



*"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” - 19<sup>th</sup> 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*

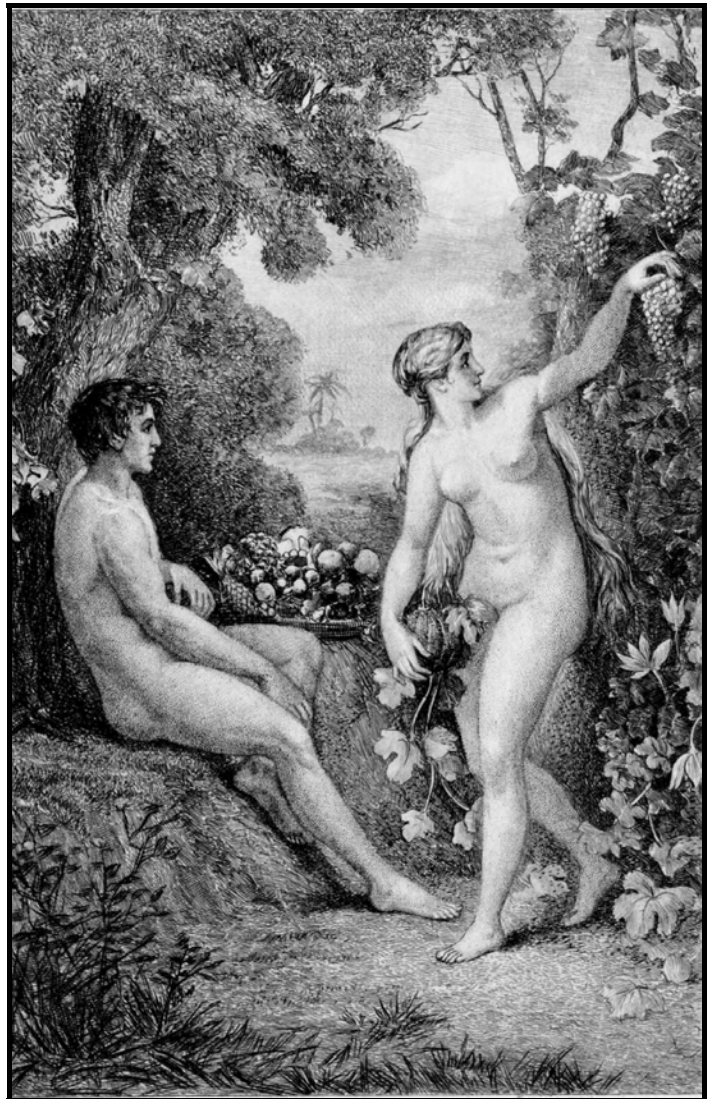
(Lenski, p. 649) The water of this river is completely pure, free from pollution or contamination of any kind - **“as clear as crystal.”** The Greek text literally reads *“as bright as a crystal.”* (*“lampron hos krystallon”*). *“Together they envision the river as a sort of shimmering and sparkling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

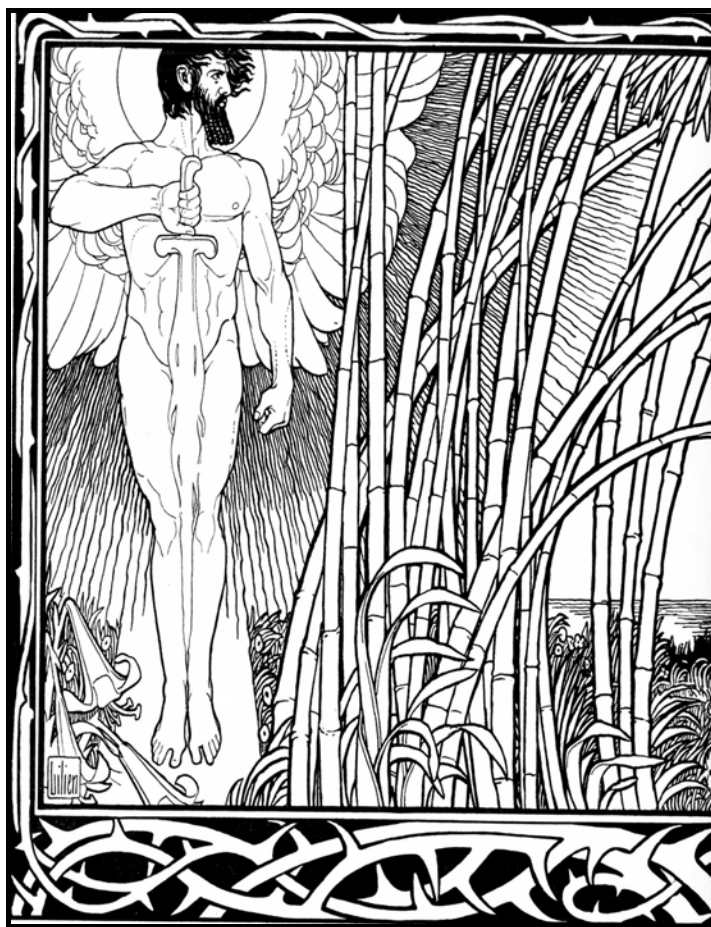
*“We have an analogy to these cases in the matter of the sacraments. As in the sacraments by virtue of the divine Word the visible means become the vehicles of divine grace, so here, by virtue of the divine Word, which designates the one tree as the tree of life, life can in reality be imparted by its 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 not become weary...It is for you that paradise is*



