

**THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST**  
**Rev (17:1-19:10) 19:11-22:5 (26 May 2002)**  
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I don't believe in an afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse (Isaac Asimov, 1920-1992).

“The boredom of heaven” . . . that poignant phrase struck me with an almost violent viciousness. Why? Because it made me ponder if perhaps we Christians have presented heaven so one-dimensionally that it would be a bore. On the other hand, for someone who finds no delight in God in this life, the thought of spending an eternity with God would seem boring at best and tortuous at worst.

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), in his book *The Great Divorce* (1945), writes of a fantastic bus ride from hell to heaven; a bus ride that is a round trip for some passengers. For those who do not seek heaven, it is a place where they do not wish to stay.

In the Book of Revelation, beginning with verse 11 of chapter 19 and running to verse 5 of chapter 22, the Apostle John reveals seven visions of the End. Notice that John does not number these last visions, thereby avoiding the false notion that he is giving a strictly chronological progression of end-time events. What we should see is not an apocalyptic calendar of events; rather, what we should see is an apocalyptic kaleidoscope through which we view the End in its awfulness and in its awesomeness. As one commentator comments:

Here is no calendarization of the End, but a tour through an eschatological art gallery in which the theme of God's victory at the end of history is treated in seven different pictures, each complete in itself with its own message and with little concern for chronology (M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation* (John Knox Press, 1989), 195).

I invite you to join me as we walk through John's end-time art gallery. We enter at chapter 19 and verse 11.

<sup>[1]Rev 19:11</sup>I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup>The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. <sup>15</sup>Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. <sup>16</sup>On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

<sup>[2]19:17</sup>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, <sup>18</sup>so

that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”<sup>19</sup> Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army.<sup>20</sup> But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.<sup>21</sup> The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

<sup>[3]20:1</sup> And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.<sup>2</sup> He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>[4]20:4</sup> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.<sup>5</sup> (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

<sup>[5]20:7</sup> When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison<sup>8</sup> and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

<sup>[6]20:11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.<sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.<sup>15</sup> If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>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."

<sup>5</sup>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."

<sup>6</sup>He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup>He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup>But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

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

<sup>15</sup>The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick [high], by man's measurement, which the angel was using. <sup>18</sup>The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. <sup>19</sup>The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup>the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup>The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

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

<sup>22:1</sup>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 <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever (NIV, but paragraph arrangement is mine).

While the devil and his agent—the beast—reign, the earth is a place of deceit and delusion. Truth is seen first in heaven and then when it comes from heaven to earth. At 19:11, heaven opens and truth Himself, the Word of God, rides to earth. This is the point at which the perspective of heaven prevails on earth, finally dispelling all the lies of the beast. The imagery is not the slaughtered Lamb turned slaughterer, it is the witness turned judge. Jesus Christ who is the Savior now is the Judge at the end of time.

The consequence of Christ's coming is the destruction of all evil, but this destruction is not immediate, it is delayed a thousand years. *The significance of the millennium is it demonstrates the victory of the martyrs*: those whom the beast put to death are those who truly live—and those who contested the beast's right to rule and suffered for it are those who will in the end rule as universally as the beast—and for much longer: a thousand years! Finally, to demonstrate that their victory in Christ's kingdom is not one which evil can again reverse, that it is God's last word for good against evil, the devil is given a last chance to deceive the nations again. But it is no re-run of the rule of the beast. The citadel of the saints proves impregnable. *To sum up, the millennium portrays the meaning of the martyrs' victory rather than predicting the manner of their victory.*

Now, we turn our attention to the New Jerusalem. The description of the New Jerusalem is a remarkable weaving together of many strands of Old Testament tradition into a marvelous picture of a place in which people live in the immediate presence of God. First, as a *place*, the New Jerusalem is at once paradise, holy city, and temple. As paradise, it is the natural world in its ideal state; as holy city, it fulfills the ideal of the ancient city; and as temple, it is the place of God's immediate presence, where His worshippers see His face. The New Jerusalem includes paradise in the form of the water of life, the tree of life, and—in accordance with Jewish traditions—it is built out of the precious stones and metals of paradise. As a city, the New Jerusalem is the seat of the divine kingdom. The throne which had been in heaven is now in the New Jerusalem. But this city needs no temple, because the whole city is filled with God's presence. As a result, the city itself becomes a temple. Its perfectly cubic shape makes it like no city ever imagined, but it is like the holy of holies in the temple.

Second, the New Jerusalem is also seen as a *people*. Note 21:3–

Behold, the dwelling of God is with humans.

He will dwell with them as their God:

they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them.

These words echo both (1) God's promise to dwell with His own people Israel and to be their God, and (2) His promise that many nations will also be His people with whom He will dwell in Zion. John combines the language of God's commitment to His covenant people with the most universalistic reference to all people.

And third, the New Jerusalem is understood as *divine presence*. God's creation reaches its final fulfillment when it becomes the scene of God's immediate presence. This is what is "new" about the new creation: it is the old creation filled with God's presence. Before chapter 21, Revelation confines the presence of God, as "the One who sits on the throne," to heaven, where His throne is. Only when all evil has been destroyed and His kingdom comes in its entirety, will God's throne be on earth. Then, when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, God will make His home with humanity on earth. In chapters 4 and 5, in heaven, the living creatures form an inner circle of priests in the immediate presence of God, and the twenty-four elders form an inner circle of thrones sharing God's rule. They mediate the worship of the rest of creation. In chapter 22, however, all who may enter the New Jerusalem have immediate access to God's throne on earth. They are priests who worship Him and kings who reign with Him.

The New Jerusalem—it is a *place*, a *people*, and a *presence*. Contrary to Isaac Asimov, it does not sound boring to me. But then again, I want to go there.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing thru,  
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;  
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,  
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

There is a wooden sign in my house that reads, "Home is where the Heart is." Where is your heart? Where is my heart? The answer reveals our home. For you see, *we are either at home or we are going home*. So, which is it?

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