

There's  
a Great Day  
Coming!



*by*  
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Many people say there is a great day coming to this old troubled world. Preachers proclaim a future era of peace on earth that is to last one thousand years. During this millennium when Christ comes again, we are told that war will be no more, that crime will cease and disease will be conquered while people live with an abundance of physical comfort in the midst of unparalleled bliss. We are also told that the animals will be tame during this period and nothing will disturb or disrupt the tranquility of nature. According to millennial prophets, utopia is just around the corner. If you ask what they base these claims upon, they confidently assure you that they are found in the Bible. They say that Isaiah is full of prophecies of what the earth will be like during the millennial reign of Christ and that they just accent it literally as God has promised.

Let us see what the Prophet Isaiah said that is so appealing. Isaiah 11:6-9 declares: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain."

We read in Isaiah 35:1, 6-7: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water. . . ." The question to be resolved is whether Isaiah was describing the physical and literal condition of the world during a future millennium or whether his language was a figurative disclosure of the effect of the Gospel during the present age. To this confrontation we invite your consideration.

Millennialists tell us. "There is a great day coming!" What is it supposed to be like? They tell us that people will live to be hundreds of years old, that they will marry and rear large families of thirty or more children, that peace will be universal, that disease will be conquered, and that death will be a rarity and no one shall want. Most of them tell us of the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven, with dimensions of fifteen hundred miles square and with walls of equal height. Thus far we have related to you their literal interpretations. Let us continue to be literal.

At the present time, the population of the world is doubling every thirty years. This increase is being maintained in spite of war, the ravages of disease, the high rate of infant mortality in many lands, and the catastrophes of famine and disasters. Millennialists assure people that the mortality rate during the millennium will be drastically reduced while the birthrate will spiral much higher. In plain arithmetic, what do these statistics mean? Keep in mind that these statistics are arrived at by following the literal millennial interpretation of the Bible.

If we were to begin with the present estimated population of four billion people and did not exceed our present rate of increase, a very conservative estimate of the world's population in 1,000 years would be 2,150,000,000,000,000,000. That is 500,000,000 times the present population. At that rate a town of 1,000 at the beginning of the millennium would have 50,000,000,000, or 250 times the present population of the United States living in one small town at the end of the millennium. New York's staggering total would zoom to a million times the present population of the entire globe. Anyone can figure this out for himself by simply doubling the earth's population every thirty years. This still allows a 10 percent mortality rate which millennialists claim to expect. According to their predictions, the rate would increase much more rapidly under the more favorable conditions.

If you think the problem created by human population is staggering, just add to it what the unimpeded proliferation of the animals will mean. I have not attempted to estimate the possible number of rabbits there might be, nor have I tried to imagine what the reptile population will be. We are told that the lion will eat straw like the ox, so must the leopard and all other carnivorous animals if "They shall not hurt nor destroy . . . ." Even man himself would have to be vegetarian when it comes to diet. With the world crawling and alive with reptiles and animals, man would have much competition for its herbage to live on. It would appear there would be some difficulty to physically permit the isolation mentioned by Micah: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree [taken literally, this would compound the overcrowding by eliminating city dwelling] . . . for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it" (Micah 4:4).

It must be apparent that this literal interpretation creates some aggravating inconsistencies, but let us

pursue it further. In Isaiah, Chapter 35, a text of Scripture that millennialists jubilantly quote as their proof of the desert blossoming as the rose, we read, "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there" (Isaiah 35:9). Naturally, it would be difficult for the lion to eat straw like the ox if no lion is there. According to the millennialists' interpretation, the wolf, the leopard, and the bear would be eliminated as ravenous beasts. This seems to pose a vexing contradiction. How can this be reconciled to what the Bible plainly says? Let us test the figurative interpretation in the light of God's Word and find the answer to this question by comparing this Scripture with other Scriptures.

According to *Young's Analytical Concordance*, the Bible contains approximately 140 references to the lions) or the lioness(es). Obviously, many are figurative, as indicated by the following quotations: "Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow" (Zephaniah 3:3). Other places where animals characterize people are: "Judah is a lion's whelp" (Genesis 49:9); "Issachar is a strong ass . . . Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, biteth the horse heels . . . Naphtali is a hind let loose" (Genesis 49:14,17,21); "Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns" (Psalm 22:20-21); "Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions" (Psalm 35:17); "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm 57:4); "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD" (Psalm 58:6).

It would be wearisome and unnecessary to quote all the texts in the Bible that are obviously figurative. Paul said that he "was delivered from the mouth of the lion" in 2 Timothy 4:17, adding, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work" (verse 18). Satan is compared to a roaring lion seeking to devour prey in 1 Peter 5:8. In Revelation 5:5 Christ is called the "the Lion of the tribe of Juda." David's picked soldiers are said to have faces "like the faces of lions" (1 Chronicles 12:8). Even a casual reading of the above portions reveal the intended figurative sense. It would do utmost violence to suggest that David's enemies had literal teeth of spears and arrows or tongues of sharp swords, but how impressive and forcefully this language portrays the warlike characteristics of his enemies!

What does the Bible say about wolves representing people? In Ezekiel 22:27 we read, "Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravaging the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain." Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves" (Matthew 7:15). He also said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16). The Apostle Paul bitterly exclaimed, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). To this we might add the noteworthy quote from Jeremiah 5:6, "Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased." The context of the foregoing quotation makes it impossible to be rendered other than in a figurative sense. In any event, a leopard could not watch over their cities, although cunning men with the fierce characteristics of a leopard might well hold such a position.

