

(Part 6 of 6 from)

THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM IN THE APOCALYPSE

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CHAPTER XXVI

From *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (1959)

IV. THE REVELATION OF THE FINAL UNIVERSAL KINGDOM OF GOD (Rev. 20:7-22:5)

The remaining two chapters [of Rev.] describe the eternal and consummated kingdom of God on the new earth. As the world of nations is pervaded by Divine influence in the millennium, so that of *nature* shall be, not annihilated, but transfigured, in the subsequent eternal state. The earth was cursed for man, but is redeemed by the second Adam. Now is the Church; in the millennium shall be the kingdom; after that shall be the new world wherein God shall be all in all . . . God's works are progressive. The millennium in which sin and death are much restricted, is the transition state from the old to the new earth. The millennium is the age of regeneration. The final age shall be wholly free from sin and death. -- A. R. Fausset¹

By some interpreters, the New Jerusalem of chapter 21 has been assigned to the Millennial Kingdom of chapter 20. But this view must be rejected for various good reasons: First, it would seriously violate the literary order of the book, by reverting to a description of the Millennium after what is admittedly an account of the last Judgment in 20:11-15, which follows the Millennial Kingdom. Second, in the new condition described by chapter 21 there is neither sin nor death, but in the Millennium both are present. Third, in the language of 20:1-22:5 there is a constantly recurring note of eternal *finality* which would be entirely inappropriate for the Millennial Kingdom which is transitional in character--"a thousand years" in length. As to the *order* of events, the conclusion of Alford is sound: "The whole of the things described in the remaining portion of the book (21:1-22:5) is subsequent to the general judgment, and descriptive of the consummation of the triumph and bliss of Christ's people with Him in the eternal Kingdom of God."²

No attempt will be made here to treat in detail the impressive visions described in the final section of Revelation. The material belongs to the field of General Eschatology to which I hope to devote a later volume. It will be sufficient, with reference to the Kingdom, to note

1 A. R. Fausset, *ibid.*, p. 724.

2 Henry Alford, *ibid.*, on Rev. 21:1.

only the *final* character of the things now before us. For these things not only belong to the category of "last things"; they mark the *end* of the category. The keynote of the section might well be stated in the words of St. Paul--"Then cometh the end" (I Cor. 15:24).

1. *The Final Rebellion* (Rev. 20:7-10)

Fire came down . . . and devoured them. -- Rev. 20:9

This rebellion of Satan and his deluded followers is not part of the Millennial Kingdom, but follows it. As John describes the tragic event, it does not come until "the thousand years are expired" (vs. 7). Then for a brief season the divine restraint will be relaxed for the purpose of providing one last and supreme demonstration of the appalling wickedness of the unregenerated human heart. How such a rebellion could spring up, following a kingdom which began with a society of regenerated people, should be no mystery. For regenerated parents are no guarantee of regenerated progeny, as we should have learned long ago. If the number who respond to the satanic leadership seems disappointingly large--"as the sand of the sea"--we must remember that under the millennial control of disease and death, the human race will greatly multiply. Moreover, the large number of the unsaved is always balanced by the promise made to Abraham--"I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (Gen. 22:17). And the saved in every age, in a sense, are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29). When John describes the objective of the satanic attack as "the camp of the saints," there is no necessary implication that all the millennial saints are shut up in Jerusalem.³ It only means that Satan recognizes, as we might expect, that here in "the beloved city" is the center or "citadel" (*parembolē*; cf. Acts 21:34) of the millennial government. The rebellion ends in judgment, not in a battle. Though Satan gathers the rebels "to battle," there is no battle. The end is by the fire of divine *execution*.

