

# No One Knows New Creation Celebration

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**Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)**

*No One Knows — New Creation Celebration*

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## Background Notes

**Key Scripture Texts:** Revelation 19-22

## Introduction

Time is a dimension of eternity. Our reading of Revelation 1-18 reveals this intimate connection between God's time and ours. Looked at from the viewpoint of heaven, the events of human history move persistently toward their goal and toward the *eschaton*. In the opening lines of *Rev* we heard the risen Jesus speak of himself as the "first and the last." He was there in the beginning, and he will be there in the end. Declaring "the end" from "the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10) means more than merely offering a glance into the divine crystal ball. John's visions in *Rev* have meant more than such a glance. Through them, God pulls the veil aside which conceals eternity from time and allows the Christian prophet to grasp the patterned perspective of human history, stamped and sealed with the purpose of God.

Now we have arrived through sign and symbol to the moment of ultimate meaning, read from the standpoint of the end, and viewed from the perspective of heaven. Along with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:24, we acknowledge the crucial words, "Then comes the end..." And what an end it turns out to be! To continue the Paul's thought:

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

We live, in our time, during the age when Christ "must reign until..." When the end arrives, the "until" arrives. Once all contrary and hostile rule, authority and power have submitted to the risen Jesus, God's world will be restored and God will be "all in all." The destination of Jesus' present rule culminates in his Second Coming and in the transformation of God's world as New Heaven and New Earth in which all things have been sorted out, and the Sabbath of God's New Creation at last arrives.

This week's study concentrates our attention on chapters 19-22 where the great drama finds resolution. We are met with a huge surprise. The goal of salvation is not dying and going to heaven — where heaven means living in a world totally disconnected from this one, never to be seen again. Heaven is but the dimension of God which, as John's revelation will tell us, is destined for unity with Earth. Yes, we will go to heaven: but we will not remain there in an outlying colony of the cosmos. Yes, heaven is important, but it is not the end of the world, only the beginning! Heaven is a temporary way station on the path to God's new world. Beyond heaven lies resurrection bodies for each of us, since God will not leave us as disembodied spirits, living largely ghostly lives detached from tangible things. As resurrected beings we will become whole persons once more, and that was God's plan all along.

But our resurrection spearheads the restoration of the whole universe. We are the firstfruits of what will happen throughout the cosmos, and our transformation prompts the arrival of heaven in union with earth — the true meaning of the Second Coming. Knowing that this is our destiny invigorates a grand celebration, something seen in *Rev* under the powerful symbol of the "marriage supper of the Lamb." Like so many of Jesus' "dinner parables," the language of feasting marks a fresh achievement of God's kingdom plan. Beyond the celebration lies an eternity of continuing purposes within a restored creation. What possibilities lie beyond such a universe

at last joined with God in eternal fellowship? Our study moves in that direction as we examine the implications of the Second Coming, and celebrate them together.

### **One More Resource**

In previous *Notes* I have suggested suitable resources for the topics germane to this series. On this final week, I'd like to offer the following recommendation:

N.T. Wright. *Surprised by Hope*. HarperOne, 2008. This book challenges the reader to re-think some of the concepts commonly associated with studying the future as taught in Scripture. A number of "sacred cows" are examined, along with fresh insights to traditional views of heaven and the Second Coming. If you are open to thinking outside the box, here's a good choice.

### **The War Scroll: Kingdom Images (19:1-20:15)**

NIV 19:1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." 3 And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." 4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" 5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" 6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." 10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. 17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." 19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth-- Gog and Magog-- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing

before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 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. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

### **Two Cities: New Bride (19:1-10)**

1. The vision of Babylon the Great, recorded in *Rev* 17-18, contained a great deal about the circumstances within the Empire as well as the coming judgment on the unfaithful city, Jerusalem. The language contained there is filled with a great deal of "woe". Yet, the fall of the faithless wife of God is not without a sequel. Though Second Temple Judaism had proved disloyal to God's covenant, there remained yet a remnant of committed followers of the Lamb. Some of them yielded their lives to martyrdom, while others fled into the wilderness rather than share in the bloody battles accompanying the destruction of the city. Along with their brothers in Christ through the world, they make up the nucleus of the new people of God, his new bride.
2. Against this painfully graphic depiction of the fall of Babylon the Great, chapter 19 begins with John's witness of a series of hymn-like shouts:
  - a. First, a great multitude shouts loudly "Hallelujah" (literally, "praise Yahweh") because glory and power is God's and because his way of executing judgment is fair. In this case, the hymn cites the judgment of the "great prostitute", no longer called "the great city", for her persecution of the servants of God. The hymn declares that the judgment is permanent: "the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever" (19:3).
  - b. Second, the 24 elders join in a second hymn, responsive to the first: "Amen" (literally, "so be it"), "Hallelujah".
  - c. Third, a great multitude, with the acoustics of the sea and storm, shouts: "Hallelujah", and then proceeds to announce the kingdom of God with these words: "For our Lord God Almighty reigns." This announcement parallels the content of the Seventh Trumpet in chapter 11. With the fall of the old Jerusalem regime, the kingdom of God now assumes its new form and becomes the basis for an even more significant proclamation:
    - 1) "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!"
    - 2) "For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear". John comments that the linen is a symbol for the "righteousness of the saints". Elsewhere in Scripture, it is the righteous of Christ with which his people are clothed.
    - 3) "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'"
    - 4) "These are the true words of God."
  - d. These expressions of joy stand in direct contrast to the "woes" of chapters 17-18. The vision John witnesses is not just about judgments on the old world, but more importantly about the arrival of the new kingdom order. Throughout the gospels, Jesus warned that the current Jerusalem regime had proven a failure in being the light of God's kingdom in the world, and God was about to take the kingdom away from Second Temple Judaism and give it to another who was "worthy" of it. The most direct passage to this effect is found in Matthew:

(Matthew 21:42-44) Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" 43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.
  - e. Then, in the same context, when Jesus announces the new form of the kingdom, he compares it to a "wedding feast":

Matthew 22:1-10 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' 5 "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet

anyone you find.' 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

- f. This same contrast appears in *Rev* 19:1-9. The story of the kingdom takes a startling new turn. The bride of the Lamb is the body of Christ, Jew and Gentile, forming the new city of God. St. Paul wrote about this new city and contrasted it with the old one:  
Galatians 4:22-31 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. 24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.
- g. What Jesus and Paul spoke about in parables and in doctrine, John sees and hears in the visionary message of the *Rev*. The message of *Rev* is telling the same story, but with the powerful language of apocalyptic and vision. His prophecy continues and fulfills the expectations of the Old Testament prophecies, like that of Hosea:  
Hosea 2:14-20 "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. 15 There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. 16 "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'" 17 I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. 18 In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. 19 I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. 20 I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.
- h. Paul echoes this new relationship which exists between Christ and the church, as his body, in this way:  
Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
- i. John's vision presents the same image of the "saints" clothed in righteousness, entering into a marriage with the Lamb on the occasion of his wedding feast. The bride of Christ stands in contrast to the harlot of Babylon in chapters 17-18. The one was unfaithful to the covenant and fell under covenant judgment. The other wears the righteousness of the saints and is being wed to the Messiah on the occasion of the great Messianic banquet. The reader is left to wonder about this "bride" and this "banquet" until a new vision appears in chapters 21-22, introduced by the words of the angel, "Come, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). Note the contrast in language to 17:1 where the angel says to John, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute."
- j. This section of *Rev* concludes with a unique conversation between John and the angel who reveals these things to John. Overcome with a sense of wonder, John bows to worship his angelic companion. In fact, the angel refuses his worship and urges the worship of God alone. Considering the frequency with which angels appear in the *Rev*, it is understandable that John might become so enamored with their role that he might falsely equate their powers with God. That danger already existed within the theology of certain aspects of Judaism, where the role of angels had taken on an enormous importance. The writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament had to correct his readers by reminding them that Jesus was superior to the angels and they should not be adored with the same reverence as that given to Jesus. Instead, angels were "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who would be heirs of salvation", a role John has already experienced in the very process of receiving his visions. (see Hebrews 1).
- k. A rather important statement is made by the angel to John in 19:10: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The use of the word "for" to introduce this assertion implies a connection with the angel's warning not to worship him, but only God. The angel connects himself to the whole body of

faithful servants of God, like John. Prophecy is, says the angel, something that derives its "spirit" from the "testimony of Jesus". By implication the angel is saying, "this sense of wonder you have in the presence of my visions does not come from me, an angel, but from my witness to Jesus whose revelation this is." This is consistent with the opening words of *Rev*:

