

# “Going to Heaven”—The Great Distraction (1)

God's eternal purpose, according to His good pleasure, the desire of His heart, is to work Himself in Christ into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as their life, their life supply, and their everything in order to make them His corporate expression, initially as the Body of Christ and ultimately as the New Jerusalem. For this grand purpose God created human beings as tripartite vessels—a composition of spirit, soul, and body—prepared to receive Him, contain Him, and express Him. However, because humankind fell into sin and death, the Lord implemented the plan of redemption in order to recover His elect to His original intention. Redemption, therefore, is not an end in itself but a procedure that enables God, without violating His righteousness, holiness, and glory, to forgive our sins, to justify us, and to regenerate us. Now based upon God's judicial redemption, we have been reconciled to God, and we are positioned to receive the divine dispensing, the dispensing of Himself into us, that, eventually, results in the corporate expression of God. In this way God's eternal purpose is accomplished, and our eternal destiny, as the New Jerusalem, to experience, enjoy, and express the Triune God is secured. As the last two chapters of Revelation make clear, our eternal destiny is to be the New Jerusalem, God's expression, for eternity in the new heaven and new earth.

Tragically, the vast majority of God's redeemed people, through the wiles of the devil, God's enemy, have been distracted from God's purpose and from His goal—the New Jerusalem. In my view, the greatest distraction is the popular concept of going to heaven to spend eternity in a custom-made mansion, or apartment, in what is supposed to be “the Father's house.” Whereas few believers care for God's purpose, the overwhelming majority are distracted by, preoccupied with, and even fixated on the notion of “going to heaven” and thus have been deceived by the enemy and led astray from God's purpose, wasting countless opportunities to experience Christ for the sake of the building up of the Body to consummate the New Jerusalem. It is the purpose of this article, as the first in a series of as yet undetermined length, to begin to identify and then reflect upon the various ways in which Christians have been distracted from God's eternal purpose by the thought of spending eternity in a “mansion” in heaven. Perhaps what is written here will incite believers who are

open-minded and who desire to test all theological claims by the divine revelation in the Word to engage in a thoughtful and serious reconsideration of traditional religious ideas concerning heaven as our supposed eternal abode. My method will be simple: first to present, very briefly, a crucial truth in the Word and then point out how the idea of “going to heaven” distracts the believers from this truth. We begin with the gospel.

### The Gospel

The New Testament affords us a full, rich, and complete revelation concerning the gospel. The Lord Jesus Himself preached the gospel—the gospel of God, which is actually the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:14, 1). In particular, the gospel proclaimed by the Lord was the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23). This gospel “includes not only forgiveness of sins (cf. Luke 24:47) and the imparting of life (cf. John 20:31) but also the kingdom of the heavens (24:14)...Both forgiveness of sins and the imparting of life are for the kingdom” (Recovery Version, Matt. 4:23, note 2).

What the Lord began in the Gospels, the apostles continued in the Acts and the Epistles. In Acts they announced “the gospel of Jesus as the Christ” (5:42), proclaimed “the gospel of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12), “announced Jesus as the gospel” (v. 35), preached “the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ” (10:36), announced “the Lord Jesus as the gospel” (11:20), declared “the word of the Lord as the gospel” (15:35), announced “Jesus and the resurrection as the gospel” (17:18), and testified of “the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24). In Galatians Paul contended for the truth of the gospel (2:5, 14), in Ephesians he spoke of the gospel of peace (6:15) and of the mystery of the gospel (v. 19), and he was entrusted with “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11). “*The gospel of the glory of the blessed God* is an excellent expression. It refers to God's economy, mentioned in v. 4. The gospel with which the apostle Paul was entrusted is the effulgence of the glory of the blessed God” (Recovery Version, note 1). In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul speaks in a marvelous way regarding “the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4). “Christ as the image of God is the effulgence of His glory (Heb. 1:3). Hence, the gospel

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of Christ is the gospel of His glory that illuminates and shines forth” (Recovery Version, 2 Cor. 4:4, note 4). Because Paul did not preach himself but Christ Jesus as Lord (v. 5), “the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine” could shine in human hearts “to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6).

