

Chapter 9

Victory Over Satan

(Rev. 20:1 - 22:5)

The Thousand Years

20:1-3 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, 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.

In the first part of this seventh vision, we have a description of Christ's victory over Satan. John says that he saw an angel coming down out of heaven. Everything in the context indicates that this angel is Christ Himself. We know that in the Old Testament, Jesus frequently is called "the Angel of the Lord."

This angel has the keys to the Abyss. The Abyss is hell. In Rev. 1:18, Jesus says: "I hold the keys of death and Hades (hell)." He also has in his hand a great chain with which He binds Satan. Thereupon He locks "that ancient serpent" up in the Abyss.

That Satan is bound with a chain symbolizes that he is not at liberty to do what he would like to do if he had complete freedom. Since the devil is a spirit, having no flesh or bones, it would be ridiculous to think of him as being bound with a chain of steel. Nevertheless, we do like to form a mental picture of the devil being bound. In doing so, we should not think of handcuffs and leg-irons. Rather, we should think perhaps of a chain which holds a vicious animal in certain confines, so that the beast cannot harm those who stay beyond his reach. If people ignore all warning signs and deliberately venture within reach of the animal, it is their own fault if they are harmed, or even killed. Such symbolism seems to be in keeping with Scripture. Although the angels who originally rebelled against God are "bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day" (Jude 6), yet they still are present in the world, roaming around to the extent that God permits. Satan himself, though bound and restricted, still roars like a ferocious lion and prowls around, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Some there are who believe and teach that, prior to Judgment Day, Satan will be removed completely from the earth for a definite period of time. Such teaching, however, has no Scriptural foundation whatsoever.

What, then, does it mean that Satan is bound? What does the binding of Satan symbolize? We are told that Christ bound Satan "to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore." The chain thus represents something that hinders Satan in his attempts to lead people into eternal damnation. We know that there is only one thing that can do this, and that is the preaching of the Gospel of Christ Jesus, which is to be proclaimed to all nations. Wherever the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed, the devil certainly is hindered in his attempt to deceive people and lead them astray.

The Greek word, which here is translated as “nations,” usually refers only to Gentiles, or non-Jews. And that is significant. There was a time when the Gentiles did not have the Gospel, and all were under the deception of Satan. One nation alone had the Word, namely, the nation of Israel, which was called God’s chosen people. The conversion of the Gentiles (or heathen) on a large scale did not begin until Christ had ascended into heaven. The evangelization of the heathen world began with Christ’s great commission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; and it put untold numbers of Gentiles beyond Satan’s reach. Thus, the proclamation of the Gospel, especially to the Gentile world, is the chain that bound Satan for “a thousand years.”

As has previously been mentioned, numbers in Revelation are symbolic and cannot be taken literally. This applies also to the number 1000. “Ten” is a number of completeness. “Ten” cubed (10x10x10) equals one thousand and represents a complete period of time. The thousand years during which Satan is bound began with the suffering and death of Christ, by which He redeemed us from the devil’s power, and it will end with Christ’s return to judgment. In other words, the thousand years represent the entire New Testament period, during which time multitudes upon multitudes of Gentiles (non-Jews) are brought to faith in Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel and are made members of Christ’s kingdom.

Satan will remain bound until shortly before the end of the world. In the last days of the world’s history, however, he will be set free for a short time. If we accept the fact that the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ is the chain that keeps the devil in check, then it is evident that if the Gospel is no longer heard, or if the Gospel light is dimmed by false doctrine, Satan is free once again to deceive men and to lead them into eternal perdition. That is exactly what will happen shortly before the end. Jesus has told us that in the last days there will be a wide-spread falling away, and the love of many will wax cold, and false prophets will increase. The very fact that large sections of the visible church are becoming apostate and many non-evangelical cults are sprouting everywhere is an indication that the devil is set free. Small wonder that Jesus once asked the question: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

20:4-6 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 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.

Before continuing with John’s vision, it might be well at this time to define and explain certain terms and expressions which will be used as we focus our attention on the next three verses. (1) “*Thousand years.*” As we have heard in our study of the first verses of this chapter, the thousand years represent the time between Christ’s first coming and His second advent on

Judgment Day. Thus the thousand years represent the entire New Testament period. (2) “*First Resurrection.*” By nature, all people, as they are born into this world, are spiritually dead; and they have no power of their own to make themselves spiritually alive. If they remain in this state of spiritual death, they will pass through temporal death into eternal death. But if these people are led by God’s Holy Spirit to repent of their sins and if, with a Spirit-wrought faith, they accept Christ as their only Savior and trust Him implicitly for salvation, then they have been made spiritually alive. This conversion, or spiritual rebirth, is the first resurrection which Christians experience; and this new life will not be interrupted by the death of the body. The soul will continue to enjoy that new life even while it is separated temporarily from the body. (3) “*Second Resurrection.*” This is the only bodily resurrection taught in Scripture. It is the resurrection of all the dead, the believers and unbelievers alike, on the last day. It is the resurrection to which Jesus referred when He said: “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5: 28-29). (4) “*The First Death.*” This is the physical death, the death of the body, which will be experienced by all human beings, believers and unbelievers, unless Judgment Day comes while they still are physically alive. (5) “*The Second Death.*” This is eternal death and damnation in hell. It is the dreadful fate of all who depart this life in a state of unbelief. They pass through temporal death into eternal death. Jesus has stated very clearly that those who reject Him as their Savior will be damned.