The serpents mentioned in the Bible are almost all poisonous reptiles. The asp, the adder, the cockatrice, and the viper are frequently mentioned. It was the serpent that beguiled Eve in Eden. The fiery serpents spread terror among the Israelites in the wilderness. The dragon mentioned refers to a swift and deadly serpent, but people are also described as serpents in the Bible. In Matthew 3:7 John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to hear him thus: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Jesus scathingly denounced them in Matthew 23:33 by saying, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" In Psalm 140:3 we read, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips." The Apostle Paul quoted the latter part of this verse in describing the characteristics of certain unbelievers in Romans 3:13.

The figurative language of the Bible is beyond controversy. Jesus described King Herod as a "fox" in Luke 13:32. Another time he accused the Pharisees and Sadducees of "devouring widow's houses, and

for a pretence making long prayers" (Matthew 23:14). In the same chapter He said they "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (verse 24). Jesus also said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6). The Apostle Paul said, "Beware of dogs" (Philippians 3:2).

Notice the figurative language that the Prophet Isaiah employed in this quote: "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand" (Isaiah 56:10-11). John wrote, "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 22:15).

The animals referred to thus far are mainly beasts of prey, or scavengers. There is still one other animal mentioned in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and that is the sheep. In the Old Testament sheep are mentioned frequently in connection with worship and sacrifice. From cover to cover, God's people are referred to as sheep. The best known of all portions of the Bible begins with these comforting words: "The LORD is my shepherd . . . He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:1-2).

The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 100:3, "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." In the New Testament it is not necessary to submit references as proof texts of sheep representing people, for it is taken for granted. "Feed my sheep" and "Feed my lambs" is the solemn charge to Peter given by the risen Lord. On the great Judgment Day, Christ described the scene with the sheep on one hand and the goats on the other, but they clearly and unmistakably represent believers and unbelievers. Christ is called the Lamb of God and the Lamb more than any other creature. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for lamb is "the tender one." There are almost two hundred references to sheep in the Bible.

Now let us compare the literal interpretation versus the figurative explanation. The literal interpretation demands literal consequences. Whether millennialists say the millennium starts with a population of four million or four billion matters little; it is only an estimate. The resulting increase is not guess work. Simply double that figure according to the rules laid down by millennial teachers and the result would be a population so staggering that it is beyond comprehension. Add to the earth's teeming human population the unimpeded prolific multiplying of the animal kingdom and try to image the outcome. Remember that there is no destruction of life, because they use the Scripture, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain." This means that cattle will continue to multiply without consumption, and wolves will not prey on rabbits or birds. All creation will necessarily be vegetarian to fulfill the preservation of life.

A single exception is made regarding dogs. They are excluded, according to Revelation 22:15. Why is the creature regarded as man's best friend not acceptable when leopards and wolves are? And what are we to do, literally, with the further statement that no lions or ravenous beasts will be there as stated in Isaiah, Chapter 35, when it says these creatures are enjoying such bliss in Chapter 11? Does this not impose a dilemma by its apparent contradiction? This is inescapably what the millennium of the literalist is really like.

Now let us examine the figurative interpretation. Remember that we are not talking about whether or not we believe the Bible; we are discussing the interpretation of the Bible. It is agreed that Isaiah wrote much of his book of prophecy in poetry. This does not make it less true, but it does permit the use of imagery and imagination. In Chapter 11 he described an earth where all the savage beasts live in harmony and tranquility with one another. Their natures are changed. In fact, their natures are so changed that in Chapter 35 we are told that no lion or ravenous beast will be there! This poses no problem when you regard the language used as being figurative, for he was only illustrating the change of nature wrought by the power of God through redemption.

As we pursue references to these animals throughout the Word of God, we find unmistakable evidence where people are called serpents, lions, wolves, leopards, foxes, swine, dogs, and other similar creatures. The applications are invariably apt; however, if people are identified by these names elsewhere in the Bible, then why not apply this rule in Isaiah too? We can remove all doubt by making an appeal to Matthew 11:2-6. When John the Baptist was in prison and wondered whether Jesus was indeed the Christ, He sent messengers to question Jesus about His claim as Messiah. Jesus gave them His credentials by telling them to witness His works and His message, and then by pointing out that this was in fulfillment of Isaiah,

Chapter 35, a portion of which He quoted. Now, if Jesus asserted that this Scripture was fulfilled in the proclamation of the Gospel, that should end all controversy as to whether it is to be taken literally or figuratively.

The *International Standard Bible Dictionary* is regarded as an authority in Bible research. It explains that almost all the animals mentioned in Isaiah and elsewhere in the Bible invariably are figurative. Everywhere dogs are mentioned in the Bible, they denote contempt. Goliath wrathfully disdained David by saying, "Am I a dog?" The supreme desecration, degradation, and humiliation of a human corpse was to have it eaten by dogs, which was the fate of Ahab and Jezebel, Israel's most debased rulers.

"Dogs" was a term that Jews applied to Gentiles. This is the significance where Jesus replied to the Syrophenician woman that "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." It is also the meaning to a limited degree where Paul warned the church to "Beware of dogs." Naturally, it is these kinds of dogs that are without as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned in Revelation 22:15. Likewise, it was not a pack of savage wolves raiding a sheepfold that Paul meant when he mournfully declared that "after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."

