in the same way they had seen him go into heaven (Ac 1:11). And Zechariah tells us the exact place where Jesus will return; his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem (Zec 14:4), the same place from where he ascended, and he'll reign from Mount Zion. It all happens on the Day of the Lord.

## The nations defeated at Armageddon (19:17-21)

I saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried out in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair: Come, gather for God's great banquet, to eat the flesh of kings, generals, mighty men, horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small. Then I saw the Beast and the Earth's kings, and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider of the horse and his army. The Beast was caught, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs, he had deceived those who had received the mark of the Beast and bowed down its image. Both of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rider of the horse killed the rest with the sword coming from his mouth, and all the birds gorged themselves on their corpses.

**Ez 39:17-18a, 20, 22, 29** Son of man, the Sovereign Lord says, call out to *every kind of bird* and all the wild animals, saying: Come together from all around to the sacrifice I'm preparing for you, a great banquet on the mountains of Israel. There you'll eat flesh and drink blood. *You'll eat the corpses of mighty men and drink the blood of the Earth's kings* as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls. ... At my table you'll eat your fill of *horses and their riders, mighty men, and every kind of warrior* ... From that day forward, Israel will know that I'm the Lord their God. ... I'll no longer hide my face from them, for I'll pour out my Spirit on them.

**Dn 7:11** I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking, and I kept looking until *the Beast was slain, and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.*

God's great banquet is in stark contrast to the wedding reception of the Lamb. The banquet is a metaphor that fires the imagination to consider the fate of the armies of the world who thought they could foil the purposes of God and his Messiah. After doing their best to rid the world of Christianity, they'll come from all over the world to capture God's city, Jerusalem, the capital of his chosen nation, Israel. Why the

uproar among the nations? Why do the peoples plot in vain, asks the Psalmist? Why do the Earth's leaders take their stand against the Lord and his Messiah? (Ps 2:1-2). In the same context, Joel says the Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem, the Earth and the sky will tremble, and the Lord will be a refuge for his people Israel (Jl 3:16).

Zechariah says that the Lord will strike all the nations that fight against Jerusalem with calamity. Their flesh will rot while they're still standing, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. The Lord will strike them with such panic that they'll attack each other (Zec 14:12-13).

The Antichrist, the leaders of the Earth, and their armies will gather to fight against Israel at the battlefield called Armageddon (Re 16:16) north of Jerusalem. They don't realize they're fighting against the omnipotent Jesus and his army. This is a great historical event that will happen in Israel. A battle between the nations of the world, who have come to capture Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation, which is defending itself. Recent wars between Israel and its neighbours have been fought with aircraft, missiles, and defence systems, and we need to think of Armageddon in that context. However, the prophecies and our text imply a ground invasion.

The Lord said it's he who will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it. Then after the city is captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped, he'll go out and fight against those nations. It's his feet that will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zec 14:2-4).

In his vision, John sees the Beast (animal in Greek) being *caught*, along with the Antichrist, and both are thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, a metaphor for hell, the place of eternal torment. The kings and their armies are killed by the judicial verdict, which comes from the mouth of Jesus. The vultures eat their corpses. This is literal. When the disciples asked Jesus where the second coming events would take place, he replied enigmatically: Where there's a corpse, there the vultures will gather (Lk 17:37). He was probably referring to Armageddon.

Megiddo was a town about 60 miles northwest of Jerusalem, and the nearby plain was an ancient battleground where King Josiah was



killed. Armageddon means Megiddo hill. Israel's mourning for the returning Messiah is compared to the national mourning for King Josiah; all the tribes of the land will mourn (Zec 12:10-13, Re 1:7)

The armies that will come against Jerusalem for the battle of Armageddon are described in Ezekiel 38-39 as Gog and Magog. This battle shouldn't be confused with the post-millennial rebellion, which is also attributed to Gog and Magog (Re 20:8-9). The words there are used symbolically; there's no actual battle, the armies are destroyed by fire from heaven, followed by Satan being cast into hell.

