



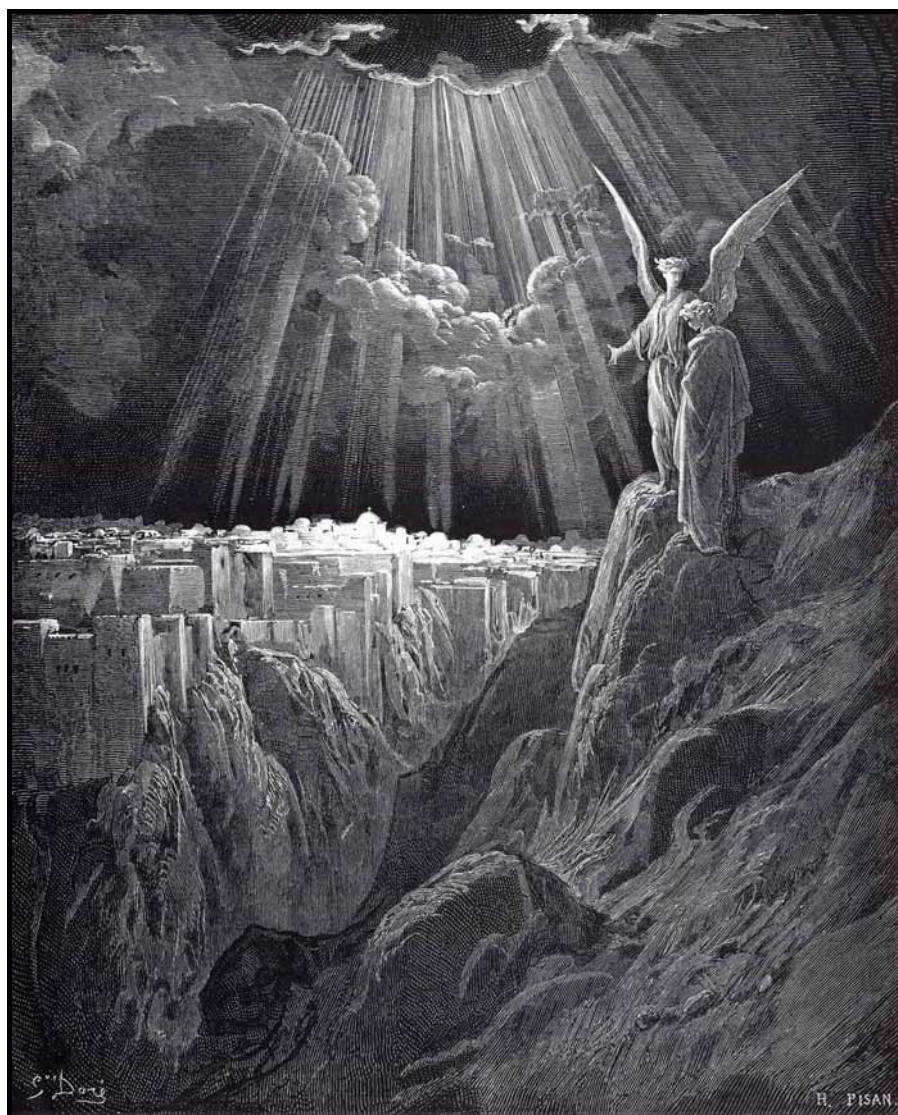
"John Beholds the New Jerusalem" by Lucas Cranach

The New Heaven and New Earth

Revelation 21:1-8

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

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



“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” by Gustave Dore

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

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

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

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

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



"The New Jerusalem" by Albrecht Dürer

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

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

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

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



“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



"The Measuring of the New Jerusalem" by Jean Duvet



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

into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



“John Beholds the Holy City” by Rudolf Schäfer

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

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

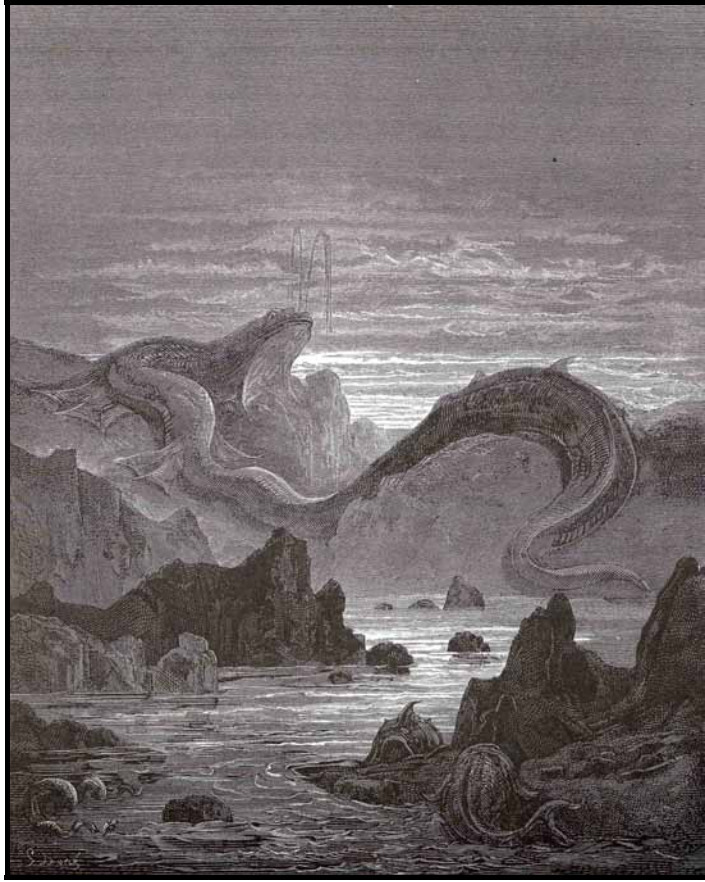


“John Beholds the New Jerusalem” - Luther Bible Woodcut

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

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

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



“The Creation of the Primordial Serpent”
by Gustave Dore

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

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

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

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



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

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



“John Is Shown the New Jerusalem”
Flemish Apocalypse

church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.” (Hebrews 12:22-23) The apostle Paul had also written of the Christian church, describing her as ***“the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.”*** in contrast to Judaism, ***“the present city of Jerusalem because she is in slavery with her children.”*** (Galatians 4:25,26)