Revelation 1:1-2 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw-- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Notice the order of authority: God, Jesus, angel, and John. This is not the revelation of the angel, but the revelation of Jesus Christ. The angel did not want John to be tempted to form some "cult of angels" just because angels had been the mediators of the visions. There is real danger here: that the readers will be so impressed by the angelic visitations that they will accord angels the honor due only to God through Jesus Christ.

### **The Divine Warrior (19:11-21)**

1. When John first received his vision of the heavenly throne room, he spoke about seeing "a door standing open in heaven" (4:1). The language of 19:11 is more dramatic, for here heaven itself stands open to the full view of earth and from its ramparts rides the divine warrior astride the white horse.
  - a. This rider on the white horse is different from the one encountered in chapter 6 at the opening of the first seal. There we witnessed an unnamed rider with a perishable crown on his head and a bow in his hand.
  - b. Here, the rider is describe in much more majestic terms:
    - 1) He is called Faithful and True
    - 2) He judges and makes war with justice
    - 3) His eyes are fiery (compare the first vision given to John in chapter 1)
    - 4) On his head are many "crowns" (Greek: "diadems"), not to be confused with the wreath-crowns. These are permanent symbols of authority and majesty.
    - 5) The fact that his name is known only to him shows his invincibility to all enemies, including demonic ones. Remember, that in ancient times, it was believed that the name kept secret made a person immune from attack by his enemies.
    - 6) His bloody robe reminds us of both his battle experience and the cross.
    - 7) He is called the Word of God: in his person he embodies the ancient Torah-Law of God (see John 1).
    - 8) He is followed by the redeemed warriors, dressed in linen garments. Compare to the appearance of the "bride of the Lamb" seen earlier.
    - 9) His offensive weapon comes from his mouth, the sword of God's word (see Hebrews 4:12).
    - 10) He comes to rule the nations as their great Shepherd (the iron scepter is really a shepherd's rod, intended to ward off predators on the flock).
    - 11) He comes in judgment with the righteous wrath of God.
    - 12) His robe and thigh bear his royal title "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". Against the background of the Roman Empire, this claim is subversive. Only Caesar could make this claim, legally. But the divine warrior takes up this title in direct challenge to the Roman emperor's prerogatives. In so doing, he directly challenges the beast and those who take his mark.
  - c. In consequence of his arrival, earth's rulers are now described as food for the birds of prey. The pronouncing angel describes various ranks of human beings from king to peasant. All must stand before the advancing army of heaven, led by the Lamb who is the Lion.
    - 1) This last great confrontation is described in terms of a power contest between the beast, allied with the kings of the earth, and the Lord from Heaven.
    - 2) Beast and false prophet are captured (not destroyed) and they are thrown "alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (19:20).
    - 3) All others who engaged in this last, great battle, faced death by the "sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse". There is no evidence in the text that the armies of heaven who followed him fought directly in this conflict.
  - d. The ancient creeds speak with one voice about the "future of Jesus":

- 1) "...he is seated at the right hand of the Father from whence her shall come to judge the living and the dead", says the Apostles Creed.
  - 2) "...shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead", from the Nicene Creed.
- e. *Rev 19* is the classic depiction of the "Revelation of Jesus Christ in glory", his "Parousia Revealed" to the whole world. To the Jewish Christians living in 70 CE, their own experience was, in the words of N.T. Wright, "a little apocalypse", a miniature version of the end of history which lay out in the future for the whole world.
- 1) Though God had judged the great harlot Jerusalem, his work of final vindication was not finished. The world at that time was still ruled by Caesars and kings who imagined themselves to be God.
  - 2) Rome was still standing and continued to persecute the church.
  - 3) History would reveal even more instances of the "beast" and his "false prophet" who would presume the prerogatives of God. Every Nero, Diocletian, Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Bin Laden would show that evil was alive and well and stood opposed to the purposes of God.
  - 4) Against such instances of the "beast" would stand the faithful witnesses to the gospel who "loved not their lives unto death" and would join the long line of martyrs, now robed with the white linen of the saints. And this has continued into our own time.
- f. And so, all creation awaits the revelation of the glory of God and the final defeat of evil. *Rev 19:11-21* is the quintessential expression of that "appearance of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). What theologians call the "Second Coming of Christ" is depicted dramatically in this passage, where Jesus comes with "ten thousand of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15).
- 1) A number of Old Testament texts foreshadow this vision:
 

Isaiah 49:1-2 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. 2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

Isaiah 11:4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

Psalms 2:6-12 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." 7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." 10 Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him

Isaiah 63:2-6 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. 4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. 5 I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. 6 I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground."
  - 2) And the imagery of the "last battle" appears in the famous prophecy of "Gog and Magog" found in the book of Ezekiel, where some passages are pertinent here:
 

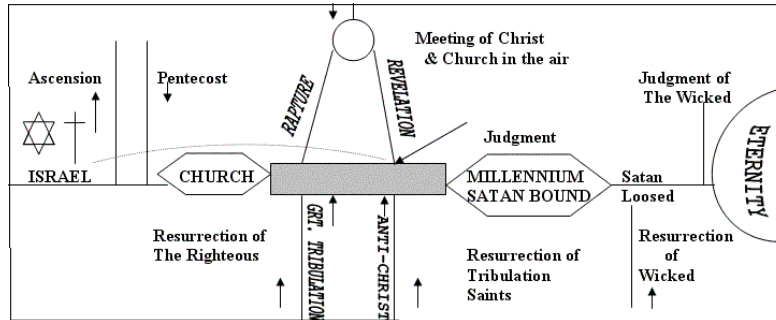
Ezekiel 39:4, 17-20 On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals... 17 "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: 'Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. 18 You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls-- all of them fattened animals from Bashan. 19 At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are glutted and drink blood till you are drunk. 20 At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind,' declares the Sovereign LORD.
  - 3) John hears about this battle in chapter 19 with the language found in Ezekiel's Gog and Magog prophecy (Ezekiel 38-39). Yet, the Gog and Magog battle is not discussed explicitly until the end of chapter 20. This implies, as many scholars suggest, that the visions are not being given in

chronological order. What is seen in chapter 19 is, after all, the last great battle. This battle will be discussed again in 20:7-10 with additional details presented.

