

COMMENTARY ON REVELATION PART 3

Chapters 19 – 22

The Messiah's arrival and reign

The Messiah's arrival & Armageddon	19
The millennium & last judgment	20
The New Jerusalem	21-22

The hallelujah chorus (19:1-6)

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, 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." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." 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!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!" Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns."

This chapter is the only one in the New Testament where you will find the word 'hallelujah,' praise the Lord! The hosts of heaven sing hallelujah because the great city, the center of the world empire, has been destroyed, together with all her evil: corruption, greed, vice, crime, robberies, murders, prostitution, drugs, slavery, oppression, blasphemy and the rejection of God's word. City life can be rough, but in the days of the Antichrist, it will be many times worse. In Rev 12:7-12 we read that there was war in heaven, resulting in Satan being hurled down to earth, and his angels with him. This will mean trouble for the earth and sea because the devil has come down to earth.

However, the hallelujahs ring out, not only for the punishments and vengeance taken on the great city but because the Lord God Almighty reigns. Rev 11:15 anticipated that the kingdom of the world would become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ and that he would reign forever. We have now arrived at the most exciting part of the book of Revelation, the last four chapters, which describe the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to reign. This is our great hope for ourselves and our planet. It will be a time of restoration, and the saints will reign with Christ in justice and righteousness.

The Trinity is a compact unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When it says, ‘our Lord God Almighty reigns’, we think about the Father, because it is he who is usually referred to as the Almighty, and he is the sovereign Ruler over heaven and earth. But here it refers to Jesus. John hasn’t seen a vision of Jesus returning yet, but the hallelujahs announce the immanent beginning of the Messianic reign on earth; the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about so often during his ministry. But before he starts his reign, there is another matter to attend to.

The wedding supper of the Messiah (19:7-10)

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. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! "And he added, "These are the true words of God." At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus."

Isa 54:5 For your Maker is your husband – the LORD Almighty is his name – the Holy One of Israel your Redeemer, he is called the God of all the earth.

Isa 62:5 As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Hos 2:19-20 I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.

The wedding of the Lamb has come. Read the parable of the wedding banquet in Mt 22:1-14. There, Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son. The king is God, the son is Jesus, and the bride is the Church, the elect, the righteous, the saints; all those who have accepted the invitation during their lifetimes.

In Paul's teaching on marriage in Eph 5:25-27 he commands husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Christ has purified us by his shed blood, and he has united

us to himself in love. We are already betrothed to him, but at his return, there is a wedding, whereby he formally binds us to himself for eternity. Different metaphors explain our relationship with God; we are children of God, and we are Christ's brothers, but the marriage union is the closest of them all, because, as Paul said, the two will become one flesh. Paul spoke of a profound mystery, the union of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31b-32). Metaphors of course are not to be taken literally, they guide our imagination: we will never be separated, whatever Christ does, we will be there doing it with him.

As for the bride, she has prepared herself in bright, white linen which contrasts with the purple and scarlet attire of the prostitute. It has a different symbolism to the white robes of those who come out of the great tribulation. Those robes are white because they are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Here the white linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints, acts which God prepared in advance for them to do (Eph 2:10). We are not given any details of the marriage ceremony; there are too many things happening at once. But Rev 21:2 to 22:5 gives a detailed symbolic description of New Jerusalem; a truly divine community where God and man are united forever.

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

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 wages war. 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. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is 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. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

Ex 15:3 The LORD is a warrior.

Ps 2:9 You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.

Isa 63:2-3 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? "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."

Isa 66:15-16 See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all people, and many will be those slain by the LORD.

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

Heaven is open; God is intervening dramatically in the history of the world. The Lord Jesus is descending to Earth; not on a literal white horse, but as conqueror, and as the awaited Messiah. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and he is ever faithful. He is a warrior, and he will defeat his enemies. Paul used a different metaphor in 2 Thess 1:7b-9, but it is the same occasion. He says the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who don't know God with everlasting destruction. They will be shut out from the presence of the Lord and the majesty of his power. The slaughter of men here is not a metaphor (Isa 66:15-16). He will tread the winepress alone; not even the US will support him.

God is a just God, and what Jesus does when he returns is done in strict justice, and following what is right. His blazing eyes symbolize judgment, while the many crowns express the universality of his royal status. The name written on him, which is known only to himself, may be compared to the white stone with a new name written on it, which Jesus will give to the overcomers. The names will be known only to those who receive them (Rev 2:17).