*“The Guardian of the Tree of Life” by E.M. Lilien*

*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 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

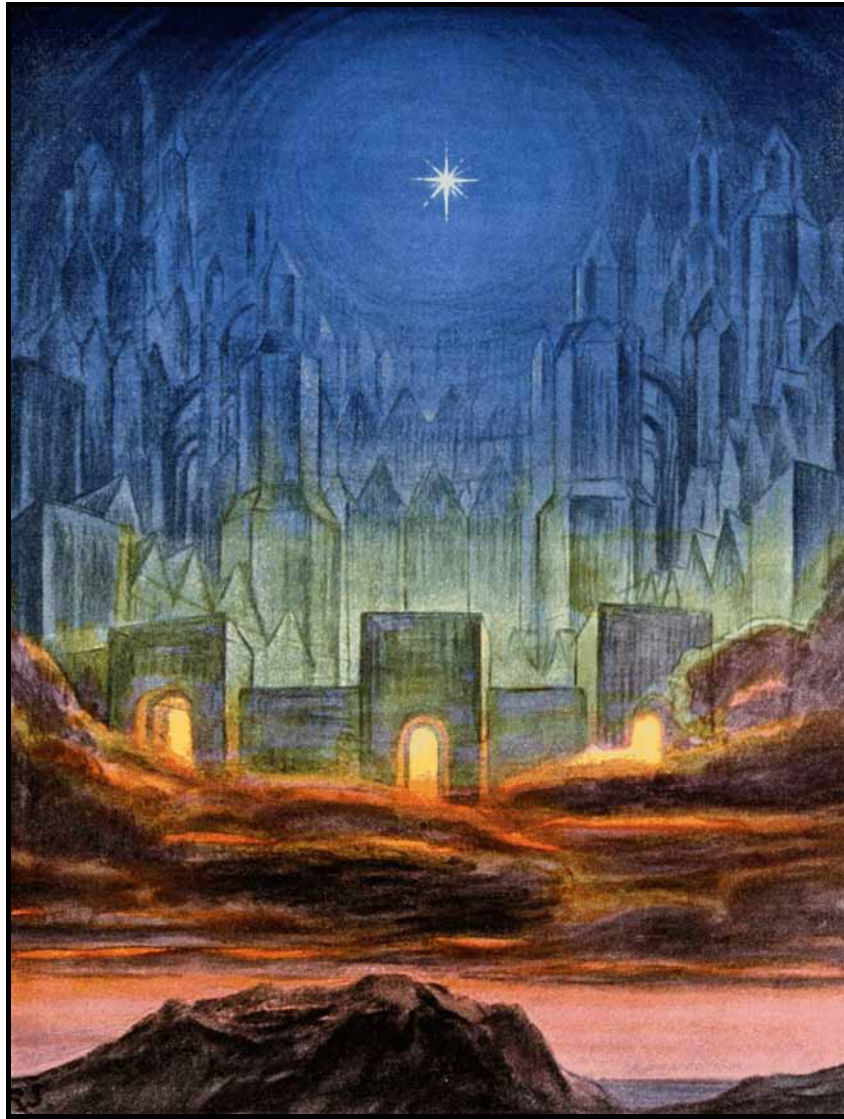


*“The Rending of the Temple Veil”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

