



The Reign of Christ

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The Reign on Earth

“Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ;” Titus 2:13

The return of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of the Christian. There are many promises which will be fulfilled on that glorious day when Jesus gathers all who trust in him. One treasured promise is that after we are gathered up we will be with Him forever [1 Thessalonians 4:17]. Jesus Christ is coming back to claim the throne of His father David [Luke 1: 23]. We believe that reign takes place on earth and will last for a thousand years [Revelation. 20: 4]. To fulfil the Old Testament prophecies He will reign from Jerusalem with His rule extending over all the earth.

If we are to be with Him, then we will also be on earth during that time. In Revelation the four living creatures and the twenty four elders bring before the Lamb the prayers of the saints. These prayers contain a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals;

For you were slain and have redeemed us to God by your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation

And made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth” Revelation 5: 9, 10

The destiny of the believer is not just to be with Christ but also to reign with Him. Earlier in Revelation there is a promise to those who overcome that they will be given authority over the nations [Revelation 2: 26]. The promise is repeated in Revelation 20: 6 *“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has*

no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years". In verse 4 there is a special mention of the martyrs who will be given particular responsibilities during the thousand years. Verse 6 confirms that ruling over the earth is not limited to the martyrs. All who share in the first resurrection will also have a part to play in the kingdom of Christ on earth.

In writing to the Corinthian church Paul is astonished that members are using secular courts to resolve disputes. They are allowing the unrighteous, who are not part of the kingdom of God, to judge between them! How can the unbeliever, in rebellion against God, possibly judge the believer who has God's law written on his heart! Paul clearly understands that the destiny of the believer is to reign with Christ. *"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" 1 Corinthians 6: 2.* He confirms this in writing to Timothy by quoting a well-known saying: *"If we endure we shall also reign with him". 2 Timothy 2: 12.* Those who faithfully follow Jesus Christ to the end will be raised to reign.

Raised to reign with Christ, and yet Paul was aware that Timothy was struggling with those in Ephesus who wasted time bickering about words. While at Corinth the church was plagued by many problems. They were so immature in the faith that Paul says he has to speak to them as carnal and babes. Were these really the people whom Jesus will use to guide the world in the ways of righteousness when He establishes His kingdom?

The church in the twenty first century cannot claim to be any better. All the problems experienced by Corinth and many more are to be found in today's churches. The same question, which we raised regarding Corinth, could be asked today. Will these be the people Jesus uses to reign in His kingdom?

In the parable of the talents [Matthew 25: 14 – 30, Luke 19: 12 - 27] Jesus explained who He will use to rule over His kingdom. In both

records of this parable those who have proved faithful in whatever task they have been given while He is away will be rewarded with greater responsibility when He returns. Those who have been unfaithful will be discarded. They will be cast out of His kingdom into darkness.

Of the servant who is faithful while his master is away Jesus says, *“Blessed is that servant whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.”* Luke 12: 43, 44. Obedient service in the present life is preparation for greater service in the coming kingdom.

There are some who regard the work place as merely a spring board for evangelism. Therefore to them obedient service is limited to how effective we have been in speaking about the gospel. That is much too narrow an understanding. We will be judged on how faithfully we have discharged our calling. The skills learned during our life time in this age will either directly or indirectly be used by the Lord when we come to reign with Him.

Jesus is coming back to a shattered world which will need to be rebuilt. It will be the world of the 21st Century, not some imaginary idyllic period from the past which in reality never existed. Many of those who will people the nations during the reign of Christ are living now. It is their world complete with its technology which Jesus Christ is coming to rule over. He will send out His servants to transform that world.

Jesus demonstrated when He lived on earth that He did not regard technological advance as evil. For most of His life He worked as a carpenter and builder. As such He used the tools of His trade, hammers, saws, chisels, none of which existed in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis we learn that technological advance alongside the arts first came through the rebellious line of Cain [Genesis 4: 19 -24]. Despite their pedigree Jesus used the tools developed by man for good.

He will use our skills to turn that which has been used for evil to good. In His kingdom He will need demolition contractors to bulldoze the pagan temples which litter the earth. He will need military men to decommission and find new uses for the weapons of war. He will need librarians to remove from libraries all that is falsely called knowledge. He will need mothers to comfort hurting families and children. The list could go on and on to include teachers, farmers, lawyers, legislators, administrators, IT consultants, and many many more. In fact all the skills required by 21st Century society will be useful during the reign of Jesus Christ on earth.

Those who lived in earlier centuries will be needed too. Skills long lost will be brought back to usefulness. Parts of the world which are not so highly developed will require guidance from those who understand their society.

Pastors, Bible teachers and missionaries will be sent out into the world to instruct people about Jesus Christ. In that time *“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” Habakkuk 2: 14.*

Is this too radical a vision of the future? It may be controversial but it is founded in the belief that **we are coming back to reign**. We are not turning up to be spectators enthralled by all that Jesus is doing. We are called to be co-workers with Christ actively involved in the establishment and administration of His kingdom. Faithful service now is equipping us for our future destiny.

We are coming back to reign over the world we know. Not the world of some past era. That is why those who were beheaded for Christ during the reign of the beast are singled out for special mention above all the other martyrs down the centuries. They stood firm during the final years of the age and proved themselves incorruptible. They are

the ones who understand this present world more than others. They can be trusted to be over all who serve Christ in His kingdom.

A common objection to what has been described above questions how there can be two types of people living on earth at the same time. There will be those in their mortal bodies and the redeemed in resurrection bodies living side by side. I answer that objection by pointing out that it has happened before. For a brief period of time Jesus in His resurrection body met with, talked with, ate with, his disciples who were still mortal. Admittedly they were perplexed at times and weren't quite sure who He was but it happened.

So we eagerly look forward to the day when Jesus Christ returns. *"When Christ who is our life appears then you also will appear with Him in glory". Colossians 3: 4*

The People of His Kingdom

When Jesus returns we will come back with Him. In our resurrection bodies we are coming back to reign. When we return our initial task will be to pick up the pieces of a shattered world. The skills we have learned in the present age will be used to God's glory in the age to come.

Prior to the return of Christ, Satan will stir up rebellion. It is a desperate attempt to reassert his crumbling authority over the world. In Revelation it is described as the reign of the beast. Second Thessalonians refers to it as the apostasy under the 'man of sin'. God allows this rebellion *"that they may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"* 2 Thessalonians 2: 12.

At the end of the present age Christ will return to claim His throne. Satan will incite the armies of the beast and kings of the earth to resist Him. All those who have followed the 'man of sin' to make war on Christ, will be destroyed [Revelation 19: 21]. As will those who worship the beast and his image or receive his mark. They will be subject to the wrath of God [Revelation 14: 9 -11].

Who will be left for us to reign over?

This rebellion has often been portrayed as global and absolute. If that is correct it raises the question, who will be left for us to reign over? If all have followed or worshipped the beast, all will be destroyed.

Jesus is coming back to reign over the nations [Isaiah 2: 4, 42: 1]. We will share in that rule as confirmed in the Lord's word to the church at Thyatira, *"and he who overcomes and keeps my works to the end, to him I will give power over the nations, ..."* Revelation 2: 26. Therefore there will be nations and peoples who are not condemned in the judgment that falls on the beast and his followers.