What about this wolfish nature after a man is converted? How does a person with the reputation of a fox or a "snake in the grass" behave after his nature is transformed by the power of the new birth? Gone is the preying characteristic of the lion and the ravenous beast. Gone is the subtle treacherous nature of the serpent. In its place is the new creature making companions of violent lion-like Sauls filled with murderous rage and seeking to exterminate the infant church and the Barnabases whose natural characteristics resemble the lamb. God's purpose is to redeem people and to renew them in the image of God. God is not establishing a universal zoo. His purpose is the redemption of men. No doubt, God can alter the nature of asps and cockatrices so that they could become the playthings for children; but God's design is to take people described as having the poison of asps under their lips, and with the deadly cunning and shrewdness of a cockatrice, and bring about their surrender to Christ and fill them with His Spirit so that even little children can trust them without fearing any harm. Men have tamed animals, but only God can change the heart of man and renew a right spirit within.

In the ordinary King James translation of the Bible, it is common to find center column references. These invariably refer to other places in the Bible where a similar quotation is made. I challenge anyone to follow these references of "Comparing Scripture with Scripture."

If you follow this method, you will make the amazing but simple discovery that every prophecy in the Old Testament, including Isaiah, Chapters 11 and 35, invariably and without exception, will point you to the Gospel. Jesus Christ did not interpret these passages the way present-day millennialists do. He insisted on their application to His mission and His message. Can we do less? The question asked is, "What is the millennium really like?" The answer depends on whether you interpret the Bible according to the millennialists or whether you seek the answer from Christ and the Gospels. Christ does give us the answer. It is His Gospel. He says so Himself. That is final so far as the church is concerned. "God . . . Hath . . . spoken . . . by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

*How long is a thousand years?* This question is not as foolish as it may seem. Historically it would take us back prior to the time William the Conqueror invaded Britain. The discovery of America was not quite 500 years ago. Millennialists tell us that Christ is coming back to establish His throne in Jerusalem and reign over this world for 1000 years. The basis for this belief rests chiefly on about seven verses of Scripture in Chapter 20 of Revelation. Now, if the Bible does teach this, then it will come to pass. Unfortunately, not everyone interprets this portion of Scripture in the same manner. Let us read what the Bible says: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their

hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 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. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison" (Revelation 20:1-7).

To suggest that this passage of Scripture can have a figurative meaning is to risk being accused of not believing the Bible. Yet, when a literal interpretation is considered, we discover hundreds of different and conflicting views on the details. Many give up and just accept what the most convincing minister says. The most prevalent theory is that Christ will reign in Jerusalem and that the Jews will be preeminent under His rule. All millennialists seem to agree that a holocaust Armageddon will take place at the end.

Millennial literalists themselves are by no means agreed. Some are post-tribulation rapturists while others are pre-tribulation rapturists. Some say there will be four resurrections and seven judgment scenes. Some say there are two Gospels, while Scofield and others claim there are four. Most of them say that Christ offered two kingdoms, one Jewish and the other universal regeneration. These are but a few of the confusing teachings we are called upon to sort out and thread our way through a maze of proof texts and so-called authorities on Bible exposition. Being literal is by no means a perfect solution, and above all it should caution us to be careful about any arbitrary or dogmatic conclusion and cause us to humbly seek the aid of the Holy Spirit to guide us aright.

The safest way to discover whether a teaching is symbolic is to compare its use in other parts of the Bible. There are many examples where 1000 is used in the Bible. In Psalm 50:10 we read, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." To literally confine God's ownership of the cattle to a mathematical 1000 hills would destroy its intent. Which thousand hills would they be? What about the arrows mentioned in Psalm 91:7? "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand . . ." Does this imply that arrow number 1001 might find its target? Does it suggest counting them? Daniel 7:10 says, "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him . . ." Figures like this are meant to convey the idea of a countless multitude. The indefinite span signified by a thousand years is further shown in Psalm 90:4, which states, "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday. . ." In 2 Peter 3:8 we read, ". . . that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." These quotations should suffice to demonstrate that a thousand years in the Bible does not necessarily limit it to our calendar, which incidentally, did not exist when this prophecy was written.

The master key to correctly understand Revelation, Chapter 20, is found in verses 5 and 6. Let us carefully examine these verses again: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 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." If we can determine assuredly what the "first resurrection" is, then we will know who will reign with Christ 1000 years. Is there a resurrection in the Bible that makes people "blessed and holy," which denies the second death of its power and that creates a body of reigning priests? This is what is required to meet the conditions. Let us see.

We know that death was the penalty pronounced on Adam and Eve when they sinned. The solemn judgment of God was, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). However, they did not die physically the day they partook of the forbidden fruit, but they were immediately separated from fellowship with God and hid themselves from Him. Spiritually they died. No longer did Adam bear God's image, and of his seed it is written that "in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22). People who die in their sins unforgiven are under the power of the second death, which is eternal separation from God. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Just as Adam died spiritually through his sin, so Christ, the last Adam, resurrects us from spiritual death to eternal life, thus taking away the power of the Second Death. This becomes very clear as we proceed.

The state of spiritual death is recognized everywhere in the New Testament. First Timothy 5:6 states, "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Colossians 2:13 says, "And you, being dead in

your sins. . . ." We read in Ephesians 2:5, "Even when we were dead in sins. . . ." Paul elaborated endlessly on the significance of this spiritual death, but he also strove to point men to an alternative. He wrote in Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Verse 6 continues, "And hath raised [resurrected] us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places."

It is clear then that the first death is spiritual death caused by sin and separation from God, while the first resurrection is when one's sin is forgiven and he has eternal life in Christ. In Adam all die. His generation is called the generation of the dying. The New Testament begins with the generation of Jesus Christ. Those who belong to Him are the generation of the living. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Those who put on Christ, therefore, share in the first resurrection, which is described by Paul in Ephesians 2:56: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened [made alive] us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised [resurrected] us up together. . . ." This new birth is the only resurrection that makes a person "blessed and holy."