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)*



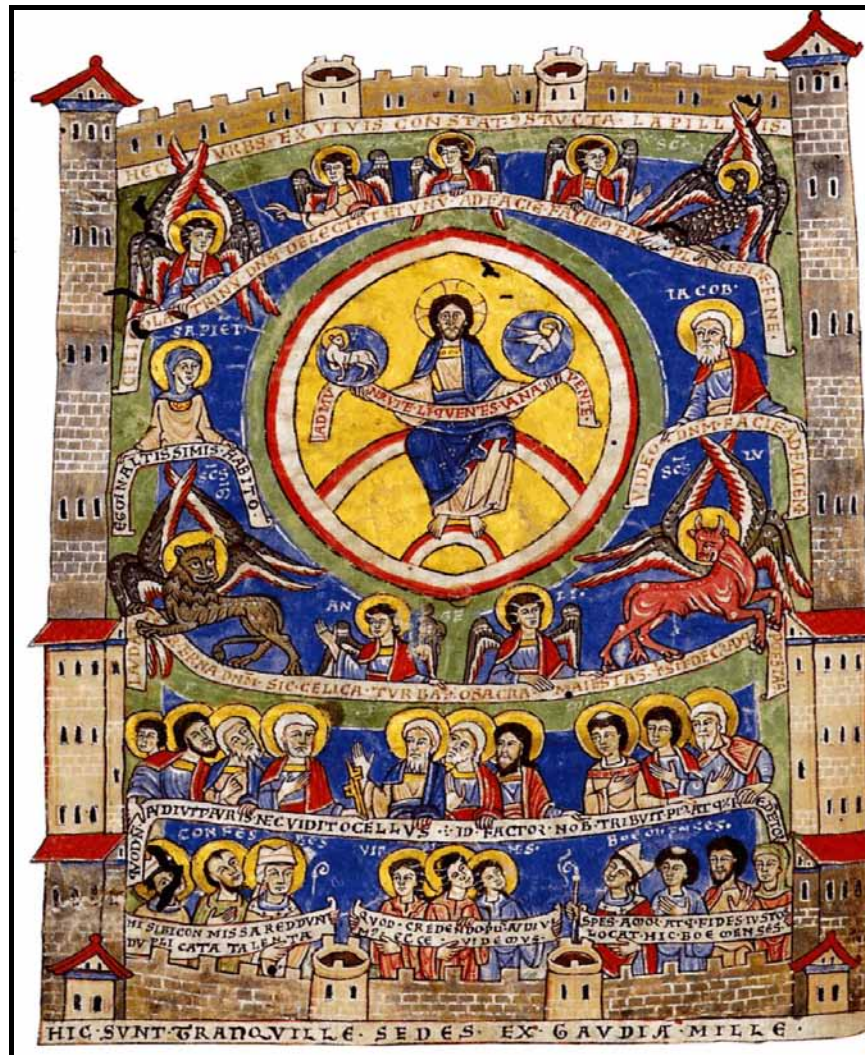
*“The Courts of Heaven” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

## **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”  
12<sup>th</sup> 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**

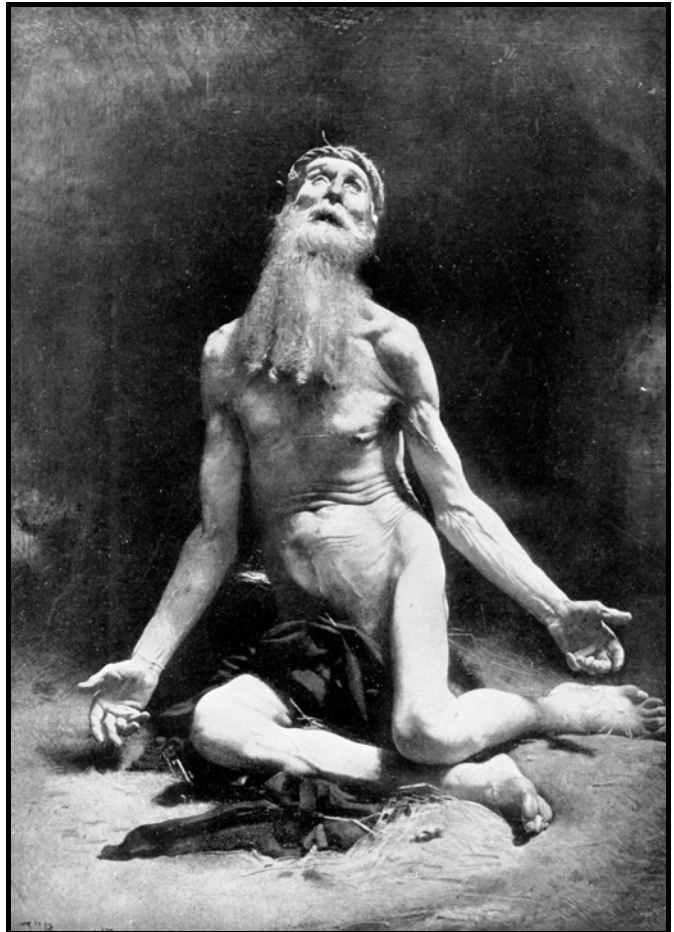
The nature of heaven as God’s dwelling place serves to define the essence of heavenly joy for the believer is the experience of God’s immediate presence. Christ, who has ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, promised His disciples:

***“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:

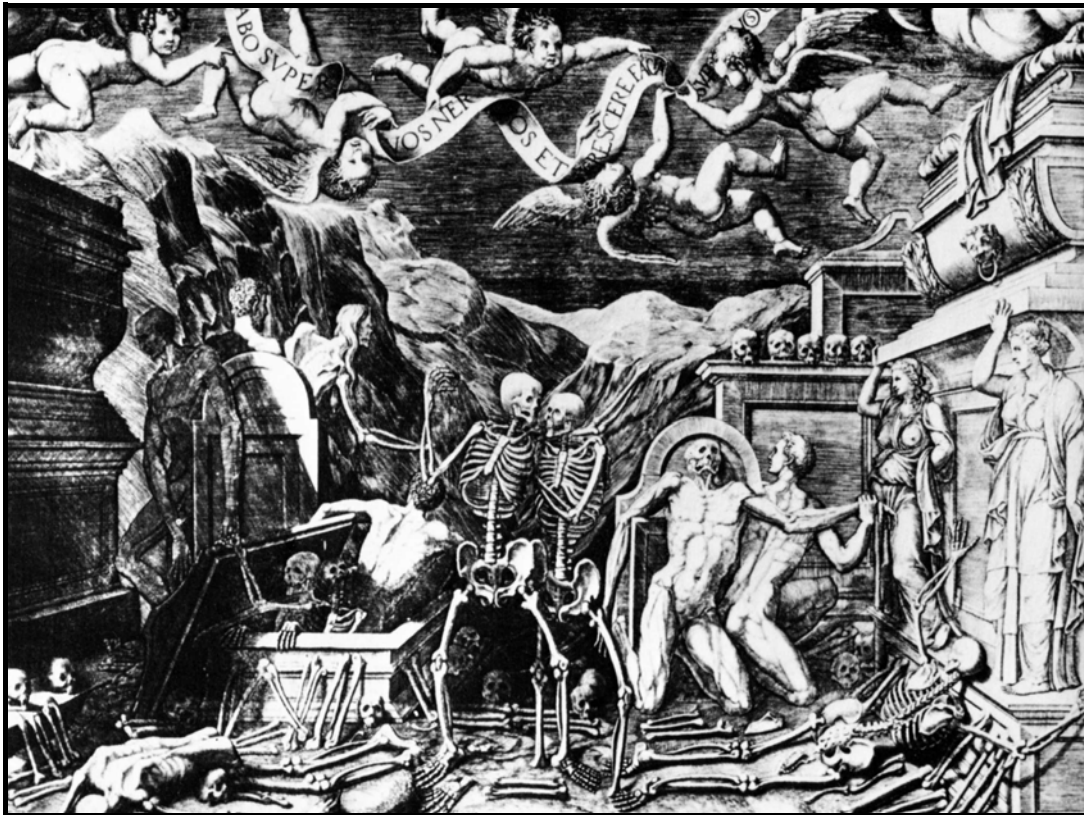
*“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign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