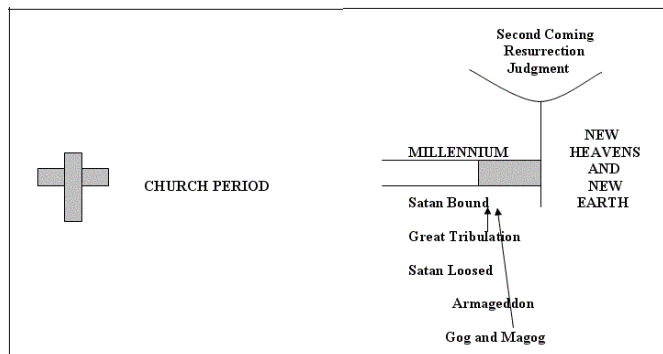
**The Thousand Years and its Aftermath (20:1-15)**

**Background**

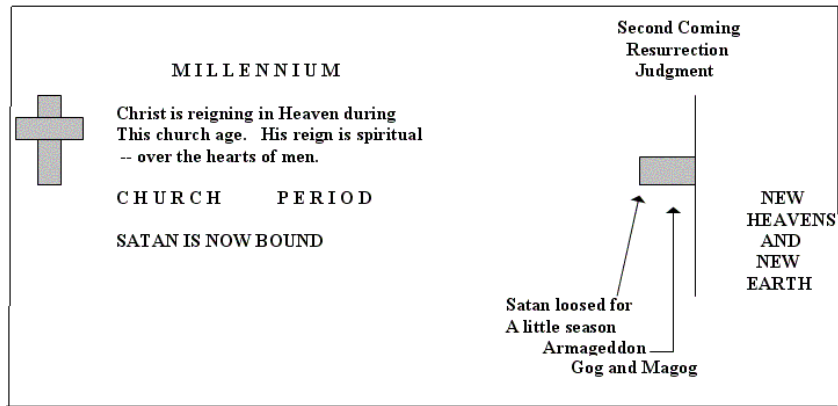
1. No section of *Rev* is more hotly debated than this one. Having studied *Rev* for over 30 years, I have read countless commentaries which deal with this part of the book. I have read the text in Greek and noted the different exegetical problems raised by New Testament theologians about it. The so-called "history of interpretation" surrounding this text is massive.
2. When a student of the Bible wants to distinguish herself on the question of "last things" (eschatology), she will use labels such as "pre-millennial" or "post-millennial" or "a-millennial" to identify her loyalties. The interest in the word "millennium" comes from the Greek text of *Rev* 20 where John speaks about the "thousand years" (Greek: *chilia etē*, [χίλια ἔτη]). These two words are used together some six times in *Rev* 20. They occur without the cardinal number "one"; appear without the article "the" four times and with it two times. Nowhere else in Scripture does the idea of a "millennium" appear in conjunction with the phrase *chilia etē*. Yet, these two words are the source of significant argument about the correct interpretation of *Rev* and our entire understanding of last things. A summary of several positions is given below:
  - a. Some believe that the millennium will occur after the second coming of Christ. This view is traditionally known as **Pre-millennialism**.



- b. **Post-millennialism** has held that the millennium occurs toward the end of the church age and that Christ's climactic coming will occur at the close of the millennium.



- c. Others believe that the millennium started at Christ's resurrection and will be concluded at his final coming. This view has been called **A-millennialism**, though it is better to call it, more simply, **inaugurated millennialism**.



- d. The **Preterist** view may look similar to the inaugurated millennial view depicted above, depending on whether it is full preterist or partial preterist version.
- 1) The **Full Preterist** will argue that the Second Coming, in its entirety, took place in 70 CE and that the so-called millennium had to do with that period between the first coming of Jesus and his second coming in 70 CE. Obviously, the term "thousand", in this case, means less than a literal thousand years. Based on this, the Full Preterist goes on to argue that the New Heavens and New Earth are already here, but are symbolic for the changed relationship of heaven and earth.
  - 2) The **Partial Preterist** could actually be either a pre-millennialist, post-millennialist or an a-millennialist. What the Partial Preterist wants to argue is that a great many of the prophecies given both by Jesus and Revelation have been fulfilled already in the events leading up to and surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. In a real sense, Jesus has already entered into his *Parousia*, his "Coming" or "Second Presence". However, many things have not yet taken place having to do with the earth. Thus, a millennium, in some sense, still awaits, as does the New Heaven and New Earth.
3. All views believe deeply that it is God's decisive act in history through Jesus Christ that sets in motion dramatic events destined to transform the world and bring about God's kingdom. The differences pertain to the how, the when and the where.
  4. While recognizing that solid scholarship exists within all of these positions, it is our view that a combination of the partial preterist and the inaugurated millennialist position best expresses what we read in the New Testament and in particular in the book of *Revelation*.

### The Argument

1. The literary genre of *Rev* is that of apocalyptic and symbolism. *Rev* 1:1 told us that the method of communication would be through symbols. John has experienced the book as a series of visions.
  - a. Vision language has its own chronology. When John writes "After this I saw", which he does many times in the book, he does not mean "I saw after this". The sequence in which he saw the visions does not establish the sequence in which the events actually take place. That is why we can read about seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls without assuming that these visions follow each other chronologically just because the visions are seen in that order.
  - b. G.K. Beale, in his commentary on Revelation, notes that there are three levels of communication at work in 20:1-6:
    - 1) Visionary level: the actual visionary experience that John had in seeing resurrected people and the other objects of his vision.
    - 2) Referential level: which consists of the particular historical identification of the resurrected people and the other objects seen in the vision.
    - 3) Symbolic level: which consists of what symbols in the vision connote about their historical referents.
  - c. John uses words like "thousand years", "resurrection", and "life" because he saw, at the **visionary level**, people who were resurrected and given life for "a thousand years".
    - 1) Because he sees these objects and hears certain things in the vision does not mean they are literally happening in that way, but are being portrayed symbolically as part of the visionary experience.

- 2) Symbols saturate this text (20:1-6): chain, abyss, dragon, serpent, locked, sealed, and beast.
- 3) Words like "resurrection" or "life" don't in and of themselves tell us whether the visionary and symbolic language has a one-to-one correspondence to its historical referent
- d. Any argument for a particular view of the millennium based on a literal chronology must face the argument that the sequence of 20:1-6 is, like much of Revelation, visionary rather than chronological. The fact of the matter is that John repeatedly says, "After this I saw", giving solid support to the idea that the sequence of events is that of the vision and not of the events portrayed.

### **The Text: An Outline**

1. The millennium begins during the church age by God's curtailment of Satan's power to deceive the nations and to destroy the church (20:1-3)
2. The millennium begins for believers during the church age by the resurrection of their souls, placing them in the heavenly condition of having authority with Christ as Priests and Kings over spiritual death (20:4-6)
3. Satan will be released to deceive the nations again, so that they will attempt to annihilate the church (20:7-10)
4. The final judgment will occur at the end of cosmic history: all people will be resurrected and judged according to their works, and the guilty will be consigned to eternal punishment (20:11-15)

### **"A Thousand Years"**

1. Six times the phrase occurs in chapter 20. As indicated above, the word "one" is not used with the phrase.
  - a. In Hebrew use, the word *eleph*, translated as "thousand" can mean simply "a very long time". As my Hebrew professor told us years ago, when you encounter this word in the Hebrew Bible, just think of it as "a whole bunch of something".
  - b. The absence of the word "one" adds support to the idea that the phrase means simply a long, indefinite period of time. The stress is on the quality of "long" not the quantity of "1000".
  - c. In the context of chapter 20, the "thousand years" refers to a period between the first and second comings of Christ.
  - d. From the actual historical experience of the church, we would concede that the period from the first coming of Jesus until now is, indeed, a long, indeterminate period of time. However, to the first readers there would be no way of knowing "how long".
  - e. This has lead some to conclude that the emphasis should not be on the length of the period as much as on its character, based on what *Rev* tells us happens during it.
2. Jewish thought is rich with examples of time periods during which God would fulfill his purposes for his people. Not all of them were 1,000 years in duration. Within the Rabbinic traditions we discover numbers from 40 to 365,000 years. Multiples of 10 usual imply, symbolically, the idea of completeness.
3. The Old Testament contains some examples of the symbolic significance of such numbers:
 