The battle of Armageddon and associated events are the final acts of God's judgment on an unbelieving world. This passage parallels the opening of the sixth seal (Re 6:12-17), the pouring out of the seventh bowl (Re 16:17-21), and the description given in Ezekiel 38:18-23. A great earthquake will devastate the whole world. Mountains will crumble, walls will collapse, and rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur will fall on the troops. The vultures are called to feast on the dead. Ezekiel emphasizes the conversion of Israel at this time. He says they'll then know that the Lord is their God. The Lord will no longer hide his face from them; rather, he'll pour out his Spirit on them (Ez 39:28-29).

### **Satan is imprisoned for 1000 years (20:1-3)**

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He held the key to the Abyss and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, locked it, and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

**Is 24:21-23** In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the Earth below. They'll be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon. They'll be locked up in prison and be punished after a long time. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign in glory on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem before its elders.

The vision that John saw following the vision of Armageddon is that of Satan being captured and bound for 1000 years, the millennium. When the Beast and the false prophet were captured, they were cast immediately into hellfire, but Satan will be bound and imprisoned in the Abyss for the duration of the Messiah's reign on Earth.

There's no reason to regard the 1000 years as figurative. It may be approximate, but we can't say that the period is more or less. Satan is securely imprisoned in the Abyss by an angel. The Abyss originally meant the unseen depths of the sea or a bottomless pit, then the underworld. The reference here isn't to a literal part of our physical creation. It's a spiritual underworld, the abode of demons, and a place of torment (Lk 8:31, 2 Pt 2:4, Jude 6).

The mention of a chain, Satan being bound, and the locking and sealing of the pit, all emphasize the fact that Satan will not influence Earth whatsoever during the time of his incarceration. There's no way he can deceive the nations or do anything during that time, not until he's released for a short time at the end. Satan has already been identified as the enormous red dragon of Chapter 13. He's that ancient serpent (Gn 3) called the devil, who presently leads the whole world astray (1 Jn 5:19).

Many people in Africa and other parts of the world deal with evil spirits daily. Some people sacrifice to spirits and seek their help. Some are possessed by spirits, while others suffer sickness inflicted by black magic and sorcery. I've seen Muslims seek refuge in the churches because Christians are mostly immune to demonic activity, and their prayers are effective. Victims often testify to being *bound* by spirits. A leg, arm, or mouth may be *bound*. Local practitioners can *bind* a spirit so that it can no longer harm a victim. Jesus' teaching on binding and losing is very relevant for these people.

After Satan's incarceration, it's in God's plan that he be released for a short time. In his infinite and sometimes mysterious wisdom, God tolerates evil and uses it for his purposes, but one day, he'll eliminate evil from the universe.

## The resurrection of the righteous (20:4-6)

Then I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for witnessing for Jesus and sharing God's word. They hadn't bowed to the Beast or its image and hadn't received its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead didn't come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection of the dead. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection; the second death has no power over them. They'll be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

**Dn 7:9** As I looked, I saw *thrones put in place*, and the Ancient of Days took his seat.

**Lk 14:14** They've nothing to repay you but you'll be repaid at the *resurrection of the righteous*.

According to Daniel 2:34, 44, the eternal kingdom of God is built on the ruins of the world's sinful empires. Only after the statue that represented those kingdoms was smashed, did the rock that destroyed them become a huge mountain and fill the Earth. When the final kingdom has been destroyed and Satan has been bound (cf. Mt 12:29), the Messiah will be free to restore the fallen world, where justice, righteousness, and the knowledge of the Lord will abound.

John saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. We saw these thrones in Chapter 4. Those seated there were interpreted as representatives of the saints from both Israel and the Church. The redeemed are God's children of God and they'll judge and rule with the Messiah. Jesus told his disciples that at the renewal of everything, when he sits on his glorious throne, his disciples would also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). When Zechariah spoke about the Lord's future rule from Jerusalem, he said many nations would be joined to him and become his people (Zec 2:10-13). He'll again choose Jerusalem and live there.