Jesus' robe is dipped in blood. He is coming to be King of kings and Lord of lords, but we should never forget what he accomplished at his first coming when he died on the cross for the sins of mankind and redeemed his people forever. It is because of his gory death on the cross that the saints will be resurrected to life. The sharp sword coming out of his mouth is a metaphor. There is no sword; it is symbolic of the dynamic word of God which he speaks, and which always accomplishes what is expressed (Heb 4:12). Jesus will only need to say the word and his enemies will be defeated. Similarly, the rod of iron with which he will rule the nations expresses his severe rule.

The armies of heaven will follow him. These are the angels mentioned in 2 Thess 1:7 together with the saints who have just been resurrected. They ride white horses because they are conquerors, and they wear fine linen because they are his called, chosen, and faithful followers mentioned in Rev 17:14, 19:8. They are made righteous through their faith in the blood of Christ, and their mission is righteous and just. Both angels and saints are also included in 1 Thess 3:13, where our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

The resurrection of the righteous dead and the rapture of the living saints takes place simultaneously with Jesus' descent from heaven. The rapture isn't explicitly referred to in Revelation, but 14:15-16 may be interpreted as such. It is assumed everywhere that the saints pass through the Great Tribulation and are the objects of the Antichrist's persecution (Dan 7:25, Rev 12:17, 13:7). They are counseled to endure and be faithful in 13:10 and 14:12.

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

In Acts 1:11 angels told Jesus' disciples that Jesus would come back in the same way they had seen him go into heaven. Then Zechariah tells us the exact place to which Jesus will come back; his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem (Zech 14:4), the same place from where he ascended. He will reign from Mount Zion. It all happens on the day of the Lord.

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

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, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Ezek 39:17-18a, 20, 22, 29 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. 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. ... At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind ... From that day forward the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God. ... I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel."

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

This great supper of God is in stark contrast to the wedding feast of the Lamb. The Great Supper of God is a metaphor that fires the imagination to consider the fate of the armies of the world who thought they could foil the purposes of God and his Messiah. After doing their best to rid the world of Christianity, they will come from all over the world to capture the city of God, Jerusalem, the capital city of God's chosen people Israel. Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain, asks the Psalmist? Why do the earth's leaders take their stand against the Lord and his Messiah? (Ps 2:1-2). Joel says the Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem, the earth and the sky will tremble, and the Lord will be a refuge for his people Israel (Joel 3:16).

Zechariah says that the Lord will strike all the nations that fight against Jerusalem with a plague. Their flesh will rot while they are still standing, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. They will be stricken by the Lord with such panic that they will attack each other (Zech 14:12-13).

The Antichrist, the leaders of the earth, and their armies will gather to fight against Israel at the symbolical battlefield called Armageddon (Rev 16:16). They don't realize that they will fight against the omnipotent Jesus and his army. This is a great historical event which will happen in Israel. A battle between the nations of the world, who have come to capture Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation which is defending their capital city.

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

The Antichrist will be captured, along with the false prophet, and they will be thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, a metaphor for hell, the place of final torment. The kings and their armies will be killed by the judicial verdict which comes from the mouth of Jesus. The vultures will eat their corpses. This is literal. This is probably the meaning of Jesus' word that where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. The disciples had asked where the second coming events would take place.

The identity of the place called Armageddon is not clear. Megiddo was a town about 60 miles NW of Jerusalem, and the nearby plain was an ancient battleground. The armies that will come against Jerusalem for the battle of Armageddon are described in Ezek 38-39 as Gog and Magog, but this battle should not be confused with the final act of rebellion described in Rev 20:8-9, which is also attributed to Gog and Magog. The latter follows the millennium, but there is no actual battle. Those armies will be destroyed by fire from heaven, followed by Satan being cast into hell, judgment day, and the end of the world.

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

Satan imprisoned for 1000 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.

Isa 24:21-23 In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders – with great glory.

The vision that John saw following the vision of Armageddon is that of Satan being captured and bound for 1000 years (the millennium). The Antichrist and the false prophet will be captured and cast immediately into hell (19:20), but Satan will be bound and imprisoned in the Abyss for the duration of Messiah's reign on earth.

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

The mention of a chain, Satan being bound, and the locking and sealing of the pit, all emphasize the fact that Satan will have no influence on earth during the time of his incarceration. There is no way he can deceive the nations or do anything during that time; not until he is released for a short time at the end. Satan has already been

identified as the enormous red dragon of chapter 13. He is that ancient serpent (Gen 3) called the devil, who leads the whole world astray.

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

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

The resurrection of the righteous (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 about 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 share 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.

Dan 7:9 As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of days took his seat.