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

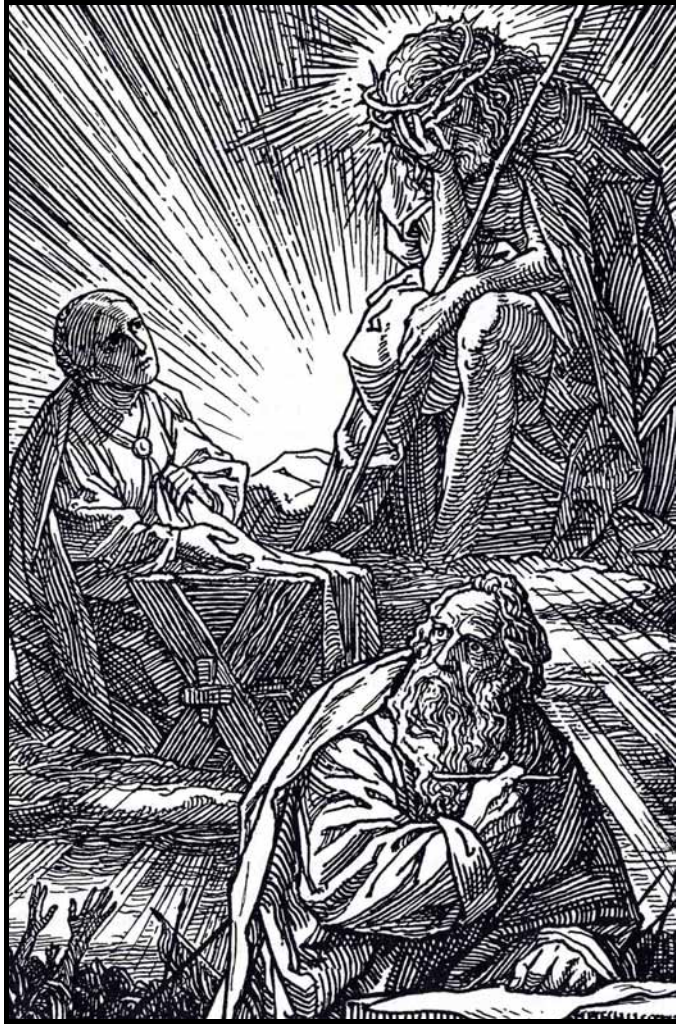
the Lord in that day and will become My people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent Me to you.”
(Zechariah 2:10-11)



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

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

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



*"Isaiah Foretells the Coming of Immanuel"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

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

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

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

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



“The Dance of Death” by Michael Wohlgemuth

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

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

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

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

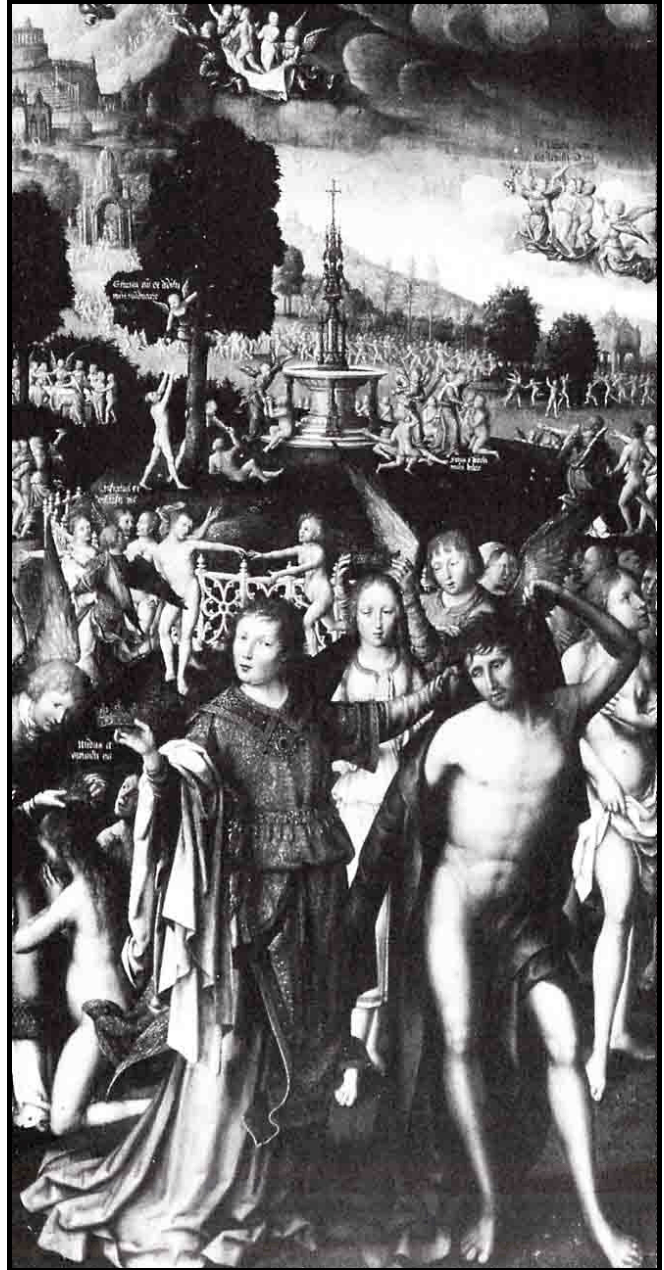
“He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” That which God declares will surely come to pass. The verb *“gegonan”* is a perfect indicative active third person plural form. It is literally translated - *“they have come into being.”* The verb’s plural subject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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

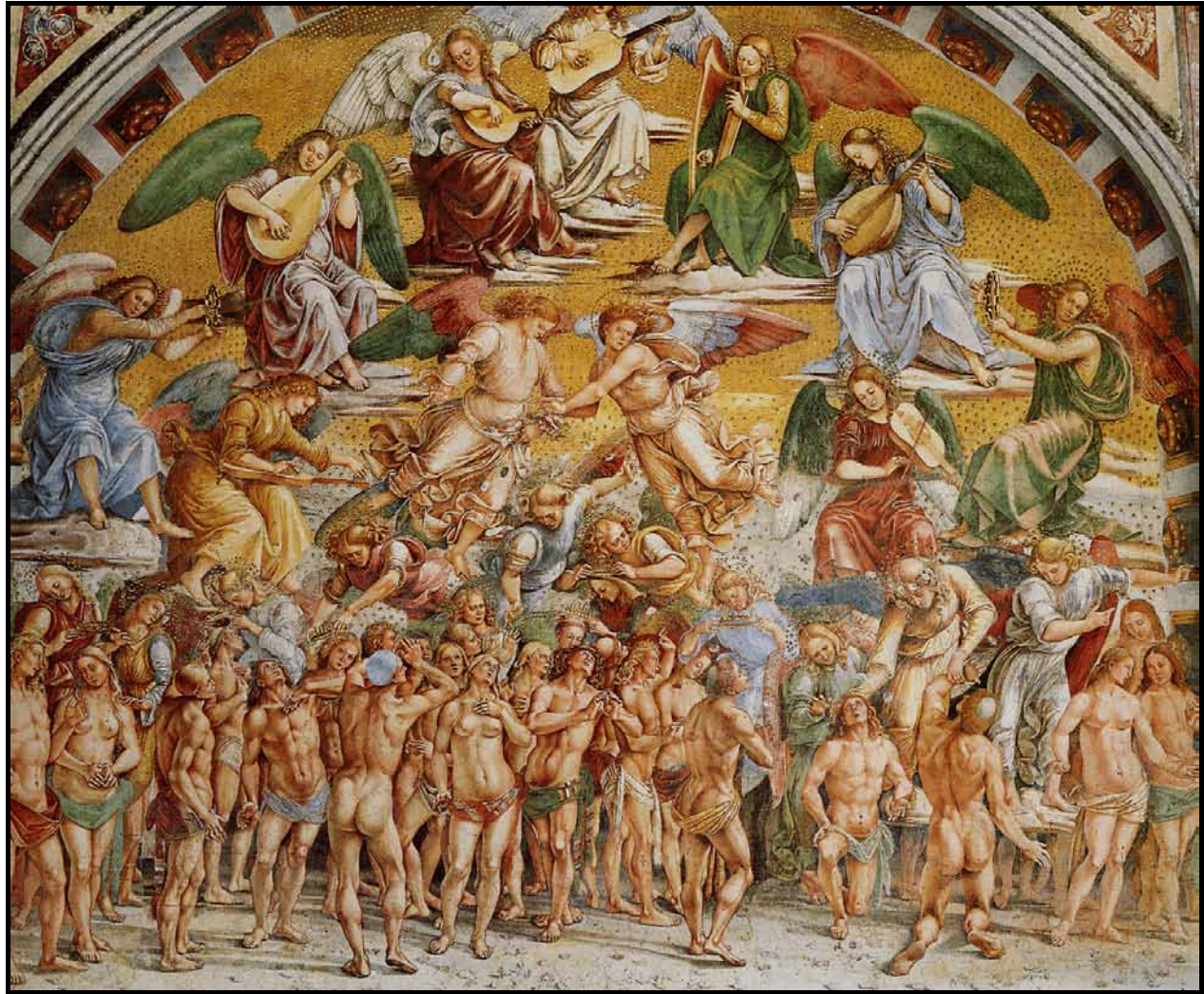
“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels.” (Revelation 3:5)