Then John saw the souls of those who had been martyred during the Great Tribulation. They hadn't worshiped the Beast. He had seen their souls before (Re 6:9), but this time he sees these deceased people come back to life and reign with Christ for 1000 years. This is the first resurrection. Jesus spoke about the *resurrection of the righteous* (Lk 14:14), and he spoke about those who would be considered worthy of taking part in the millennium and in the resurrection *from* the dead (Lk 20:35-36).

Paul said that when Jesus comes, *those who belong to him* will be resurrected (1 Co 15:23), *and the dead in Christ* will rise first (1 Th 4:16). First because they precede those who are still alive in Christ, but the point is, the resurrection of unbelievers is never mentioned in connection with Christ's coming. When he comes, he'll send out his angels to gather the elect (Mt 24:31). Two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left (Lk 17:34-35).

John very clearly states that there are two resurrections, by adding that the rest of the dead aren't resurrected until the Messianic reign is over. It's not only the martyrs who are resurrected; the whole Church will reign with Christ (Re 5:9), including those who are raptured (1 Th 4:17). The Church is blessed and holy because it takes part in the first resurrection and will be priests of God and Christ during the millennium. This is the clear and obvious interpretation of these verses.

### **Satan's release and final rebellion (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 – and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 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 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'll be tormented day and night forever and ever.

**Ezek 38:2-6** Son of man, set your face against *Gog, of the land of Magog*, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him and say: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you. Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I'll turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army – your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. Persia (Iran), Cush (Sudan), and Put (Libya) will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops – the many nations with you.

The 'four corners of the Earth' is an idiom meaning everywhere on Earth, maybe with emphasis on far-off places. Verse 8 refers to Gog and Magog (Ez 38-39) who symbolize remote hostile nations, although the context there refers mainly to the battle of Armageddon.

It seems extraordinary that Satan could deceive the nations once more after they've experienced a 1000-year peaceful and prosperous reign under the Messiah. We've no evidence that the subjects of the Messianic kingdom will be born again of God's Spirit, apart from the conversion of Israel, which will be a special act of God's grace, when the Messiah defeats their enemies at Armageddon. This final act of Satan may occur to illustrate how callous is the unregenerate heart of man. They gather for battle, travel across the face of the Earth, and surround the camp of the saints. The center of Messiah's kingdom on Earth will be Jerusalem and the nation of Israel, his people. Israel's habitation during their wanderings after the Exodus was always called their camp.

There's no battle; Satan and his armies come to a swift end when fire comes down from heaven and devours them. The devil will be cast into hell where the Antichrist and the false prophet were thrown, and where they'll be tormented day and night forever. A harsh, but just, sentence. The subjects of the Messianic kingdom will enter it as unbelievers, survivors of the tribulation period (Zec 14:18). They'll marry and have children and live long lives (Is 65:20). The world will still be divided into nations and ethnic groups that will be punished if they don't go to Jerusalem regularly to pay homage to the Messiah.

The Earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Is 11:9).

Jesus will be King over all the Earth, and the saints, who were resurrected at Jesus' return, will be ruling with him. The sovereignty, power, and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to them, the people of the Most High (Dn 7:27). As a resurrected, immortal people, they'll live in New Jerusalem (Re 21:2 – 22:5). It symbolizes a glorified mode of existence in union with Christ, the Church being depicted as the wife of the Lamb. The glory of this city will be seen above earthly Jerusalem, but the inhabitants will be in another space-time dimension.

### **Judgment day and the end of the world (20:11-15)**

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The Earth and the heavens 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 their deeds 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 they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name wasn't found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

**Dn 7:10** The court was seated, and *documents were opened*.

The great white throne isn't mentioned elsewhere in the Bible; it's symbolic of God's sovereign authority and justice. The one depicted as sitting on the throne is of course God, who isn't further defined as the Son or the Father. But Jesus said that the Father judges no one, all judgment has been entrusted to him (Jn 5:22). And in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, it's the Messiah who sits on his throne in heavenly glory to judge people (Mt 25:31).