2. *The Final Judgment* (Rev. 20:11-15)

I saw a great white throne. -- Rev. 20:11

a. The *Judge* here must be our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him alone, according to His own claims, has been committed "all judgment"; "the Father judgeth no man" (John 5:22). And for this immense adjudication our Lord is perfectly fitted; for He not only has the requisite divine ability, but He alone of the Persons of the Godhead has had a personal experience of human life, being not only Son of God but also "Son of man" (John 5:27).

b. The *purpose* of this judgment is not to determine who is to be lost or saved. This is a matter which must be settled before death. In this respect, all men are always living in a day of judgment, a time when by the grace of God personal destiny is determined by human decision. As our Lord once said, "He that believeth on him is not judged: he that

³ See Loraine Boettner's unfair caricature, *ibid.*, p. 71.

believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18, ASV). The purpose of final judgment is to exhibit the character of the judged and award to them "according to their works."

c. The *subjects* of this judgment are named in the passage as "the dead" (Rev. 20:12). And since they are to be judged "according to their works" (vss. 12-13), the implication points strongly to a class of people who are dead spiritually as well as physically. "By works of law shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rom. 3:20, ASV margin). For the saved, on the other hand, there can be no such judgment, because their judgment with reference to sin took place at Calvary. It is a very solemn fact, of course, that the believer's *works* must be brought into judgment for reward or loss (I Cor. 3:12-15), but this will have taken place at some point between the Rapture of the Church and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom; and it will have nothing to do with salvation. Furthermore, since all those saved before the Millennial Kingdom will have a part in the "first resurrection," and during the Millennium none of the saved will die, there appears to be no reason for any resurrection for saved people afterwards. If there are any of the saved in this final resurrection, nothing at all is said about their destination, whereas that of the unsaved is specifically stated (Rev. 20:15).

d. The *books* mentioned must include at least the written Word of God and the divine record of human deeds. In the latter perhaps there will be other books, such as the book of *memory*; and the book of the *universe* where, it has been suggested by some, there could be found a physical recording of the image of every act committed and the sound of every word uttered from the beginning of the world. As to the "book of life" which appears here, this seems to be definitely set apart from the books out of which the dead are to be judged according to their works. It is not one of "the books," but "another book." Its purpose is to testify silently, by its omissions, against those who had rejected the mercy of God. Significantly, there is here no book of death, for while men are elected to salvation, none are elected to damnation. It is their own choice, not God's, that bring them at last into the place of doom.

e. The *outcome* of this judgment is eternal perdition in the lake of fire (vss. 14-15). No other destination is even mentioned in the context of the passage. If any are saved out of this judgment and ushered into heaven, strangely nothing is said about them. Such an idea seems to be excluded by the opening words of the passage: the Judge sits on a "great white throne" (vs. 11). Encircling this throne there is no "rainbow" of bright hope, as in the case of the pre-Kingdom judgment throne (4:3), bringing salvation to an innumerable multitude (7:9-14). But the color of the final judgment throne is the ineffable whiteness of absolute holiness and justice, unrelieved by any semblance of grace. At this solemn adjudication the matter of rebellion and discord in the universe receives its final disposition in preparation for the Kingdom in which God will be "all in all."

3. *The Final Universe* (Rev. 21:1)

A new heaven, and a new earth. -- Rev. 21:1

The "heaven" and "earth" here undoubtedly refer to the *physical* universe. The "first" or original universe passes away, and is replaced by a "new" universe. This does not necessarily mean the annihilation of our present world of matter; for the Greek *kainos* may mean new in *character* rather than in substance. The same term is used of the regenerated believer: he becomes a "new creation" (II Cor. 5:17, ASV) in a crisis which does not annihilate the personal entity but transforms it. So in the final change of the physical universe, it does not lose its identity, but will pass away as to its "outward and recognizable form" and be renewed in a "fresh and more glorious one."⁴

The method of renewal, according to Peter, will be by fire: "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." And out of this divinely wrought dissolution will come "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:10-13). Peter's language here clearly distinguishes between the physical universe and the righteous order of things which will dwell there. And the transformation by fire applies to the former.