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

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

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

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



“The Coronation of the Elect” by Luca Signorelli

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



"The New Jerusalem" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-27

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

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



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

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

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

“One of the seven angels...” The scene is introduced by deliberate design with



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

language that closely parallels the introduction of the vision of Harlot Babylon in Revelation 17:1.

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

“the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

These two women personify the kingdoms of Christ and Antichrist, the true church and the false church. In

the imagery of Revelation, they are depicted as rival cities - Jerusalem the holy and Babylon the great. The bride

and the harlot are the opposite of one another in every way. As in the vision

of the harlot, so also in the vision of the bride, the scene is introduced and explained by

“one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues.” (Cf. Revelation

17:1) It may well be the same angel in both instances, although the text does

not specifically indicate that to be the case. The parallel continues in the

identical language of the angel’s invitations to John, **“Come, I will show you...”** (Revelation 17:1; 21:9).

There is some irony in the fact that

one of the plague angels, who had

earlier served to rain down the judgment of God upon a sinful world, would now be

called upon to introduce the wonders of the heavenly city. Swete aptly calls it **“a**

divine paradox.” (Swete, p. 283)

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

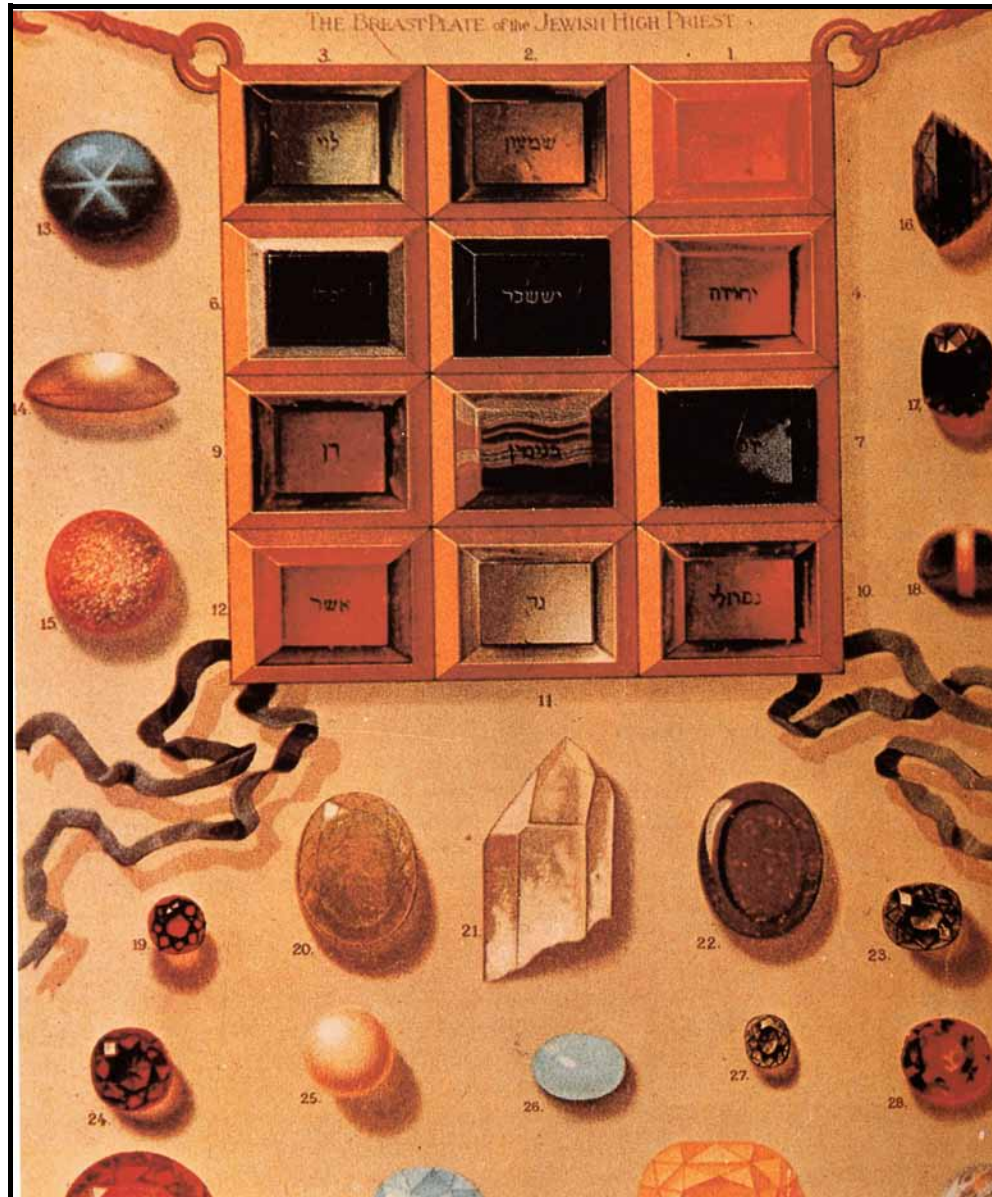
In the visions of both Ezekiel and John the essence of the heavenly Jerusalem's glory and the blessedness of the saints who will dwell therein is the immediate presence of God. Through Ezekiel God promises: ***“My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then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