With this brief clarification, let us continue. John says that he saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. It is a clear teaching of Scripture that on the last day the believers will participate with Christ in judging the world. Then John proceeds to identify the occupants of the thrones. They are “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.” They are identified further as not having worshiped the beast or of having received his mark. On the contrary, they had been faithful and loyal to Christ; they had remained steadfast in the true and saving faith. Now they had the privilege of sitting on thrones; now they were given authority to judge, Thus they were experiencing the fulfilment of Christ’s promises: “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations” (Rev. 2:26); and again, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne” (Rev. 3:21).

Note well, John *did not see the resurrected bodies* of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus. He *saw the souls of beheaded people* who had laid down their lives for the sake of Christ. And certainly, it is a plain teaching of Scripture that when believers reach the end of their earthly existence, only their bodies die. Their souls never die, but go to live with Christ in the glories of heaven. To the penitent malefactor on the cross Jesus gave the promise: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). On that day the malefactor’s body died, but his soul went directly to heaven to be with Christ. What a comforting truth it is for all children of God to know that at the time of physical death the soul does not die, but goes directly to heaven and just keeps on living with God. We repeat, the soul is immortal, it never dies.

What, then, are the meaning of the words: “They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. This is the first resurrection?” As we mentioned earlier, when we clarified the

terminology employed in this chapter, the first resurrection refers to the conversion of the sinner. He was born into this world as spiritually dead. At the time of his conversion, he was made spiritually alive; and that new spiritual life will not be interrupted when the body dies. Even while the soul is separated from the body, it will continue to enjoy that new life with God. That is exactly what John is saying when he tells us that the souls of the martyrs lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Later on John says that when the thousand years are ended, the dead bodies of the martyrs will be raised and will be reunited with their living souls. Accordingly, as we have previously stated, the thousand years are a symbolic term, representing the entire New Testament period. “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.” This refers to those who died in unbelief. The believers experience the death of their bodies, but their souls enjoy the blessings of God in heaven; the unbelievers also experience the death of their bodies, but their souls do not reign with Christ. Instead, their souls are in a state of complete separation from God and His blessings.

And for how long will this condition of the soul continue? “Until the thousand years are ended.” This does not mean that at the end of the New Testament era the souls of the unbelieving dead will begin to live, When the thousand years end, when the New Testament era comes to a close and Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, the souls of the unbelievers will receive their bodies; and then these unbelievers, with body and soul, will experience eternal separation from God. On the other hand, the souls of the believers will also receive their bodies; and then, with soul and body, the believers will continue to enjoy throughout eternity the blessings which their souls already had experienced between the time of their physical death and the coming of judgment day. That is what John means when he says that the believing dead will live during the thousand years, while the unbelieving dead will not live during that time,

This particular vision closes with a beatitude, the fifth beatitude of Revelation: “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them.” As we have heard, the first resurrection occurs when sinners, who by nature are spiritually dead, are converted and made spiritually alive. Having by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit accepted Christ Jesus as their personal Savior and Redeemer, and having by faith received the full and free forgiveness of all their sins, these converted persons have been declared just and holy in the sight of God. Although these spiritually alive people are not exempt from physical death, yet the second death, which is eternal damnation in hell, has no power over them. What a blessing to be numbered among the saints and to know that because we “have part in the first resurrection,” the second death cannot touch us! Yes, what tremendous joy and bliss to have the soul released from its earthly habitation and to be received into the heavenly mansions!

An equally great blessing, and equally as comforting, is the truth that all believers will continue to be priests of God and of Christ, and that they will reign with their Lord throughout the New Testament age. Peter reminded the Christians of his day: “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” (1 Pet. 2:9). This beautiful and blessed relationship will not be interrupted by physical death, but will continue during the thousand years. As priests, the believers shall worship and serve the Lord in the perfection of

holiness in heaven; and as kings, they shall reign with Christ for a thousand years, - throughout the New Testament era, - and then, “when there shall be finished the thousand years,” forever and ever.

Satan’s Doom

20:7-9 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the 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.