Sheep and Goats

To understand this we look to one of the fundamental qualities of God, which is mercy. The deception of the 'man of sin' may be widespread and severe but many will not be taken in. Those who show mercy will receive mercy. This is I believe the interpretation of that much debated parable of the sheep and the goats found in Matthew 25: 31 - 46.

At the end of this age there will be a judgment. If there is no literal reign of Christ on earth the judgment in this parable would be the final judgment. If it is the final judgment it throws up problems for it is based on works not faith. A tiny act of mercy will be rewarded with a ticket to heaven. This contradicts the New Testament teaching that salvation is by faith not works.

If we understand that the parable of the sheep and the goats is not the final judgment but is about who will populate the millennial kingdom, then the problem is removed. It becomes a parable about mercy.

The parable identifies three groups of people. The Sheep, who are selected because they showed compassion to 'My brethren'. The Goats, who are rejected because they had no compassion. And My Brethren.

My Brethren

Elsewhere Jesus defined His brethren as *"those who hear the word of God and do it"*. Luke 8: 21.

'My brethren' will stand out as a distinct group because by this time they have received their resurrection bodies. They have been judged and found worthy. Those who are part of the first resurrection are described as blessed and holy. The second death has no power over them and they are not part of this judgment.

The Sheep and the Goats

The sheep are those who showed mercy. In the brethren's time of need the sheep had compassion on them. The reward for mercy is to be shown mercy. The goats however showed no compassion. They followed the beast in his persecution of the saints. Now they follow him into everlasting punishment.

A problem many have with this interpretation is the reward given to the compassionate sheep. They are to; *"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* The sheep are welcomed into the kingdom of Christ on earth. From the foundation of the world it was the intention of the Father to establish a kingdom ruled over by His beloved Son. Therefore it can be said of this kingdom that it was prepared before the foundation of the world. On the ground of their mercy they are granted a foretaste of the eternal kingdom in which all the righteous will dwell.

If the sheep now accept the rule of Christ they will enjoy eternal life. This is not a second chance. It is prolonging their first chance because they have not died. These are the people who will make up the nations which populate the planet during the reign of Christ.

The Messiah's Reign

Psalm 72 closes with the words, *"The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended."* In his closing words King David asks for a blessing on his reign and that of his son who will follow him. As we read the Psalm it is clear that, as a prophet, David is being inspired to see beyond his own time to the reign of a future king. A king whose reign will last for ever and will extend to all nations. It is a psalm which gives an insight into the kingdom which the sheep will enter during reign of Christ.

It will be a righteous reign. People will be judged according to God's law not the arbitrary laws of man. Because of this there will be justice

for the poor. The children of the needy and those who have no helper will be delivered. There will be no more violence or oppression.

Famine and starvation will not exist in Christ's kingdom. There will be an abundance of grain. Harvest will be plentiful. Creation will be restored. Worship will be continuous.

His reign will, as the psalm expresses it, lead to an abundance of peace. Isaiah picks up the theme with those well known words, *"They shall beat their swords into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks"* Isaiah 2: 4. There will be no more war between nations.

This is the kingdom intended by God from before the foundation of the world. It is a kingdom which will last for one thousand years [Revelation 20: 4] and then, for all who gladly accept the reign of Christ, it will continue into eternity.

The enduring rebellion

Not all will gladly accept His rule. Psalm 72 states that He will have to crush the oppressor. Just as the roots of rebellion remained in the descendants of Noah so the 'good people' who inherit this kingdom will still have sin in their hearts. There will be those whose hearts are inclined to wickedness. To maintain the reign of justice and peace Jesus will have to rule with an iron rod. Of this time we read in Isaiah, *"He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked"*. Isaiah 11: 4. Revelation takes this up describing the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as one who will rule the nations with a rod of iron, [Revelation 19: 15].

Many in this kingdom will pay lip service to honouring Christ. When the opportunity arises they will rebel. The rejection of Christ's rule will lead to the final judgment.

Worship

Jesus is coming back to reign. He will reign on earth for a thousand years. We are coming back to reign with Him. The millennial reign of Christ will be a time in which, as foreseen by Habakkuk, *"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."* Habakkuk 2: 14

Worship in the Millennium

During His reign there will be universal worship of Jesus Christ as King of Kings. In Psalm 22 the psalmist foresees the suffering of the Christ, but he does not leave it there. He also sees Christ's triumph when He will reign over the nations. *"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's and He rules over the nations."* Psalm 22: 27, 28. The one, who was once despised, will become the centre of worship. Throughout the Psalms the declaration is repeated that a time is coming when all the earth will worship the God of Israel.

Gathered to Jerusalem

Isaiah chapter 11 looks forward to a time when peace and harmony is restored to the earth. At that time the Gentiles shall seek the Lord. *"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place will be glorious."* Isaiah 11: 10. They will seek Him and find Him in Jerusalem. *"At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem."* Jeremiah 3: 17. In that city the people will be gathered to praise the Lord, *"To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise*

in Jerusalem, when the peoples are gathered together, and Kingdoms, to serve the Lord". Psalm 102: 21, 22

Feasts reinstated

There will be set times when the nations are to come and worship. *"...everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King and the Lord of Hosts and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."* Zechariah 14: 16.

We read in Isaiah that it is not just at Tabernacles that the people are to gather. *"And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord."* Isaiah 66: 23.

Some may be surprised to learn that some of the Old Testament feasts are to be reinstated in the Millennium. An explanation is given in Ezekiel. Referring to the reinstituted order of priests we read, *"And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the unholy and cause them to discern between the unclean and clean. In controversy they shall stand as judges and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed meetings and they shall hallow my Sabbaths"*. Ezekiel 44: 23 – 24. The laws, feasts and Sabbaths will fulfill the same purpose as in the Old Covenant. They will be used as a means of teaching people God's ways.

In Ezekiel 45 there are four feasts to be celebrated in the Millennial Kingdom. Three feasts, Passover, Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles come from the Old Covenant. To these is added the new feast of New Year. The four feasts will be celebrated as reminders of the completed work of Christ.

Passover sets the sacrifices in context. It reminds of the willing sacrifice of Christ. Unleavened Bread reminds that His was a sacrifice without sin. Tabernacles will be a celebration of the Messiah's reign.

Today nations have their national and independence days. These are days set apart to express national pride. That is the role Tabernacles will fulfill in the Millennium.

The New Year feast is for cleansing of the Temple. Sacrifice is offered to atone for everyone who has sinned unintentionally or in ignorance. This is to teach people that even unintentional sins require a sacrifice so that the sanctuary is not defiled.

Sacrifices Reinstated

Perhaps more surprising than the celebration of the feasts is the reintroduction of animal sacrifice. Of the sons of the foreigners who serve the Lord we read, *“their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar”*. Isaiah 56: 7.