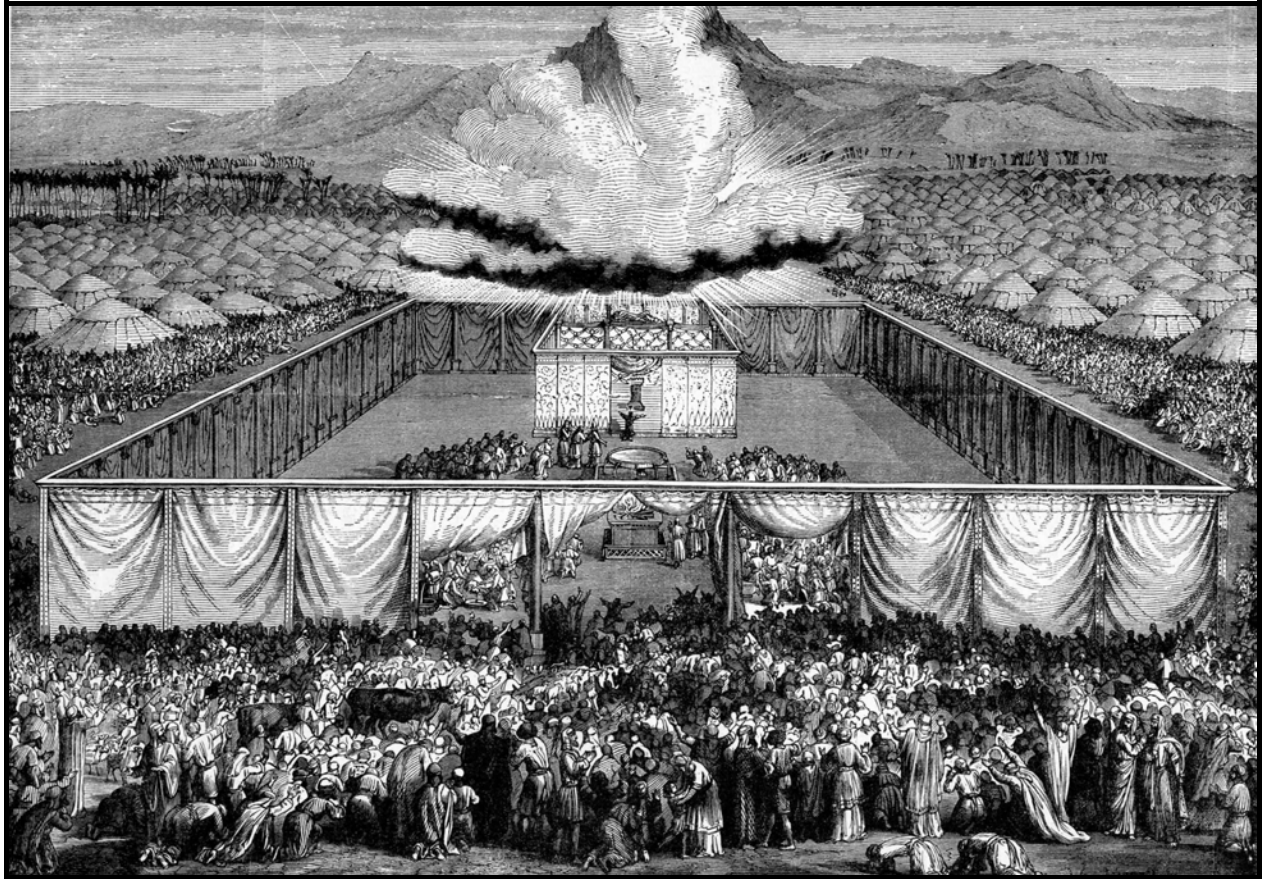
“The Temple of Solomon” Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut - 1534

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

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



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

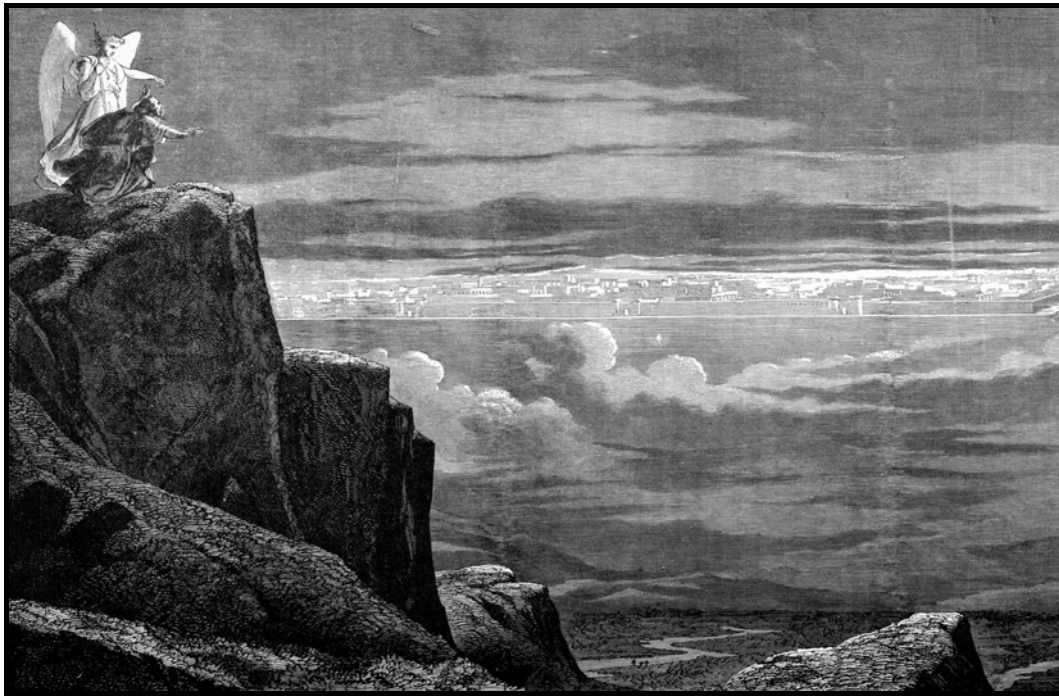


“The Shekinah Over the Ark Within the Tabernacle” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

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

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

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



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

“It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.”

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

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

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

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

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



“Behold the Holy City” by Rudolf Schäfer

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

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

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

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



“The Watchmen on the Heights” by Rudolf Schärer



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

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

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



“The Measuring of the Heavenly Jerusalem” by Jean Duvet

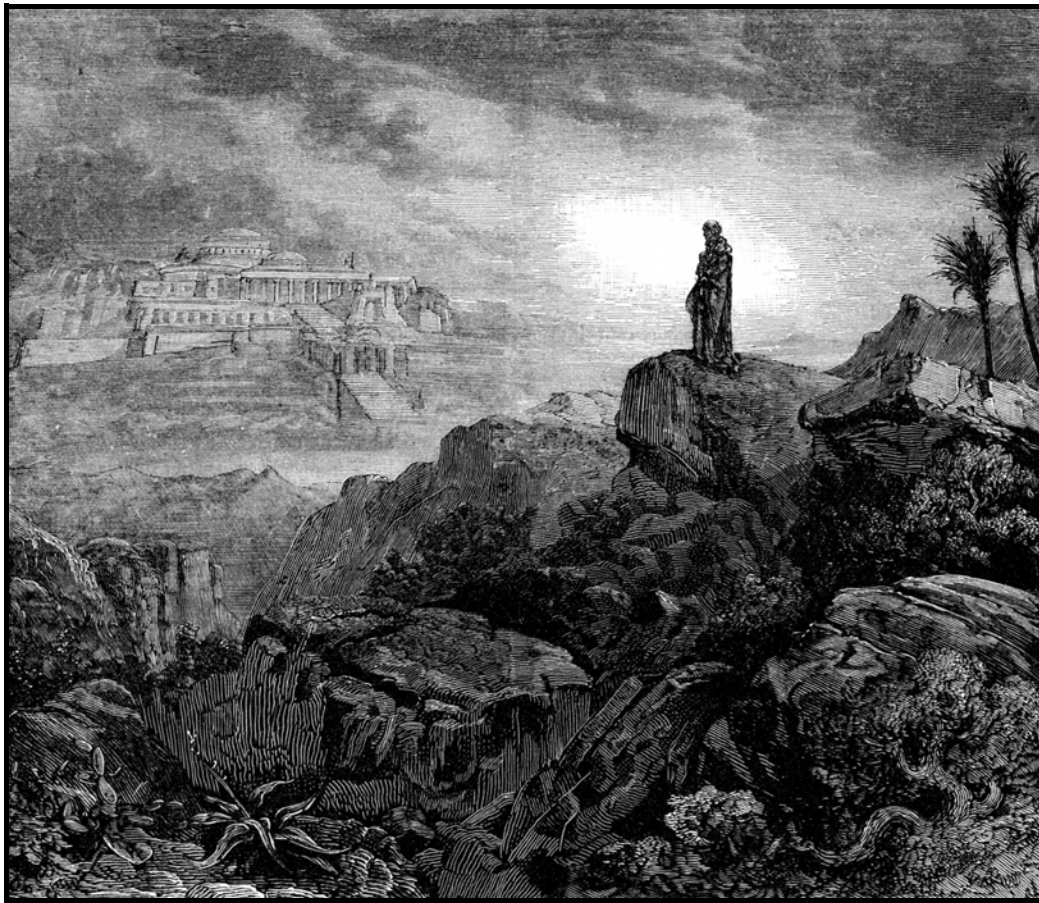
The repeated emphasis upon the number “*twelve*” (12 gates - 12 angels - 12 tribes - 12 foundations - 12 apostles, etc.) signals the identity of the Holy City as a symbol of the Christian Church. In Biblical numerology generally, and throughout Revelation particularly, twelve is the “*church number*”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