Modern research is teaching us more and more about the wonders of *physical* substance. It is no longer regarded as the dead and mechanistic thing postulated by an obsolete science. The possibilities existing in a clod of earth are beyond human imagination. And what God can do with our present universe, in preparation for His eternal Kingdom, can only be guessed at. Yet perhaps we have a suggestion in the nature of the resurrection body of the saved where corruptible matter by the energizing power of the Spirit takes on a wondrous character, being made glorious, powerful, and imperishable (I Cor. 15:42-44). Our present physical universe, with all its marvels, is nevertheless now a realm characterized by transience, decay, and death. Even the millennial state, with these liabilities under far-reaching divine control, will fall short of the ideal world. "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth" (II Pet. 3:13).

4. *The Final City* (Rev. 21:2, 9-22:5)

That great city, the holy Jerusalem. -- Rev. 21:10

It is interesting to observe that, while the account of the new universe is confined to a single verse, no less than twenty-five verses are used to describe its great city in detail. The record speaks of its "glory" (vs. 11), its "gates" (vss. 12-13, 21, 25), its "wall" (vss. 14, 18), its "measure" (vss. 15-17), its "foundations" (vss. 19-20), its "street" (vs. 21), its "temple" (vs. 22), its "light" (vs. 23), its "nations" (vs. 24), its "river" (22:1), its wondrous "tree" (vs. 2), and its "throne" (vs. 3).

4 Henry Alford, *ibid.*, on Rev. 21:1.

The name of the city, as in common usage, refers to both the structure and those who dwell there. According to the angelic word, the "holy Jerusalem" is "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (21:9-10). The members of the Church will be its honored citizens (Phil. 3:20, ASV). But the saved of all ages will have free access to its glories and benefits (Rev. 21:24-26).

Although the details of its description suggest many very precious symbolical meanings, we must not lose sight of the *literality* of the city. For it is a *place*, "prepared" by the Lord of glory Himself (Rev. 21:2; John 14:1-3). Surely, it would be foolish to argue that, because in the Holy Communion service its symbolism is the thing of highest importance, therefore it is of no consequence whether or not we have a literal bread and a literal cup. If the King of the New Jerusalem and also its inhabitants are literal, there is no reason for balking at the literality of the city itself. While some details of its structure may not be fully understood, none of them are wholly outside the realm of sober possibility. If there were twelve apostles and twelve tribes of Israel, why should not the new Jerusalem have its twelve foundations and twelve gates, bearing these historic names? (Rev. 21:12-14). These details have an anchor in the facts of history.

The dimensions of the New Jerusalem are admittedly gigantic--"twelve thousand furlongs" in breadth, and length, and height (vs. 16). Even if we interpret this language as indicating the shape of a perfect cube, however, the concept is not inconceivable. In this case, its lines and equal dimensions would suggest that exquisite simplicity toward which modern architecture is moving. But on the other hand, as it may be, if the height of the city refers to the *eminence* upon which the city is set (possibly formed by the twelve foundations arranged in pyramid fashion), then again the literal concept would be one of great architectural splendor. The 144-cubit wall seems to harmonize better with this interpretation of the city's dimensions. What a sight such a city would be, gradually rising toward the sky by the great step-backs of its twelve-jeweled foundations. It is true that this concept would be totally out of proportion with the dimensions of our present earth. But there is to be a "new earth." And if the earth is to be made the eternal dwelling place of Christ and His redeemed people, as the passage suggests, then the earth will become the center of all things. Surely there would be a divine fitness in this, for here the great drama of sin and redemption will have been played out before an awed universe. And in that case, doubtless, the new earth will be so constituted, both as to size and glory, that it will harmonize perfectly with its eternal city.

5. *The Final Kingdom*

They shall reign for ever and ever. -- Rev. 22:5

a. When the last enemy of God has been put down by our Lord acting as Mediatorial King, the purpose of His Mediatorial Kingdom will have been fulfilled. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (I Cor. 15:25). This point in the

history of the government of God will have been reached when death itself comes to an end, for "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:26). And this point is clearly indicated in Revelation 20:14 where we are told that "death" is cast into the lake of fire. With the end of this "last enemy" there can be no more any intermediate state, therefore, "Hades" also is abolished. In the inspired record, the destruction of death and Hades appears as the last act of our Lord in preparation for the new and eternal world.