We understand the sacrificial system to have been completely fulfilled and brought to an end by the all sufficient atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We forget that none of the Old Testament sacrifices ever finally atoned for sin. *“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin.”* Hebrews 10: 11. They existed for the purpose of teaching that there is a need for a sacrifice which can cancel our sin. The only sacrifice which counts is that of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The sacrifices of the Old Testament have been described as the invoice while those of the Millennial Kingdom are the receipt. One looks forward to the payment which has to be made. The other looks back to the payment which has been made. Neither is the payment; that was made on our behalf by Jesus.

Unintentional sin committed during the reign of Christ on earth is already covered by His sacrifice and can be forgiven. The intentional rebellion which takes place at the end of the thousand years can never

be forgiven. For such sin justice demands and receives eternal punishment.

A Temple

With festivals and sacrifices it is natural to conclude that a Temple is needed. *“Now it shall come to pass in the later days that the mountain of the Lord’s House shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.”* Isaiah 2: 2. Ezekiel adds that God will dwell with Israel. *“I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God and they shall be My people.”* Ezekiel 37: 26, 27

If we accept that Christ is coming back and will live with His people in Jerusalem and that there will be a house built for Him, then the prophecy at the end of Ezekiel in chapters 40 to 47 ceases to be allegory and becomes the description of a real millennial Temple.

The level of detail is comparable with that provided in Exodus for the construction of the tabernacle. Of both God says that they must be built according to His design [Exodus 25: 40, Ezekiel 43: 10 - 12]. Ezekiel is told to write down the details of the design. The reason given is that the precision of the prophecy would cause Israel to repent. As Israel builds this temple according to God’s design they will remember their past laxness towards His laws. Holiness is to be taken seriously.

When reading Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48 we need to remember that for the writer this was very exciting. Ezekiel was a priest. His life’s work for which he had trained was service in the Temple. Before he had entered into this service he was taken away as a slave to Babylon. A priest without a Temple is like a fish out of water. Life has little point. During his time in slavery the dreadful news had come that the Temple been burnt down. All his hopes were dashed. Then twenty years into

his captivity he receives this vision of a new Temple, a Temple more perfect and more beautiful than the one which had been destroyed.

In this Temple a number of the things which were included in the Tabernacle are missing: There is no veil separating the Holy from the Holy of Holies. The veil symbolizing our separation from God was torn when Christ died for our sins. There is no table of shew bread. The shew bread looked forward to Jesus who is the bread of life. The real bread from heaven is now dwelling with His people the symbol is no longer necessary. There is no lamp stand. Jesus, the light of the world, is now living in the world. There is no Ark of the Covenant or mercy seat. Jesus has confirmed His covenant with Israel and through Him they have obtained mercy. There is no high priest for Jesus is our high priest forever.

There is an altar on which sacrifices will be made as a reminder of the cost of Christ's sacrifice.

There is a stream of living water flowing from the door. Is this literal river or is it an allegory? Like so much in prophecy it appears to be both. There will be a river flowing from Jerusalem to bring life to a barren and parched land. It also symbolizes the new life which Jesus will bring to a wounded world.

Ezekiel had first encountered God in a vision of His glory beside the river Cheba. That vision assured him that God was not tied to one place but could even be with them in captivity. In this vision Ezekiel the priest is assured that everything which is wrong with the world is going to be put right. There will be another Temple and God's glory will return.

Creation Renewed

Jesus is coming back, not just to reign over a kingdom, but also to liberate Creation.

When God made this world He saw that it was very good. It was a perfect world in which sin and death had no place. Nature was in harmony. Then Satan rebelled and deceived mankind into sin. The fruit of that sin spread through all Creation. Gentle creatures living in peace soon became, as has been said of its present state, 'nature red in tooth and claw'.

God's hand prevents self-destruction, which would be the inevitable result if sin were not restrained. In this world there is both great beauty and also the scars of sin making ugly what was once good. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes that, *"For we know that the whole of creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now"*. Romans 8: 22. The natural world is tortured by the corruption of our sin. We see the effect of sin on creatures all around us.

One day a sparrow hawk knocked a sparrow out of the sky. It landed outside my living room window. The hawk pounced and carried the sparrow away to eat. Both are beautiful creatures. Eating its fellow creature was not part of God's Creation. It is the consequence of the corruption of our sin.

Creation set free

We praise God that the fallen state of the world is not the end of the matter. *"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."* Romans 8: 20, 21. The present futility is not the permanent state. Creation will be set free. That freedom is directly

linked to our freedom. It will be set free when we are set free. At present we are clothed in a mortal body, a body, which like creation, is dying because of sin. Soon we are to be clothed with a resurrection body when the mortal puts on immortality. Then we will be free.

We do not have to wait until the New Jerusalem for the perfect creation to be restored. The renewal will start when Jesus returns and we are raised. Jesus called it the “*regeneration*”, *Matthew 19: 28*. Peter referred to it as “*the times of restoration of all things*” *Acts 3: 21*. When Jesus returns He will begin the restoration of this world to its former glory.

Paul gets so excited over this revelation that he writes, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*” *Romans 8: 18* [nasv]. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to see the perfect world which God created, a world which revealed the glory of God through His handiwork? Paul says that any suffering which we may be experiencing today cannot be compared to the joy, the awe, the wonder of being part of the regeneration. Then we will see the world as God made it. It is a prospect which should get every environmentalist knocking at our doors eager to sign up to be part of this promise.

Harmony between animals

To encourage us, God has given glimpses of what the regeneration will be like. Perhaps best known is the passage from Isaiah: “*And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD*

as the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah 11: 6 – 9. Also “The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,” says the Lord,” Isaiah 65: 25.

Today’s world is evil in the sight of God. The Creator, who cares when even a sparrow falls to the ground, cannot look with pleasure on the killing instinct which has corrupted what was once so good. Such evil will be banished from the kingdom of Jesus Christ in which *“they will not hurt or destroy”*. We will see wildness tamed and paradise restored.

When God created the world he gave to the beasts, birds and reptiles every green herb for food [Genesis 1: 30]. In the kingdom of Christ that natural state will be restored. Sceptical biologists argue that carnivorous predators such as lions cannot survive without meat. That has been demonstrated to be incorrect. For more information read ‘The lion that wouldn’t eat meat’ on www.creation.com. Follow the links to read other articles on vegetarian carnivores.

No longer will there be any fear. The friendship between mankind and animals will be restored. Wolves, leopards, lions will be like pets to the children.

Healing of the environment

“...the desert shall blossom as the rose; it shall blossom, abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing.” Isaiah 35: 1, 2. The natural world is pictured as rejoicing at the return of Christ. We have seen in recent years how that with careful irrigation, Israel has been able to make the desert bloom. The Bible promises that when Jesus returns there will be abundant water. *“For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water;” Isaiah 35: 6 – 7.* Such will be the abundance when the sky no longer holds back its rain that the crops will

be plentiful. *"the days are coming says the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper," Amos 9: 13.* Before the reaper has had time to harvest the crops it will be time to plough and sow again.

Men may fear the coming of the Lord for He will hold them to account for their sinful actions, but the natural world will rejoice. It will be set free from its present futility. *"Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it; let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth."* Psalm 98: 7, 8. We live in a world which *"groans and labours"* due to its *"slavery to corruption"*. A gardener can tell when a plant is stressed and not performing well. In contrast a plant which is grown in the right conditions and given the right amount of food and water will flourish. God looks at our world and sees it stressed. Whether in deserts or windswept grass lands, plants struggle to survive. When Jesus returns the conditions will change. Plants of the field and trees of the woods will thrive [Psalm 96: 12].

