

# John's Vision of the Kingdom

***“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”***  
—**Revelation 22:17**

**CHRIST'S KINGDOM, AND** the blessings it will give to the people, is one of the prominent themes of the Bible. Jesus' death as the world's Redeemer provides the blessings of life for all the willing and obedient of mankind. The Messianic kingdom will be the agency through which those blessings will be dispensed. These two great truths, and related teachings, are the essential message of the Word of God. Its historical records, prophecies, promises, symbols, types, and parables are all parts of this one great theme of redemption and deliverance for both the footstep followers of Christ and the world.

The theme of Messianic kingdom blessings reaches a glorious climax in the last three chapters of Revelation. In these chapters, many of the promises relative to the kingdom, and the symbolisms which portray it, as touched upon in other parts of the

Bible, are elaborated and given their true setting in the great plan of God. Not only are the kingdom, and its blessings, portrayed in these chapters, but the work of redemption which provided the blessings is also emphasized. This basic feature of the plan is kept before our minds by references to the “Lamb”—“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

## **THE COUNTERFEIT**

The establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and its functioning for the blessing of the people, as portrayed in the closing chapters of Revelation, provide a refreshing change from much that is contained in the earlier chapters of this book, where we are shown symbolic beasts which persecute God’s people. There we see an unholy city, likened to a harlot who commits fornication with the kings of the earth. (Rev. 17:4-6,18) It is evident that neither the “beasts” nor the harlot-city, called Babylon, are in any way related to the true Messianic kingdom, except as counterfeits.

The Lamb symbolism is first mentioned in the 5th chapter of the book, where Jesus is referred to as “a Lamb as it had been slain.” (vs. 6) In this chapter we are given a brief, yet comprehensive glimpse of the completed plan of God as centered in the Lamb. John wrote, “I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every

creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, . . . and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”—vss. 11-13

## **ON MOUNT SION**

The Lamb is mentioned again in chapter 14, verse 1, which states: “I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” In verse 4, these are identified as those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”

Still another reference to the Lamb is found in chapter 17, verse 14. Referring to ten symbolic and unholy kings, John wrote, “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.” Here we have a change in the message of the book. Previously, the various “beasts” and the harlot-city government seem very much in control. Evil triumphs, and God’s people are persecuted. Now these make war with the Lamb but are not victorious. The Lamb overcomes them, and this victory of the Lamb is shared with those who are with him, the “called, and chosen, and faithful.”

Chapter 18 portrays in symbolic detail the final and complete destruction of the unholy city, Babylon, and the Lord’s people are bidden to rejoice at the eradication of this evil system. (vs. 20) The revelator further explains, “The light of a candle

shall shine no more at all in thee [Babylon]; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”—Rev. 18:23,24

The opening verse of chapter 19 reads, “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God.” Looking to the future, John speaks here of the time when no longer would God allow evil men and institutions to triumph and to persecute his people. The time would come for him to assert his authority and power throughout the earth. This he would do through his appointed King—the “Lamb”—and the called and chosen and faithful who would be with him.

## **THE MARRIAGE**

John then sees in prophetic vision a most dramatic act in the plan of God. It is described as follows: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” (Rev. 19:7) These faithful followers of the Master had all been betrothed to him through their vows of consecration to do his will. However, their covenant was one of sacrifice. They were willing to suffer and to die with him, and were inspired with the hope of sharing the glory of his kingdom when it would be established.

In laying down their lives in the service of the Lord, these also endeavored to be like their Master—kind, patient, generous, loving, sympathetic. They

did their best to adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit. They sought to be emptied of self, that the Holy Spirit might fill and control their lives, producing its fruit and its graces. They endeavored to give heed to all the instructions of their future Bridegroom, particularly to his command that they lay down their lives for one another.

These “called” and “chosen” and finally “faithful” followers of the Master knew that they could not be united with their Lord in “marriage” until they had made themselves ready. They knew also that it was as a company that they were promised, if faithful, to become the “bride” of Christ. It is the bride that makes herself ready, and this is accomplished through the faithfulness of all the individual members of the bride class—the faithful followers of the Lamb. They knew that one of the chief ways to please their future Bridegroom was to be faithful to one another. Now, in the progress of the prophetic narrative as it unfolds in Revelation, we find that the bride has made herself ready, and that the marriage of the Lamb is come, with great rejoicing.

## **SATAN TO BE BOUND**

In the opening of chapter 20, the revelator begins to reveal some of the major developments related to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and the blessings which will reach the people through its agencies. Verses 1-3 tell of the binding of Satan, “that old serpent, which is the Devil,” and that he is bound for a thousand years. What a blessing this will be to mankind!