Lk 14:14 Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

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

John saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. We saw these thrones in chapter 4. Those seated there were interpreted as representatives of the saints from both Israel and the Church. It is the redeemed who are the children of God; it is they who will judge and rule with the Messiah. Jesus told his disciples that at the renewal of everything, when he sits on his glorious throne, his disciples would also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). When Zechariah spoke about the Lord's future rule

from Jerusalem, he said many nations would be joined to him and become his people (Zech 2:10-13). He will again choose Jerusalem and will live there.

Then John saw the souls of those who had been martyred during the Great Tribulation. They had not worshiped the Antichrist. He had seen their souls before in Rev 6:9, but this time he sees these dead people come back to life and reign with Christ for 1000 years. We are then told that this is the first resurrection. Jesus spoke about the *resurrection of the righteous* in Lk 14:14, and in Lk 20:35-36, where he speaks of those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age (the millennium) and in the resurrection *from* the dead.

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

John very clearly states that there are two resurrections, by adding that the rest of the dead are not resurrected until the 1000 years of messianic reign are over. It is not only the martyrs who are resurrected, it is the whole Church who will reign with Christ (Rev 5:9), including those who are raptured (1 Thess 4:17). The Church is blessed and holy because they take part in the first resurrection and will be priests of God and Christ during the millennium. This is the clear and simple interpretation of these verses.

Satan's release and final rebellion (20:7-10)

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog – and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

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

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

It seems extraordinary that Satan could deceive the nations once more after they have experienced a 1000-year peaceful and prosperous reign under the Messiah. We have no evidence that the subjects of the Messianic kingdom will be born again of God's Spirit, apart from the conversion of Israel, which will be a special act of God's grace, when

the Messiah defeats their enemies at Armageddon. This final act of Satan may occur to illustrate how callous is the unregenerate heart of man. They gather for battle, travel across the face of the earth, and surround the camp of the saints. The center of Messiah's kingdom on earth will be Jerusalem and the nation of Israel, his people. Israel's habitation during their wanderings after the Exodus was always called their camp.

There is no battle; Satan and his armies come to a swift end when fire comes down from heaven and devours them. The devil will be cast into hell where the Antichrist and the false prophet were thrown, and where they'll be tormented day and night forever. A harsh, but just, sentence. The subjects of the Messianic kingdom will enter it as unbelievers, survivors of the tribulation period (Zech 14:18). They'll marry and have children and live long lives (Isa 65:20). The world will still be divided into nations and ethnic groups, and they'll be punished if they don't go to Jerusalem regularly to pay homage to the Messiah. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9).

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

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

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to 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 they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Dan 7:10 The court was seated, and the books were opened.

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

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

John sees the unregenerate dead, now resurrected, whether they were important or not (20:5). He also sees the Book of Life, which was mentioned in Rev 3:5. The dead cannot complain about their judgment; everyone will be judged according to what they have done.

The Lord searches the heart and examines the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct and what his deeds deserve (Jer 17:10). The righteous are also rewarded for their deeds (Mt 16:27), but that occurred at the first resurrection, at Jesus' coming, so that they might enjoy their rewards during the millennium. The opening of books is not literal; we are to realize that everything we have said and done is accurately recorded in the mind of God. Nothing has been missed, and he will reward those who deserve reward, and punish those who deserve punishment.

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

A new heaven and a new earth (21:1)

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth”, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

Isa 65:17-18 See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. 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. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

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

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

John doesn’t only see a new earth, he sees a new sky as well as a new earth. He builds on a prophecy by Haggai which said that God will shake the sky, the earth, the sea, the dry land, and the nations. The condition of the whole of the visible creation will be changed and reduced to ruins. The nations will be defeated, and their armies

destroyed, and then Jesus, the desired of all nations, will come and the temple will be filled with glory (Hag. 2:6).

John's millennial earth has no sea. If this is taken literally, it means a complete change in the meteorology of the new earth. The amount of water would remain constant but be distributed differently so that destructive weather patterns would cease. The lifting of the Edenic curse will bring about many changes in the new world. But the evidence is in favor of the sea being a symbol of chaos and the turbulent, rebellious nations (Dan 7:2-3, Rev 12:17, 13:1) which will certainly be subdued during the millennium. On judgment day, after the millennium, the sea gives up its dead (Rev 20:13).

The rest of the chapter is a symbolic description of New Jerusalem, which should not be taken as a description of the new earth.