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

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

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

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

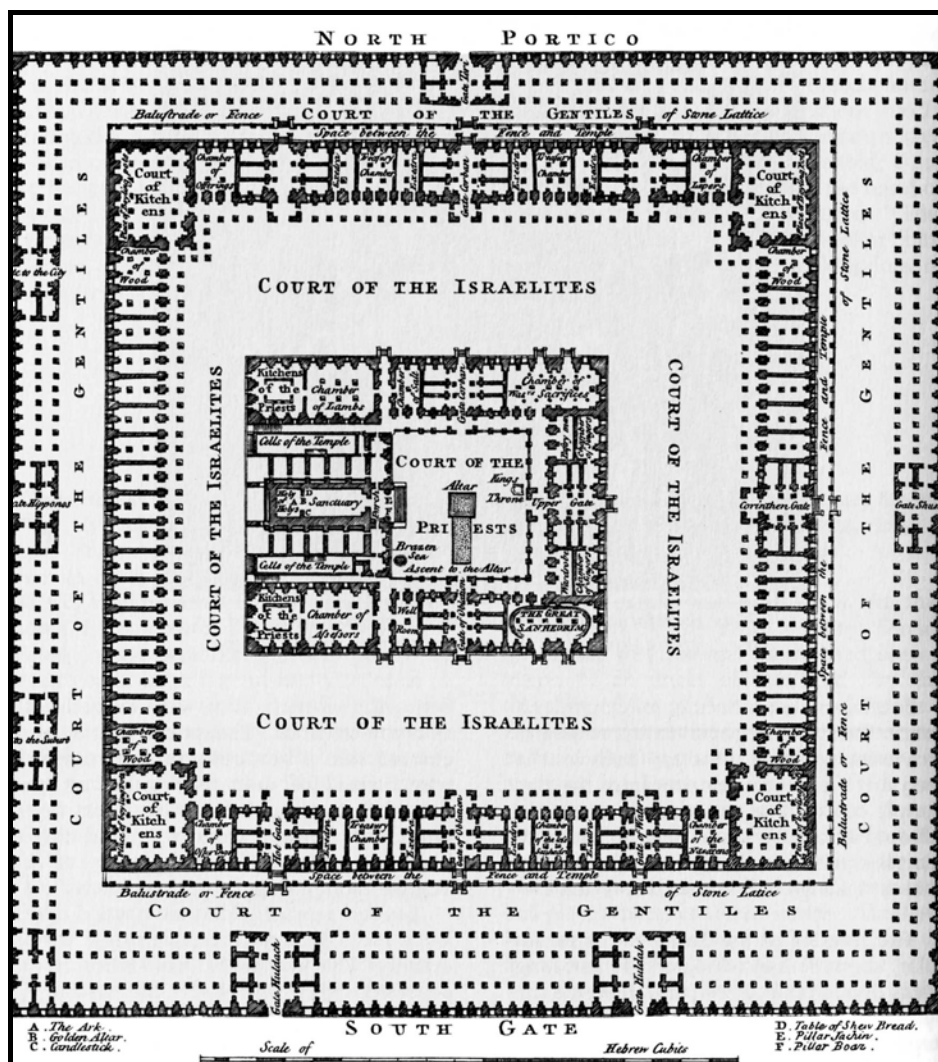


*“The Prophet Ezekiel’s Vision of a Perfect New Temple”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

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

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

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



18th Century Diagram of the Temple

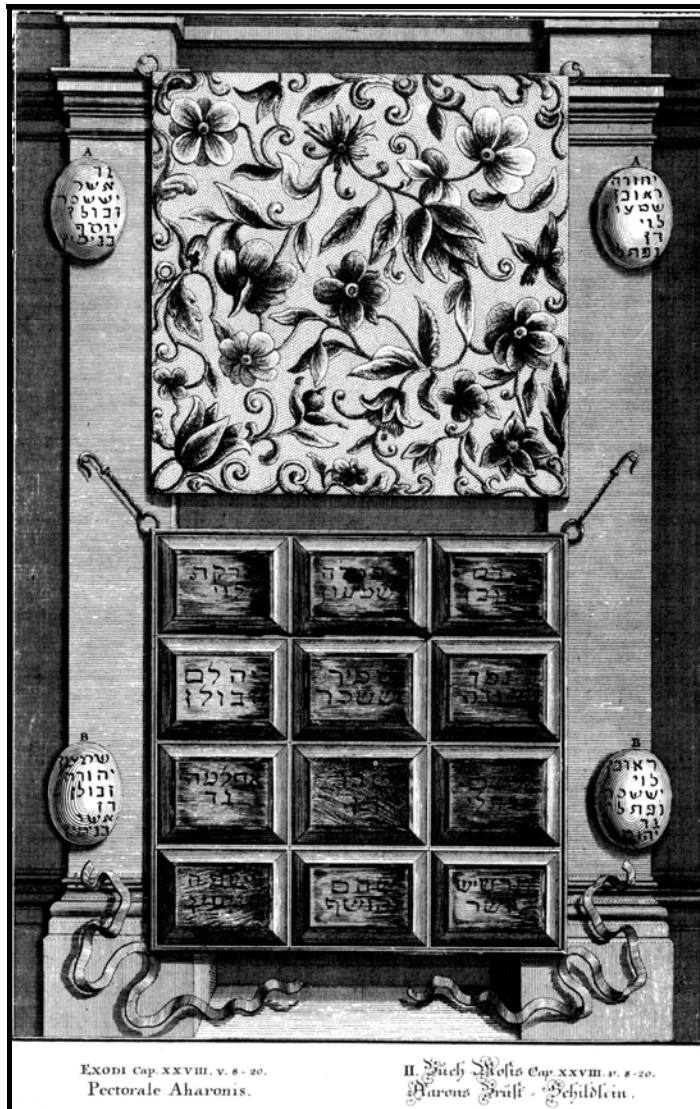
(Job xl,16), but a rod of gold, such as befitted an instrument used in the service of God; cf. Rev. 12:8; 8:3;9:13; 15:7. (Swete, p. 287)