As the New Testament era was ushered in, Satan was bound. That is, by the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus in the Gentile world, Satan was held in check; he was hindered in his efforts to deceive and mislead the nations. The result was that multitudes of heathen were converted and were brought into the kingdom of God. However, as the thousand years come to an end, as the New Testament age draws to a close, Satan will be released for a short period of time. This means that in the very last days of the world’s history there will be widespread apostasy. When the Gospel message no longer is proclaimed in its truth and purity, or when it is replaced by all kinds of man-made theories and philosophies, then, indeed, Satan is free again to deceive men and lead them to eternal perdition. With Satan on the loose again, we need not be surprised that in so many supposedly Christian denominations and churches the precious Gospel of the crucified and risen Redeemer is being denied, or at least is being relegated to a position of secondary importance. Nor need we be surprised that antichristian and Satanic cults are mushrooming throughout the world.

Having been set free by man’s misuse and abuse of the Gospel, Satan sees the door wide open for him and accordingly seeks to gather the antichristian forces from the four corners of the earth for a final and desperate attempt to bring about the destruction of the Church. The nations whom he deceives and whom he leads in an unprecedented attack on the Church are referred to as Gog and Magog. Gog, the leader of Magog, is portrayed in the prophecies of Ezekiel and represents all the spiritual and moral evil in the world. We may say that the Gog and Magog in these last days of the world’s history consist of any and all forces and powers that are in opposition to the Christian Church, such as antichristian speculation, higher criticism, Russellism, Mormonism, Atheistic communism, materialism, sensualism, gross immorality, abortion, - in short, any and all forces that endeavor to corrupt the Church and bring about her destruction.

The attack of this Satanic army against the Church is the same battle of Armageddon, described in chapter 16, and is also the same battle fought by the two beasts against the Rider on the white horse, described in chapter 19. The size and strength of Satan’s army is not to be underestimated. “In number they are like the sand on the seashore.” John sees them marching across the breadth of the earth to surround the camp of God’s people, the Church, the city dearly loved by God,

Tremendous, indeed, are the spiritual and moral evils with which the Church must contend in these last days of sore distress; and at times the members of Christ's "little flock" may be inclined to feel that the situation is hopeless and that the saints are fighting a losing battle. However, the Christians are not to despair. They are to remember the Source of their life and strength. To understand the symbolical use of "Gog and Magog" in Revelation, it is sufficient for us to know that in Ezekiel's vision these great enemies of God's people were destroyed with fire, hail and burning sulfur from heaven. In like manner, John sees fire descending from heaven to destroy Satan's army. Once again, there is no description of the battle itself; and the account of the victory is very brief, but unquestionably decisive: "Fire came down from heaven and devoured them."

20:10 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 forever and ever.

With the army of Satan destroyed, Satan himself, the great deceiver and father of lies, is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, there to join the beast and the false prophet. Throughout eternity he and all his angels will occupy the place prepared for them by God, and never again will they be able to harass and persecute the elect of God. Thus all of the Church's enemies are put out of action. Christ had promised victory for the Church; and victory the Church received. The gates of hell could not prevail against her. For ever and ever Satan and his cohorts will be tormented in the fires of hell; for ever and ever the saints will reign with Christ in heavenly bliss.

The Great White Throne - The Final Judgment

20:11 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.

In different places in Revelation, John previously had recorded five visions of the final judgment. This sixth vision of the final judgment, however, is by far the clearest. John sees "a great white throne and him who was seated on it." Although the occupant of the throne is not identified by name, we know that it is Christ. Jesus Himself had foretold this in the days of His earthly ministry when He said: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (Matt. 25:31).

So awesome is this final coming of Christ as Judge that John says: "Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them." Many interpret these words as meaning that the present earth and sky will completely be annihilated. However, we do not feel that annihilationism is taught here or in any other passages of Scripture. It is true that St. Peter writes: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Pet. 3:10); but these words do not speak of annihilationism.

Just because something is burned up does not mean that it has been annihilated. When an article is burned up, its form is destroyed; but do you know that every single atom of that article

still exists, either in the form of ashes or carbon or invisible gas? We certainly know and believe, as St. Paul says, that “this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). What form it will have after Judgment Day we do not know. Since the created world also was contaminated by man’s sin, it will need to be renewed. St. Paul refers to this when he writes: “The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). And St. Peter, who had written that “that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat” (2 Pet. 3:12), in the very next verse states: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). Consequently, while this world, in its present form, will disappear, yet we know that it will be renewed in such a way that no sin, but only righteousness, will be found in it. This new heaven and new earth will be described more fully in the next chapter.

20:12-13 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

As John continues with the narration of his vision, we realize that there are a number of important doctrines that are brought to our attention in these next verses.

In the first place, we note that John “saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne” - that “the sea gave up the dead that were in it” - that “death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them” - and that “each person was judged.” These phrases certainly indicate the universality of the resurrection as well as the universality of the judgment. Both of these doctrines are taught frequently and clearly in Sacred Scripture. We call your attention to but a few Biblical passages. In John 5:28-29 we hear Jesus saying: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” In 2 Cor. 5:10 Paul writes: “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.” The same apostle, writing to the Christians in Rome, says: “We will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Rom. 14:10).