Joy

The Lord granted to Isaiah a vision of what it would be like on that glorious day. *"For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of thorns shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of brier shall come up the myrtle tree;"* Isaiah 55: 12, 13. Under the curse [Genesis 3: 18] Adam's toil was rewarded by thorns and thistles. In the regeneration the curse is removed. Thorns and briars will be replaced with cypress and myrtle. We will be filled with joy as we see a world more wonderful, more beautiful, more healthy than anything we have yet experienced.

How will all this come about? The secret is to be found in Isaiah 11:9. *"For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."* As peoples and nations are brought into

submission to the reign of Christ, He will heal their lands. The promise made to Israel, that if they humbled themselves and prayed He would hear from heaven and heal their land [2 Chronicles 7: 14], will now cover the whole earth. That healing is pictured in a stream of living water flowing out from Jerusalem to the East and West [Zechariah 14: 8, 9]. Ezekiel sees the river flowing into the Dead Sea [Ezekiel 47: 8 - 10]. Wherever it goes there is life and healing.

Israel

God cannot reject Israel

The judgment of Israel and Judah for their sin is a reoccurring theme in the Prophets. The nation will be punished for its rebellion and hardness of heart but God's anger will not last. *"For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you". Isaiah 54: 7.* And also *"I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside."* Zechariah 10: 6. God was angry with Israel but in His time He will forgive them.

Although they are still the chosen people, they will not know Him. Their destitution will last many days. But after that they will, *"seek the Lord their God and David their king"*. Hosea 3: 5.

God cannot reject Israel. That assurance is attached to the promise of a new covenant [Jeremiah 31: 35 – 37]. There will come a time when God gathers them back from the nations in which they were scattered [Micah 4: 6 – 7]. From the lame and the outcast He will make a strong nation.

The Bible makes clear that this will not happen because Israel deserves mercy. In Ezekiel 36: 19 – 32 we read that wherever Israel went they profaned God's holy name. God will restore them for the sake of His holy name. At that time Israel will be ashamed of the disgrace they brought on the name of the Lord.

Note the number of times that God says 'I will' in this passage.

I will sanctify my great name.

I will take you from among the nations

I will sprinkle clean water on you

I will cleanse you

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you
I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh
I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes
I will deliver you from your uncleanness
I will call for the grain and multiply it
I will multiply your fruit trees

The restoration and sanctification of Israel will be an act of Sovereign Grace. It has nothing to do with whether they deserve it. If it were down to Israel's repenting we may doubt if it will ever come about. It is not down to them. It is the word of God. He will bring it about.

God will keep his promises

God will fulfill the promise which He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that the land will be an everlasting possession. The prophets transfer the promise to the time when Israel is restored to the land and ruled over by God's servant David. [Isaiah 60: 21, Ezekiel 37: 24 - 25, Amos 9: 15].

Under the covenant made at Sinai, God promised to dwell with Israel [Leviticus 26: 9 – 13]. In the short term it was conditional on obedience. God will not make a promise which He does not intend to keep. In sovereign grace He will bring about a change of heart so that the time will come when He can dwell with His people. The covenant of Peace which the Lord will establish with them is no longer conditional. It will come to pass as a testimony to the nations [Ezekiel 37: 26 – 28]. In Isaiah we are assured that even if the mountains shall depart and the hills are removed that covenant of peace with Israel will last [Isaiah 54: 10].

Jubilee

The year of jubilee is to be fulfilled in Christ's Second Coming. Leviticus 25 sets out detailed instructions for the year of Jubilee. At the jubilee, property is redeemed and slaves set free. Jubilee begins with a trumpet sounding throughout the land on the Day of Atonement. In Isaiah, Israel is promised that when the great trumpet sounds they will be gathered one by one [Isaiah 27: 12, 13].

It will be a glorious return. In distant lands they will remember the Lord and return [Zechariah 10: 9, 10]. From the East and West the Lord will bring them back to Jerusalem [Zechariah 8: 7 – 8]. The scattered people will be assembled from the four corners of the earth [Isaiah 11:11-12, 16]. The nations will help in gathering them and strangers will be added to them [Isaiah 14: 1, 2]. Ships of Tarshish will bring them back [Isaiah 60: 8 – 9]. It will be a time of joy. The ransomed of the Lord will return with singing [Isaiah 35: 8 – 10].

The acceptable year of the Lord in Isaiah 61: 1 – 7 looks forward to this future jubilee. The captives gain their liberty and a double portion of land will be theirs. We note that in Daniel 9: 25 there are seven periods of seven years from the second command to restore Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince. That is also a jubilee.

Abundance and Prosperity

The covenant with Israel promised abundance [Leviticus 26:3-5]. A promise repeated in Deuteronomy 28: 1 – 12 and 30: 8 – 10. This is also transformed from a conditional covenant to a prophetic promise. Israel will become a land renowned for its crops [Ezekiel 34: 26, 27, 29]. Following the wedding of the Lamb the earth will produce abundance [Hosea 2: 19 – 22]. The land will become like the Garden of Eden [Ezekiel 36: 30, 35]. The mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk [Joel 3: 18]. In fulfillment of Leviticus 26:10 the harvests

will be so plentiful that it will be time to sow before it is gathered in [Amos 9: 13 - 15].

Long life and healing

Another conditional promise which will be fulfilled in the millennium is the removal of sickness and barrenness [Exodus 23: 25, 26 also Deuteronomy 7: 13-15]. In the time of blessing that follows the return of Christ, the barren will rejoice in the number of their children [Isaiah 54: 1 – 5a]. The land will overflow with their children [Isaiah 49: 18 – 20]

Long life is promised. They shall not bring forth children for trouble but will be able to enjoy the fruit of their labours [Isaiah 65: 20 -23, Zechariah 8: 4 -5].

This promise highlights something we have glossed over so far. It appears that the people of nation of Israel, who repent at the coming of the Lord, will remain in their natural body. They will live, have children and eventually die at extreme old age.

The Jews and Gentiles who have come to faith before the gathering up of the church and physical return of Christ will be in resurrection bodies [1 Corinthians 15: 51 – 53, 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17]. They will enjoy the blessing of the first resurrection, secure in the knowledge that their names are written in the Book of Life, the final judgment and second death have no power over them [Revelation 20: 6].

Holiness and obedience

In the millennium Israel will be characterized by holiness and obedience to the Lord's commandments. There was a conditional promise in Deuteronomy that Israel would be a holy people [Deuteronomy 28: 9 – 13]. In Isaiah, by the grace of God, following the time of refining, Israel will be made holy. They will become a holy nation [Isaiah 4: 2- 4]. If the people are refined and made holy, then their

names will be written in the Book of Life. On the Day of Judgment they will join the saints of former ages and enter the New Jerusalem.