Moreover, those who have their sins forgiven are saved and have eternal life in Christ. These are the only ones on whom "the second death hath no power." Power here is from the Greek word *exousia*, meaning "authority." Since the Second Death only has authority over those who die in their sins, it follows that it has no authority or claim on those who are in Christ Jesus.

If our deductions are correct thus far, then the remainder of this portion of Scripture must be in complete harmony with the conclusions set forth. In other words, they must verify this interpretation. It should be pointed out that there is no mention of the Jews in Revelation 20:1-7, nor is there any reference to a tribulation, or for that matter, any indication of a reign on the earth at all. Verse 4 tells of the souls of those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and who lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. These souls are reigning with Christ, but there is no hint that Christ is in Jerusalem.

Did you notice that verse 6 says "they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years"? It is not customary for priests to reign. But, again, this qualification is in complete harmony with the New Testament standing of believers. In Revelation 1:5b-6 we read: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests [that is, reigning priests] unto God and his Father. . . ." Peter further confirmed the reigning priesthood of believers by calling them a "royal [or regal, reigning] priesthood." He described the nature of this priesthood in 1 Peter 2:5 as follows: "Ye also, as lively [living] stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." If we are accused of "spiritualizing," we have Peter and God's Word to set the example for us to follow.

We have not exhausted the number of Scriptures that could be quoted to corroborate the spiritual priesthood and kinship of believers. But let us now consider the most difficult element of this enquiry. Is the Kingdom of God ever going to be literally on this earth for a thousand years or is it a spiritual kingdom that will continue until the Second Coming of Christ? To this we unhesitatingly assert that it is a spiritual kingdom and submit the following proofs thereto. Peter already declared that the priests (believers) offer up spiritual sacrifices. Since God has made believers spiritual kings and priests, it follows that the reign is spiritual also. That is the reason Paul said, "Let not sin . . . reign in your mortal body" (Romans 6:12). "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."

Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). Millennialists would change this. The Scofield Bible notes comment on this declaration by saying, "Eventually His Kingdom will come by observation." But where did Christ say it would? How can anyone reconcile a glorious throne in Jerusalem with pomp and power extending over the entire globe with Christ's statement, "My kingdom is not of this world"? The devil offered Him all the kingdoms of the world and He refused the bribe. The Jews on one occasion tried to take Him by force and make Him their king, but He brushed aside their misguided acclaim (John 6:15).

In contending for the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God in Revelation, Chapter 20, we have carefully regarded the context. It is introduced by an angel, which is a spirit being. He comes from heaven,

which is a spiritual realm. He carries a symbolic key similar to the keys to the kingdom, which Christ gave to Peter in Matthew, Chapter 16. The key was to unlock and subsequently lock up the bottomless pit, a spiritual place. Hell and evil are bottomless in the sense that there is no limit to the degradation to which fallen man can plummet. The devil, which is seized, is an evil spirit. The ones who reign with Christ are described as the souls of witnesses who gave their lives as martyrs for the faith. The first resurrection is the spiritual new birth, which makes men blessed and holy and free from the power of the Second Death. There is not a single shred of evidence of any grand earthly domain of Christ as proclaimed by the millennialists. Try to find it!

What is vividly portrayed is the age long struggle between good and evil, between God and this world and between Christ and Satan. It ends with the ultimate triumph of good. Throughout this struggle, those who belong to Christ reign with Him. The early church suffered the cruel onslaught of paganism and triumphed by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11).

Next came the torment under the symbol of the beast throughout the Dark Ages. Liberation came through sacrifice and through heralds who proclaimed God's Word, that "the just shall live by faith." Now, at this present time, the spiritual lamps of the world are going out. One nation after another is becoming anti-God. Freedom is losing out as men reject the teachings of Christ. The world is becoming enveloped again in pagan darkness in spite of all its vaunted claims to progress and education. Satan is loosed for the little season and is deceiving the nations. Missionary work is almost impossible by the standards of a few years ago. The enormous increase in the use of drugs, pornography, immorality, lawlessness, crime, drunkenness, sensuality, brutality of sports, and the licentiousness of the stage all indicate storm warnings. God's judgment is not far off! It will come without warning.

This interpretation accepts everything the Bible says. It adds nothing to it by way of private interpretation, and it takes nothing away. It also is in harmony with the Bible description of the end of the world in other places. Let us observe what the Bible says.

Peter gave a vivid picture of the sequence of events at the end of the world in 2 Peter 3:7-12. After warning and exhorting people to live godly lives, he said: "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (verse 12). This certainly is not current millennial teaching. Why did Peter neglect to mention Christ coming back to reign in carnal delight here if it was supposed to be? Instead, Peter said he was looking for this time world to dissolve completely. Moreover, in verses 15-16 he quoted Paul as being in full harmony with this sequence of end events regarding the Second Coming.

Paul's views are expressed in 1 Corinthians 15:23-26. A portion reads as follows: "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming [this 'coming' refers to His Second Coming]. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father. . . ." Thus, Paul emphatically declared that the end of this world coincides with the Second Coming. Why did both Paul and Peter say nothing about a millennium at this point if they believed in one? On the contrary, they left no possible time or room for one. When Christ comes, "Then cometh the end." The kingdom will be delivered up to God, not set up on earth. This is final.