Indeed, all the dead will be raised, both believers and unbelievers, both great and small, both adults and children, both those who here on earth occupied positions of fame and power and those who were regarded by the world as insignificant. None will be overlooked; none will be exempt. Even the sea will give up the dead that are in it. Yes, even death and Hades will give up the dead that are in them. No matter where individuals may have been buried, whether on land or on sea; no matter where the ashes of their dead bodies may have been scattered; no matter where their souls may be when judgment day dawns, whether in hell (Hades) or in heaven, - all souls must be reunited with their bodies to appear before the judgment throne of Christ.

Next, we focus our attention on the judgment itself. John says that the books were opened - that the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books - and that each person was judged. According to the account of the final judgment, as given by our Savior in Matthew 25, every person will be judged on the basis of his works. Those who have performed good works will go to heaven; those who have neglected to do good will be sentenced to hell. We may wonder how this can be reconciled with the fundamental teaching of Scripture concerning salvation, namely, that we are saved, not by our own works, but by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9).

It is true, our salvation is purely by the grace of God. By nature, we were sinful human beings, deserving nothing but hell and eternal damnation. Nor could we do anything to save ourselves. But the Holy Spirit called us by the Gospel. Through this Gospel He removed the scales from our sin-blinded eyes and enabled us to behold the beauty of our salvation in Christ Jesus. Yes, through the Gospel He worked within us a true and living faith in Christ as our only Savior and Redeemer. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, through the Gospel, also sanctified us in this faith; that is, He gave us the strength and ability to serve God with holy works, – works that are pleasing in the sight of our God. While these good works do not merit or earn for us eternal salvation, they nevertheless are the evidences of the saving faith that the Holy Spirit has created within us; they are the fruits of our faith. The unbelievers cannot perform works that are good and pleasing in the sight of God: for, as Scripture says, “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). Accordingly, since only the true believers can perform good works in the sight of God, does it really matter whether Christ judges us on the basis of our faith or on the basis of the fruits of our faith? As St. James points out, “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17); and a dead faith cannot save. Thus, judgment on the basis of works assumes that good deeds are the fruits of a true and saving faith.

In addition to the books which contain a record of every person’s deeds, John says that “another book was opened, which is the book of life.” This book contains no record of deeds, but only names, - the names of the elect, - the names of all who are saved. Jesus once said: “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” (John 5:24). What joy to know that we do not have to wait until judgment day to find out where we will spend eternity. Our faith in Christ Jesus assures us now already that we belong to God; yes, we know now already that our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

We might mention very briefly that the Bible speaks of two judgments. The first judgment occurs at the time of physical death, when a person’s soul either is received into heaven or is sent to hell. The second judgment occurs on the last day, when every individual, with soul and body reunited, will appear before Christ’s Judgment throne to hear the verdict publicly, - either the verdict: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father,” or the verdict: “Depart from me, you who are cursed” (Matt. 25). We hasten to add, however, that the verdict rendered at the time of physical death will in no way alter or be altered by the verdict publicly announced on the last day.

20:14-15 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is

the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Physical death separates the soul from the body. In the case of an unbeliever, his body will lie in the grave until judgment day, while his soul will be kept in Hades, or hell, until that day. Thus “death” and “Hades” are companions. On judgment day “death” and “Hades” are thrown into the lake of fire. Consequently, Hades (or hell) will no longer be the place where *only the souls* of the unbelievers are kept until judgment day. After the final judgment, there is only the second death, the lake of fire, into which Satan and all his anti-christian powers and all the ungodly, *the latter with body and soul*, are cast, – there to suffer unspeakable agony and torment throughout eternity.

Those whose names were not found written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire, there to share the fate of Satan and all the forces of evil. Jesus could not have stated it in more simple language than when He said: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

New Heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem

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.

The theme of the opening verses of this chapter might well be the words of the Lord: “I am making everything new!” (v. 5). We are introduced to a new heaven and a new earth; we behold a new Jerusalem; we see a new people; and we are thrilled by new experiences.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Out of nothing, simply by speaking His word, this world and everything in it was created by God. It was a beautiful place for man, the crowning work of God’s creation. But when our first parents fell into sin, they not only corrupted themselves, but all creation likewise was tainted by sin. And so, when Christ comes again on judgment day, the present world will be destroyed by fire. However, as we have mentioned in the preceding chapter, this will not be an annihilation. The destruction of the present world will not be the end of all matter. No; the destruction of the present world will be followed by the re-creation, the renovation of the heavens and the earth; creation will be freed from its bondage to sin and corruption (Rom. 8:21); and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Already in the days of the Old Testament, God had spoken of this new heaven and earth when He said through the mouth of His Prophet Isaiah: “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Is. 65:17). And in the New Testament the Apostle Peter writes: “In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

“And there was no longer any sea.” Some interpret this as saying that when the new heaven and the new earth appear, there will no longer be any sea. We feel, however, that this phrase is not to be disconnected from the preceding phrase. The first heaven and the first earth

had passed away, and so did the sea; the sea no longer existed. The sea, too, was part of the creation that had been touched and tainted by man's sin; and so, the sea likewise had to vanish. While we are told that the heavens and the earth were destroyed *by fire*, we simply are told that the sea ceased to exist.