The New Covenant

As believers we entered into the blessings of the new covenant, which Jesus announced at the last supper. We received the blessings when as sinners we repented and accepted that His blood paid the price for our sin. The outward sign that we have entered into the new covenant is a new nature, a nature which seeks to obey God and displays the fruit of the Spirit.

We read in Zechariah that Israel will mourn when: *“they will look on Me whom they pierced.” Zechariah 12: 10.* There will come a day when Israel will recognize Jesus as the one who gave His life for them. The promise of a new covenant was made to Israel. God has said that He will bring on them all the good that He has promised [Jeremiah 32: 40 - 42]. Under the reign of Christ, Israel will receive a new heart which enables them to gladly obey their King.

“Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit”. Isaiah 27: 6

The wedding feast

“Alleluia. For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready.” Revelation 19: 6, 7.

When Babylon, the kingdom of this world, falls the whole of heaven rejoices. The great enemy of the kingdom of God has been judged. The Harlot’s persecution of the saints is avenged. The way is now cleared for ‘*the marriage supper of the Lamb*’, to proceed. Jesus can come to claim His bride.

The wedding garment

We are told that the bride has made herself ready and been granted to be arrayed in fine linen. In the customs of the Jewish wedding after the betrothal ceremony there would be a period, usually a year before the wedding took place. In that year the Bride would spend her time preparing the wedding garment.

This would be a linen garment, which she would embroider to make it as beautiful as possible, in readiness for the great day when the bridegroom would return to take her to the marriage feast. In Revelation the garments are not made beautiful by embroidery but by the righteous acts of the saints, [Revelation 19: 8].

The verse is careful to say, “*granted to her*”, to wear the fine linen. These righteous acts are not of our own doing but the work of the Holy Spirit living in us. It should be the supreme desire of all of us who are born again of the Holy Spirit, to allow Him to work in our lives so that the way we live is pleasing to our Lord. We will then have beautiful garments to wear on that great day.

Who is the Bride?

After the return of Christ to this earth and the defeat of His enemies there will be a wedding feast, but who is the bride? If you ask Christians who is the bride of Christ most will answer; the church.

Jesus set much of His ministry into the context of the customs surrounding the Jewish wedding. He spoke of guests invited to a wedding feast, [Matthew 22: 1 – 14]. As a bridegroom He would come and take us to the place He had prepared for us, [John 14: 3]. He likened His followers to 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom, [Matthew 25: 1 – 13]. He referred to Himself as the Bridegroom, [Matthew 9:15, Mark 2: 19].

Paul saw himself in the role of a matchmaker with regard to the Church at Corinth, [2 Corinthians 11: 2] and the relationship between husbands and wives should be a picture of Christ and His church, [Ephesians 5: 25 – 27].

If our studies were based solely on the New Testament it would be reasonable to conclude that the Church was the Bride of Christ.

The Bridegroom

The Bible for John the Baptist was the Old Testament. In John 3: 29 we read that John the Baptist called Jesus the Bridegroom. In John's mind there would have been no doubt as to the identity of the bride. The Lord [Jehovah] already had a wife, *"Return, O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married to you."* Jeremiah 3: 14.

This is a theme picked up in Jeremiah 31: 31, 32. The prophet Jeremiah understood the covenant made at Sinai as a betrothal. At that time, God committed Himself to Israel, as a husband commits himself to a wife. After the Lord called Israel out of Egypt, under the canopy of cloud that covered the mountain, He gave Israel His marriage contract, the Mosaic Law.

Israel broke her side of the contract. Despite Israel's adultery the Lord cannot break His side of the agreement for He hates divorce, [Malachi 2: 16]. One day God will renew the marriage contract.

The new covenant promises that Israel will receive a new heart, [Jeremiah 31: 33]. According to Ezekiel 36: 24 – 28 this transformation will take place when the Lord gathers Israel from the nations at the time He comes to reign. In the context of Jeremiah the new covenant is a renewal of the marriage contract.

“For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercy I will gather you”. Isaiah 54: 7. The time is coming when the Lord, as a husband, will show everlasting kindness to Israel, [Isaiah 54: 4 – 8]. The story of Hosea and Gomer graphically depicts the heartbreak that the Lord experienced over Israel's unfaithfulness. It also contains the promise of renewal. The Lord will betroth Israel to Himself for ever, [Hosea 2: 16, 19, 20].

By declaring Jesus to be the Bridegroom, John the Baptist was not voicing a new revelation. He was stating that Jesus the bridegroom was Jehovah the Lord God of Israel.

If Israel is the bride, what about the church?

The church is grafted into the rootstock from which Israel the natural branches came, [Romans 11: 24 – 29]. We inherit the promises given to Israel by becoming part of Israel. When Jesus commissioned the disciples to go into all nations, He was declaring that the Gentiles could also be joined with Israel in His bride. There is one bride and one bridegroom for both Jew and Gentile.

“The marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” The bride will be ready when the full number of the Gentiles has been gathered in and the nation of Israel has received a new heart. Once the Bride is complete the wedding feast can begin.

The feast will take place on earth, for it is to the earth that Jesus and His followers have returned and it is on the earth that renewed Israel is to be found. The betrothal of Israel to the Lord took place at Sinai under the canopy of cloud, [Deuteronomy 4: 11-13]. The consummation of the marriage will also take place under a covering spread by God. There will be a canopy over mount Zion, [Isaiah 4: 5]. The word used here for covering is chuppah, which is also used for the wedding canopy. It is on Mount Zion that the Lord will make a feast for all peoples, [Isaiah 25: 6 – 9].

Who will be invited to this feast?

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be there as will Moses and Elijah, in their resurrection bodies. The feast was intended for the Jews but sadly many will not sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, [Matthew 8: 10 – 12]. The saints of the Old Testament will be there in resurrection bodies. The Gentiles, from every tribe and nation, who have placed their trust in Christ, will be there also in resurrection bodies. Newly converted Israel will also be there in mortal bodies. They will now have entered into the new covenant promised to them in Jeremiah. At that time God says of Israel, *“I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins I will remember no more”*. Jeremiah 31: 34 and *“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them.”* Ezekiel 36: 27.

At the feast, Jesus will serve those who were watching for His return, [Luke 12: 37]. But those Jews who have, down the ages, rejected their Messiah will not be present. Nor will any unbeliever and gentile who believes that on the basis of his own righteousness, he can take part in the feast, [Matthew 22: 11 – 13].

Tabernacles

The feast of tabernacles was instituted at Sinai as a time of rejoicing over the Lord’s bountiful provision, [Deuteronomy 16: 13 – 15]. It was

also to be a reminder of how God had provided for Israel on the exodus from Egypt, [Leviticus 23: 41 -43].

The Jews understand the Feast of Tabernacles to prefigure the marriage of Israel to the Messiah. That is why for the Jews, to this day, it is a popular time for weddings to take place. At the last trumpet He will come for His bride Israel. The feast of Tabernacles is also known as the feast of ingathering, [Exodus 23: 16], which is fitting for a time when the fullness of the Gentiles has been gathered in and the nation of Israel has entered into the New Covenant.