Satan is here referred to as the one who has deceived all nations. His deceptions began in the

Garden of Eden, and have continued throughout the ages, and he is still deceiving the people. Indeed, Satan is yet today one of the greatest enemies of the Lord's consecrated people, going about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour them. While we know the truth of God's Word, and are not ignorant of Satan's "devices" (II Cor. 2:11), it is only with the Lord's help and by faithful alertness, together with humility of mind and heart, that we are able to detect the Devil's sophistries for what they are—namely, misrepresentations of the plans and purposes of God. If this is true with respect to those who know God's truth, how helpless is the world of mankind to detect the cunning lies of the great Adversary!

How, then, we should rejoice that Satan is to be bound during the Messianic kingdom. The "angel" that binds him is undoubtedly the returned Lord, and to emphasize the thoroughness with which he is bound, a "great chain," a "bottomless pit," and a "seal" are mentioned. Only by divine power could the great Adversary thus be rendered powerless to carry on his work of deception and oppression of the people. What a glorious prospect it is to realize that this will be accomplished and that his imprisonment will continue for a thousand years, as the text declares. Then, as the record indicates, Satan is to be loosed for a "little season" to test those who have been enlightened and restored to perfection. Then he will be destroyed.

## **SAINTS SHARE THE KINGDOM**

In chapter 20, verse 4, we read, "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God; . . . and they lived and

reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Verse 6 confirms this, saying, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” This is the blessed hope of those who through faithfulness have laid down their lives as witnesses for Jesus and the Word of God. These constitute the “wife” class mentioned earlier, the members of which, after their resurrection, are joined with Jesus, their Heavenly Bridegroom.

The *King James* translation states in verse 5 that “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” These words are not found in the earliest New Testament manuscripts, and were probably added by a copyist many centuries later. We can see the possible reason for this. These words were added during the time in which the counterfeit church-state system claimed that the thousand-year kingdom had started, and in which they were then ruling as Christ’s representatives. It was clear that the dead were not then being restored to life, so the translator who made the addition thought it was needed in order to have the sacred record harmonize with what he believed to be the truth—that Christ’s kingdom was then in operation.

Another branch of the counterfeit church-state system had such difficulty with the idea of a thousand-year Messianic kingdom that they purposely omitted the entire Book of Revelation from their Bible. This group, as well as most denominational groups of “Christendom,” believed essentially that the kingdom of Christ was established at Pentecost, and that this kingdom would continue

until the “end of the world.” There was no room in this view for a thousand-year kingdom in which all mankind would be blessed.

However, we are glad for the truth concerning Christ’s thousand-year kingdom, in which his true followers—the “bride of Christ” class—will reign with him. We are happy to know that what began at Pentecost was the making ready of this “little flock” to live and reign with Christ, and that the kingdom itself will put down all authority contrary to God, and that finally the great enemy Death will be destroyed. How blessed we are in mind and heart as we look forward to the glorious work of that kingdom.—I Cor. 15:22-26

## **THE THRONE**

Verse 11 of chapter 20 reads, “I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.” A throne is a symbol of kingdom authority. This “white throne”—white being symbolic of purity and righteousness—is the Messianic kingdom authority which will oversee in the affairs of men. The “bride” of Christ will share this authority with the Bridegroom. Together, they will constitute “the Christ,” and be symbolically seated on the “white throne” of righteous power.

The “earth and the heaven” that flee away from the face of the one who sits upon the “great white throne” are the civil and spiritual ruling powers of Satan’s world. These cannot continue once the authority and power of the new Messianic kingdom take control of earth’s affairs. Satan, the prince of this world, will then be bound, and the remaining

vestiges of his dominion will quickly give place to “the King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

John continues, “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened.” (vs. 12) Thousands of years ago, through the disobedience of our first parents, the human race lost its standing before God. However, Jesus provided an opportunity of release from the penalty of death, and the privilege of returning to God’s favor. In this portrayal of kingdom blessings, we see the world of mankind awakened from death and standing before God. This symbolizes the fact that then, through Christ, God will once again begin to deal with and bless his human creatures.

“And the books were opened.” This is a beautiful symbolism of the fact that then “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) Satan, the prince of darkness, will be bound and powerless, and the truth concerning God and his purposes will quickly rid the minds of the people of the many misrepresentations of God which, throughout the ages, the Adversary has imposed upon them. These opened “books” of divine knowledge will make God’s will plain to all, and they will be judged upon the basis of their obedience to this revelation of truth—or, as the text further states, “out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

Verse 12 speaks of another book—“the book of life.” During the Messianic kingdom, as the people respond in obedience to the revealed will of God, their names, symbolically speaking, will be entered in “the book of life.” In other words, they will be in the way of life, and if through faithfulness they

maintain their standing before the Lord, they will eventually enter into everlasting human life.

