

Revelation — Lesson 24

20:4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Does verse 4 describe a future situation or a past situation? For a clue, let's look at who is assembled here. We have seen this same cast of characters before — the martyrs and the beast. If we are correct that this beast is Rome, then this chapter is still talking about Rome.

And isn't that what we would expect? This entire book has been building toward the climax in these final three chapters. Do we really expect God to suddenly change the subject now that he has reached the grand conclusion?

Who are on the thrones in verse 4? It can be none other than the church. Jesus promised in Chapters 2 and 3 that those who overcame would share his rule over the nations. That is what we see here.

In addition to seeing the church as a whole, John also sees those individual Christians who were killed by Rome. He sees the martyrs who were killed because they had not worshipped the beast.

Had these Christians been defeated? Hardly! Revelation rings throughout with the message that death is not a defeat for a Christian. Defeat would have occurred had a Christian renounced Jesus in order to live. Remember Matthew 16:25 — “For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” The only defeated Christians were those who compromised with Rome.

What happens to these martyrs? They live and reign with Christ for 1000 years. The Revised Standard Version more accurately reads “they came to life” and reigned with Christ 1000 years. They are like the two witnesses we saw earlier. They appeared to have been killed and defeated by Rome, but they came to life. All was not as it seemed!

Is this resurrection literal or figurative? Our general rule with apocalyptic language is to understand language figuratively unless something forces us to understand it literally, and there is no reason to depart from that rule here. In fact, the Bible includes many *figurative* resurrections. Daniel 12:2, for example, is a figurative resurrection depicting the coming of the Messiah, and that same figurative resurrection is mentioned in Luke 2:34 by Simeon. Isaiah 26:19 and Hosea 13:14 are other examples.

What does this particular resurrection scene in verse 4 depict? It depicts the same thing in a new setting that was depicted in Ezekiel 37 where the same image was also used. In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel saw a bodily resurrection occur in the valley of dry bones. In verse 11, God told him that the bones were “the house of Israel” who had lost all of their hope. The resurrection of those bones was used to depict the restoration of their hope. Read verses 12-14 —

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.

Does such an interpretation fit the context of this passage? Yes, perfectly. These martyrs are figuratively raised to life to depict the restoration of hope that the church was experiencing. In Ezekiel the symbol was used to depict a national restoration of God’s people from

Babylonian captivity. Here the symbol is used to depict the restoration of God's people from Roman captivity.

What happens after they come to life? They reign with Christ for 1000 years. What does that mean? **We know what that means!** It means that their restoration is completely complete! Their *victory* over Rome is just as complete as was Satan's *defeat* with regard to Rome. Those two events are two sides of the same coin. If one is 1000 years, then so must be the other.

And note that they reign *with* Christ for 1000 years. You often hear people talk about the 1000 year reign *of* Christ, but where is that mentioned anywhere in these verses? The 1000 year period denotes the reign of the martyrs *with* Christ. There is no time limit given here (figuratively or otherwise) on the duration of Christ's reign.

Finally, we should recall our earlier comments about those who build elaborate religious theories based on a single verse or perhaps a few verses from Revelation. Isn't it odd that such an important theory (in their own mind) is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible? Barnes explains the situation well in his commentary on Revelation —

It is admitted, on all hands, that this doctrine [of premillennialism], if contained in the Scriptures at all, is found in this one passage only. It is not pretended that there is, in any other place, a direct affirmation that this will literally occur, nor would the advocates for that opinion undertake to show that it is fairly implied in any other part of the Bible. But it is strange, not to say improbable, that the doctrine of the literal resurrection of, the righteous, a thousand years before the wicked, should be announced in one passage only.

If premillennialism were true then wouldn't one have expected Paul to say something about it somewhere in his many letters? Instead, what Paul tells us is very different from premillennialism.

5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

Who are the rest of the dead in verse 5? This group must be those who died in service to the beast. It is the same group we saw in 19:21. Those in this group also come back to life, but they do not come back to life until after the 1000 years are over. That is, they have no part in the complete victory of the saints.