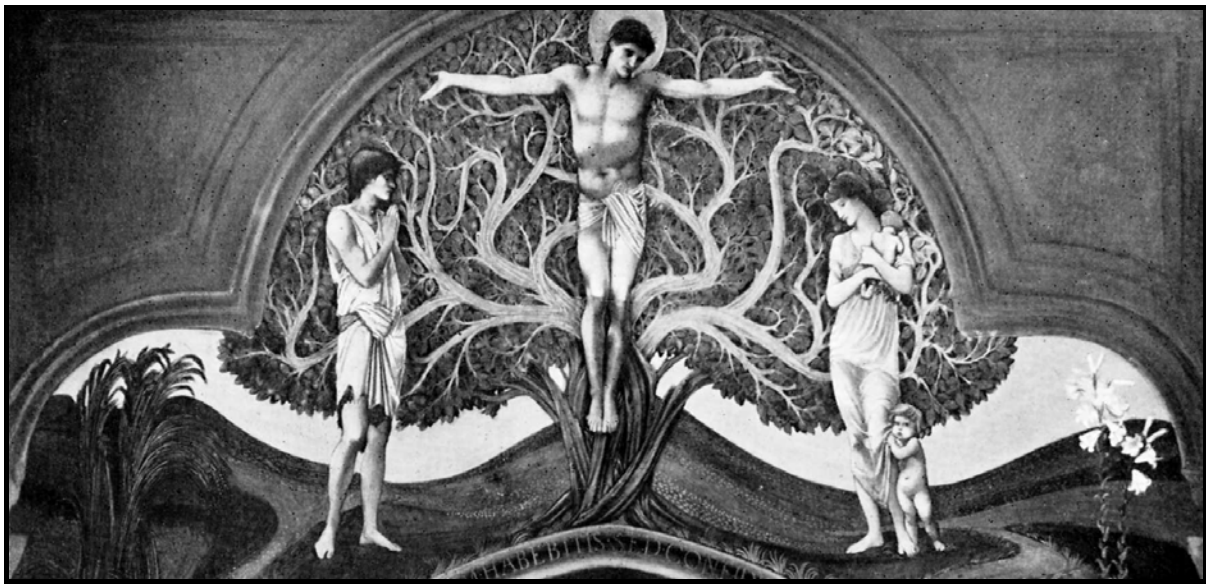
*“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the 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!”***  
***19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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)

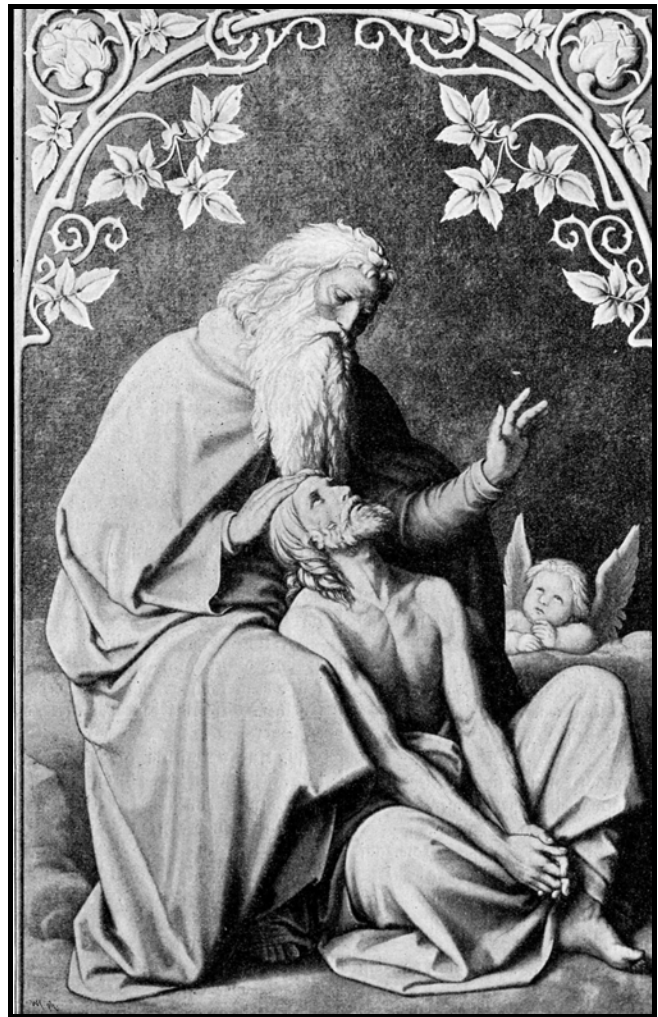
Jesus uses the same **“place”** language to describe both heaven and hell in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. The beggar dies and is carried by the angels to Abraham’s side in heaven. Dives also perishes and is condemned to eternal torment in Hell. He gazes across the vast chasm that separates 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” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*