21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband,

It appears quite evident that the "Holy City, the new Jerusalem" is the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the sum total of all true believers in Christ. In chapter 19, the holy Christian Church had been described as the bride of the Lamb, clothed in bright fine linen. A similar description is given here of the Holy City, the new Jerusalem; for we are told that she was "prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Consequently, we are led to believe that the New Jerusalem symbolizes the Church Triumphant, the Bride of the Lamb, clothed in the garments of salvation prepared and provided by God, - in robes that had been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14).

21:3 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,"

John says that he heard a loud voice from the throne. There can be no doubt that the message which John heard came directly from God Himself. The message is one of unspeakable comfort and begins with the words: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them."

In the Old Testament, when the Children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness, the tent (or tabernacle) was in their midst; and it was in the pillar of cloud and fire hovering over the tabernacle that the Israelites had visible evidence of God's presence with them. However, that tabernacle also served as a type of things to come. In the new heaven and the new earth, God will dwell visibly in the midst of His people. Then the redeemed no longer will walk by faith, but by sight. God Himself will be with them. He will be their God; and they will be His people.

Although it is true that all believers already are God's people, yet this relationship will be revealed perfectly and completely in the new heaven and the new earth. It is as St. John writes in his Epistle: "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" (1 John 3:2).

What a life that will be! In our present existence here on earth, we know that God has promised to be with us; we know and believe that He is loving and almighty and that He will provide for all of our physical and spiritual needs: we know and believe that He is our true Father and that, by faith in Christ, we are His dear children. Yet, because of our human frailties and weaknesses, we often feel lonely, neglected and forgotten; and frequently the clouds of gloom and pessimism threaten to deprive us of the comfort and the hope and the confidence that our

God wants us to have. But how different this will be when the heavenly Jerusalem will come down from the sky! Then, as members of the Church Triumphant, we will see with our own eyes that God indeed is living with us, that He is our God, and that we truly are His people, His very own, purchased with the blood of the Lamb, and now living in His presence and enjoying His blessings forever and ever.

21:4 “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.”

Many of the descriptions of heaven are given in negative terms, so to say, because in our present state it is absolutely impossible to comprehend the realities of heavenly bliss. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). However, in our present state we *do know* what it means to stand beside the coffin of a loved one; we *do know* what it means to mourn and weep; we *do know* what it means to endure pain. But in the new heaven and the new earth there will be *no* death, *no* mourning, *no* crying, *no* pain. That is what we mean when we say that many of the descriptions of heaven are given in *negative* terms.

When sin entered the world, a host of ills and afflictions followed in its wake, the greatest and most gruesome of which is death. In the new heaven and the new earth there will be no sin. Hence, there will be no consequences of sin. That means that there will be no suffering, misery, sorrow or pain; no, there will be no death. Thus there will be no occasion for weeping and the shedding of tears.

“For the old order of things has passed away.” In his vision John sees that the things characteristic of this present world, - suffering, misery, sorrow, pain, - have vanished from the Church in its hour of triumph. Truly, the old order of things has passed away.

21:5 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.”

Then John heard the voice from the throne saying, “I am making everything new.” Men are striving so hard nowadays to improve conditions in this present world and make it a better place in which to live; yes, some even have dreams of building a perfect social order. They forget, however, that such a perfect world must be preceded by a destruction of the present order of things. Then, not men, but God Himself will bring into existence a new heaven and a new earth, which will be the permanent and perfect dwelling place for the people of God.

And how can we know, how can we be sure that God is planning the very best for His children? Because He who said, “I am making everything new,” told John: “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Our faith and hope are not founded upon any human ideas and speculations, but upon the infallible Word of God. He is the very personification of truth and is absolutely incapable of deception and falsehood. At all times and in all places we can depend

upon His Word. When He says that He is going to make everything new, you may know most certainly that He will do precisely that. Very appropriate in this connection are the words of Jesus: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt, 24:35).

21:6 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."

The same Almighty God who had said to John, “I am making everything new,” now says to him: “It is done.” Everything is finished; everything is new. Thus, in this vision, John sees the new heaven and the new earth as having replaced this present world. It is presented as an accomplished act so that John may see it and write about it.

Whatever God promises is as good as done, because He is the “Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” He is the eternal God who changes not. Very graphically does the Psalmist say of Him: “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2). He was in existence before this present world was made; and when this earth and sky will have passed away, He will be there to usher in the new heaven and the new earth, Always is He in complete control, What a comforting truth!