Verse 6 is the fifth of the seven beatitudes in this book. What is the *first* resurrection? At the end of verse 4 and in verse 5 we read: “They *came to life*, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not *come to life* until the thousand years were ended. *This* is the first resurrection.” To which of those two resurrections does “this” refer? Verse 6 gives us the answer. Those who are raised in the first resurrection are blessed and holy. They are the ones who reign with Christ 1000 years. Thus, the first resurrection is the resurrection mentioned at the end of verse 4.

If there is a first resurrection, then is there a *second* resurrection? Yes. The second resurrection is the one mentioned at the beginning of verse 5. Those in the second resurrection are the group that comes to life *after* the 1000 reign with Christ, and we will learn more about that group in verse 13.

What is the second death in verse 6? The second death is mentioned in contrast to the first death that resulted in the two groups of dead people we see in verses 4 and 5. The first death affected both those who were on the side of Christ and those who were on the side of the beast. One of those two groups, however, would not die again! The martyrs who came to life would not face the second death. The second death will affect only those who served the beast.

Is the second death the eternal death that awaits them at the end of time? Not necessarily. First, we have been discussing figurative resurrections and so we should not be surprised to also find figurative *deaths*. Second, although for some the first death was quite literal, for most of the Romans it was not. We have already discussed the figurative meaning of the seals, trumpets, and bowls that lead to their first death. Third, we must never lose sight of the time frame of the book, which we will see at least twice again before this book ends — it reveals things that are *shortly* to come to pass. And fourth, just as we see earlier that Heaven immediately awaits a faithful Christian after death, so too eternal torment immediately awaits the faithless after death. That latter fate was true even before the cross. (Luke 16:23) Thus, even if we were to conclude that this second death is the literal and eternal death that awaits the faithless, we would not have to conclude that it is a yet future event.

Some might ask why there will be a final judgment day if the faithful and the faithless already go to their respective destinations prior to that day. But don't we do the very same thing today in our criminal courts when we separate the guilt phase from the sentencing phase? A person's eternal fate is sealed on the day of that person's death, but the sentence will be proclaimed on a later day. And on that day the wicked will also be given the opportunity to do something they never did in this life — bend the knee to Jesus Christ and confess that he is Lord of all. Nero will one day be on his knees before the Lord Jesus Christ, as will we all.

Those who experience the first resurrection will not experience the second death. Instead, they will be priests and will reign with Christ for 1000 years. Was this something new for them? What this a status that these Christians had not previously enjoyed? Not at all! The church is a royal priesthood! (1 Peter 2:9) Revelation 1:5-6 tells us that we became part of a kingdom of priests when we were freed from our sins by the blood of Christ. These verses in Chapter 20 are simply a public reaffirmation of a status that the martyrs enjoyed even before their death. They reigned with Christ in life, as do we! They were royal priests in life, as are we!

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Why is Satan not loosed until after the 1000 years are ended? So that he will not detract from the picture of complete victory symbolized by the 1000 years. The “little while” in verse 3 during which Satan is loosed is contrasted with the 1000 year reign. Both periods of time depict a state of affairs. The church’s victory was total and complete. Satan’s victories will be neither total nor complete. Satan has *not* been loosed for 1000 years! Satan has been loosed for only a little while.

What causes Satan to be loosed? We aren’t told, but I like what Hailey has to say on that issue: “In the spirit of faithfulness [the early Christians] bound Satan by overcoming him. When such a spirit and loyal devotion to the principles and cause of Christ no longer distinguish God’s people, the restraining power is gone; Satan is loosed once more.”

What are Gog and Magog in verse 8? We first meet Gog of the land of Magog in Ezekiel 38:2-3 —

Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold I am

against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of
Meshech and Tubal.

Ezekiel 38:17 tells us that God had spoken about Gog “in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them.” And yet where is any such prophecy found in the Bible? No such prophecy mentions Gog by name, but there are many prophecies that foretell of heathen enemies of God’s people that would be defeated by God. There is no literal Gog or Magog. Instead, Gog of Magog figuratively depicts whoever happens to be the current enemy of God’s people. That is how he was used in Ezekiel 38.

The setting in Ezekiel was that the Jews had been promised a restored kingdom, and they had responded, “So what?” First there had been Egypt, and then the Philistines, and then Assyria, and now Babylon. Who was next? What guarantee did they have that the same thing wouldn’t happen to their newly restored kingdom?