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

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

“He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.” - Next the angel takes the measure of the city’s massive wall and finds it to be “***144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.***” “***144 cubits***” equals about 216 feet. By comparison, Herodotus reports that the battlements of mighty Babylon, renown throughout the ancient world, comprised a circuit of nearly 300,000 feet, 75 feet wide and 300 feet high. Solomon’s Porch, on the southern end of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was 30 feet wide and 180 feet tall (2 Chronicles 3:4) In this instance, the symbolic number points, once again, to the people of God, the Church. “***144***” is the square of twelve. Its use here is reminiscent of the triumphant host arrayed in white - the 144,000 - of Revelation 7:4-8. The reference to “***man’s measurement***” is intended to assure the reader that although the calculation is being made by an angel it, nonetheless, conforms to the ordinary human standards which men can understand. “*The measurements taken by angelic hands are such as are in common use among men; no fantastic standards are to be employed by the reader.*” (Swete, p. 290) The language is similar to that of Revelation 13:18’s description of the number of the beast - “***for it is a man’s number.***” Dr. Franzmann observes:

“The “great high wall” (vs.12) seems in comparison with the other dimensions strangely small (only 216 feet tall). The dimension is symbolic rather than descriptive. The number 144 is one of the many multiples of 12 which abound in the description of the city as the home of the enlarged 12 tribes, and the puny scale of the wall indicates that it serves not as a defense (since all God’s enemies lie conquered) by merely as a delimiting enclosure.” (Franzmann, p. 141)



***“The Sacred Breastplate of the High Priest”
18th Century Bible Illustration***

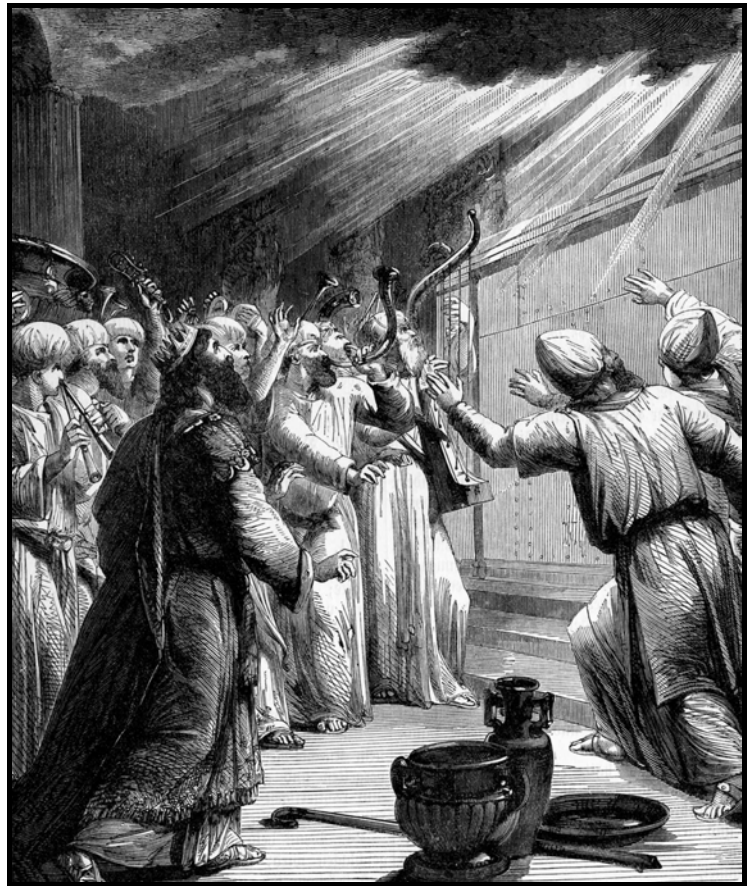
“The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. - Having described the dimensions of New Jerusalem, the seer now goes on to narrate the magnificent materials from which it is constructed. The overall image is one of resplendent glory and unimaginable beauty which reflect the majesty and the splendor of God. Franzmann summarizes:

“Though the wall is slight it is precious and splendid, built of the jasper which serves as a picture of the effulgent glory of God (cf. 11). And the city itself is a city of gold strangely and wondrously pellucid. The whole structure of the city is adazzle with

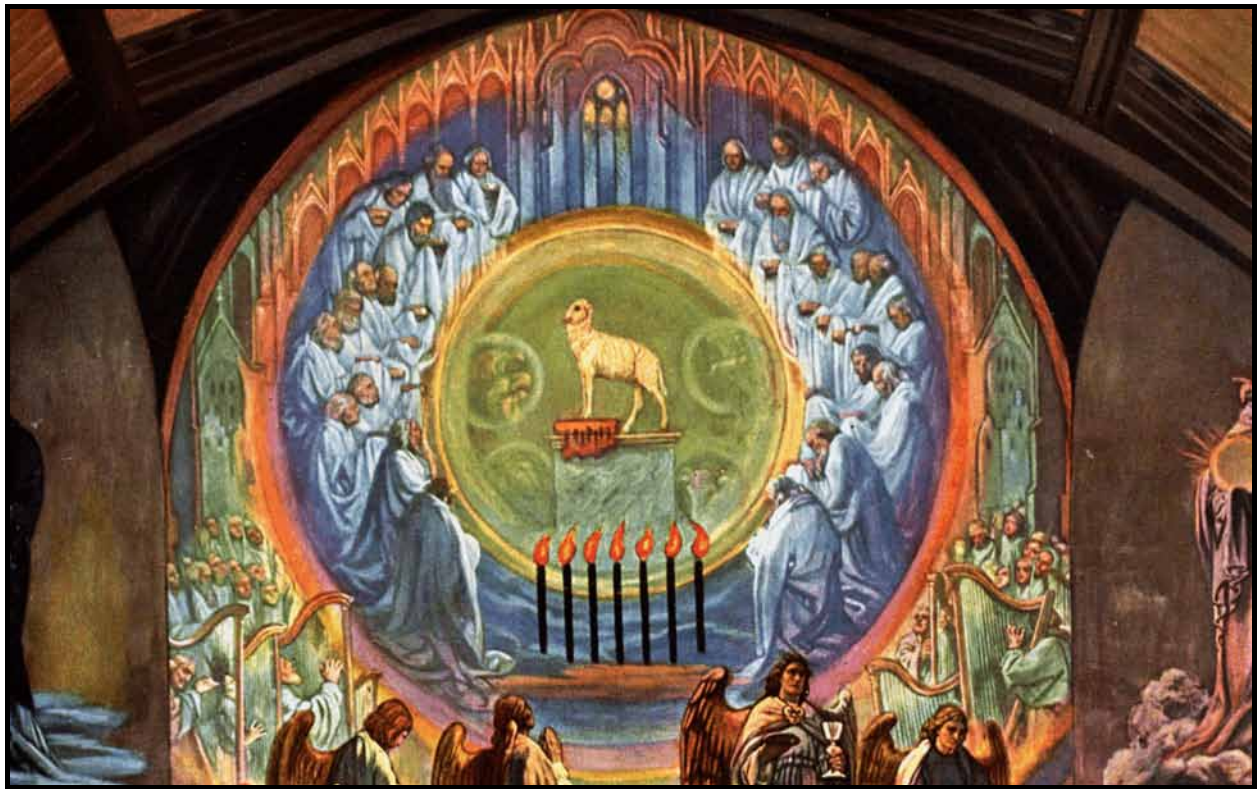
the brilliance and color of gems and gold, its foundations adorned with the jewels that once were set in gold filigree in the high priest's breastpiece (Exodus 28:17-20), its twelve gates each a single pearl, its streets of shimmering transparent gold." (Franzmann, pp. 141-142)

“Jasper” is a sparkling, diamond-like crystal. The construction of New Jerusalem's wall symbolizes the radiance of God's glory which surrounds and characterizes the Holy City (cf. Revelation 4:3; 21:11). John's description repeatedly emphasizes purity and transparency - ***“the city was made of pure gold, as pure as glass;”*** (vs.18), ***“the street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass*** (vs. 21). This is designed to remind the reader that the glorious light of New Jerusalem is reflected not inherent. The true glory of this splendid place is the presence of God in her midst and that divine presence is the source of her radiance.