In one of his Epistles—Romans—Paul not only speaks of the gospel (1:1, 9, 15-16; 2:16; 10:16; 11:28; 15:16, 19-20; 16:25) but also presents a wonderful outline of the gospel. In Paul’s understanding, the gospel of God (1:1) concerns His Son, “who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (vv. 3-4). The focus of the gospel of God is the Son of God, and, based upon the redemption accomplished through the propitiating death of Christ, the goal of the gospel is to make sinners the sons of God to constitute the Body of Christ. The book of Romans begins with sinners and ends with churches, genuine and proper local churches that are expressions of the unique, universal Body of Christ. The aim of Paul’s gospel preaching, therefore, was to carry out God’s economy—His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in Christ as life into His chosen and redeemed people (cf. 8:6, 10-11) for the building up of the Body of Christ as His corporate expression. This, in essence, is the gospel of God.

### Another Gospel

What is commonly preached today, however, is not the gospel of God or the gospel of the kingdom or the gospel of the glory of Christ; rather, what is announced today is another gospel—the gospel of “going to heaven.” The “good news” proclaimed by many is not centered on Christ but on heaven or on what is wrongly identified as “My Father’s house.” Let us consider some examples.

The writer of “What Is the Gospel?” says, “God...wants you to be happy...but sin prevents you from going to heaven” (1). Such a statement reveals that the message of the gospel is concerned with going to heaven. Because God wants us to be happy, He wants us to go to heaven: “God really wants you to be happy. Heaven will make you happy. Knowing without doubt that you are going to heaven will make you happy and get you through the tough times until you get there. God really wants you to go to heaven” (1). In the opinion of this writer, the gospel is about happiness in heaven, and the word of the gospel points the way to heaven. This gospel, confidently called the “only True Gospel” (1), is the gospel of going to heaven.

In a message entitled “Are You Going to Heaven?” we are

told, “Heaven is a wonderful place. It is filled with beauty and splendor. Streets of gold and walls of precious stones” (1). Because God loves us, He wants us to live in His lovely place. “The Bible tells us that God loves us so much that someday He wants us to live in Heaven with Him *forever*” (1). However, “God will not let us into Heaven with our sins and since we can’t get rid of our sins by ourselves...we have a problem” (1). However, Christ died for our sins so that we may be admitted into heaven and walk on the streets of gold. “Isn’t it wonderful to know,” we are assured, “that God loves us and cares for us, and that He wants us to have a home with Him forever in Heaven?” (2). If this is not a going-to-heaven gospel, what is it? The central point of the gospel according to “Are You Going to Heaven?” is heaven—not God or the kingdom of God, not Christ or the glory of Christ.

An article entitled “My Father’s House” is based, as usual, upon a misreading, misunderstanding, and misapplication of John 14:2-6. This message on mansions says, “The word mansion means ‘abiding places’ or rooms. Jesus was saying that his Father’s house had lots of rooms. It is a mansion!” (1). The gospel, the good news, is thus about a room in a mansion! “There is even more good news. Jesus is preparing a room just for us!” (1). The reason that there will be “a room just for us” is that Jesus “wants us to be with him in heaven,” and to assure us that He will usher us into our room, “He will come again and personally receive us into heaven one day” (1). According to the mistaken view promulgated here, the words “I am coming again” in John 14:3 are alleged to refer to the Lord’s second coming at the end of the age, not, as the context of John 14 reveals, to His coming in resurrection to dwell in us even as we dwell in Him.

“My Father’s House” wants us to believe that Jesus is the way to heaven. “He wants us to know that he is God’s chosen way to heaven” (1). Although the Lord revealed that He is the way to a person—the Father, in “My Father’s House” we are taught that Jesus is the way to a place—heaven. “Jesus said he was the only way to heaven....We must accept Jesus as our Savior to go to heaven” (1). Once again, the gospel is about going to heaven, and Jesus is the way to heaven, in particular, the way to our special room in the Father’s “mansion.”

A message posted on the Internet by Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church bears the title “How to Know for Sure You Are Going to Heaven.” This message is about certainty—the certainty of going to heaven and thereby of obtaining eternal life. Whereas “one of the characteristics of the first followers of Jesus was their certainty,” understood as certainty regarding eternity in heaven, “most people don’t have such confidence when it comes to eternal life” (1). The purpose of CRPC’s message is to enable us to have certainty about heaven. We are asked,

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“Do you have certainty about eternity? Do you know for sure?” (2). The way to have the desired certainty about “going to heaven” is then spelled out: “Throw away all trust in your own goodness. Look to the cross of Jesus Christ....Transfer all of your hopes from what you have done to what He has done for you at Calvary. Place your trust in Him alone” (2).