The next words that God speaks to John, and which John is to record, obviously refer to the Gospel invitation that the Lord will extend to those who are spiritually thirsty as long as this world stands. “To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” Thus does our Lord graciously promise to satisfy the spiritually thirsty with His free gift of forgiveness and salvation. (Note well: salvation is solely the work and gift of God; and every person who thirsts for this salvation, may have this wonderful water of life without cost.) In this connection we are reminded of the words which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well: “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Until the end of days, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ will continue to be efficacious. It is our prayer that sinners everywhere may realize their desperate need and may be led to accept in true faith the forgiveness and salvation that Christ so graciously extends to them in and through His precious Gospel,

21:7 “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

As we recall briefly the seven letters to the seven churches in the opening chapters of Revelation, we see that great emphasis is placed on “overcoming.” However, the enemies who are to be overcome are not specifically mentioned. The phrase, “to him who overcomes” is followed by the promised blessing. Nevertheless, from several other references in Revelation it becomes evident that the one “who overcomes” is the Christian who successfully withstands all the temptations and attacks of Satan and the antichristian world, and does not permit these arch-enemies to rob him of his faith and the crown of life.

Every Christian who thus, by the power and grace of God, overcomes these vicious enemies “will inherit all this,” - namely, all the blessings in the new heaven and the new earth. He will enjoy freedom from death, freedom from pain and grief, freedom from weeping and mourning; but above all, he will enjoy the privilege of being in close fellowship with God; yes, he will rejoice in the fact that God will be his God and that he will be God’s son. What a wonderful and blessed relationship! What a comfort to know that for ever and ever God will be our dear Father and we will be His dear children. However, as we shall see from the next verse, not all people will be privileged to share in these blessings and glories.

21:8 “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.”

Those who will not share in the glories of the new Jerusalem include the following:

- (1) The cowardly, - those who lack the courage to stand up for Jesus and His cause; especially those who fear the beast and his power more than God.
- (2) The unbelieving, - those who absolutely reject the Gospel of Christ Jesus; also those, who in the face of trial and persecution, renounce their faith in Jesus.
- (3) The vile, - those who pollute themselves by worshiping the beast and by indulging in all kinds of abominations.
- (4) The murderers, - those who deliberately harm or kill their fellowmen; especially those who persecute the people of God by word and by deed.
- (5) The sexually immoral, - those who delight to abound in sexual sins; perhaps also those who commit spiritual adultery by being unfaithful to their God and Lord.
- (6) Those who practice magic arts, - all sorcerers who deceive people by their witchcraft, astrology and other satanic arts.
- (7) The idolaters, - all who fear, love and trust anything or anyone more than the true God; especially also those who worship the beast and his image.
- (8) All liars, - all who are involved in hypocrisy, insincerity and falsehood; this certainly would include all false prophets.

All these will be cast into hell, into the lake of fire. This is the second death, also known as everlasting destruction or eternal damnation.

However, lest individuals be plunged into godless despair, we feel it necessary to call your attention to a very important truth. All the sins that are enumerated in this particular verse are not unpardonable. If a sinner, who has been living in one or more of those sins, truly repents, he should know that in Christ Jesus there is full and free forgiveness for these and all other sins. But when people persist in their sins, refuse to repent, and thus reject God’s gift of forgiveness in Christ, they exclude themselves from the glories of the new Jerusalem; and thus they actually choose for themselves a place in the fiery lake of burning sulfur, which is the second death. How

tragic!

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."

In the remaining verses of this chapter we have a symbolic representation of the Church Triumphant. The intention is not to describe literally the eternal home of all believers, but rather to set forth the glorious conditions which all believers will enjoy eternally. Earthly language is employed to aid us in understanding, at least to some extent, the glory of the city "not made with hands."

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls and who carried the seven last plagues said to John, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." This could be the same angel mentioned in Rev. 17:1. There we were told: "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.'" In contrast to the great prostitute, the servant of Satan, John now is shown the bride of Christ, the wife of the Lamb, the Church Triumphant in all her heavenly glory.

21:10 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.

Prior to his death, Moses was instructed to climb Mount Nebo; and from this mountaintop he was permitted to see the land of Canaan, the land which God had promised to give to the Children of Israel. Many centuries later, while in exile on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John, in a state of spiritual ecstasy, is carried away to a high mountain, from the top of which he is permitted to see the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. Thus John is granted a full view of the Church's glory in her state of triumph.

21:11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

In symbolic language, John proceeds to give us a description of the Holy City. As the "glory of the Lord" is the bright light in which God revealed His presence to Israel in the wilderness, so in eternal life the glory of God fills the Holy City, the Church Triumphant, giving to her a splendor that is indescribable. The glory of God filling the city indicates God's presence with His people. This fact is substantiated by the statement that the source of light "was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." In Rev. 4:3 God is described as having the appearance of jasper and carnelian. Accordingly, God Himself is the source of the city's light; His presence fills the Holy City with light. Since there is no more sin, nor any consequences of sin, God can dwell in the midst of His people. Indeed, God, who is Light, and in whom is no darkness whatsoever, can now have perfect fellowship with His people.

21:12-14 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the

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

The great, high wall is symbolic of the security that God's people will enjoy in the new heaven and the new earth. There will be no need to fear any hostile attacks; for there will be no enemies to attack the Church in Glory. All the enemies will have been cast into the lake of fire.