As noted above, the jewels which comprise the city's twelve foundations are similar to those on the breastplate of the high priest, with some variation. Eight of the twelve stones match (cf. Exodus 28:17-20; 39:8-14). The discrepancy in the remaining four may be the result of variations in terminology. The stones on the high priest's vestments were a glittering reminder that he stood before the Lord on behalf of all the people of God. The greatest privilege of the high priest was to stand in the immediate presence of God before the sacred ark in the Holy of Holies. In New Jerusalem that privilege is extended to all God's people who in Christ have become - ***“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God***



“The Glory of the Lord Filling the Temple of Solomon”
19th Century Bible Illustration



“The Adoration of the Lamb” by Rudolf Schärer

through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:9,5).

The twelve foundation stones include: (1) jasper - a clear, diamond-like crystal; (2) sapphire - a sky blue gem sometimes flecked with gold; (3) chalcedony - a green agate found near the Greek city of Chalcedon in Asia Minor; (4) emerald - a clear green gemstone; (5) sardonyx - a white stone with even layers of bright red; (6) carnelian - a bright red stone similar to a ruby; (7) chrysolite - a stone of golden color; (8) beryl - a opaque blue or sea green stone; (9) topaz - a gold-green gem; (10) chrysoprase a translucent pale green jewel similar to beryl; (11) jacinth - similar to the modern sapphire, clear and deep blue in color; and, (12) amethyst a brilliant violet or purple gemstone.

“The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.” - Heaven’s famous “pearly gates” are surely the best known feature of John’s magnificent vision. Pearls were among the most precious treasures of the Roman world. Jesus uses the pearl as the treasure of great price for which a man would give up everything he owned (Matthew 13:45-46). Long before, God had promised that the gates of restored Jerusalem would be precious jewels: *“I will make your*

battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your wall of precious stones.” (Isaiah 54:12) John describes the fulfillment of that prophecy on a scale that overwhelms the human imagination, each gate tower fashioned from a single massive pearl.

The theme of royal luxury continues as we pass through the great pearl gates to the city’s main thoroughfare. *“The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.”* The Greek (“plateia” - literally an adjective “broad or wide” whose use alone implies the noun “hodos” - “way”) is singular. It may be used to refer to a major street or plaza or collectively to all the streets of the city, viewing the entire network of streets as one extended reality. Once again, the text notes the particularly fine nature of the gold from this street is fashioned - *“pure gold, like transparent glass.”* Nothing in the old creation could compare with gold so pure and precious. Lenski adds an important word of caution about the symbolic nature of this awesome vision:

“The material of which the city is built is precious and beautiful beyond all imagination. All of it is pure gold and priceless jewels and pearls. Silver is ignored because it was regarded as being too tawdry and cheap. This is not gold as we see it in great government vaults, but everything is made of gold save where jewels and pearls are seen. These are not jewels and pearls as we know them, but are tremendous in size, vast foundation stones and doors that are each made of a single pearl. Stop imagining. Eye hath not seen what God has prepared for those who love Him! All is intended to be humanly unimaginable. All of this language is human symbolism which means that the half has not been told. All of this is only a dim shadow of the reality; it multiplies beyond conception the precious material of which we have bits on



“The Redeemed Entering the Gates of Heaven” by Hans Memling

this old earth, multiplies it beyond all bounds in order to give us at least a faint inkling of the infinite reality of what the Eternal City or union with God in the new world means.” (Lenski, pp. 638-639)



“The Dedication of Solomon’s Temple” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful and deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” - In the present reality, no sinful human being can endure the majestic glory of the holy God. To Moses on Sinai God had declared: ***“You cannot see My face for no one may see Me and live.”*** (Exodus 33:20). Isaiah had fallen down before God’s throne and had cried out in despair: ***“Woe to me. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!”*** (Isaiah 6:5). But in the new heaven and earth, man -

cleansed from his sin by the blood of Christ - is banished from God's glorious presence no more. This joyous truth is indicated by the absence of a temple in the golden city. A church is place where God's people may gather to worship Him. A temple, on the other hand, is the place where God Himself deigns to dwell. In his eloquent prayer at the dedication of the first temple, Solomon acknowledged this reality: ***"I have built a magnificent temple for You, a place for You to dwell forever...But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain You."*** (2 Chronicles 6:1,18). God's presence within the temple of Solomon was indicated by the visible presence of the Shekinah glory above the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. (2 Chronicles 7:1-3) According to His Word and promise, the Temple became the nexus of God and His people. Again, Solomon reflects this confidence in his dedicatory prayer:

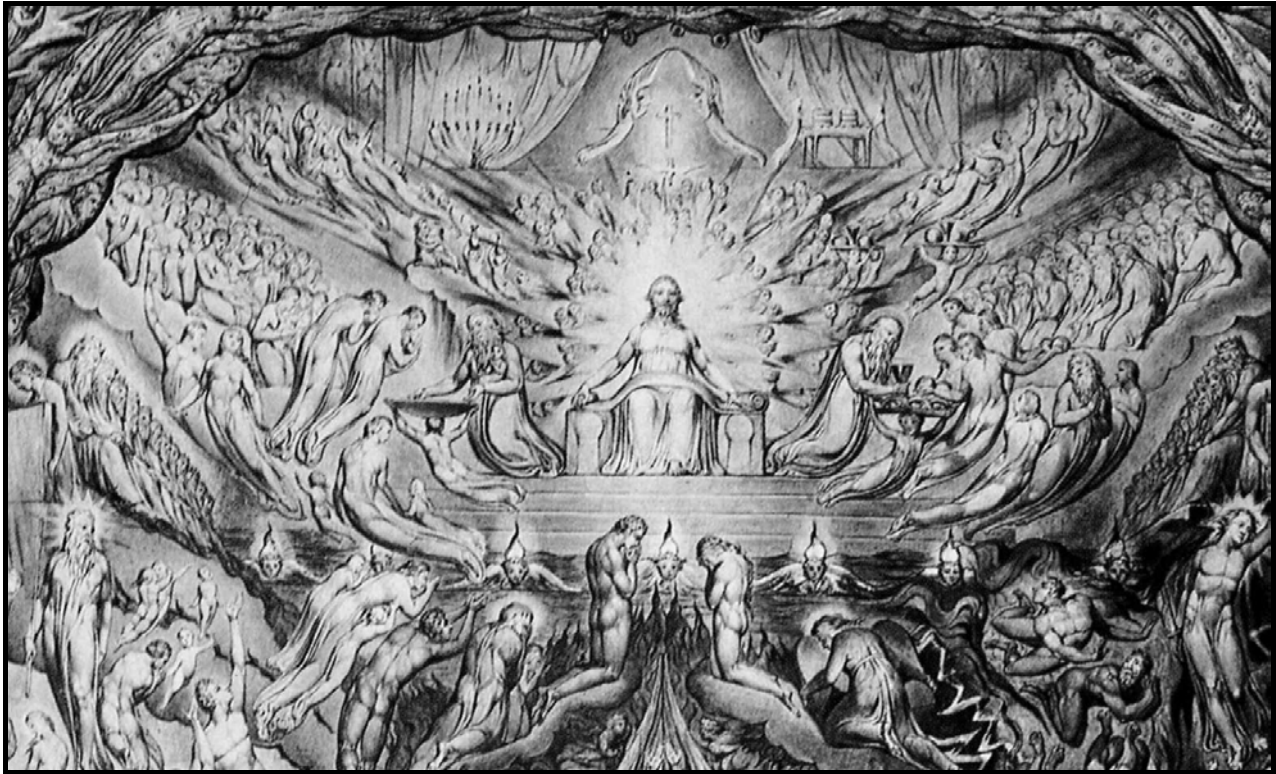
"Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your presence. May Your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which You said You would put Your name there. May You