The New Jerusalem (21:2-8)

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

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

New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to a *renewed earth* at the beginning of the millennium. The marriage of the Lamb was signaled in Rev 19:7-9 and now the glorified resurrected Church is ready to reign with the Messiah. The city is described by a metaphor: a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Christ is the bridegroom, the saints are the bride. It is not a literal marriage; marriage symbolizes the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church, the spiritual union between God and man. God will live with man and be their God,

and they will be his people. There will be no more suffering in this new environment; no more death or pain. This is something new. God said he would make everything new.

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

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

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

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

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

An angel shows John the bride of the Lamb; that is, the Messiah's wife. But he does not see a woman; he is taken up a very high mountain to watch the descent of a city that is a 2,200 km cube. This cube of course is a metaphor; we have to imagine what it means. This is not

an earthly city; it descends from heaven, and it shines with the glory of God, like precious jewels. This city represents God's glorified people. Just imagine all those precious jewels, pearls, and gold. That symbolizes our ultimate glorification. The community is huge, numbering in the millions, and it is made up of people who have been redeemed from every tribe, nation, and language. When the holy city descends to earth, it will shine with the glory of God.

The number 12 recurs throughout. There are 12 gates symbolizing free access, with 12 angels symbolizing security. The gates are inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, and there are 12 foundations inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles. The redeemed are God's people from both old and new covenants, from ancient Israel and the Church. Each side of the city is 12 thousand stadia and the walls are 144 (12 x 12) cubits thick! That is 200 feet or 65 meters! The population has previously been symbolized as numbering 144,000 (14:1). Paul said that Christians are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:19-21). Our living conditions are not revealed. No one has seen or heard or conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9). The holy city, the new Jerusalem is a symbolic representation of our life in union with Christ during the millennium, and it is also an appropriate description of our existence into eternity.

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

The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, as pure as transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

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

Isa 54:11-12 Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with lapis lazuli. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.

Isa 60:3, 5b, 11, 19 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn ... The wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. ... Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night ... The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

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

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

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

Life in paradise (22:1-5)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Tree of Life produces twelve kinds of fruit, with a fresh crop every month. Another metaphor again which should not be taken literally. The tree of life symbolizes the fact that whatever we need to nourish and keep our bodies healthy will be extravagantly provided for. The leaves are for the healing of the nations. The saints in the city will be ruling the world and serving God and the Lamb, bringing this healing from their throne to the unregenerate nations outside the gates. The curse our world has experienced since Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden will be gone.

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

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

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." 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. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!" Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy."

Dan 8:26 Seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.

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

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

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

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

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

Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 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.

Num 24:17b I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.

Ps 62:12 You reward everyone according to what they have done.

Isa 62:11b See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

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

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

angels (1 Cor 6:2-3). In addition to general rewards that all the saints will enjoy, Christ will reward each person according to what he or she has done.

In Rev 1:8, 21:6 a voice says he is the Alpha and Omega; it could be the Father or the Son speaking. Here it is the Son who claims to be the Beginning and the End. He is God, the LORD of the Old Testament, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col1:17).

The saints are blessed, because they have been cleansed in the blood of Jesus, giving them access to the Tree of Life and to the Holy City. The 'dogs' are outside. This is a metaphor for the wicked who are outside of salvation. Their place will one day be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur (Rev 21:8), but here the context is the millennium, and 'outside' means outside of the holy city. The nations over whom the Messiah and the saints are ruling are the wicked who, because of their sin, threw in their lot with the Antichrist.

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

**Let all come and receive the gift of life
(22:17-21)**

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this scroll. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Deut 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

The book finishes appropriately with an invitation and a warning. The Holy Spirit and the Church have always been the ones responsible for drawing people to Christ through the word of God. Those who respond continue the invitation. Salvation is a gift, it can't be earned. As the woman at the well was informed, the water of life is the eternal and supernatural life communicated to us by the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38-39).

If God's Spirit lives in you, just as God raised Jesus from the dead, he will also raise you from the dead and give life to your mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).

Moses warned the Israelites long ago that they should not add or subtract from God's word. The present warning is given specifically for the book of Revelation. Because it is not an easy book to interpret, there is the temptation to find fault with the text or to force it into a preconceived mold. This is forbidden; nothing should be added or taken away. The warning is not only addressed to scholars but to *everyone who hears* the prophecy contained in the book. The consequences are dire.

Jesus says he is coming soon. Our response should be to make sure we know him, and that our sins are forgiven. We should desire and pray for his return, even when life is comfortable. The book closes with a benediction for those who have washed their robes. Let everyone ask

themselves if they are clothed in the righteousness that Christ provides and which is obtained through faith alone.