The wedding feast will be a time of great joy for all the redeemed:

- A celebration of the gathered harvest on Christ's return.
- A celebration of the renewal of the earth under the reign of Christ.
- A celebration that the second death has no power over those who are part of the first resurrection.
- A celebration of all the blessings which will come during the reign of Christ and the eternity beyond.
- A celebration that Jesus is no longer an absent friend.
- A celebration of the redeemed now united with their Saviour forever.

What a wonderful day for all who accept the invitation to that feast and are clothed in His garments of righteousness.

In Jewish tradition, after the wedding feast the Bridegroom took his bride to their new home. Our new home is the New Jerusalem where at the end of the Millennium, when the feast is over we will live with Christ forever.

The Judgment

We have looked at what the Bible reveals about the millennial reign of Christ. We now come to how the millennium will end. Its ending is like fitting in the last few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The picture is now complete. The story which began with the creation is coming to a conclusion.

To encourage godly living Peter, in his second letter, writes that a future judgment is coming. In that judgment, the present heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire. *“But the heavens and earth, which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 2 Peter 3: 7*

Some take this passage as denying the literal millennial reign of Christ on earth. In verse 10, the destruction of the earth seems to take place on the day of the Lord when He comes as a thief in the night. Peter is aware that his readers will have been taught about the thousand year reign of Christ. Therefore they will question what he has written. To explain he adds, *“But beloved do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.” 2 Peter 3: 8.* He recognizes that he has compressed the timing of events in order to make a point. In the eternal scheme of things the intervening age is a necessary, but short lived, interlude. We can look beyond it to the final outcome.

He is making the point that to avoid being part of the final destruction we must ensure that our lives are marked by holy conduct and godliness. We are to be diligent to be found in Him in peace, without spot, blameless.

“The earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” 2 Pet 3: 10

As the resurrected faithful, during the Millennium, we will work with Jesus to lovingly restore the world. There will be peace, justice, prosperity and plenty for all for a thousand years. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of God. The natural world will be restored to its created harmony. At the end of that time all that work of restoration will be destroyed.

Destroyed! Why?

In chapter 2 we considered who will people the earth during this period. The resurrected faithful are coming back to reign with Christ. They will reign over the nations which are left after the time of anguish which ends the present age. These are people who have neither followed 'the beast' in his blasphemous challenge to God nor come to faith in Christ. In their favour, they have shown some humanity and compassion to the brethren of Christ in their suffering. Therefore Jesus invites them to experience His reign.

Good people

The gospel of the street says that; 'if there is a heaven I will be alright for I am a good person'. By implication if God doesn't allow 'good people' into heaven He is unjust. The sheep would see themselves as 'good people'. The millennial reign of Christ as it progresses answers the question of why 'good people' lacking faith cannot be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem. Although some of these people will gladly accept the reign of Christ and enter into a saving relationship with their Lord, it seems that most will come to resent His rule.

Gog and Magog

We move on to the final outcome of that reign which vindicates the justice of God. Ezekiel 38 and 39 is a passage of scripture which is widely debated. These chapters describe the invasion of Gog and Magog. There are a number of views with regard to the timing of this

invasion. Pre-tribulation, Mid-tribulation, Post-tribulation, the beginning of the Millennium and the end of the Millennium all have their advocates. To these I add another understanding.

Two separate events are described in these chapters which tie in with Revelation 19 and 20. In Revelation 19 there is an allusion to Ezekiel 39 with the birds being gathered to the supper of the great God. Revelation 20 makes a more direct reference to Gog and Magog as found in Ezekiel 38. The events are both similar but also have some marked differences which set them apart in time. There is a reason for this.

Rejection of Christ's rule

At the end of this present age Jesus will return to claim His throne. The people of this world will oppose His rule and gather to fight against Him.

At the end of the millennium there will be another rebellion [Revelation 20: 7- 9]. As we have seen the population of the world which is left is made up of 'good people', who according to their own estimation deserve to be admitted to heaven. But now they have a choice. At the end of the 1000 years Satan is released to test them. At last they have a champion to stand against Christ. The 'good' people and their descendants will reject the reign of Christ. His laws have been a burden to them. Instead of Christ they chose Satan.

That is why we have these two descriptions of the rebellion by Gog. It emphasizes that the end of the coming age will be almost identical to the end of this present age. Both end in the rejection of the reign of Christ.

Can all be saved in the end?

In the parish magazine, the Vicar for the parish in which I live, wrote, "As a Christian I believe that, at a time and in a way that I am not

completely able to comprehend, we will share in a joy which transcends our limited understanding, with those who have gone before.” In the context of his article it is clear that he believes all will share that joy one day. So contrary to the teaching of the Bible, he believes that none will suffer eternal punishment. It is a nice thought but also a cruel deception.

The Millennial reign of Christ will prove that even the ‘good people’ in reality hate His rule. All excuses that man makes as to why he disobeys God have now been answered. The rebellion vindicates the justice of God in forbidding all, who have not willingly submitted to His reign in their life, from entering the New Jerusalem. At the end of Revelation we read: *“Blessed are those who do His commands, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates of the city. But outside are the dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and whoever loves and practices a lie.” Revelation 22: 14, 15.*

The citizens of the millennial kingdom and all those who preceded them in the former ages have one thing in common *“they love and practice a lie”*. The same old lie that Eve fell for in the garden. Satan’s constant lie is that God does not want to give the best to His creation. Satan taunts, ‘listen to me and you will become like God’. We now understand why so many are outside. For a time men will have lived in a foretaste of the perfect kingdom of God. Their one wish will be to destroy it.

It is the perfect justice of God that only those who freely chose to submit to His rule over their lives can enter through the gates to the eternal city. Those who are outwardly good by the standards of this world but inwardly in rebellion cannot and never will be able to enter.

The judgment of Jesus has been vindicated. He is righteous and just. **Worthy is the Lamb.**

A completed story

We now understand what the whole Biblical story has been leading up to. From the Fall to the close of the Millennium it has been a tale of man's rebellion and failure, set against the grace of God. Families failed, nations failed, kings failed. The battle against our own human nature always ends in defeat for those who have not been transformed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3: 3. Jesus was surprised that Nicodemus a ruler in Israel had not learnt this lesson. The history of his nation Israel should have been sufficient to convince him of this truth. Neither man nor nature can enter that kingdom unless they are born again.

Have we died to self that we may live for Christ? The Apostle Paul, who recognised his natural inability to live a godly life, was able to call on the Corinthians to *"imitate me"*. He could do so because he knew he had died to self. Now he lived for Christ. To the Galatians he wrote. *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* Galatians 2: 20.

The whole of nature and all the people who are to live in the new creation must be born again. Everything that is not born again will be destroyed by fire.

Eternal Punishment

Eternal punishment is not a popular subject within the present day church. Many preachers avoid such a negative topic altogether. The Bible warns that the rebellious will be left outside the gates of the New Jerusalem and that it won't be a place of joy. According to Jesus it will be a fiery furnace and a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth [Matthew 13: 42].

Perhaps we all by nature believe that we deserve to enter the Kingdom of God. Better by far is to recognize that all of us deserve to be among those who are shut out. We should be among those who are tormented in the fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Once we get that understanding right we will diligently seek to become people marked out by holy conduct and godliness.