The teaching of Jesus concerning the end of the world is plainly described in Matthew 13:33-52. He even explained the meaning and interpreted it so that no one could err. He said there will be both evil and good men in the world until the end of this Gospel era. They are compared with tares and wheat. "The harvest is the end of the world" (verse 39). Here the Greek word *sunteleia* is used, which signifies "the full end of the age, the consummation of God's dealings with man." At this time, the righteous will receive their rewards and the wicked their punishments. What is noticeably absent is any hint of a millennium. Christ is silent about returning to reign in Jerusalem in the future, not only here but anywhere else in the Gospels. This establishes a four-fold harmonious account by Christ, Paul, Peter, and John concerning the end of the world. None of them mentioned a millennium; in fact, their statements leave neither time nor place for one.

Christ's command to "Go ye into all the world and make disciples" is still in effect. It will remain so in accordance with His promise, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end [*sunteleia*] of the age."

Jesus did not qualify this promise by adding, "Until I come and set up the millennium." This would have been an appropriate place to say so had He intended such a plan, but there is total silence about that doctrine! Instead, Paul preached with vehemence and urgency, "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Peter clinched his appeal by saying, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Could God be long-suffering in prolonging- this age if a millennium were awaiting us next?

You may ask the question, "What then? Will Christ reign a thousand years on earth?" The answer is definitely no. The Bible does not teach that. However, there is something far better, namely Heaven. Revelation, Chapter 20, ends on a note of victory and glorious triumph. It does not offer a cramped and crowded millennium here on earth, which is destined to end with unspeakable bloodshed according to millennialists, but the Bible offers us the limitless, endless prospect of peace and joy of eternal life in Heaven. John the Revelator described the end scene thus: The Judgment Day has arrived, and all mankind is present. All eyes gaze at the One Who occupies the Throne. He opens the books, and He scans the Book of Life. The all-important thing then is to know if YOUR name is written in the Book. IS YOUR NAME WRITTEN THERE? It is if you have forsaken sin and enthroned Christ as the Lord of your life. In the final consummation of things, that is all that really matters. Christ has the answer! Have you?

Where is your birth certificate for the new birth? There's a great day coming if you have obeyed Christ's invitation to "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28). Today He is your Savior. Tomorrow He will be your Judge!

Just who are the 144,000 select individuals mentioned in Revelation, Chapters 7 and 14? The Scriptures that describe this mysterious group have been subjected to a great deal of speculation as well as a variety of interpretations. This very interesting subject is introduced as follows: "And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Revelation 7:4). Then follows the detailed classification in verses 5-8, which prescribes 12,000 members from each of the tribes of Juda, Reuben, Gad, Aser, Naphtalim, Manasses, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph and Benjamin. It will be observed that while twelve tribes are listed, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted and replaced with Levi and Joseph. What does this imply? Does this have any significance?

Many religious groups and cults owe their origin to leaders who believed they fulfilled this prophecy. Usually they taught that when the full complement of 144,000 members associated themselves with their group, then Christ would come again and a millennial reign on earth or the end of the world would ensue. The once-publicized House of David of Benton Harbour, Michigan, is a prime example. However, some Sabbatarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and many others have made similar claims. Usually these people make sweeping declarations that they believe what the Bible says literally. Let us investigate these claims in the light of the Scriptures.

In the first place, if we accept the literal figure of 144,000, then, to be consistent, we should also accept the literal tribes of Israel mentioned. Since all tribal distinctions have been obliterated after the Dispersion in A.D. 70, it is no longer possible to distinguish separate tribes in the original sense. Also, the descendants of Joseph and Levi were no longer numbered among the inheritance of Israel's twelve tribes, although they are found here as substitutes for Dan and Ephraim. Let us be literal!

A further description of the 144,000 is found in Revelation, Chapter 14. A portion reads as follows: "And 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. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:1, 3-4).

The literal interpretation of this Scripture demands the elimination of all married men and the exclusion of all women. The Berkley translation defines the company as "celibates." A further stipulation requires the Father's name in their foreheads and the ability to sing the new song which only the redeemed could

master. Thus, we have 144,000 people of Jewish ancestry selected equally from twelve specified tribes that no longer exist due to assimilation, and all of them celibates. This is literally what it says, and for those who claim to believe the Bible literally, this is what they must accept as conditions set forth.

It seems to me there must be a much more scriptural interpretation of this portion of God's Word. First, let us ask why Dan and Ephraim were eliminated and why were Levi and Joseph substituted to occupy their places, despite the fact that the "tribe" of Joseph never did exist as such? This greatly complicates the problem of being literal.

The real solution lies in observing the meaning of the names of Jacob's sons. You will recall that when Jacob blessed his sons while on his deathbed, he also blessed both the sons of Joseph. By doing so, he maintained the twelve tribes of Israel and still left the tribe of Levi free for the office of the priesthood. The meaning of those names furnish us a clue as to why these specific tribes constituted the 144,000. Reuben, the firstborn, means "excellency of dignity and power." Judah means "praise." Gad means "an overcomer." Joseph, please note, means "a fruitful bough by a well." Manasses means "forgetting the harsh past which Joseph experienced in Egypt." Levi is chosen more because of his office than the meaning of his name. You will notice that all these names have meanings characterizing Christian graces, such as praise, victory, fruitfulness, etc.