To convince the Jews that under the Messiah their glory would be secure, Ezekiel used a symbolic battle with the fictitious Gog of the land of Magog to show that they would be able to defeat *any* enemy with the Messiah on their side. There, as here in Revelation, Gog of Magog denotes “anybody yet nobody in particular.” No matter who it is who attacks the church, that enemy will fare no better than Rome.

The meaning of the symbol is the same in Ezekiel and in Revelation. God’s people have just been vindicated from a terrible oppressor. A huge army gathers from all over the world to make war against them. God defeats that army without his people having to even lift a finger.

What God is saying is that “I have already defended and vindicated you in this present crisis and I will do so again anytime and anywhere no matter who rises against you.”

And once again that is a beautiful message for us today! I fear that the church today has developed a severe inferiority complex. If at any time the church could have felt inferior and powerless, it was during the Roman persecution — and yet the church then as now was anything but inferior or powerless. Rome was not the eternal kingdom!

That description belongs only to the church! Later in Chapter 21 we will find out exactly how God views the church, and he does *not* view it as inferior. If we see ourselves as inferior, is it any wonder if we find ourselves ineffective? The first step to being the kind of church that God wants us to be is to see ourselves as God sees us, and there is no better place to determine how God sees the church than right here in the closing chapters of Revelation. I fear that the church's neglect and misunderstanding of this great book have hindered the mission of the church.

And who is Gog today? Where is Magog today? What is our great enemy today? Whatever it is, God will deliver us from that great enemy if we remain faithful to God and refuse to compromise with Gog. Gog's army is huge. In Ezekiel 39:12 Gog's army was so large it took 7 months to bury them all! But however big and powerful the opponent, God can take care of them, but we must do our part. Remember Revelation 12:11 — "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

We also see in these verses that Satan would change his tactics after his defeat with regard to Rome. Rather than relying on a single great power as he did with Rome, verse 8 tells us he would gather his allies from the four corners of the earth. But wherever he gathers his army for battle, the war is the same one that has raged throughout the centuries starting with the opening chapters of the Bible, and the outcome of that battle is certain.

In verse 9, the army surrounds the beloved city. What is this city? It is the new Jerusalem that we will see later in 21:2. It is the church. The old Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God's people in the Old Testament. The new Jerusalem is the dwelling place for God's people in the New Testament. The new Jerusalem is the church, the beloved city.

The "camp of the Saints" in verse 9 is an interesting phrase. The word "camp" in Greek is a military term that is used six times in Acts to describe the barracks or headquarters of Roman soldiers. It is used

twice in Hebrews to describe the camp of Israel. The “camp of the Saints” is the barracks of God’s faithful army.

In verse 10, Satan is cast into a lake of fire to depict his utter and complete defeat. Why has he been completely defeated? Because he has just been told that no matter what he ever does he will never be able to defeat the church. Not one of his future attacks will ever be successful. His failure with regard to Rome will be the story of his life. His defeat is total and complete not just with regard to Rome but with regard to any army he may use to battle the church no matter how large or powerful that army may be. Satan cannot overcome the church!

Verses 4-10 have shown us the triumph of the church over Rome and the assurance of the church’s future security. Verses 11-15 will show us the other side of the coin. These next verses will show us what happened to those who bet against the church and lost! They will show us what happened to those who renounced Christ to save their lives here on earth.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

We see in these verses a great judgment scene. Is this the final judgment? It is certainly true that the Roman persecutors and the faithless Christians will one day face a literal final judgment that will be very similar to what is described here. But similarity of language does not prove identity of subject! The time frame of the book suggests that this is not the final judgment. The context of these verses suggests that this is not the final judgment. Let's try to avoid the temptation to suddenly jump ahead in time thousands of years!

Yes, I know that countless sermons have used these final chapters of Revelation to describe Heaven and the final judgment, but I also know that for many the book of Revelation is just a large cafeteria in which you move down the line picking what you want and leaving the rest. Could this language be used to describe the final judgment and the church in Heaven after the end of time? Yes. Is that what is being described? I don't think so. And if we have two possible explanations — one occurring shortly after the book was written and one that has yet to occur — shouldn't we prefer the one that occurred shortly after the book was written in light of the time frame given in this book?