Sin corrupted the present heavens when Satan and his angels rebelled. Sin has left its scar on the wonderful creation of this earth. The millennium will show us that, despite the perfect reign of Christ, sin is endemic. It has to be totally destroyed. Nothing with any trace of sin can ever enter the New Jerusalem.

Eternal Life

We have all sinned. Only the grace of God in sending Jesus to die for our sin can atone for our guilt. Entry into the kingdom of God is never a right. It is a privilege bought for us at an unfathomable price.

Can I achieve a life without sin so that I am worthy to enter the kingdom? The answer is NO. But I know someone who is able to do that work in me. *"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* *Philippians 1: 6.*

There is going to be a people who enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. They are a people who have allowed Jesus to enter and transform their lives to make them worthy sinless citizens of His eternal kingdom. They have been born again.

The Eternal City - Revelation 21: 1 – 21

The Bible covers the whole of human history. The story starts from before man was created and continues through to the beginning of eternity. As an old hymn says of this wonderful book, "It begins with the tale of a garden and ends with a city of gold".

If we are on the way which leads to life our journey is heading towards a glorious destination. In the book of Hebrews we are assured that for those who have faith, *"God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."* Hebrews 11:16. But for now, travellers on that straight way are strangers and pilgrims in this life.

The previous chapter faced up to the fact that there will be a judgment at the end of the millennial reign of Christ. At that time many will be shut out of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. They will be condemned to a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, also described by Jesus as a furnace of fire and in Revelation as a lake of fire.

Those who, in faith and obedience to Jesus, do His commands will enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. They will be a people utterly devoted to their Lord, for they will know that their only right to be there is due to His shed blood.

The closing chapters of the Book of Revelation bring us to the point in time when the old creation has fled away from the presence of God. Everything sinful and evil has been cast into the lake of fire. The devil and his followers will never again disturb the peace of heaven.

The New Jerusalem described in these chapters is the fulfilment of all that God intended when He created Man. The vision is put into words, using things we know. That is the only means of revealing to us what; *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what*

God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit". 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10. We should let the Holy Spirit use the words of Revelation to thrill our imagination with the glory of all that God is doing now and the end to which all the redeemed are moving.

God dwells with Men

In scripture the organized peoples of the earth are described as the sea. Divided, turbulent, tossed back and forth by the waves of new ideas and doctrines, without God they are at the mercy of every deceit. Separated into nations whose fortunes, like the tide of the sea, rise and fall. Sometimes there is storm, sometimes calm, but the quest for lasting peace eludes them. In this vision John sees that all the turbulence has passed away with the old creation. There is now only one nation 'the people of God' and real peace reigns.

The Son of God left the glory of His Father's house, emptied Himself and became Man so that He would win a bride and bring her to a new home, the new earth. That bride is now seen. The faithful have been prepared by the Holy Spirit to be that bride. They will live with the Bridegroom in the New Jerusalem. God and man will live forever in harmony. The lessons of sin have been learnt. Death, sorrow and pain are now things of the past.

Even in glory Jesus has not changed. The one who washed the disciple's feet will wipe away our tears. He will wipe away all the sorrowful memories of the past. In His presence, with His love and wisdom, we will have eternal joy and peace.

"And the one sitting on the throne said, "Behold I make all things new." And he said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true." Revelation 21:5

From His throne God calls us to take special note of the following words. They are addressed to those who overcome and sum up the

promises to the overcomers in each of the seven churches. These overcomers will inherit all the promises of God. But those in the church who live by the values of Babylon will share her destiny. As Revelation draws to a close the exhortations and warnings become more intense. God does not wish any to perish but all to come to repentance.

The work of redemption was completed on the cross when Jesus cried, *"It is finished"*. *John 19:30*. The work of the New Creation will be finished when God proclaims, *"It is done"*. *Revelation 21: 6*.

Out of the old has come the new. Paul deals with this principle of death and resurrection. The seed is planted and dies, so that a new plant may come from it. This is the principle running through the whole of creation. Without Christ nothing can be made new. *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"*. *1 Corinthians 5: 17*.

God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Everything, which has happened, is happening or will happen, is under His rule.

The Bride of the Lamb

There was a time when Satan took Jesus to a high mountain to show Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. Jesus saw not as Satan sees, but through the eyes of God. He was being offered Babylon the great prostitute. He refused this tainted prize, firm in the resolve to purchase a bride who would be glorious and pure. We now see that bride radiant in her beauty. What John saw and tries to describe far exceeds anything we have experienced. Let the Holy Spirit impress on our own minds the wonder of all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

The walls ensure that all who dwell in the city are secure. The gates with twelve angels guarding them remind us that when man was

ejected from the Garden of Eden an angel was sent to guard the way to the tree of life. God has angels guarding the entrances to the city and the way to the tree of life. Eternal life is a precious gift only given to those who receive Jesus. There is no way to it for those who have rejected Christ.

There are gates on the East, North, South and West welcoming people from the four corners of the earth. The city belongs to the people of God who are represented by the twelve tribes of Israel whose names are on the gates.

There is only one foundation for our faith, Jesus. The Apostles were sent out to preach the gospel of Jesus to the whole world. Only by believing that gospel can we enter the city. Without faith in that gospel there is an impenetrable wall, which denies us, access to God. Therefore the names of the Apostles are on the foundations to remind us that unless we accept the gospel of which they were witnesses the wall of separation from God remains.

A Perfect City

The proportions of the city are a cube with dimensions, which are symbolic for perfection. The walls also have a perfect dimension. The city is pure gold, as pure glass representing something better than the finest man can conceive. The foundations are precious stones reminding us of how precious in the sight of God is the ministry of the Apostles who faithfully bore witness for Him.

After Judas betrayed Christ, there were only eleven Apostles. Who does the twelfth stone represent? Is it Matthias who was elected by the Apostles or Paul called by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles?

The first foundation is jasper, as is the wall. The light of the city is described as like jasper. Christ is her light and her walls are salvation. On the breastplate worn by the High Priest the last stone was jasper. In

that foundation we have a memorial to Christ, the first and the last. He was the first apostle and foundation of our faith. He will be the last when the enemy death is destroyed and the kingdom is delivered to God His Father. No more war, no more death all because of Christ.

Each gate is a single pearl. Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a pearl of great price. The story describes two aspects of the kingdom. To the Gentile, at the time of Christ, a pearl was immensely valuable, worth selling everything to buy. But to the Jew a pearl was worthless. It could not be worn because it came from a creature that was listed in Leviticus as unclean. Why would anyone sell everything to buy an article of no value? That is what Jesus did when He descended to this earth to purchase a people mired in sin. Worthless because of our sin but treated by God as a pearl of great price. The gates of pearl are an eternal reminder of that infinite sacrifice. They are also a reminder to us that it is worth everything we have to be part of that heavenly city.

The gates of the city are open to all who have presented themselves a living sacrifice, no longer conforming to the pattern of this world but transformed by the renewing of their minds. The street of the city is gold, like transparent glass. Everything about this city is transparent. In glory we too will be transparent, by the grace of God we will be transformed so that there will be nothing to hide.