Psalm 90:4 For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

Ecclesiastes 6:5-6 Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man-- 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

Exodus 20:5-6 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Deuteronomy 7:9 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

1 Chronicles 16:15 15 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations.

These texts convey God's superiority over the ordinary flow of time, but also connect the idea of "a thousand generations" with the unfailing covenant love of God for his people. What we see in Revelation's use of the "thousand years" symbol is that as a result of his redemptive work in Christ, God intends to fulfill his covenant love to his new covenant people, his new Israel, the wife of the Lamb.
4. The "thousand years" is about the following realities in the life of God's people:
  - a. Coming to life
  - b. Being priests with Christ

c. Ruling with Christ

d. Protection from the destructive intentions of Satan

5. We have already been brought to life with Christ because of his death and resurrection. Several texts describe this present reality which John's vision refers to as "the first resurrection":

John 11:23-26 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Ephesians 2:4-7 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:1-4 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Romans 8:10-11 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

These texts teach that the resurrected Jesus imparts resurrection life to those who follow him; that they have already been raised with Christ and occupy kingdom privileges even now. It is this kind of resurrection to which Revelations refers when it speaks of the "first resurrection".

6. The role of Satan changes as a consequence of the inauguration of the thousand year kingdom.

a. The angel from heaven has the "key to the abyss". In other sections of *Rev*, the "key" is associated with authority over death and Hades (see chapters 1, 3, 6 and 9). The abyss is an image for the realm of death, demons and Satan. Because of his death and resurrection, Jesus has authority over Satan's realm which includes death and Hades. During the church age, the power of Christ overcomes the power of death. Paul speaks of this kingdom age in 1 Corinthians when he writes:

15:20-28 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

b. Jesus has been given authority ("the key") to defeat death, so that, in the end, he may present a fully justified kingdom to his Father.

c. The "binding of Satan" and the "seal" used to restrict his activity have been sources of debate. Those who hold to a pre-millennial view, argue that during the church age Satan is not bound, but walks around freely in the world. The view we are advocating here, following Revelation 20 as referring to the church age, argues differently. Several texts point to the substantial restriction of Satan during the present stage of the kingdom:

Matthew 12:24-29 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." 25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions **unless he first ties up the strong man**? Then he can rob his house.

Luke 10:17-19 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." 18 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to **overcome all the power of the enemy**; nothing will harm you.

John 12:31 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; **now the prince of this world will be driven out.**

Colossians 2:13-16 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that

was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And **having disarmed the powers and authorities**, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Hebrews 2:14-15 14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might **destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil**-- 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

d. Satan's binding was put in motion after Christ's resurrection, and it lasts throughout the age between the first and second aspects of his Coming.

1) Satan no longer has authority over the realm of the dead as he did prior to Jesus' resurrection.

2) Satan is under messianic authority, since Messiah triumphed over death and Satan through his resurrection.

3) Satan can no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years ends, when he will be able to do so for a brief period, during the last great battle.

e. The matter of Satan's deception of the nations is important. Since Eden, the serpent has made it his purpose to engage in deception. Until the coming of Jesus, the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), the serpent continued his world-wide deception during which most of the nations were under his delusions. Israel, among all the nations, was uniquely afforded the opportunity to demonstrate what it meant to live under the rule of God as his kingdom people. Yet, as Revelation has already shown, Second Temple Judaism, with its capital in Jerusalem, failed to be the faithful wife of God. Until the first coming of Jesus, that deception continued. But now, since Christ's redemptive work has been accomplished, Satan has been placed under the authority of Jesus, crushed under his heel, so that "the gospel of the kingdom can be preached into all the world as a witness to all the nations" (Matthew 24:14). After all, Jesus has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth", so that the gospel **can be preached** to all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

1) This does not mean that Satan is kept from all mischief, for he roams the earth like a lion seeking for prey (1 Peter 5:8). Yet, as followers of Jesus, we are commanded to "resist him" (5:9) with the presumption that we will be victorious.

2) He is the god of this world, blinding the minds of those who otherwise would see the truth of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). Yet, the gospel shines light into this darkness and reveals its truth in the face of Jesus Christ (4:5-6). The blindness is not permanent.

3) Though Satan has "great wrath" because he has been cast out of heaven (Revelation 12), which we have already seen, his ability to pursue God's woman and engulf her with a flood of evil is limited by God who has prepared a place for her in the wilderness.

4) The binding of Satan, then, is not total, but neither is his power during the present time. To the suffering community of the first century--and to us--this is a word of great hope. The thousand years during which we live is under the authority of the risen Christ. His gospel goes into all the world and reaps a harvest.

5) The "seal" is yet another symbol of Christ's authority over the power of Satan during this church age. Even as the Emperor placed his official seal on important documents so as to authorize their purposes, so also Christ retains the final word on what Satan is allowed to do during this age.

7. The church is both a kingly and priestly community during the thousand years. Through these dual roles, it brings blessing to the world: salt and light are the symbols Jesus uses to describe these functions. The preaching of the gospel, the worship of God, the administration of God's purposes in the world--these are the royal and priestly functions discharged by the people of God. Seated with Christ in the heavenly kingdom already, we mediate the blessings of God to the world. Peter describes this function in his first letter:

1 Peter 2:9-12 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Notice the royal priestly role and how it fulfills its purposes "among the pagans".

## **The Release of Satan (20:7-10)**

1. The notion that a present-day restraint on Satan will be removed by God in the future is found even in Paul:  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.  
Paul's language of a final rebellion, the idea that something is restraining Satan's work and that a coming deception precedes the "Second Coming"--all of these agree with the pictures of the final battle in *Rev 20:7-10*.
2. One of the purposes of the Second Coming is to destroy the work of Satan. The images of the Second Coming in *Rev 19*, studied above, picture Christ's arrival as a battle, with a defeat of Satan and his clients, the beast and false prophet, as the result. In order to make this image even more graphic, John's vision reaches into the rich prophetic literature of Ezekiel 38-39.
  - a. Ezekiel has already been given a hopeful vision (in chapter 37) of the coming resurrection of God's people, an event Christians believe has been initiated by Jesus' own resurrection as the firstfruits.
  - b. Though new life is given to very dead and dry bones, still danger awaits on the horizons of history. And Ezekiel is warned about the mysterious rise of the armies of Gog and Magog. In Rabbinic literature, these two words refer to the Gentiles and kings of the earth who stand opposed to God and his kingdom. From the various place names which appear in this prophecy, it is evident the prophet had in mind specific nations which surrounded Israel and posed a threat to her security.
  - c. It should be noted that some modern commentators have attempted to connect these people groups with Russia and her allies. Moscow, Tobolsk, and Rosh have been correlated to these place names in Ezekiel. The scholarship behind these connections is poor to awful. No reputable scholar accepts these conclusions. For example, "Rosh" is the Hebrew word for "head" and has nothing to do with Russia. During the Cold War, it was popular in some prophecy circles to make these identifications.
  - d. On more solid ground is the idea that Gog and Magog are well-known images of the enemies which surround the people of God. That is, in fact, the way John's vision interprets them.
    - 1) At the end of the thousand years, a final battle shapes up between God and Satan in which Satan tries to annihilate the people of God but is met with his final defeat.
    - 2) The events of chapter 19 actually describe the outcome. Remember, the chronology of the vision is different from the sequence of events in history.
    - 3) God's judgment on Satan places him into the same fiery lake with the beast and false prophet.