On judgment day, the Earth and sky will flee from God's presence, and no place will be found for them. Some think this signals the end of this present Earth and sky, others think this is poetic imagery expressing the fear of the corruptible in the presence of God. This vision of the Last Judgment has a sense of finality about it. Jesus declared that heaven and Earth would pass away, but his words would never pass away (Mt 24:35, also Mt 5:18). Heb 12:27 says that what can be shaken – created things – will be removed so that only what can't be shaken may remain.

John sees the unregenerate dead, now resurrected, whether they were important or not (Re 20:12). He also sees the book of life, which was mentioned in Re 3:5. The dead can't complain about their judgment; everyone will be judged according to what they've done. The Lord searches the heart and examines the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct and what his deeds deserve (Jr 17:10). The righteous are also rewarded for their deeds (Mt 16:27), but that occurred at the first resurrection, at Jesus' coming, so that they might enjoy their rewards during the millennium. The documents would have been in the form of scrolls; books came much later. We are to realize that everything we've said and done is accurately recorded in the mind of God. Nothing has been missed, and he'll reward those who deserve reward, and punish those who deserve punishment.

Death and Hades are thrown into hellfire, but again, this is a metaphor. You can't throw things like Death and Hades into a fire. The significance is that they are finally annihilated. But, unfortunately, millions of unbelievers are cast into hell to be tormented day and night forever (Re 20:10). Even if it's not literal fire, the torment will be real. They are 'outside', with no access to the tree of life, or to the Holy City.

### **A new heaven and a new Earth (21:1)**

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.

**Is 65:17-18** See, I'll create new heavens and a new Earth. The former things won't be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I'll create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I'll rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

**Is 66:22-23** As the new heavens and the new Earth that I make will endure before me, declares the Lord, so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the Lord.

Revelation 21 doesn't describe a newly created Earth. He says in verse 4 that the old order of things has passed away. The expression 'a new heaven and new Earth' alludes to the Isaiah passages, and on reading those chapters, it's clear that Isaiah is referring to a renewal of the present Earth, not a new planet. What John sees is the 1000-year reign that he mentioned six times in Re 20:4-6. It's the 'renewal of all things' spoken of by Jesus in Mt 19:28, and the liberation of the creation from its bondage to decay, as spoken of by Paul in Rom 8:18-21. The elect are receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken (Heb 12:28). The sky and the Earth will be shaken, so that a transformation of the world might take place, making way for the Messianic kingdom, that can't be shaken.

John doesn't only see a new Earth, he sees a new sky as well as a new Earth. He builds on a prophecy by Haggai which said that God will shake the sky, the Earth, the sea, the dry land, and the nations. The condition of the whole of the visible creation will be changed and reduced to ruins. The nations will be defeated, and their armies destroyed, and then Jesus, the desired of all nations, will come and the temple will be filled with glory (Hg 2:6).

John's millennial Earth has no sea. If this is taken literally, it means a complete change in the meteorology of the new Earth. The amount of water would remain constant but be distributed differently so that destructive weather patterns would cease. The lifting of the Edenic curse will bring about many changes in the new world. But the evidence is in favor of the sea being a symbol of chaos and the



turbulent, rebellious nations (Dn 7:2-3, Re 12:17, 13:1) which will certainly be subdued during the millennium. On judgment day, after the millennium, the sea gives up its dead (Re 20:13).

The rest of the chapter is a symbolic description of New Jerusalem, which shouldn't be taken as a description of the new Earth.

### **New Jerusalem (21:2-8)**

I saw the Holy City, 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: Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he'll dwell with them. They'll be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes. There'll 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's done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I'll give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I'll be their God and they'll be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they'll be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Abraham was looking forward to a city whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10). It's our hope also: We've come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb 12:22). This is New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God to the Earth. The adjective 'heavenly' indicates origin. Paul calls it the Jerusalem that's above (Ga 4:26), or *from above*, a city who's our mother, because we'll be her inhabitants.

New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to a *renewed Earth* at the beginning of the millennium. The marriage of the Lamb was signaled in Re 19:7-9 and now the glorified resurrected Church is ready to reign

with the Messiah. The city is described by a metaphor: a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Christ is the bridegroom, the saints are the bride. It's not a literal marriage; marriage symbolizes the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church, the spiritual union between God and man. God will live with man and be their God, and they'll be his people. There will be no more suffering in this new environment; no more death or pain. This is something new. God said he'd make everything new.