As we pass from chapter 20 into chapter 21 of the Apocalypse, therefore, we stand at the junction point between two worlds and between two kingdoms. It is the end of the "first" or "natural" order of things, and the beginning of the final order of things. Here also the Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord ends, not by abolition, but by its mergence into the Universal Kingdom of God. Thus it is perpetuated forever, no longer as a separate entity, but in indissoluble union with the original Kingdom of God from which it sprang. What will happen is succinctly described in St. Paul's classic passage on the subject: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:24, 28). This does not mean the end of our Lord's regal activity, but rather that from here onward in the unity of the Godhead He reigns with the Father as the eternal Son. There are no longer two thrones: one His Messianic throne and the other the Father's throne, as our Lord indicated in Revelation 3:21. In the final Kingdom there is but one throne, and it is "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:3).

b. The changed conditions in this final Kingdom will be very wonderful and far-reaching. But, in general, it should be observed that there is no *absolute* break with the former world, as in the Platonic postulate. The Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord will constitute the glorious consummating era of the first order of things and will serve as the divine *bridge* between the temporal order and the eternal order. As Lange has well said, "The Apocalypse alone sets forth the true mediation of the last metamorphosis of the old world, in the Millennial Kingdom."⁵ When in the record of Revelation 21:5 the voice from heaven announces, "Behold, I make all things new," we must not suppose that our world will then lose its identity, but rather that in its reconstituted form, it will begin to exist under new and perfect conditions. Two of these conditions may be stated as follows:

First, of all these changed conditions, perhaps the greatest is that at last "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). Even during the glorious millennial reign of Christ with His Church on earth, their actual residence will be in heaven. But in the eternal Kingdom heaven comes down to earth; God dwells with men! At last the long history of temporary theophanies will be done. In the face of Jesus Christ men at last will

5 Lange, *Revelation*, p. 363.

see the face of God with no hindrance of circumstance or interruption of temporality.

Second, in this final Kingdom of God some of the most familiar things of the present life will be missing: "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (21:4). And in such a world, of course, there can be no sin; for sin is the cause of all tears, all pain, and all death. Thus, we read, that in this new order of things with its glorious city, there will be no place for the "unbelieving" and sinners (21:8). "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (21:27). The description closes on a somber note: All the unsaved are shut "without" the city (22:15), and for such there is no remedy (22:11).

c. As the divinely given visions of the future Kingdom come to an end in 22:5, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself speaks from heaven historically in a final word to "the churches" (22:16). And He identifies Himself here as "the bright and morning star"; for while during the life of the churches on earth it is night, not day, the morning is always "at hand" (Rom. 13:12). In His message we note two important things:

First, as an antidote to any possible hesitation (often unspoken) to believe all the wondrous revelation of this book of the Kingdom, we are given His own gracious assurance: "These sayings are faithful and true" (22:6). And in the face of this divine validation, all our doubts must wither away and die. For the very name of the Speaker is "Faithful and True" (19:11); and therefore of all He has spoken nothing can possibly fail.

Second, to "the churches" on earth, He gives a thrice-repeated reminder of something which must never be forgotten; for it will give courage in the hour of battle, strength in the hour of weakness, and hope in the hour of despair. Let us hear Him as He speaks:

"Behold, I come quickly" (vs. 7)

"Behold, I come quickly" (vs. 12)

"Behold, I come quickly" (vs. 21)

Thus, in His last historic word from heaven, our Lord writes once more over the portals of the Church that "Blessed Hope" under which she must live and labor during every moment of her existence upon the earth. And if we are wise in the simplicity of the Word of God, we shall respond in the words of the "beloved disciple," who heard and recorded the message:

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (vs. 20).