*“Heaven Is My Home” by Walter Firlie*

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”  
19<sup>th</sup> 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***



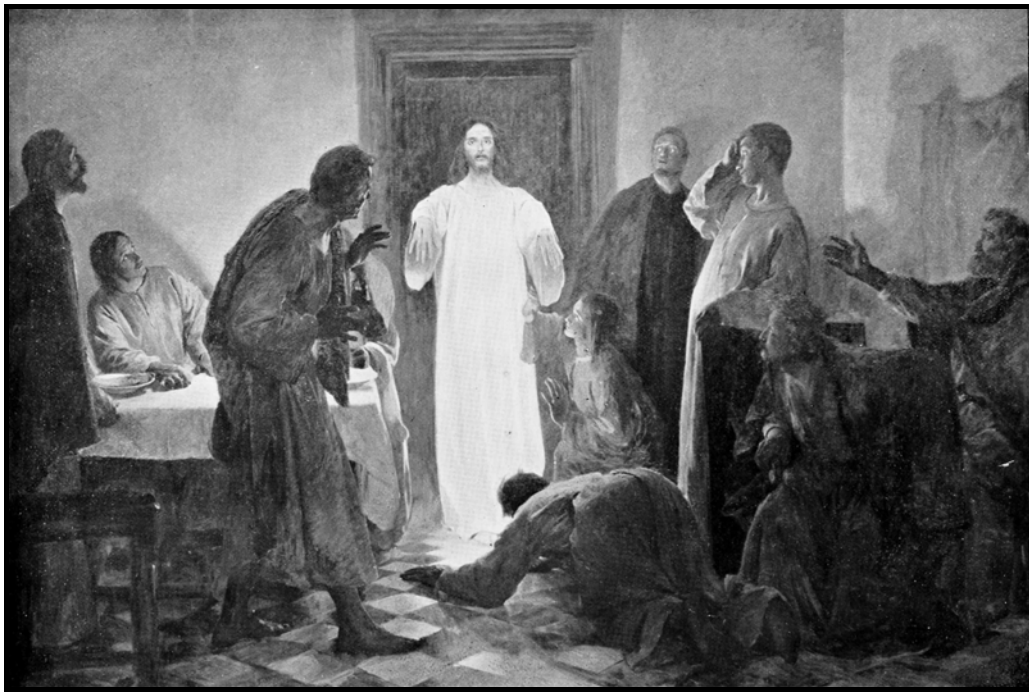


*“The Perfect Harmony of Eden”  
Luther Bible Woodcut by Bocksperger-Amman*

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**

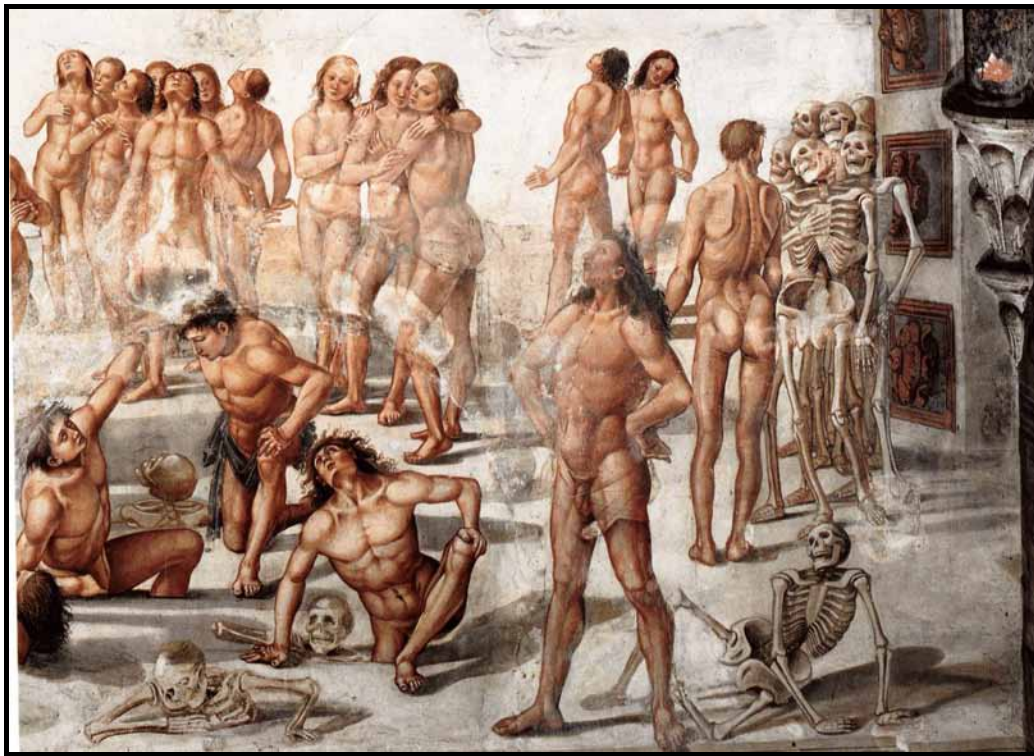
Scripture provides few specific details of life in the new heaven and earth. Brighton asserts: “*God did not reveal to John how the newly restored creation in its geophysical dimensions and character will appear.*” (Brighton, p. 631). As previously noted, however, the Biblical text clearly indicates 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.