Although the world will end with a literal judgment, there are many *other* judgment scenes in the Bible. The picture of God sitting in judgment is a common one in the Bible and often refers to events that are *not* the end of the world. In Psalm 9:4-7 the Psalmist uses a judgment scene to describe God's past judgments against the enemies of his people:

For thou hast maintained my just cause; thou hast sat on the throne giving righteous judgment. Thou hast rebuked the nations, thou hast destroyed the wicked; thou hast blotted out their name for ever and ever. The enemy have vanished in everlasting ruins; their cities thou hast rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.

Notice the past tense in those verses. Daniel 7 is another example. Recall that the fourth beast in Daniel 7 refers to the Roman empire, and read in Daniel 7:9-11 what *precedes* the destruction of that fourth beast:

I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened. I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame.

Does that sound familiar? Read Revelation 20:11-15 again! They are describing the same event. In both we have a throne. In both we have an occupant of that throne. In both we have books opened. In both we have fire. In both we have Rome. The parallels are inescapable — and Daniel gives us the *time* of the judgment — the days of the Roman empire.

Who is judged here? The dead that are raised in verse 13 are the ones who are judged here. Who are they? They are the “rest of the dead” from verse 5 — that is, they are the people who died in opposition to Christ and in the service of Rome. These are the ones who were killed by the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls.

These verses show the great contrast between those who stood with Christ and those who stood with Rome. Those who stood with Christ experience a complete and total victory symbolized by a 1000 year reign with Christ. Those who stood with Rome experience a complete and total defeat symbolized by death in a lake of fire.

But what about the book of life in verse 15? Why is it mentioned? That book is brought out to justify this sentence. We also know from Chapters 2-3 that there were some in this group who saw only a blotted out spot where their name had once been in that great book. Can you imagine anything worse than seeing a blank spot in that book and knowing that your name was once there? If there is anything more

horrible to contemplate than seeing erasure marks where your name once appeared in the book of life I'm not sure what it could be.

What about in verse 14 where it says that death and hades are defeated? That has to be the end of the world, right? Why? If I moved that event in any direction I would not move it *later* in time! Instead, I would move it toward the cross. That was when death and hades were defeated! Yes, it is certainly true that on that great last day when we are literally raised incorruptible it will come to pass that "death is swallowed up in victory," (1 Corinthians 15:54), but it is equally true that death was defeated at the cross and at Christ's resurrection from the dead. As Romans 6:8-9 tells us, "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him." The defeat of death is a past event now, and it was a past event when Revelation was written. As 2 Timothy 1:10 tells us, Jesus "has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Past tense!

Why then are death and hades shown as being defeated here? Because Rome's power of death had been removed. Death is personified in Revelation and nowhere is that clearer than in verse 13 where Death gives up its dead! **Rome's defeat was Satan's defeat, and Satan's defeat was Death's defeat.** Rome had used death as a terrible weapon, and that was all over.

What is left in this book? Chapters 21 and 22 conclude the book with a beautiful description of the triumphant and victorious church. In fact, nowhere will you find a more beautiful description of the church than in these final chapters of the Bible. The Old Testament ends with a curse. Let's see how the New Testament ends.

Chapter Twenty One

The church has just come through a major crisis, and these final two chapters describe the victorious and vindicated church that comes out

of that crisis. We will hear about the newness of its environment — a new heaven and a new earth. We will hear about its beauty — golden streets and jeweled walls. We will hear about its purity — a beautiful bride. We will hear about its stability and strength — huge walls and a city four-square. We will hear about its importance and its testimony — a source of light to those living in darkness.

The question for us will be whether these descriptions of the church apply to the church on earth then and now or rather to the church in Heaven at the end of all time. We already know which of those two options fits better with the time frame and the context, but is there perhaps some language used in these chapters that requires us to move these chapters forward in time? We can all agree that many of these descriptions found here could apply equally well to the Lord's church at any point in its history, but is that true of *all* the descriptions here? Stay tuned!

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

In 20:11 the earth and the sky fled from the presence of God, and no place was found for them. The figure of heaven and earth passing away is common in the Bible. God depicts the judgment of the ungodly by *figuratively* bringing their world to an end just as one day he will *literally* bring their world to an end.