This is the city which Jesus is preparing for us. As this present age draws to a close we are to encourage each other with this hope of our eternal home.

Eternal Life - Revelation 21: 22 - 22: 20

“But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for He has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11: 16.

One thing that unites those listed in the roll call of faith found in Hebrews 11, and all the faithful who have, like them, been strangers and pilgrims on this earth, is the quest for a better, that is, a heavenly country. The faithful of the Old Covenant believed that God had something better in store for them. We have, at the end of Revelation, been given a glimpse of what is to come. None of us will really know the wonder and glory of that city until we are walking the streets paved with gold, but at least we have a foretaste.

The Light of the Lord

The city will be filled with the presence of God. All earthly aids to worship will no longer be required. Before the fall, Adam enjoyed fellowship with God. The barrier of sin did not exist. In the New Jerusalem with sin banished that fellowship will be restored. There will be fullness of joy and perfect worship in the city.

In this present world our light is merely the light of the sun. Our vision is limited to what can be seen by that light. In heaven we will have the light of God. Everything He sees we will be able to see. In this life most of creation is hidden to us. In the next the vastness of all that God has made will be revealed for us to enjoy.

From the book of Daniel we learn that the saints will be raised up to reign with Christ. [Daniel 7:27]. In the sight of God the faithful are the true kings of this world. The righteous are the glory and honour of any nation for *“righteousness exalts a nation”*. Proverbs 14:34.

The freedom of that city is expressed in the gates never being shut. There is no compulsion because everyone in the city has chosen to follow the Lamb. The night of sin has passed. No one will think of disobedience for they have experienced the tragic consequence of rebellion.

Verse 27 contains a warning. Nothing unclean or causes an abomination or lie will be allowed to enter the city. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life can enter. It is by faith in Christ that we can be cleansed and made new. Only then will we be fit to live in the presence of God. We are not to deceive ourselves into thinking that there is any other way.

The River and Trees of Life

From the throne flows the river of life, clear as crystal. The crystal clear water symbolizes the Holy Spirit [John 7:37 - 39]. By drinking deeply and often we will be kept clean and pure fit to live in the transparent radiance of the city.

After the fall man was exiled from the Garden of Eden to ensure that he did not eat of the tree of life and live forever. Now we are invited to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. The trees, nourished by the living water, will bear fruit to feed us and leaves to heal us. They represent the word of God which will both sustain us and shelter us throughout eternity. A wonderful picture is created of the nations of the world gathered under the shade of the trees, eating the fruit and drinking the water, and living in eternal harmony under the guiding word of God. The curse, which divided man from God and man from man, has been removed.

In the centre of this wonderful gathering is the throne of God and of the Lamb. Because we are clean we will be able to look on the face of God and live. Gladly we shall serve Him and bear His name for the

only reason we are there is because He paid the supreme price to redeem us from the punishment that should have been ours.

Soon

We have been permitted a glimpse of our glorious future. Revelation now closes with a reminder of its opening words. This is a message sent direct from the throne of God, therefore it is absolutely reliable. To this assurance Jesus adds His own words of encouragement [Revelation 22: 7].

As at the beginning we are reminded that the time is near. If the time is near then it may be in our lifetime. Therefore every generation should study and take seriously this prophecy. We are promised that whether or not the Lord returns we will be blessed by studying and by keeping the words written here. The message contained in it is in fact for all time and every generation.

Jesus taught that the church should always be ready, alert, watching. By failing to watch the church has at many times and in many places become conformed to this world. Nowhere else in scripture are the consequences of being worldly so clearly spelt out. The worldly have no part in this city.

John is so amazed at what has been revealed that he cannot help but fall down in worship. He falls down at the feet of the angel who is showing him these things. The angels are our fellow servants of God. Like us they owe everything to Him. Therefore the angel rebukes John and reminds him that only God is to be worshipped [Revelation 22: 9].

At the close of the book of Daniel, he is told to seal up the words of his prophecy until the end time [Daniel 12:4]. It is then that they will be understood. The message of Revelation is not sealed for it is not limited to the end of this age. It is a call to righteous living throughout an evil age. In the end there will only be two types of people, the ones

who do wrong and the righteous. Those who are counted as righteous are to persevere in their righteousness until the Lord calls them home.

Jesus is coming soon to reward everyone according to his work. Are we ready? Only the obedient can enter the city and eat of the tree of life.

Outside the city

Those who continue in their rebellion will be treated like rubbish and left outside the city. Jesus used the term Gehenna to describe Hell. It was the name of the rubbish dump outside the city of Jerusalem from which the smoke of bonfires was always rising. He also called Hell the 'outermost darkness'. Hell is so far from the presence of God that His light, which floods His creation, never reaches it.

Our spacial ideas need to be reversed. The inside of the city will encompass the whole of God's creation. Outside is a tiny, miserable, eternally tormented place of darkness where everyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life will be consigned and forgotten.

Closing Words

Jesus emphasises the truth of the things in this prophecy. The morning star heralds the dawn and the coming kingdom. The root of David is to be its King. This prophecy, brought to the church by an angel sent by Jesus, is like the morning star, assuring us that soon the day will dawn.

The church, as the bride, unites with the Holy Spirit in saying "Come". With the anointing of the Holy Spirit the church is to share the invitation to come and drink of the water which springs up to eternal life. For the time being the invitation is still open.

The redemption that cost the life of the mighty Son of God, when He humbled Himself even to death on the cross, is so wonderful and

complete that God wants all to hear. They are to come and receive His forgiveness, and drink freely of the water of life. The reading of this prophecy should stir us all to the urgency of the task.

Such is the divine inspiration of this prophecy that it closes with a warning. Those who tamper with what it says will lose their place in the New Jerusalem. Both translators and interpreters beware; to alter the meaning and mislead the redeemed will be judged severely by God. The matters dealt with here lead either to eternal salvation or eternal punishment. Take care lest some are caused to stumble

Jesus Himself bears witness to all that is written in this prophecy. He closes the vision with the promise that He is coming quickly. To which we all reply, **“Yes, Come Lord Jesus”**.

Trumpet Sounds has for more than 25 years published a quarterly newsletter commenting on the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecy. The newsletter is available free of charge either by email or printed copy by post. To request a regular copy please use the contact email at the bottom of the page.

Our Beliefs

We believe: in one God eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ is God manifest as man, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His atoning death and bodily resurrection, His ascension into heaven and His return in power and glory to judge the earth.

We believe: that salvation is only through faith in shed blood of Jesus Christ which paid the debt of our sin, that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to lead a victorious Christian life, that all people who have ever lived will be raised from the dead some to eternal judgement and some to eternal life.

We believe that the Bible does not just contain but is the uniquely inspired and inerrant word of God. The Bible is the revelation of God's truth to men, truth which has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the true meaning of scripture is the natural and most obvious interpretation. We pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us into that understanding and enable us to hold firmly to the truth.

The study of the prophetic events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ has suffered from many imposed systems of interpretation which have brought about considerable confusion within the church. We pray that the simplicity of the teaching of Scripture with regard to the Second Coming will be restored.

We pray that any who read this book who have not already trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ will be challenged to make that commitment. Further help is available from the email address below:

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