The name of Dan, on the contrary, means "a serpent by the way, an adder in the path. . . ." There is nothing redemptive or consistent with this characteristic of God's church. Consequently, the tribe of Joseph, the fruitful bough, is substituted for Dan, the biting adder that majors in harmfulness, in making up the 144,000. The omission of Ephraim is not so clear because his name means "doubly fruitful." This might indicate preference over some of the others chosen, but it is qualified by "bringing forth in a strange land." God's people do not belong to a strange land. There are no "foreigners" in God's household. In Psalm 87 a great issue is made for those who were born in Zion, and it specifically excludes those who were born in Egypt or nations outside Israel. The new birth mentioned in the New Testament symbolizes deliverance from bondage (Egypt) and makes us citizens of the Kingdom of God. This is the reason Levi, of the priesthood, takes precedence over Ephraim, the foreigner.

When we examine the further limitations of membership among the 144,000, it seems preposterous to exclude all women and all married men. This absurdity immediately dissolves when we relate the interpretation to its proper scriptural place. We must remember that the church is the bride of Christ; she is espoused to Him. To be espoused means "to be given under a solemn vow to marriage." Mary was espoused to Joseph, and when Mary was discovered to be with child, Joseph was very lenient in offering her a bill of divorce, for the Law permitted stoning. Mary made a sacred commitment to be the bride of Joseph and only the divine intervention convinced Joseph that he should honor his espousal. Christ regards His bride, the church, in the same light, and any flirtation, compromise, or assimilation with the world is compared to adultery. That is the reason the 144,000 are said to be celibates; they are undefiled. They have not defiled themselves by committing adultery with the world (James 4:4). They all are redeemed, and they all sing the song of deliverance and victory. They follow Christ wherever He goes. What a glorious portrayal of the church this affords.

Twelve is the biblical number that signifies completeness. Twelve tribes of Israel and twelve Apostles were chosen to introduce both the Old and New Testaments. They represent the true church, undefiled by the world, separate from evil and joined in holy wedlock to Christ. In the church are manifest all the Christian graces, and through it Christ spreads His blessings. If you are redeemed and can sing the new song of deliverance from sin, then you can have assurance of being included in this perfect number of completeness that signifies all the redeemed.

In Revelation, Chapter 7, we are told that each of the 144,000 is sealed. This strongly suggests the seal of the Holy Spirit. This is referred to a number of times. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:13, ". . . in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." He stated in Ephesians 4:30, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Then, he wrote to the church at Corinth, "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest [pledge] of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:22). Thus, it is plain that those who are saved receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, which corresponds with the seal of the 144,000.

You will observe that the location of the 144,000 is on Mount Zion in the presence of the Lamb; this is significant. Mount Zion is not to be confused with the old city of Jerusalem or Palestine. Mount Zion is the church, the dwelling place of God in the New Testament. Psalm 87 glows with prophetic ecstasy of the significance of Zion: "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. . . . And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her. . . . The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there" (verses 2-6).

God is the census taker, and He wants to know where you were born. If you were born (born again) in Zion, you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a member of the church, which is the body of Christ, and you must accept all the responsibility of a follower of Christ. You receive all the privileges and protection afforded through citizenship in Zion, both in this world and in the world to come. Your birth certificate will be sealed by the Holy Spirit, and this is your passport to Heaven. No wonder the recipients sing a new song that only the redeemed can learn. This seal, citizenship, and song separate this group from all other people on earth. This seal is the evidence of membership in this select number. It is the exclusive mark of the redeemed.

Let us now observe reference to the fact that the 144,000 are said to be "the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4). In the Old Testament the firstfruits were regarded as belonging to the Lord. In some cases it was the earliest portion of the harvest, but it could also be first in the sense that it is the principal or best quality fruit. This was an acknowledgment that all life and produce was a gift from God, over which the worshiper was a steward. In James 1:18 the antitype of this principle is refined and its spiritual significance is demonstrated. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." In Romans 8:23 Paul further identified it thus: "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Other references could be supplied, but these suffice to show that the church of believers constitute those bearing their firstfruits unto God in accordance with Revelation, Chapter 14.

It is scarcely necessary to call attention to the sentence which says, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Revelation 14:4b). Suffice to call attention to the well-known words of Christ in John 10:27, which reads, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." To truly follow Christ implies much more than being a nominal church member; it means total surrender and complete obedience to His will. This is another hallmark of the redeemed.

Perhaps we ought to include some reference to the words, ". . . having his Father's name written in their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). Evidently, these people are branded. A brand signifies ownership. They belong to God because they have been redeemed by His Son. We are told in Genesis that God created Adam in His own image.

In Romans 1:23 we are told how fallen man "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." It is impossible for fallen man to reflect the likeness of God. However, in Romans 8:29 we read, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Here the word firstborn refers to the highest or first in rank rather than first in genealogy. But it also implies that the image of God, which was lost through Adam's fall into sin, is restored through redemption. It is evident in the believers. This image, or likeness, characterizes every child of God, regardless of race, color, creed, language, or social status. They all bear the image or family likeness of Him Who "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The Father's Name is written in our foreheads when, as Paul said, "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Only redemption can perform this miraculous transformation. It is not difficult to identify the 144,000 if we reject all private interpretations and simply compare Scripture with Scripture. It is not an exact number, but a number symbolizing the complete totality and fundamental unity of all believers for all time.

Let us briefly return to the phrase, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). What does predestinate mean here? Perhaps a simple illustration will help. Suppose a man who could not swim decided to leap into the deep, swirling waters of a raging torrent. From a natural standpoint, he would be predestined to drown. Or, if a man wearing only

light summer attire were to go out in a blinding snowstorm with extreme sub-zero temperatures, he would be predestined to freeze. If, however, he should decide to enter a cabin where there is a blazing fire in the stove, he would be predestined to get warm once he entered that cozy room. In a similar manner, when a sinner comes to Christ in repentance and surrenders himself to His will and follows Him obediently, God said that such a man "is predestinated to be conformed to his image." The choice is ours. The effect is according to God's eternal law. You are conformed to the likeness of the thing you love. That is why God warns you not to love the world but to love Him. To have the Father's name in your forehead indicates the enthronement of Christ and His reign in your heart. You make the choice, but God determines the consequences.