## **Final Judgment and Resurrection of the Dead (20:11-15)**

1. A reading of Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:26-28 shows God on his throne at the time of final judgment:  
Daniel 7:9-10 "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.  
Ezekiel 1:26-27 26 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.
2. Jesus, perhaps in the clearest language, speaks about the shape and form of this day of judgment:  
John 5:24-29 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. 25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come

when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. 28 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out-- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

This is the event now described by John's vision. The resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, or as the creeds affirm, "he comes to judge the living and the dead".

3. Paul contributes to our understanding of the day of judgment:

Romans 14:10-12 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

4. Though judgment is for both the Christian and the unbeliever, this section of Revelation 20 seems more concerned about the danger of the "second death"--the one which awaits the resurrection of the wicked. The second death affects those who have not experienced the "first resurrection", described earlier in the chapter. The second resurrection, described in the current section, is a resurrection to the judgment which results in the second death. The "great white throne" is a source of great fear to those who stand before it.

a. This has led some to distinguish two kinds of judgments: one for believers and the other for non-believers.

b. The Great White Throne seems designed for the wicked.

c. The Judgment Seat of Christ seems designed for the Christian.

d. Both judgments take place at the end of cosmic history as we know it.

e. For the Christian, the judgment is an assessment of works done in the body. The assumption here is that the person is already justified as a child of God by the finished work of Christ.

f. For the unbeliever, the judgment is based on works also, but the unbeliever has only his works to bring to God and nothing of the mercy of Christ received by faith. The unbeliever arrives before the Great White Throne without the wedding garment--the righteousness of Christ. And he arrives without having undergone the first resurrection, the new birth.

5. The fiery Lake awaits the wicked. But what about the righteous? The last two chapters address that important question. In them we see more clearly the glorified church, raised by God to a new bodily existence, composed together as the city of God, and coming down from heaven.

### **The War Scroll: New Creation (21:1-22:21)**

NIV Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 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. 4 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."

5 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."

6 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. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 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."

9 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." 10 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. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 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. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16 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 is long. 17 He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. 18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19 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, 20 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. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 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. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 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.

22:1 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 2 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. 3 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. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 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 for ever and ever.

6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. 11 Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

## **The End of the Old and the Beginning of the New (21:1-8)**

1. When John tells us about his visions in *Rev*, he writes "I saw". This is the language of revelation, of divine things seen by human eyes under the most extraordinary of circumstances. This "seeing" comes to John through symbol and familiar metaphor largely drawn from the experience of the Old Testament. In 21:1-8, we read, for the last time, these words, "I saw" in 21:1 and 21:2. From this point forward until the book closes, John will continue to be shown things, but he writes about them as realities right before his eyes, things that he experiences directly without the intervention of this unusual vision. We could say, with Paul (1 Cor. 13), John is seeing "face to face". Shortly we shall see why this is so.
2. These verses belong to the thought of 20:11-15, since they once more remind us about the finality and horror of the "second death" (21:8), a theme already presented in 20:14 when John is told about the final judgment of the wicked. Here, the second death is for: "the cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, the sexual immoral, magicians, idolaters and all liars. This last judgment is connected with the fiery lake of sulfur as it was in 20:10, 14. Their judgment belongs to the idea presented in 21:1 that the "first heaven and first earth had passed away".
3. John also hears that "there will be no more death...for the old order of things has passed away" (21:4). This is equivalent to the statement made in 20:14, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire". Ironically, John is told about "the death of death", that is, the end of death. This was, after all, the same message Paul gave us in 1 Corinthians 15 where he said "the last enemy is death", and Christ must reign until he destroys death.
4. Also woven into 21:1-8 are these additional themes:
  - a. There is no more sea (21:1). The "sea" was connected with the reign of "chaos" among the diverse peoples of the world (called "the waters" in 17:15). In Genesis, creation begins with the Spirit of God "brooding over" the waters, over the "face of the deep". Once God spoke the first creative words, he caused light to appear and the waters to be divided into manageable forms. The sea is "the abyss", were the countless dead have drowned and from which rose the "beast" of chapter 13. John sees a new creation where the old order is gone and something new has come into being.
  - b. Once more the reader hears about the "Bride of the Lamb" in the form of the "Holy City", "New Jerusalem" coming down out of heaven from God. The harlot Babylon no longer rules over the kings of the earth (chapters 17-18). In her place is God's woman, holy and dressed with his matrimonial garments prepared for her husband, the Messiah.
  - c. God comes to live with his people: he becomes their dwelling place in this new city.
  - d. The words "it is done" are repeated here as they were in 16:17 when the seventh bowl judgment was poured out. The periodic use of "the language of fulfillment" throughout *Rev* reaffirms that the order of the book is not of events but of the vision itself. Much like the words at the sounding of the seventh trumpet when the heralding angel cries, "No more delay", and "the mystery of God will be accomplished" (10:6-7), so this text retraces the events leading up to the moment of fulfillment.
  - e. Appropriate to this moment of completion is the title affirmed by the one sitting on the throne: "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End" (21:6). Embedded in the proclamation of his royal name comes an invitation: "To him who is thirsty I will give to drink...He who overcomes will inherit all this and I will be his God and he will be my son" (21:6-7). God completes what he begins: he is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12) and invites his faithful people to share in the inheritance of the new creation. Imagine a father, after having built an estate, turning to his son or daughter and saying, "One of these days all of this will be yours!" Even so, God, having created the new heaven and the new earth, declares to his children: "One day this will be yours". Jesus spoke similar words in the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 6).
5. The rich language of 21:1-8 owes much to the Old Testament prophets and their vision of a restored creation. This is especially true of Isaiah:

Isaiah 65:17-18 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

Isaiah 66:22 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.

Isaiah 52:1 Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.

Isaiah 61:10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Exodus 40:34 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Zechariah 2:10 "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD.

Exodus 29:44-46 "So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. 45 Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. 46 They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.

Zechariah 8:7-8 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. 8 I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

Jeremiah 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Isaiah 25:8 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 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Zechariah 14:8-9 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. 9 The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

6. As these texts show, God's intention was to live among his people in a restored world, a re-constituted creation. Just as *Rev* has painted a picture of judgment and the "de-creation" of the world, so now, in these closing sections of the book, John writes about the renewal of all things. After all, this was the goal of the gospel message. As St. Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Galatians 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

Romans 8:18-23 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

7. This last text from Paul reinforces the powerful images of *Rev* 21-22. For Paul, the revelation of "the sons of God" promises the "liberation" of "creation itself...from its bondage". The future of the world, therefore, is not finally to perish, but to be re-made, created afresh by God. Just as God raises his people from the dead, so also he raises up and glorifies his new creation. John sees the people of God (the city of God) "coming down out of heaven". When it makes its descent, the new creation takes place. When God comes to be among his people, the world he has made receives its own resurrection.