"The Call of Isaiah" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

hear the prayer Your servant prays toward this place. Hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.” (2 Chronicles 6:19-21)

In this sense, the entire city has been transformed into a temple, a place where God deigns to dwell in the midst of His people. Thus the text asserts - ***“the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”*** The barriers and boundaries are gone and the original harmony and fellowship of Eden has been perfectly restored.



“The Glory of God Gives It Light” - Detail from “The Last Judgment” by William Blake

“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” - The imagery shifts to reiterate the point with the assertion that not only the temple but also the sun and the moon will be superfluous in New Jerusalem. *“John is not supplying his readers with information about future astrological changes but setting forth by means of accepted apocalyptic imagery the splendor which will radiate from the presence of God and the Lamb.”* (Mounce, p. 384) Isaiah had foretold: ***“The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory.”*** (Isaiah 60:19) The equation of God’s presence with

light is common throughout Scripture. In the prologue to his Gospel, John uses the same theme to illustrate the significance of the incarnation of Christ:

“In Him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it...The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world...The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:5,9,14)

The brightness of this light will reach out to embrace all the redeemed - ***“The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.”*** Once more the text echoes the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 60:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” (Isaiah 60:1-3)



“The Star in the East” by Edward Burne Jones



"The Adoration of the Magi"
by Albrecht Dürer

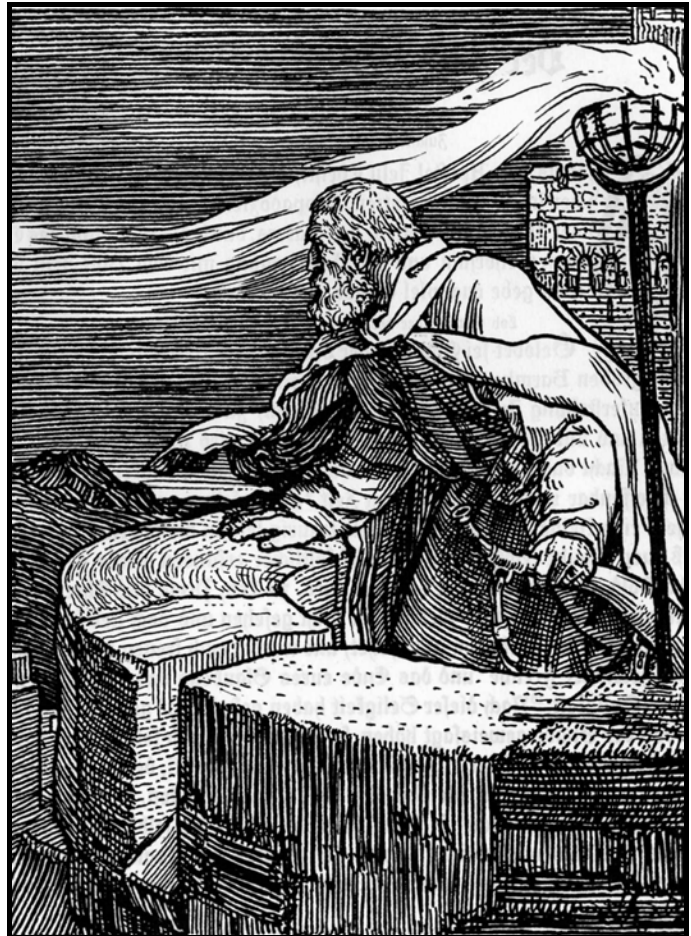
The fulfillment of this prophetic promise was previewed in the journey of the wise men from the East to Bethlehem (cf. Matthew 2:1-12). The language stresses the worldwide scope of the plan of salvation. This emphasis is consistent throughout Revelation. *"The nations"* and *"the kings of the earth"* are *"the glorified saints"* (Lenski, p. 644) from every place and time. In Revelation 5:9 the 24 elders had rejoiced before the Lamb because *"You were slain and with Your blood You have purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."* The countless host before the throne and the Lamb included men *"from every nation, tribe, people and language."* (Revelation 7:9) These victorious saints *"will reign forever and ever"* (Revelation 22:5; cf. also 5:10; 20:4,6) and are thus rightly referred to as *"the kings of the earth."* The

phrase *"The kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it"* does not refer to physical wealth or earthly treasure. Such a view would be completely inconsistent with the symbolic nature of the text. What earthly treasure could even remotely compare to the grandeur of this golden city? Lenski seems to be on the right track when he argues: *"This is saying in symbolical language what is expressed literally in 14:13: **'For their works follow with them.'** The glory and the honor of the nations and of the kings are all that they wrought for the Lamb while they were here on the old earth."* (Lenski, p. 645) The concept is repeated in Verse 26 - *"The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it."*

"On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night there." - The splendor and joy of New Jerusalem are eternal. No enemies remain to threaten or

oppose. The gates of this great city need never be closed to insure the security of its blessed inhabitants. Their security is absolute for it rests in the constant presence of God. Once again, this symbolic language should not be understood to indicate that the cycle of day and night will not exist in heaven. **“Night”** in this context represents the perils and terrors of sin. In New Jerusalem these will no longer exist.

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does whatever is shameful or deceitful...” - The text defines the nature of the threat that has been eliminated to achieve the perfect security of the saints. Neither taint of evil nor corruption of sin shall mar or imperil the eternal glory of the saints. Those who have indulged in such things are gone forever, banished to the torments of unending hellfire. Only those who have been forgiven and cleansed, ***“whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life”*** shall dwell within this glorious city. This glorious scene is captured beautifully in Phillip Nicolai’s magnificent chorale *“Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying!”* -



“The Watchmen on the Heights Are Crying”
by Rudolf Schüfer

*“Wake, awake, for night is flying.
The watchmen on the heights are crying,
“Awake Jerusalem, arise.”*

Midnight hears the welcome voices,

And at their thrilling cry rejoices. O where are you, ye virgins wise?

The bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take.

Alleluia! With joyful care, yourselves prepare. To greet the Bridegroom who is near.

*“Now let all the heavens adore Thee, let men and angels sing before Thee,
With harp and cymbal’s clearest tone.*

*Of one pearl each shining portal, where, singing with the choir immortal,
We gather round Thy radiant throne.*

*No vision ever brought, no ear hath ever caught, such great glory;
Therefore will we, eternally, sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee.”*