The number twelve symbolizes the continuity of the New Testament Church and the Old Testament people of God. Yes, twelve is the number that symbolizes the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

The twelve gates, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed thereon, indicate that only the true Israelites, the members of God's spiritual Israel (all true believers in Christ), are granted entrance into eternal and glorious union with God.

This same truth is emphasized by the presence of an angel at each of the twelve gates. You will recall that after Adam and Eve had been driven from the original Garden of Eden, Cherubim were stationed at the Garden's entrance to guard the way to the tree of life. So here, the presence of an angel at each entrance seems to signify that entrance into the Church of Glory is granted, not to dogs, not to liars and the ungodly (Rev. 22:15), but only to the members of God's chosen people, the elect, God's spiritual Israel.

The statement that there are three gates on each of the four sides of the Holy City probably denotes catholicity or universalism, – the truth that devout believers will come from among all nations on the earth, especially from the Gentile or non-Jewish nations. In this connection we are reminded of the words of Jesus: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11).

Abraham of old looked forward "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). Here, in a vision, the Apostle John now sees the Holy City, The Church Triumphant, as having "twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The twelve apostles are the foundation of the Church. St. Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus of this when he wrote: "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19-20). Paul is saying that the Church is founded upon the Word of God, - that Word which was proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. This foundation is unshakeable. Only those are included among the saints in glory who in this life based their faith on Christ Jesus and His saving Word; yes, union with God in the Holy City is restricted to those who now, in this time of grace, rest their souls on the Word of the Lamb.

21:15-17 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the

city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using,

The angel, who had been talking with John, now proceeds to measure the city, its gates and its walls, with a rod of gold. We are reminded of the incident recorded in chapter 11, where John was commanded to measure the temple. At that time, John was told not to measure the outer court and the city. The latter areas were to be occupied by the Gentiles, the unbelievers. Here in chapter 21, however, we are not dealing with the visible church in the world, which consists of a mixed and motley multitude (the tares growing together with the wheat). No; here we are viewing the Church Triumphant, which is composed of all true believers in Christ, but only the true believers. In this heavenly Jerusalem there are no hypocrites or ungodly persons.

The shape of the Holy City is a perfect cube, – all of its sides having the same measurement. It is significant to note that this was also the shape of the Holy of Holies in both the Old Testament tabernacle and the Old Testament temple. The Holy of Holies was considered a special dwelling place of God, a place where God manifested His presence. However, the people were not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could do so. The counterpart of the Holy of Holies in the new heaven and the new earth is not a sanctuary built with hands, it is not a sanctuary with God's people on the outside, but it is the Holy City, the Church Triumphant, all the saints in perfect, eternal union with God.

John sees the Church represented as a perfect cube, measuring 12,000 stadia (about 1400 miles) in each direction. Let it be said once again that the numbers with which we are dealing are symbolical. Twelve is the number of the church; ten is a symbol of completeness. Ten cubed represents utmost perfection or completion. Consequently, 12x10x10x10 equals 12,000, - a symbol of the church as a completed whole. The Church Triumphant consists of all the elect; and all of the elect are perfect in every respect. In this new heaven and new earth, all the saints know God perfectly, are perfectly happy and blessed, and enjoy all the gifts and blessings in the fullness of perfection.

Since all the dimensions of the Holy City are twelve and the multiples of twelve, we need not be surprised that the thickness of the walls is 144 cubits, which is the total of 12x12. This shows us once again that the Holy City is “the perfect embodiment of the community-creating will of God who chose the twelve tribes of Israel and of the Lamb who appointed the twelve apostles.”

21:18-21 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The

twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

Here is splendor that surpasses all human understanding, The cube, symbolizing the symmetry and perfection of the Holy City, is made of pure gold, transparent as crystal. The wall of the City is made of jasper. Exactly what kind of stone this is, we do not know. In fact, the precise identification of many of the precious stones mentioned is uncertain. This is particularly true of many of the stones that form the foundations. Each of the twelve foundations is made of one kind of precious stone, and each gate is made out of one pearl. We know that the twelve foundations symbolize the twelve apostles. That they here are represented by precious stones seems to indicate that the Word of God which they proclaimed and which, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they recorded has indeed been a treasure and a source of tremendous blessing to the Church.

That the street of the city is of pure gold, as transparent as glass, once again makes us realize how incapable we are when it comes to visualizing and describing the beauty and the glory and the perfection of the heavenly Jerusalem. But although the glory and splendor of this city exceed our fondest imagination, yet of one thing we can be certain: everything in the city is light, filled with the glory of God. All of God's ways and dealings will be manifest to our eyes, and one miracle after another will be revealed to us. Beyond that, all that we can say has been expressed in these words: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). How the incomparable beauty of the Holy City ought to revive our drooping spirits as we continue our journey through life!