'It's done', because God is the Beginning and the End. Time doesn't limit God; everything he has decided is certain. Our minds can't conceive what God has prepared for those who love him, but the invitation is there for all. All one needs is a thirst for God. Jesus said, if anyone is thirsty, he should come to him and drink (Jn 7:37). The overcomers who do God's will until the end will inherit all God's blessings, but the sinners' lot is in hell. Those who are out to enjoy life, those who fear insult and persecution for Christ's sake, those who turn back, and those who surrender to their baser desires will all share in the devil's fate; eternal torment, the second death.

### **Union with Christ in New Jerusalem (21:9-18)**

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me: Come, I'll 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 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 Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 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's long. The angel measured the wall

using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

**Ez 40:2, 3b** In visions of God, he took me to the land of Israel and *set me on a very high mountain*, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city ... I saw a man ... *with a measuring rod in his hand*.

**Ez 48:30-31a** These will be the exits of the city: Beginning on the north side, which is 4,500 cubits long, the *gates of the city will be named after the tribes of Israel*.

An angel shows John the bride of the Lamb; that is, the Messiah's wife. But he doesn't see a woman; he's taken up a very high mountain to watch the descent of a city that's a 2,200 km cube. This cube is a metaphor; we have to imagine what it means. This isn't an earthly city; it descends from heaven, and it shines with the glory of God, like precious jewels. This city represents God's glorified people. Just imagine all those precious jewels, pearls, and gold. That symbolizes our ultimate glorification. The community is huge, numbering in the millions, and it's made up of people who have been redeemed from every tribe, nation, and language. When the Holy City descends to Earth, it'll shine with the glory of God.

The number 12 recurs throughout. There are 12 gates symbolizing free access, with 12 angels symbolizing security. The gates are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, and there are 12 foundations inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles. The redeemed are God's people from both Old and New Covenants, from ancient Israel and the Church. Each side of the city is 12 thousand stadia, and the walls are 144 (12 x 12) cubits thick! That's 200 feet or 65 meters! The population was previously symbolized as numbering 144,000 (14:1). Paul said that Christians 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 as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:19-21). Our living conditions aren't revealed. No one has seen or heard or conceived what

God has prepared for those who love him (1 Co 2:9). The Holy City, New Jerusalem, is a symbolic representation of our life in union with Christ during the millennium, and it's also an appropriate description of our existence into eternity.

### **The glory of New Jerusalem (21:19-27)**

The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, as pure as transparent glass. I didn't see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city doesn't 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.

**Is 24:23** *The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, with great glory.*

**Is 54:11-12** *Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I'll build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphire. I'll make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.*

**Is 60:3, 5b, 11, 19** *Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn ... The wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. ... Your gates will always stand open, they'll never be shut, day or night ... 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.*

The significance of the precious stones is their sparkling brilliance, the reason wealthy women adorn themselves with them. The breastplate of the Jewish high priest also had 12 precious stones. The streets of transparent gold are symbolic of the city's glory. The city doesn't need light from the sun or moon; their light would be eclipsed by the glory of God and the Lamb.

The nations that walk by its light (cf. Is 2:3) are the subjects of the millennial kingdom who live throughout the world. The Earth's leaders will bring their glory to Jerusalem during the millennium, but they can't enter New Jerusalem. The relation between the two isn't clear. Isaiah saw the glory of Jerusalem in the last days (Is 60), and the prophets always framed their prophecies in the context of this present world. God says he's making everything new; the old order of doing things will pass away. New Jerusalem will be our millennial home, but it's a metaphor. We don't know much about our future state.

There are over two billion people who claim to be Christians in the world today. Only the Lord knows those who are his, but the complete number of the redeemed from all time may be a billion or more. Where are they going to live when they return to Earth with Jesus? That question is not easy, but the easy answer is that they'll be living in New Jerusalem, and it hasn't been revealed how that existence will be.