We have seen throughout this book how literal events are used as symbols to describe other events. For example, we have seen the literal plagues of Egypt and the literal fire of Sodom used as figures to describe the judgment of Rome. Those literal events were *past* events, but we also see the same thing done with *future* literal events. The events that will occur at the literal judgment at the end of time are used here (and elsewhere in the Bible) to figuratively describe other judgments by God. So, too, the literal dismantling of the world that someday will occur is used here to figuratively describe the dismantling of Rome's world.

In Isaiah 13 God dismantles the earth and the stars to depict the judgment of Babylon by the Medes. In Isaiah 34 the heavens are dissolved and rolled together as a scroll to depict a judgment against Edom. Matthew 24:29 describes the judgment of Jerusalem as a day when “the sun [shall] be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” Joel described the events leading up to the establishment of the church in Acts 2 as a time of “blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.” (Acts 2:19-20 quoting Joel 2:30-31)

Is verse 1 discussing the final judgment at the end of time? While that event could be described with language such as this, there is no reason to conclude that John has suddenly leapt forward in time by thousands of years. The context of Chapter 21 and the time frame of this book suggest that this language is describing the judgment of Rome. And that conclusion fits perfectly with how the same language is used in Isaiah and Matthew to describe other past judgments by God against great enemies of his people.

We *know* from Matthew 24:34 that Matthew 24:29 is describing a first century event (the judgment of Jerusalem). Why then can't the same language here in Revelation 21 describe the judgment of Rome? If Matthew 24:29 is not the end of the world, why would someone feel compelled to apply this same language in Revelation 21 to the end of the world? What was said *once* in Matthew 24:34 about the judgment of Jerusalem is said *four* times in Revelation about the judgement of Rome. (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10)

Just as the apocalyptic language in Matthew 24:29 depicted the destruction of the Jewish world in Jerusalem, so the same language here depicts the destruction of the Roman world. Just as things would never again be the same for Jerusalem, so things would never again be the same for Rome. Their old world was gone. Something else was about to take its place. Remember Daniel 2:44 — “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall

break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

What is the new heaven and the new earth in verse 1? The language of judgment is often language of destruction, but the language of blessing is often just the opposite — language of creation. A new heaven and a new earth are created in which the previous oppressor (in this case, Rome) does not exist. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth depicts the removal of some specific enemy or some other radical change in circumstances. The particular change under consideration must be determined from the context — in this case, Rome.

In this case, the dramatic change in circumstance also includes the removal of the sea. That sea that separated God from his people and from which the first beast arose is missing in this new world.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; 3 and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

What is the holy city in verse 2? Look at the clues! It is the new Jerusalem. It is prepared as a bride. Many more clues will follow, but from these two clues alone we already know that this holy city is the church.

Why does verse 1 picture the church as coming down out of Heaven? One reason is to show the contrast with the beasts of Rome that came up out of the earth and sea. The church is not the product of man! The eternal kingdom was not made with human hands. Unlike the

false religions of this world, the church of Christ did not originate from man. The church was established by God.

A second reason the church is shown coming down out of Heaven is that God's people have been referred to throughout this book as dwelling in Heaven (even while still on earth) and the wicked have been referred to as those who dwell on earth. Now that the wicked and their wicked Roman world are gone, the church is pictured as returning to a world that has been made new. God had pictured them safe in Heaven while he took care of the Roman problem on earth, and now that the Roman problem has been resolved, God pictures the church returning to earth. But this earth is not the same one they left because this earth is a Rome-free earth. That great enemy of God's people is no more.

Why are there no more tears or death or pain? Verse 4 tells us — it is because the former things have passed away. What are the former things that have just passed away? The blood thirsty harlot and the two beasts are gone. Rome is no more. The condition of the church has just changed dramatically.

But couldn't this same language apply to Heaven? Yes, it could if taken out of this context. The end of the world will certainly bring a dramatic change of circumstances. But the context suggests that a different change is being considered here.

But how could the beautiful promises in verse 4 apply to anything other than the end of the world? You should ask Isaiah that question because he used similar language to apply to something other than the end of the world, and if he could do that, then why not John?