21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

In the Old Testament worship of God, the temple occupied a prominent place; in the New Testament, the House of God, or church, likewise is the place where the Means of Grace are dispensed, - the means through which God imparts to us His grace and forgiveness. But in the heavenly Jerusalem there is no temple, nor is there any need for a temple. Nor is there any further need of the Means of Grace, for the elect are in perfect and eternal union with God. "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." Indeed, the special, intimate and visible presence of the Lord God turns the entire city into a temple; and the saints in glory have direct access to God, they see Him face to face and they know Him even as they are known. In the Church Triumphant, worship of God and service to Him are perfect.

21:23 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.

In our present life on earth God gives us the physical light that we need. Nevertheless, He gives us this light, not directly, but by means of the sun and the moon. In a similar manner, we receive our spiritual illumination, not by the direct revelation of the glory of God, but through the Gospel of Christ. In the heavenly Jerusalem, however, the sun and moon are not needed to shine

upon it, nor is there any need for the light of the Gospel; for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb.

The glory of the Lord is the bright light in which God revealed His presence at various times in the Old Testament era; and at the dawn of the New Testament age, when the announcement of Jesus' birth was made to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains, we are told that the glory of the Lord shone around them. However, that glory appeared only for a short time and then disappeared. But in the heavenly Jerusalem the glory of God, yes, God Himself in all His radiant attributes, will be an illumination for His people for ever and ever.

“And the Lamb is its lamp.” We recall that when Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him onto a high mountain and was transfigured before them, His face shone with the brightness of the sun. That was a marvelous, but a momentary, experience for the disciples. In the New Jerusalem it is different. There the Lamb of God is the Lamp, shining with indescribable brightness; and the saints in glory will rejoice in this light for ever and ever.

21:24-26 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

Correctly understood, the Church Triumphant can be called an “international city;” for “the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.”

“The nations” consist of the glorified saints, those “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9), - the “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev, 7:9). All the true believers in Christ, it matters not of what nationality they are, it matters not what the color of their skin may be, - all will dwell in the light emanating from the Lamb and the glory of God.

“And the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.” This had been foretold already in the Old Testament; for in Isaiah 60:3 we read: “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” All the called and faithful servants of the Lord, patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, together with all the mighty rulers who in true faith accepted Christ Jesus as their Savior and Lord, - all will bring their praises to God and the Lamb, especially glorifying and praising the Lord for the salvation which Jesus secured for them by His suffering and death.

The gates to the Holy City will never be shut, for there will be no night there. These words describe the perfect safety of the saints in glory. For the protection of the inhabitants, the gates of earthly cities usually were closed with the approach of darkness. Since there is no night in the Holy City, and since there are no enemies to threaten the safety of the saints, the gates to this city are never closed. The citizens of this city of God, the Church and thistles, - a curse that destined man to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, - but a curse, too, that would ultimately cause the serpent's head to be crushed. In this preview of the New Jerusalem, however, we are

told that “no longer will there be any curse.”

Turning to Gal. 3:13, we read: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” Taking our place, Christ was nailed to the cross as one accursed of God, Thus Christ bore the curse and removed it from us. What the Christ on the cross bought for us is now attained, namely, everlasting life in glorious union with God and the Lamb. In the heavenly city, the tree is entirely a tree of life. There shall be no more curse, for all the consequences of sin are gone forever; and the old serpent, the devil, has been cast into a lake of fire.

“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.” Thus it is emphasized again that God will be present with His people; and all the redeemed will be His servants and will worship Him and will “serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.” What a life that will be!

But the greatest bliss of the redeemed is expressed in the words: “They will see his face.” To see our God and Savior as He is, face to face, is an experience that presently is completely beyond our understanding. As a matter of fact, in our present existence, we are not even going to attempt to find words that can describe adequately what it will be like to see God face to face.

“And his name will be on their foreheads,” - signifying that the redeemed will be God’s permanent and everlasting possession. These are the same people whom John described previously when he said: “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). Of them John wrote: “They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (14:4). They belong to God; they will be His throughout eternity; they are the Church Triumphant.

22:5 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 forever and ever.

The thought expressed in this verse is the same thought that was expressed in the closing verses of the previous chapter. The source of light in the new heaven and the new earth will be God Himself. The dark night of sin and death will have passed away; and the light of God’s countenance will surround His people continually. Hence, there will be no need for the light of a lamp or the light of the sun. With God’s face shining upon the saints in glory, all other lights are superfluous.

Of Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, it had been said: “And he will reign for ever and ever” (11:15). Of the followers of the Lamb it now is said: “And they will reign for ever and ever.” Everything that had been lost in the Garden of Eden is now completely restored in the heavenly Paradise. And so, with this picture of the Redeemer and His redeemed living and reigning together in eternal bliss and glory, the vision of John comes to a close. As these words

and promises must have brought endless hope and comfort to the persecuted Christians in John's day and age, so may they also be a source of inspiration and encouragement to us as we make our journey through life.