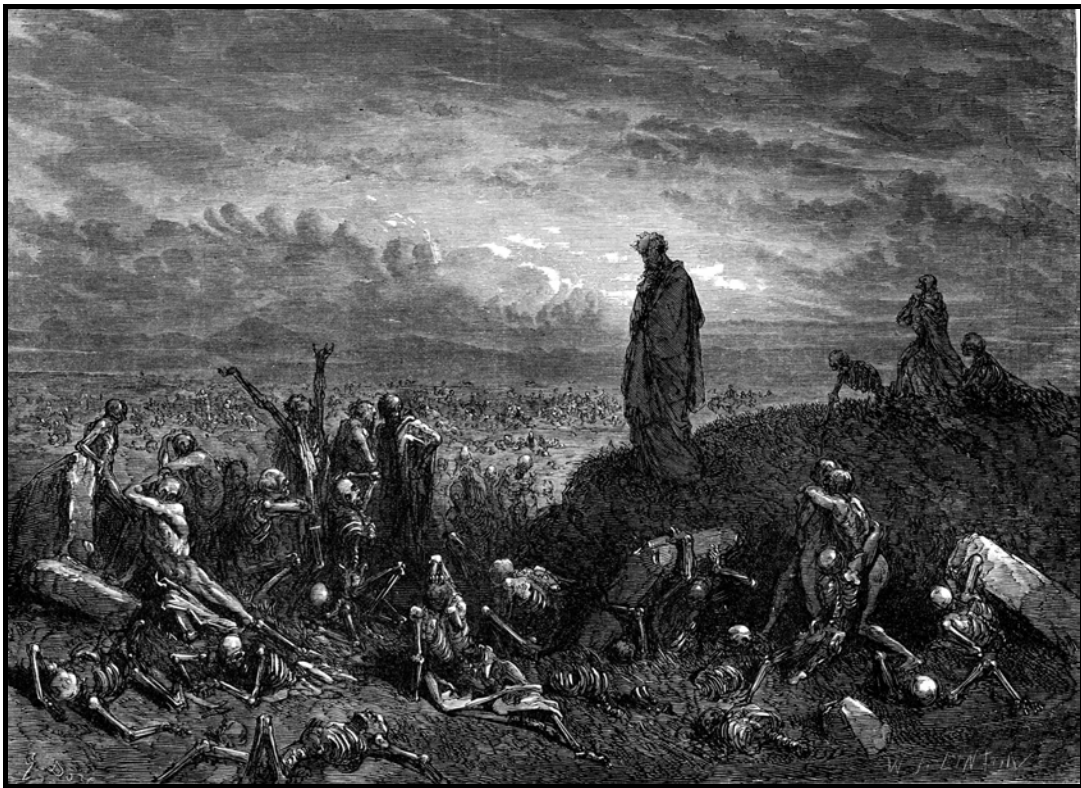
***“The Risen Christ Appears to the Disciples Inside the Upper Room”  
by J. H. F. Bacon***

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”  
19<sup>th</sup> 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