### **The Bride of the Lamb: A Closer Look (21:9-22:7)**

1. The next division of the book begins with words we have read before:

Revelation 17:1-2 1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of **the great prostitute, who sits on many waters.** 2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones

Revelation 21:9 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.**"

10 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. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a

and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. 5 This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

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. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

2. Notice the many parallels between the two passages. These visions are intentionally crafted to be point and counter-point. No two images of women could be more different from each other.
  - a. To see the harlot, John must go into the desert. To see the bride, he must go into a great and high mountain.
  - b. The harlot is on the back of the beast from the sea. The bride is coming down out of heaven from God.
  - c. The harlot has gold and precious stones that "glitter". The bride has precious stones that are brilliant with the glory of God.
  - d. The harlot drinks from a golden cup filled with abominable things. The bride drinks from the spring of the water of life (see 21:6).
  - e. The harlot rides on a beast covered with blasphemous names. The bride rests on foundations named with the twelve apostles of the Lamb; her city has gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.
3. The tragedy of Old Jerusalem's fall still rings, no doubt, in the ears of the writer. The loss of the earthly city who had proven unfaithful to God was a source of amazement to John (17:6: "When I saw her I was greatly astonished"). How could this city so loved by God, delivered time and time again from her enemies throughout history--how could this city fall into such dreadful sin and finally undergo such great judgment? Jerusalem is fallen. Now what shall we do? Where will God place his name and reveal his presence? Because of these and countless other questions, John is invited this time to see God new creation in the form of the "New City". The expectation for such a city echoes throughout the Old and New Testaments:

Genesis 11:4-8 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves **a city**, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see **the city** and the tower that the men were building. 6 The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building **the city**.

Psalms 46:4-5 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.

Psalms 48:1-2 Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. 2 It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King.

Psalms 87:1-3 He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; 2 the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. 3 Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: Selah

Psalms 107:4-7 Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. 5 They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. 6 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 7 He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.

Isaiah 1:26 Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.

Isaiah 26:1-2 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. 2 Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith.

Isaiah 33:20-24 Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken. 21 There the LORD will be our Mighty One. It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams. No galley with oars will ride them, no mighty ship will sail them. 22 For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us. 23 Your rigging hangs loose: The mast is not held secure, the sail is not spread. Then an abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder. 24 No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill"; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.

Isaiah 54:11-14 "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. 12 I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. 13 All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace. 14 In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you.

Hebrews 11:10 For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:13-16 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for **he has prepared a city for them.**

Hebrews 12:18-29 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

Hebrews 13:12-14 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

4. Still, the most comprehensive vision of the renewed city of God and its Temple is found in Ezekiel 40-48, where the prophet is guided by a man "whose face shone like bronze" (40:3). Ezekiel writes mysteriously about what he sees with these words: "some buildings that looked like a city" (40:2). What John sees in the *Rev*, has many parallels in these Old Testament chapters. The student of John's book would benefit from a reading of this material and note how *Rev* transforms the imagery used there into the "New Heaven and New Earth". The reader should also note that Ezekiel writes his prophecy "fourteen years after the Fall of Jerusalem" (40:1), much like John's prophecy set against the backdrop of the coming fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.
5. John describes important aspects of the city he sees:
  - a. He requires a high vantage point to observe the city because it comes down from God out of heaven (see Ezekiel 40:2). This implies the city already exists in heaven, and that is confirmed by some of the passages from Hebrews, quoted above. Starting with the millennial reign of Christ (chapter 20), the souls of the faithful rise to join their departed counterparts in heaven. John's opening visions (chapters 4-5) revealed the throne with innumerable worshippers around it. He saw the city already in its perfection in heaven. Now he sees the city descending to earth, fulfilling the spirit of the Our Father prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."
  - b. Its appearance is a prism of the glory of God. The city is made up of those who bear the full image of God and radiate his likeness. John expressed it poetically in 1 John 3:

1 John 3:1-2 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Paul reminded us in the Romans 8 passage about "the glory that will be revealed in us." Elsewhere, he told the Corinthians (2 Cor. 3:18) "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
  - c. Foundations support the city, while gates allow entrance into it. John sees both in his vision of the city of God. The New Jerusalem has an historical dimension, for it consists of the people of God stretching backward and forward throughout salvation history.
    - 1) Through Israel, the national people of God, the story of God's purposes for the world began. Abraham and his descendents were the gateways into the covenant community, so appropriately the

new city preserves this with the imagery of twelve gates. Paul, in affirming the historical role of Israel in bringing redemption to the world wrote:

Romans 9:4-5 Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

And Jesus was the perfect Israelite, the fulfilled Jew, the Climax of the Covenant. He said:

John 10:9 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

- 2) Since the old city of Jerusalem has fallen under the judgment of God, there is need to lay new foundations for the New Jerusalem. This symbol points to the new starting point for a restored Israel, namely the Twelve apostles. This is consistent with Paul's teaching about the church which consists of both Jew and Gentile:

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

It is interesting to notice how Paul speaks of the growth of the new building in the present tense: "rises to become a holy temple in the Lord". What John sees in his Revelation is not the "rising" but the "descending" of the city of God from heaven to earth. Throughout the thousand years, the city has been in the making. Jesus used similar language when he spoke about his Father's house:

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 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.

- d. In 21:15-21, John is shown how the city "measures up". This is not the first time we witnessed the use of a measuring instrument in *Rev*. In chapter 11 John was given a measuring rod (see Ezekiel 40:3), but it was in the context of a more somber circumstance, namely, the destruction of the old city. There, he was to measure the worshippers of the "inner temple" but leave out the rest of the temple since it was doomed for judgment. Here, it is not John, but the angel who had a golden measuring rod with which he measures, not part of the city, but all of it: the city, its gates and its walls.

- 1) The resulting measurement shows a city laid out like a square, with equal width and length, 12,000 units on a side and a wall that is 12 cubed units thick. The reader cannot help but see the connection to the twelve apostles and twelve tribes in this symbolic notation. By combining both Jew and Gentile (not merely adding, but multiplying 12x12), the city is truly just: it leaves out no group in some arbitrary fashion. That is why we see the imagery of the "square"--the symbol for equality and inclusion. No longer are Gentiles excluded but join with the remnant Jews to become, together, the new people of God; not a "replaced Israel", but a fulfilled one where ethnicity no longer plays a role in defining what it means to be the people of God. Once more, we turn to Paul's own language which speaks about the dimensions of God's new people:

Ephesians 3:17-19 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- 2) The image of the "wall" is significant. This wall encloses both Jew and Gentile within one equally established city. This is an intentional contrast to the old city where "the wall" marked the division of Jew from Gentile, with Gentiles being largely left out. Even in chapter 11, John is told not to measure the "outer court". Again, Paul writes:

Ephesians 2:14-16 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

- 3) The use of precious metals and precious stones to describe different aspects of the city (21:18-21) speaks to the glory and splendor of the new city. It is a beautiful reflection of the person of God himself who, according to other scriptures, (1 Timothy 6:16 ) "lives in unapproachable light, whom

no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen." Yet, through the people of God, residents of the new city, this light makes its appearance in the world.