The foregoing interpretation is in complete harmony with God's Word in a sense not possible with a literal application. Any cult that claims to be the 144,000 ignores the other elements required, namely 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes and the fact that all are celibates.

Once I received a letter explaining this text from the millennial viewpoint. Here is what this great preacher said: "After the church is gone [the rapture], this message will be preached by part of the remnant of Israel [probably the 144,000 of Revelation, Chapters 7 and 14], for a witness to all nations [Matthew 24:14] . . . and I believe this message of 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand' will be preached during the time of Jacob's trouble, otherwise known as the 'days of tribulation' [Matthew 24:21, 29]. These tribulation days will close with 'the day of the Lord.' This is the end spoken of in Matthew 24:24. "

Let us examine this statement in the light of the Bible. First of all, the 144,000 Jews mentioned bear no resemblance to the group described in Revelation, Chapters 7 and 14, having no tribal distinction or celibacy. All you have to do is turn to Matthew, Chapter 24, and instead of reading about the Jewish revival described by this writer, you will discover that it is a time when false christs and false evangelists afflict the world to the point that even the very elect become confused. It further states that the message to believers is not that of final judgment, but they are told to flee to the mountains and pray that their flight be not on a Sabbath Day nor in winter. Apart from the many places this interpretation is in conflict with the plain Scriptures, it reveals its source of private interpretation by intruding in brackets "[probably the 144,000 of Revelation, Chapters 7 and 14]." There are no "probables" in God's Word. Also, there is no mention of 144,000 Jewish evangelists in Matthew, Chapter 24, nor of any revival, for that matter. [A complete detailed explanation of this chapter is included in my book called *The Sign of His Coming*]. It is obvious that any legalized, mathematical, tribal, or racial group of celibates only destroys the beauty and meaning of this passage and reduces the statement to one of total absurdity.

Viewed in the light of its intended meaning to represent the redeemed of all ages, it is etched on the prophetic horizon as a theme of enchanting beauty and lofty purpose. The bride, which is the church, is "celibate" in that it is espoused to Christ and is not defiled by any illicit love affair with the world. They all sing the song of the redeemed, which none can learn until delivered from the bondage of sin. They "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," a characteristic that only the redeemed can fulfill. The number is not limited to mathematical exactness, but it symbolizes completeness, while the tribal composition indicates by their meanings that they produce the fruit of the Spirit. Only such a group could be called the "firstfruits." Only the redeemed could be said to be without guile and without fault before God, as the passage asserts. Literalism only distorts this metaphor into a caricature of private interpretation, which is condemned in 2 Peter 1:20-21. Truth in symbol is just as valid as truth in any other attire. Truth is found in its meaning and intent. The words are meant to communicate the idea. The majestic beauty of the church revealed through these symbols is beyond controversy for they glorify our Redeemer as Savior and Lord throughout endless ages.

Perhaps the correct place to start a discussion about the New Jerusalem is to read exactly what the Bible says about it. This takes us to Revelation 21:9-10: "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." Verse 12 tells us that on the gates of the city you will find the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed. Verse 14 informs us that the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb are written plainly in the city's foundations.

Verse 18 tells us the city is of pure gold, with streets of gold and walls composed of precious stones reaching to a height of 1,500 miles.

The question before us is to determine whether this is an actual city or a symbolic description of some spiritual Truth. Millennialists rejoice with great enthusiasm when they describe this beautiful city of God. Its walls of 12,000 furlongs in length, breadth, and height present its awesome magnitude. It would comprise an area of some 2,250,000 square miles, or about two thirds of the land area of the United States of America. Its walls towering 7,500 times as high as the Empire State Building, or three times as high as the apogee of the astronauts circling the earth denote an incredible height. These walls are described as being composed of precious stones and are only 144 cubits thick, or about 200 feet. From a literal, human standpoint, this would defy some principles in engineering. The beautiful symmetry in all Creation suggests that God operates within the confines of His own fixed laws. Again, we ask whether this is a literal city as our millennial friends so frequently proclaim or is there a more Scriptural solution to its meaning and interpretation? The Bible does not leave us in doubt!

Attention is called once more to verse 9, where the angel took the viewer in the spirit to come and behold the bride, the Lamb's wife. Christ is not married to a city, but His bride is the church, composed of the redeemed of all ages. This removes all doubt and speculation about what is symbolized. Notice the beautiful harmony that its dimensions portray. Twelve is the Bible number used to convey unity and completeness. Here we have walls of 12,000 furlongs in length, breadth, and height. Twelve a thousand fold indicates the ultimate degree of perfection. The thickness of 144 cubits is twelve times, again testifying to its unity. The fact that the gates and foundations bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles of the Lamb (twelve of each), harmonizes with the words of Paul concerning the structure of the church in Ephesians 2:20: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The corner stone here is more properly rendered the "keystone." It also signifies the basic unity between the Law and the Gospel.