### **Life in paradise (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 the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They'll see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They'll not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they'll reign forever and ever.

**Gn 2:9b** In the middle of the garden were *the tree of life* and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**Ps 46:4** *There's a river whose streams make glad the city of God*, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

**Ez 47:1, 12** The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and *I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east. ...Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river.* Their leaves won't wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they'll bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. *Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.*

**Zec 14:6-8** On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. It'll be a unique day, a day known only to the Lord - with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day, *living water will flow out from Jerusalem*, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter.

Living water in John's gospel is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the water he gives believers becomes a spring of water welling up in them to eternal life (Jn 4:14). Streams of living water will flow from within the believer. It symbolizes the Holy Spirit whom believers receive from God (Jn 7:38-39a).

In Ezekiel, the water flows from the temple on Mount Zion during the millennium. It's literal, becoming a river that flows into both the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. It symbolizes the regeneration of the Earth that will take place. God said: I'm making everything new (Re 21:5).

There's no temple in New Jerusalem, but there's a river that symbolizes eternal life. The water flows from the throne of God and the Lamb down the main street. The tree of life, which was in the garden of Eden, is seen on both sides of this river, and the overcomers have access to its fruit (Re 2:7). It symbolizes eternal life communicated by the Holy Spirit as God and believers are restored to perfect fellowship.

The Tree of Life produces twelve kinds of fruit, with a fresh crop every month. Another metaphor, which shouldn't be taken literally. The fruit, however we like to visualize it, ensures that whatever we need to nourish and keep our bodies healthy will be extravagantly provided for. The leaves, on the other hand, are for the healing of the nations. The saints in the city will rule the world with Christ, bringing healing from the throne to the unregenerate nations outside the gates. They'll be healed from the effects of the curse our world has experienced since Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden.

There will be no daytime and nighttime in the city; it'll always be light. The saints will see God's face. Jesus said the pure in heart are blessed because they'll see God (Mt 5:8). After the resurrection, we'll see God, serve him, and reign with him forever. We're members of God's royal family. The people we'll rule over are the unbelievers who survive the Great Tribulation at Jesus' return.

### **This teaching is trustworthy and true (22:6-11)**

The angel said to me: These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place. Look, I'm coming soon! Blessed is he who pays attention to the words of prophecy of this scroll. I, John, am he who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell prostrate to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me: Don't do that! I'm a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who pay attention to the words of this scroll. Worship God! Then he told me: Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll. The time is near. Let the wrongdoer continue to do wrong and the immoral continue to be immoral. Let the righteous continue to do right and the holy continue to be holy.

**Dn 8:26** Seal up the vision in a scroll, for it concerns the distant future.

**Dan 12:10** Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but *the wicked will continue to be wicked.*

The remaining verses are an epilogue. The angel reassures John that the visions he has seen and the words he has heard are reliable and true. These are things that must soon take place; the major part of the Revelation remains to be fulfilled, as has been explained in this book. God guides the spirits of prophets to prophesy the truth. Jesus himself speaks again (Re 22:7) to reassure us that he's coming soon, without delay. We may find that perplexing, as he said it nearly 2000 years ago, but he repeats his statement three times in this chapter, as well as in Revelation 3:11, so he certainly wants us to live in anticipation of his coming. We need to be alert. That's why he hasn't given a clearer timetable of what is to come. We are blessed if we pay attention to the prophetic words in this book, and we stand fast during times of persecution.

This is the second time (cf. Re 19:10) that John is warned not to worship angels. He was overawed by the visions. God is the only one who warrants our worship, not angels, or political or church leaders.

Daniel was told to seal his prophecy because it concerned the distant future. John is told *not* to seal his prophecy because we are living in the last days, and the time is near. People can still find faith through hearing the gospel and being cleansed, and they're encouraged to do what is right and to be holy, as God is holy. However, there will come a time when repentance and change become impossible, because character has been determined by a lifetime of good or bad habits, or because a choice has to be made between Christ and Antichrist. Once a choice for the Antichrist has been made, the decision will be final; wrongdoers will continue in their vile behavior and wrongdoing. But at the present time, the invitation is still there to come (Re 22:17).