- (a) Ordinary light calls attention, not to itself, but to other objects which it illuminates. Yet, when this same light makes contact with precious stones and precious metals, its hidden character is revealed. Even as a prism reveals the multi-colored layering of light, so this new city reveals the underlying character of God in all his glory.
- (b) The foundation stones are correlated to twelve different precious stones. Where else do we find these stones in the scriptures? They were found in the breastplate settings of the High Priests of Israel (Exodus 28 and 39), where they representing the whole people of God as reflections of God's glory, carried on the heart of God's chief priest. Since John has already told us we are a nation of priests (1:6; 5:10; 20:6), it ought not surprise us to see this symbol used for the whole people of God, carried on the heart of God, and revealed in the priestly city of God. In addition, when Ezekiel (chapter 28) receives his prophecy against the ruler of Tyre, a city of amazing splendor in its own right, he uses the language of precious stones to describe it. These stones parallel those in our text and in the breastplate. Moreover, Ezekiel is told these stones adorned Tyre's ruler who simultaneously symbolized the guardian angel of Eden, the one we know as Lucifer from Isaiah 14. In effect, John's vision is telling us that the original garden-city, Eden, ruined by the conspiracy of the serpent, has now been more than replaced by the New Jerusalem which exceeds it in splendor and glory.
- (c) The familiar expression "pearly gates" actually refers to this vision, since the gates are made entirely from pearls! There is simplicity here. Unlike the foundations, made from different kinds of precious stones, mined from the earth, the gates are of all the same material. Pure white pearl comes from the cavity of an oyster, a living organism. Scholars describe pearl formation this way:

An organic gem grown within oysters and other mollusks when they produce nacre as a reaction to an irritant. A good sized pearl can take between five to eight years to form, which is usually the entire life of the oyster or mollusk. Pearls are most valuable when they are perfectly round. Fine natural pearls are much more expensive and rare to find than cultured pearls.[Zulu Moon Jewelry Site].

My father use to gather mussels on the banks of the Wabash River near Peru, Indiana. Occasionally, he would open them in search of the "perfect pearl". Once he found a pearl, but the jeweler told him it was not perfectly round and had no value. Dad explained how pearls are formed from a small speck of sand or dirt which irritated the throat of the mollusk, causing it to secrete a biomass which formed around the irritant. The result, over time, was the pearl. This can be a picture of redemption: the wounding of Jesus on the cross prepared the way for his glorification. Through his death and resurrection, the pearl of salvation, he became "the way" to God, the gateway to eternal life. Embodied in the "pearly gates" is the heart of salvation: Jesus the wounded one, becomes our way to God. In one of his parables, Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46).

- (d) The streets are pictured as made from transparent gold. How pure is gold? Only as pure as its source in the original ore, and in the refining process the heating of this metal to high temperatures in order to remove its dross, its impurities. Two of the seven cities in *Rev*, Laodicea and Sardis, were known for their gold refining processes. To Laodicea, Jesus writes, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire..." (3:18). To the early followers of Jesus, gold was either a symbol of the decadence of pagan society and its misplaced values, or it was a metaphor for something lasting which comes after long suffering and testing. Some examples illustrate:

James 5:1-3 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

1 Peter 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Peter 3:3-4 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. 4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

1 Peter 1:6-7 Now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The pathways of the new city, then, come to represent the suffering which leads to a highly purified life, for gold is not, by nature, transparent, as this gold is seen to be. Only the hottest of fires, the most intense trials can render a life purified in this way. The suffering church, purified by the persecution of its faith, becomes the "glorious church, without spot or wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:25). The purified city, is the holy city. And the ancient prophets imagined that the "highways" of God's future city would be "holiness highways":

Isaiah 35:8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.

- 4) The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of the city. John is not asked to look for another temple built in earthly Jerusalem. Quite the contrary, he has already been told that temple will soon be destroyed. But this is not a great loss, for in place of a time-bound, spatially limited building, rises the "dwelling of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). Already, the people of God have come to see themselves as the place where God takes up his residence. To use Ezekiel's words, "the name of the city will be 'The Lord is There'" (48:35). We are the temple of God:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

2 Corinthians 6:16-18 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Revelation 3:12 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

Revelation 7:15 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.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

- 5) The Light of the City emanates from God and the Lamb and not from the cosmological light-bearers, sun and moon. This comment reinforces the idea of "new creation" and the end of "old creation". It is also the sequel to the various judgments we have seen which cause the sun, moon and stars to stop giving their light. Far from enthroning the darkness, those darkening events prepared the way for the arrival of a new order of the universe in which light originates from the "glory of God".

(a) Light shining in a dark world was a major theme of the prophets. "The people of walk in darkness," wrote Isaiah, "have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2). Isaiah, more than any of the Old Testament prophets, spoke of the coming "light to the nations" and the transforming effect Messiah would have when his kingdom arrived in the world:

Isaiah 42:6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles."

Isaiah 49:6 I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 51:4 Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations.

Isaiah 60:1-3 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Isaiah 60:19-20 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. 20 Your sun will never

set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

- (b) We also have the words of Jesus, calling his disciples to be the "light of the world":

Matthew 5:14-17 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

- (c) The apostles, in their ministry and in their writings, made much of the light metaphor. Through it, they described how the gospel brought "light to the Gentiles", and also how already the new people of God have left the realm of darkness and are now living in the kingdom of light:

Acts 13:47-49 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. 49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

Acts 26:17-18 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Acts 26:23 The Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Ephesians 5:8-14 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Colossians 1:12-14 Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

2 Timothy 1:10-11 it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

Hebrews 10:32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

2 Peter 1:19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

1 John 1:5-7 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 2:8-10 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. 9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

- 6) "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day." (Psalm 46:4-5) Water, in the Near East, is a precious thing. Even the dew which forms on the grass is cherished. The image of the "river", which appears in 22:1-5, rounds out the vision of the "bride of the Lamb"

which began in chapter 21. Much of the language in this passage echoes the original garden of Eden, including the existence of a certain river:

Genesis 2:9-10 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

Although Genesis goes on to mention the names of the "headwaters", this text plainly says there was a single river watering the garden. In the same context, it mentions the trees God placed in this garden, one of which became a judgment tree to the human race. The river in Eden was a symbol of God's provision for the human race by watering the vegetation he placed there for human use.

- (a) This mingling of symbols for city and garden is significant. The idea of garden conjures up pictures of pastoral scenes with the absence of urban life. The Bible does not contrast country and city in this way. The city is not evil and the country good. Rather, the city can *become evil* through human failure, just as the garden was defiled by poor human choice. Because of the way John's vision combines city and garden, we might well speak of the "garden city" where the hopes and promise of the original creation is renewed, but so is the optimism that human beings can live together in genuine community, unblemished by "the curse".
- (b) A great deal of the imagery for this section is owed to Ezekiel 47 which describes a "stream flowing" from beneath the temple.
- (c) This new garden city becomes the place for the "healing of the nations", torn by war and the ravages of the "beasts of sea and land". This healing comes from the Twelve trees which are planted along the banks of the new river (see Ezekiel 47:12). This text echoes Psalm 1 where the "godly person" is "like a tree planted by the river of waters, yielding fruit in season". The use of "twelve" reminds us once more of the role of the people of God, Jew and Gentile, in the redemptive process. The faith community is suppose to be "redemptive community". This language is similar to Jesus' own use of "light" and "salt" to represent the "restorative" work of his disciples in the world. In the vision of the city "coming down" from heaven to earth, John is shown the role of God's people to be the light, salt, and healing influence in a world of darkness, decay and sickness. This is underscored by the statements which follow at the end of this section:
  - (1) God shows these things to his servants through his angel by his prophets, because these things "must soon take place" (22:6)
  - (2) Jesus is "coming soon" (22:7) and this places special urgency on the readers of this book to "keep" (that is, "obey") the words of the prophecy.
  - (3) In effect, John is being told that "prophecy" is not just about what is going to take place, but by showing us what the future will look like, places a moral responsibility on us to live today in ways that reflect the way we will live someday in the future. The city coming down from heaven is not just some utopian dream or religious fantasy. Rather, it is the vision of how God wants things to look in a world made new. Since we are already the "new creation" people, our lives should embody the reality of that city, "coming down out of heaven from God."