In verse 15, we are told that “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” The phrase “lake of fire” is not to be taken literally—John tells us, in fact, that it is merely a symbol of the “second death.” (vs. 14) The Apostle Peter, referring to Christ as the great “prophet,” or enlightener of that time, says, “It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23) Peter also refers to the day of judgment as “a day of . . . perdition [destruction] of ungodly men.” (II Pet. 3:7) Today, the godly as well as the ungodly are dying, and they will continue to do so until that day when “the dead, small and great, stand before God” and “the books” are opened.

Verse 13 of chapter 20 again emphasizes the resurrection of the dead. Here the dead are said to return from “death and hell” and “the sea.” How thankful we are to know that hell is not a place of torment, but a condition of temporary “sleep” from which there will be an awakening. Jesus said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, . . . and have the keys of hell and of death.” (Rev. 1:18) Jesus will use these “keys” to unlock the great prison house of death and set its captives free.

## **TWO PHASES OF THE KINGDOM**

Chapter 21 presents us with another symbolic description of the Messianic kingdom and the blessings which will reach the people through its rulership. Verse 1 reads, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth

were passed away; and there was no more sea.” Indeed, as previously noted, the first—or former—heaven and earth had “fled away” from before the face of him that sat upon the throne. (chap. 20:11) Now John sees the long-promised “new heavens and new earth” established.

This is a reference to the spiritual and earthly phases of the kingdom—the new heavens and new earth—foretold in Isaiah 65:17-25. Peter wrote that because of God’s promises the church looks for this “new heavens and . . . new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) In Isaiah’s prophecy, this new heavens and new earth is associated with Jerusalem. John sees the same picture, and uses the term “new Jerusalem.” In verse 2, he writes, “I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

In verses 9 and 10 of this chapter, John explains his vision further, “There came unto me one of the seven angels . . . and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.” The “descending” to earth of the kingdom symbolized by this holy city had to wait until the marriage of the Lamb had come and his bride had made herself ready. Prior to this there could be no “bride,” no “holy Jerusalem.”

## **GOD’S TABERNACLE**

John speaks of “the tabernacle of God” being with men. (Rev. 21:3) The Tabernacle in the wilderness

was a symbol of God's presence with his typical people, Israel. During the Messianic kingdom, God's presence and favor will be manifested toward all mankind through Christ and his glorified followers—the "new Jerusalem." The word "tabernacle" implies that this will be a temporary arrangement. Indeed it will be, for at the conclusion of the Messianic kingdom all authority will be turned over to the Heavenly Father, and he will be "all in all." Restored mankind will stand perfect before him, as earthly children.—I Cor. 15:28

Wonderful blessings will reach the people through the kingdom arrangement. As Paul explains, it will ultimately result in the destruction of even death itself. (vs. 26) On this point, the revelator wrote, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."—Rev. 21:4,5

## **COME TO THE WATER OF LIFE**

The last chapter of Revelation opens with still another symbolic description of the kingdom blessings, and tells how they will reach the people. John wrote, "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And

there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.”—Rev. 22:1-3

It will be divine authority that will be exercised throughout the Messianic Age, and it will be manifested through the risen Christ Jesus, to whom was given all power in heaven and in earth. It is significant that “the Lamb” is mentioned once again, for it reminds us that no blessings of life could reach the people were it not for the fact that Jesus laid down his life as man’s Redeemer and thus became “the Lamb of God.”

It is from “the throne of God and of the Lamb” that the water of life will flow out to the people. In verse 17, we read further concerning this, citing again our opening text: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The bride will say, “Come,” and partake of the water of life when she, as a class, is complete, and the marriage of the Lamb has taken place.

The bride is still making herself ready. This should be an inspiration to faithfulness in the minds and hearts of all the “espoused virgins,” as they continue to lay down their lives, proving their loyalty to their future Bridegroom—“the Lamb of God.” What a privilege it will be to participate with the Lamb in dispensing the blessings of life to “all the families of the earth.” Let us continue to rejoice in this glorious prospect.

These are simple truths of God’s plan. They have been presented effectively by the Lord’s people throughout the last 140 years of the harvest, with

which the present age is ending. These simple and beautiful truths satisfy our longings as nothing else could do. Let us give thanks to God that he has opened the eyes of our understanding relative to these “mysteries” of the kingdom. They are mysteries only to those whose eyes of understanding have not been opened to behold their beauty and simplicity. To us, although simple, they are “the power of God unto salvation.” John saw the kingdom in vision. Today, the “sure word of prophecy” enables us to see the dawning light, and we can rejoice to see that now, as never before, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—Rom. 1:16; II Pet. 1:19; Matt. 10:7