### **The Messiah is coming with his reward (22:12-16)**

Look, I'm coming soon! My reward is with me, and I'll give to each person according to their deeds. I'm Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. 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, the sorcerers, the immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and all who love and practice falsehood. I, Jesus, have



sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I'm the shoot and offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.

**Nm 24:17b** I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not yet. *A star will come from Jacob's descendants; a ruler will rise from Israel.*

**Ps 62:12** *You reward everyone according to what they've done.*

**Is 62:11b** Tell Zion her Savior is coming. Look, *his reward is with him, and his recompense precedes him.*

**Mt 16:27** For the Son of Man is about to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then *he'll reward each person according to what they've done.*

Listen to the words of Jesus, the Messiah. When he comes, there will be rewards for the saints and punishment for the wicked. God's judgments are fair; each person is treated according to what he has done in this life. In the beatitudes, Jesus said the kingdom of God will be ours, we'll inherit the Earth, we'll see God, and we'll be called God's children. Jesus promised those who made good use of the gifts they were given, that he'd put them in charge of many things (Mt 25:21), and that some, at least, would rule over cities (Lk 19:17). Paul said they'd be rewarded with eternal life, glory, honor and peace (Ro 2:7, 10). They'll be resurrected and immortal, and they'll reign with Christ. They'll judge the world and even angels (1 Co 6:2-3). In addition to general rewards that all the saints will enjoy, Christ will reward each person according to what they've done.

A voice says he's the Alpha and Omega. It could be the Father or the Son speaking, but here, it's the Son who claims to be the Beginning and the End. He's God, the Lord, Yahweh, of the OT, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He's before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col 1:17).

The saints are blessed because they've been cleansed in the blood of Jesus, giving them access to the tree of life and to the Holy City. The 'dogs' are outside. This is a metaphor for the wicked who are outside of salvation. Their place will one day be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur (Re 21:8), but the context here is the millennium, and

‘outside’ means outside of the Holy City. The nations over whom the Messiah and the saints are ruling are the wicked who, because of their sin, threw in their lot with the Antichrist.

Jesus sent his angel to pass on this testimony to all believers. It’s to be trusted. Jesus is the coming Messiah, the Davidic king, the shoot that sprang up from the root of the Davidic dynasty. He’s the star of David, as seen by Balaam. His coming will herald a new dawn after the dark days of the Great Tribulation.

### **Come and receive the gift of life (22:17-21)**

The Spirit and the bride say: Come! Let the one who hears this say: Come! Let the thirsty one come, and let he who desires the water of life take it as a gift. I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words of this document: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the calamities written in this document. And if anyone takes words away from this prophetic document, God will take away his share in the tree of life and the Holy City, which are written in this document. He who testifies to these things says: Yes, I’m coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints.

**Dt 4:2** *Don’t add to what I command you and don’t subtract from it.* Pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I’m commanding you.

The book finishes appropriately with an invitation and a warning. The Holy Spirit and the Church have always been the ones responsible for drawing people to Christ through the word of God. Those who respond should continue the invitation. Salvation is a gift; it can’t be earned. As the woman at the well was informed, the water of life is the eternal and supernatural life communicated to us by the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38-39). If God’s Spirit lives in you, just as God raised Jesus from the dead, he’ll also raise you from the dead and give life to your mortal bodies (Ro 8:11).

Moses warned the Israelites long ago that they shouldn’t add or subtract from God’s word. The present warning is given specifically for the book of Revelation. Because it’s not an easy book to interpret,

there's the temptation to find fault with the text or to force it into a preconceived mold. This is forbidden; nothing should be added or taken away. The warning isn't only addressed to scholars but to *everyone who hears* the prophecy contained in the document. The consequences are dire.

Jesus says he's coming soon. Our response should be to make sure we know him and that our sins are forgiven. We should desire and pray for his return, even when life is comfortable. The document closes with a benediction for those who have washed their robes. Let everyone ask themselves if they are clothed in the righteousness that Christ provides, which is obtained through faith alone.