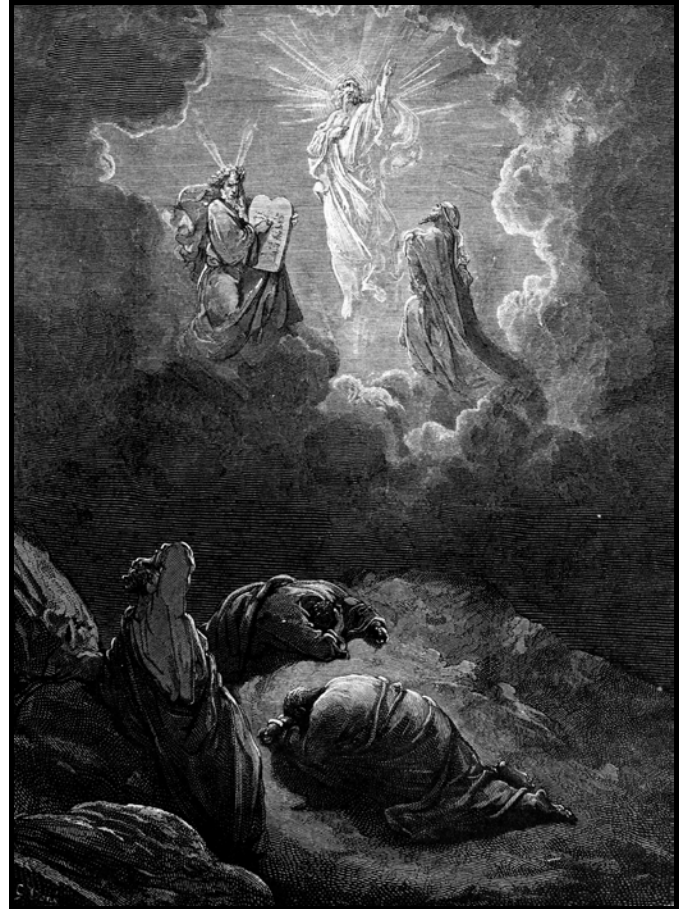
suggest significant changes in the nature of our Lord's presence. Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the eleven disciples on the Sea of Galilee all initially failed to recognize Him (John 20: 10-18; Luke 24: 13-35; John 21:1-14). He appears and disappears at will, unconfined by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

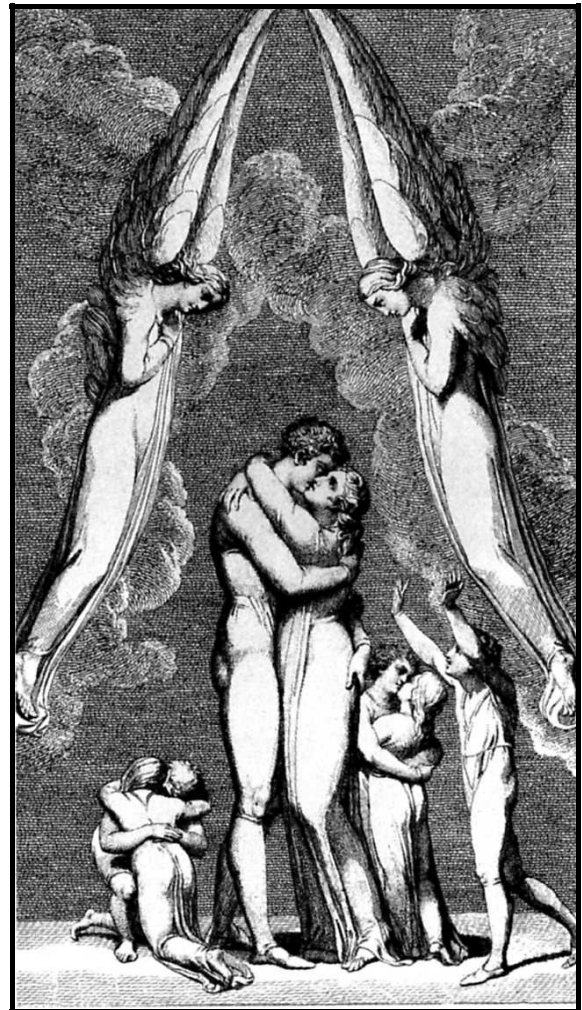
The joy of every saint in heaven will be perfect and complete. Thus there will be no

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)*