Jesus said of Himself, "I am the door" (John 10:7). The twelve gates (perfect means of entrance) to the city of God are of pearl. The pearl is the only gem that man cannot improve upon. It is perfect in its natural state, being the product of a living creature, the oyster. No man can improve on God's plan of salvation. Christ is the exclusive perfect mediator and entrance. The walls, on the other hand, are of precious stones. In their original state, these gems are of little value. They must be mined from the earth, and their potential value is realized only after a skilled craftsman changes them, cuts them, and polishes them until they sparkle and dazzle in the light. In like manner, God lifts sinners from the miry clay of sin. They are cleansed and filled with the Spirit of God until they, too, reflect the transforming light of the Son of God. Peter put this truth in these words: "Ye also, as lively [that is, living] stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Thus, the towering iridescent walls symbolize the ultimate in peace, security, and protection of the redeemed. The fact that there is no sun or moon or darkness further demonstrates its symbolism. There is no temple there! God is dwelling in His people (1 Corinthians 6:19). God has delivered us from darkness into His Kingdom of light, and He is our light. Jesus Christ is the "Sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2).

The fact that the bride of Christ comes down from God out of Heaven is significant. Man would reverse the order if he could. The plan of salvation did not originate in the mind of man but rather from the loving heart of God. It was not discovered by the saints but was delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Salvation is not a history of man's struggle upward toward Heaven to please God, but on the contrary, it is the record of God condescending to reach down to lift up man. Thus, the bride of Christ, typified as the "holy city," originated in the heart of God and descended to man as a gift from God.

There is nothing mysterious or fanciful about the New Jerusalem. It is not a golden ghetto poised in space. It is not a high jewel-walled holy prison. It is not a "holy it" at all. It is something better, namely the holy bride of Christ revealed in all her glory and basking in the sunshine of God's love, sparkling and reflecting the manifold wonders of the beauty of holiness, protected by God's omnipotent power and the recipient of God's abundant grace.

This is the city that Abraham sought when he testified that "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker [Architect] is God. . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews

11:10, 16). This is further substantiated as the true interpretation by the description given in Hebrews 12:22-23: "But ye are come unto mount Sion [the high mountain of Revelation, Chapter 21], and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven. . . ." Thus, the New Jerusalem is unmistakably identified as the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the firstborn. Abraham saw it by faith, but John saw it fulfilled!

Confirmation of the correctness of this interpretation is abundant and convincing. Paul devoted almost all of the first four chapters of Galatians in support of this conclusion. In the fourth chapter he resorted to symbolizing Ishmael and Isaac as an allegory and contrasting them with the two covenants. Ishmael represents the natural Israel, while the spiritual Israel is represented by Isaac, which he equates with the church.

His judgment of the old covenant is summed up in Galatians 4:25: "For this Agar [Hagar] is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." It seems incredibly strange that this natural Jerusalem is the one the dispensationalists are so eager to see restored. But even if that should happen, it would not fulfill prophecy, for the Bible does not say that Israel shall be restored as a nation, but rather that it shall never cease from being a nation (Jeremiah 31:36). Natural Israel ceased from being nation in A.D. 70. But the Israel of God, that holy nation of believers under the New Covenant, which is described in 1 Peter 2:9, has not ceased from being a nation, and thus it is the only Israel that can fulfill prophecy.

Paul clinched his argument by saying: "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (verse 26). When is a city a mother? How can the New Jerusalem be the mother of us all? It is simple when we let the Bible explain this mystery. Its answer is both clear and final, for it removes all doubt. Let us consult the writings of the Prophet Isaiah.

Additional support for the correctness of this interpretation is supplied by Isaiah, Chapter 66. Here the Prophet peered down the centuries into the future and portrayed a strange miraculous phenomena that could not be accounted for by the laws of nature. Let us quote the passage in full: "A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that rendereth recompense to his enemies. Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:6-8).

It is evident that Isaiah was completely baffled by the revelation imparted to him by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We hasten to the Day of Pentecost for the fulfillment. There we see Peter delivering his great sermon about the resurrected Lord in which he proclaimed Him as Lord and Christ. Conviction seized the multitude and they pled for mercy. They repented and believed, and three thousand souls were added to the church that very day. A nation was born at once. When Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. The miracle was repeated again and again until the believers were referred to as the multitude. Later Cornelius became interested and embraced the faith, and Christianity became the Gospel to the whole world. Jews and Gentiles became one fellowship in Christ. Prophecy and fulfillment harmonized in one glorious theme of universal redemption. Nothing could symbolize this better than a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God, the church of the firstborn.

The reason God uses this city to symbolize His bride is evident. It is heavenly in origin, and it is holy because it represents people who are cleansed and made whole by the blood of Christ. Holiness is a characteristic of persons rather than things, such as gold or jewels. Furthermore, this city demonstrates the unfolding of God's divine purpose and His eternal plan, which incorporates the twelve tribes of Israel conjoined with the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. This reveals God's means of spanning the centuries from the beginning of His redemptive plan until the consummation of all ages to come and how God is at work molding the church on the anvil of faith. It is the divine product fashioned in time but which will endure throughout eternity.

Although the bride, the New Jerusalem, is compared with the most costly and precious things on earth, it is really worth far more, for Peter says we were not redeemed by these corruptible things, but by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). Thus, the church was born out of God's infinite love and man's

ultimate need. Its foundations are its apostles and prophets. Its jewels are its martyrs and its heroes of faith. Its gold is the outcome of the Divine Refiner Who purges the dross until His image is reflected in the crucible. The entire structure glories the God Who brought it into being. Some glorious day the struggle will be over. Eternity will dawn and the church will participate in the new song of the redeemed as an anthem of ceaseless praise to the Lamb on the throne throughout endless age of eternity. Hallelujah! What a Savior!