### **Final Words and Epilog (22:8-21)**

1. *Rev* began as a series of letters to the churches of Asia Minor. As its message unfolded, it became a word for the whole people of God, facing challenging times and being encouraged to remain faithful to the Lamb who redeemed them.
2. The book also ends as a letter, with the same words we read in chapter 1, "I, John" (22:8). Once more, John is urged not to worship the angel, but God alone. John is not to confuse the wonder of the prophecy with the majesty of God who causes all of history to unfold according to his purposes.
3. John is also told "Do not seal up the words" (22:10). This stands in contrast to Daniel 12 where the Old Testament prophet is told that the fulfillment lay out in the future some distance. Not so for John and his

readers. "The time is near" (22:10), he is told and human beings will continue to live either lives of sin or righteousness in the meantime (22:11).

4. Once more, Jesus affirms "I am coming quickly" (22:12), adding that he comes to reward the conduct described in 22:11. But he also proclaims himself to be the beginning and ending of all history: Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbols which he explains with the words "First, Last", "Beginning, End"
5. Life in the city is marked by the presence of holiness and the absence of evil. Notably, John lists the sorts of sins no longer markers of "city life": magical arts, sexual immorality, murder, idolatry, and falsehood. It is possible, Jesus declares, to be a city and not harbor these behaviors; to be a "holy city" once again.
6. The book of Revelation is characterized as "this testimony for the churches" (22:16). As such, it is the duty of the churches to bear witness to it. From God's side, it remains the sign of how things will eventually turn out for his world. "Let God be true and everyone a liar", wrote Paul in Romans 3:4. Revelation is the written witness of what God declares is true. As time passes and history advances it continues to prove itself ever relevant to the people of God.
7. "I am Root, Offspring of David, Bright Morning Star"--these metaphors in the mouth of Jesus stress the new beginnings signaled by the prophecy of Revelation. Jesus embodies in himself the new creation. His resurrection marked the world-historical turning point for the human race. It all starts with Jesus and in him the future shines with the brightness of the "morning star".
8. The book ends with the gospel invitation: "Whoever wishes, let him come, let him take of the water of life" (22:17). After all, the book is not a crystal ball, given to us for our own insatiable curiosity about the future, It is the invitation of the Holy Spirit through the Bride (God's people), issued to the world. The form of the invitation reaffirms free will and the moral obligation human beings have before God. Yet it is full of grace: "free gift" is how the offer is described. This offer of the saving "water of life" reminds us of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well in John 4.
9. But it also ends with a warning to any who would tamper with the written form of its message (22:18-19). This warning is reminiscent of the covenant language of Deuteronomy, where God warns his people not to alter the written form of his covenant with Israel (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). This clearly implies that written scripture has covenant authority and is therefore binding on the people of God. Revelation is a covenant document which calls upon the new people of God to honor their commitments to God through Jesus Christ.
  - a. As with Old Testament covenant legislation, Revelation not only offers blessing for those who read and obey the book (chapter 1), but now here it warns the reader of the curses which will come to those who violate its authoritative words or change its message
  - b. Much is at stake here. Over the years, while people have yielded to the temptation to squeeze this book's message into their own schemes for the "end of the world", this passage offers a strong admonition to resist the temptation to modify the original intent of its message or to soften the seriousness of its prophecy.
10. Jesus once more reminds the reader, "I am coming soon". And, like an antiphonal reply from the heavenly choir, the writer of Revelation responds, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22:20). Here the book ends, though the power of its message continues to ring in our ears.
  - a. Jesus, in a real sense, is always "coming". When he rose from the dead and ascended to the Father's right-hand, Jesus entered into his "present session" (*Parousia*) as King. Even now, he reigns in heaven on high and his righteous decrees reverberate through all of creation. Indeed, he is coming.
  - b. Through the church, the new people of God, Jesus proclaims the gospel of the kingdom. And so, he is coming.
  - c. In the coming of the Holy Spirit, he is coming.
  - d. When judgment falls on faithless Jerusalem in 70 C.E., he comes.
  - e. In the letters to the churches, he plainly says he comes to judge and rebuke when the churches stand in need of correction (see 2:5).
  - f. Today, he comes when faithful hearts respond to the knock on the door of their lives, once closed to his presence. "I will come in and eat with him, and he with me", he tells the church in 3:21.

- g. The *Parousia*, "the Coming", "the presence of the Lord", is not a far-off distant event, isolated in time from our lives. Rather, it is the arrival of King who has come reign until all his enemies are under his feet.
11. Yet, this book we have finished reading speaks about not only his coming, but also his "Revelation", his unveiling, when the whole world finally, at last, sees that Jesus has been at the center of things all along. It is for this "blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13) that we are "looking". Yes, he is coming, he has come, but he also will come. He is after all the one who is, who was and who is to come. Amen. Even so Come, Lord Jesus.

Glory to God. Amen.

**Digger Deeper: *No One Knows — New Creation Celebration***  
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *No One Knows — New Creation Celebration*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. In his concluding series of visions (chapters 19-22), John witnesses the climax of history, and God gives him a glimpse of what the New World will look like. According to 19:6-10 what event is being celebrated. Who are the participants in this celebration?
2. How is the Second Coming described in 19:11-21? How is Jesus described? Identify the key symbols, and explain why each one is appropriate. What are the main results of the Second Coming as detailed here?
3. If numeric values for time are also symbolic, what is the significance of the "thousand years" in 20:1-6. What happens during it and what happens at the end of it, according to 20:7-10?
4. Images of what we commonly call "The Last Judgment" appear in 20:11-15. How is the event portrayed and who is involved? Once the judgment takes place, what are the results?
5. The language "New Heaven and New Earth" appears in 21:1. Compare this language with Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Also, notice how 2 Peter 3:13 uses these phrases. What is God's future for the cosmos?
6. According to 21:2-4, which of the following is true: the future is about 1) going to heaven, or 2) heaven coming to earth. Explain the image of the Holy City as "New Jerusalem," and what will its arrival on earth mean for the human race?
7. What is John suppose to "write down" in 21:5, and why is this important?
8. The statement "It is done" appears in 21:6. Based on 21:7-8, explain this statement.
9. According to 21:9-27, relate the following terms to each other: the bride, wife of the lamb, New Jerusalem, and Holy City. Write down everything these verses tell us about "the city." What do you think is intended by the various numeric symbols? By the precious stones and precious metals? What is not found in the city?
10. Chapter 22 begins with the symbol of "the river of life." Compare this with Genesis 2:10 and comment on the parallel. What grows on the banks of the river and for what reason? Compare this with Ezekiel 47 and comment on the literary allusion.
11. How important is "light" in the vision of God's new creation? Compare Genesis 1 and note the connections between the first creation and the new one. Does God simply put things back together, or does He move his creation forward in truly new ways?
12. According to 22:7, 12, and 20, Jesus "is coming soon." Why is this promise repeated three times? What significance does Jesus place on his "coming"?
13. What invitation is extended in 22:17, and to whom is it offered?
14. Based on 22:10, should *Revelation* be an open book or a closed book? What command and warning about the book appears in 22:18-19? Briefly suggest ways that the command might be violated. As you give your answer, consider how people have abused the interpretation of the book.
15. In this closing chapter (22), what picture does Jesus give us of himself? Note the various names, titles, and descriptions he uses to reveal himself to John's audience.
16. In light of the message found in *Revelation*, list five things worthy of a "New Creation Celebration." How might these become part of our regular habits of prayer, worship and service for Jesus Christ — until he comes? How might his coming be a strong motivation for us in the present?