- **Isaiah 25:8** [with reference to a deliverance from Moab] He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.
- **Isaiah 30:19** [with reference to a deliverance from Assyria] For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt

weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

These promises in Isaiah were intended to emphasize that Israel's past troubles would soon be no more, which is the same way the language is used in Revelation. Rome had been judged. The figurative language in verse 4 describes the dramatic change in circumstances experienced by the victorious church.

So *when* will all of the promises in verse 4 occur? When will every tear be wiped away? When will death be no more? When will there be no more crying or pain? Verse 3 gives us the answer — these promises will occur when the dwelling of God is with men. So when will that happen? We should ask instead when *did* that happen! 1 Corinthians 3:16 tells us that we are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us. Ephesians 2:22 describes the church as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. God dwells with men *now*. Christ's perfect sacrifice made that possible. The events in this book were simply a public reaffirmation of what was already true — God is on the church's side! God dwells in his church, and anyone who persecutes that church will answer to him.

These descriptions concerning crying, tears, pain, and death should not be taken literally. This language is symbolic, and we must consistently treat it as such. Here, as in Isaiah, these descriptions depict the state of God's people after a specific enemy has been removed by God.

But what about the phrase “no more death”? Death has played a major role in this book. Death was the primary weapon that Rome used against the church. But when God defeated Rome, he defeated Rome's power to inflict death. Rome would never again have the power of physical death over God's people. And once again, compare Isaiah 25:8 — **“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.”** Isaiah was speaking there about a deliverance from Moab. If Isaiah can use that language to figuratively describe a deliverance from Moab, why can't John use the same language in the same way to describe a deliverance from Rome? If we don't ground our interpreta-

tion of Revelation firmly in the Old Testament, which is the source for much of the language in this book, then our interpretation will almost certainly be wrong.

Finally, as for death, remember Hebrews 2:14-15 — “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” These events have already occurred.

5 And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. 7 He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”

All things are new. The former things (that is, Rome) have passed away, and the church now finds itself in a new environment. The world of Rome has been judged, and a new world has been created for the church.

It is done. Satan and Rome have been defeated. Their world has been destroyed. The blood of the martyrs has been vindicated. A new world has been created that does not include Rome. The church has come down from Heaven to enjoy its new environment. Everything has been finished with regard to Rome.

The second death in verse 8 is the death in Chapter 20 that was reserved for those who were on Rome’s side. Did that second death in-

clude only Romans? No. Verse 8 tells us that it includes the cowardly, the faithless, and the polluted. That is, it also includes those former Christians who renounced Christ in order to live. It includes those who saved their life, only to lose it.

How does God view those who compromise with the world and turn their backs on Jesus? Cowards! Faithless! Polluted!

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

What are we about to see? Heaven? No. The angel says that we are about to see "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." We are about to see the victorious church!

The real question is not *what* we are about to see, but rather *when* are we seeing it? Are we about to see the church in Heaven after the final judgment of the world, or are we about to see the church back on earth safe and sound after the judgment of Rome?

We have already had a first clue that should help us answer that question. Look at verse 2. There John saw "the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down out of heaven** from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." We see the same clue in verse 10. Not only are we not looking at Heaven in these verses, but we are not looking at the church in Heaven in these verses. We are seeing the church "coming down out of heaven."

10 And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare Jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons

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

This beautiful chapter parallels Ezekiel 40 in many of its descriptions of the church. For example, Ezekiel's vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40 also takes place while Ezekiel is on a high mountain.

In verse 10, John sees the holy city coming down from Heaven. As we discussed, the holy city is pictured coming down from Heaven because a new Rome-free world has been created in which it may dwell.

Verse 11 tells us that this city has the glory of God. That is true because the church of Christ is the body of Christ, and Christ as Hebrews 1:3 tells us is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." The city is the church of Christ!

This city has 12 gates guarded by 12 angels with the names of 12 tribes inscribed on each gate. The wall had 12 foundations with the names of the 12 apostles inscribed on each. (How can *anyone* read that description of this city and not understand that numbers are used symbolically in this book?) Twelve is the number of God's people, and this city is the dwelling place of God's people. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The city of God described here is the church of Christ.

And so far we have not seen a single description of that city of God that does not apply to the church right here and right now just as it applied to the church in John's day.