Yet another illustration comes from Billy Graham. In response to the question “What will Heaven look like?” he says,

When the Apostle John was given a glimpse of the City of Heaven, he wrote that “it shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious stone, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:11). He went on to describe it as a vast city made of gold and every type of precious stone. (1)

**H**ere Graham makes the common mistakes of confounding heaven with the New Jerusalem, which, in the book of Revelation, is portrayed as “coming down out of heaven from God” (v. 2) and of teaching that heaven, wrongly called “the City of Heaven,” is literally a vast city of gold and precious stones. Concerned that his questioner may not be assured of eternity in this golden city, Graham goes on to ask, “Do you have the hope of Heaven in your heart? You can, by making sure of your commitment to Christ today” (1). For Graham, the reason for making a “commitment to Christ” is the assurance of heaven, not the carrying out of the eternal purpose of God.

In his book *Heaven: The Undiscovered Country* Ron Rhodes concludes with “Postscript: An Invitation to Believe,” the purpose of which is to encourage unsaved readers to believe in Christ in order to go to heaven. Telling the reader that it is “the *faith in your heart* that saves you” (192), Rhodes asks his reader to follow him in prayer:

Dear Jesus: I want to have a relationship with You. I know I can't save myself, because I know I'm a sinner. Thank You for dying on the cross on my behalf. I believe You died *for me*, and I accept Your free gift of salvation. Thank You, Jesus. Amen. (192)

Rhodes then welcomes the saved and heaven-bound one to God's eternal family: “On the authority of the Word of God, I can now assure you that you are a part of God's forever family. If you prayed the above prayer with a heart of faith, you will spend all eternity by the side of Jesus in heaven” (192).

Bishop J. C. Ryle supplies our final case of the going-to-heaven gospel. In “Heaven and How to Get There” he

encourages us to “think awhile about Heaven,” claiming that he intends to tell his readers “what God plainly teaches about it in His Word” (1). “A place of incomparable external, as well as internal beauty,” heaven will be “a place of glad reunions,” where the “bereaved wife shall meet again the husband she has missed so long; the son shall meet again the mother whose departure left his life so desolate” (1). Ryle continues by expressing his concern for those who hope to be in heaven but have not yet made a start: “You must make a start if you are ever to see the loved ones who have gone before” (2). Next, Ryle presents Jesus as the only way to heaven: “If you reject Him,” he warns, “you shut the door to heaven on yourself. Heaven is a prepared place, and you must be prepared for heaven by repenting of your sin and putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your Saviour” (2).

**T**hese going-to-heaven gospel messages have a number of features in common. First, they speak clearly about a precious truth: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). This surely is good news! Also, we are exhorted to believe in the Lord Jesus and to trust in Him, and to this we must utter a hearty “Amen!” However, in each of the examples cited above, the gospel is presented as a word concerning the way to heaven, and the goal of the preaching of the gospel is to bring assurance about going to heaven. This is contrary to the divine revelation in the Scriptures and caters to the natural, religious thought about the afterlife. The gospel about going to heaven is certainly a distraction from the gospel of God concerning His Son—the gospel that presents Christ, the God-man, as our righteousness and our life so that by believing into Him and receiving Him we may be forgiven, justified, reconciled, and regenerated to become sons of God, members of the organic Body of Christ. The gospel of going to heaven is about material glory in heaven; the gospel of God is about the glory shining in the face of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Eternal Life

The notion of spending eternity in a golden heaven also distracts the believers in Christ from the divinely revealed truth concerning eternal life. As believers in Christ, we need to have a scriptural view and a proper realization and understanding of the eternal life of God, which we received of God through our believing into the Son of God (John 3:15, 36a). Eternal life, the divine life, is a life on the highest plane, for it is the life of God (Eph. 4:18), even the Triune God Himself, the One who is self-existing, ever-existing, uncreated, incorruptible, indestructible, and eternal (John 5:26; Rom. 8:2; Heb. 7:16). To be eternal is to be perfect and complete in quality, time, space, and existence. Thus, eternal life is perfect and complete in its quality, in its quantity,

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in time, in space, and in existence. In contrast to every other kind of life, including the natural human life, the eternal life is not only everlasting but eternal both in time and in nature (John 3:16; 1 John 1:2). This is the uncreated life of God, the incorruptible life (2 Tim. 1:10).

**T**he eternal life is the life that is in the Son of God and that is the Son of God (1 John 5:11-12; 1:2; John 1:4; 14:6). The Son of God is the means through which God gives us eternal life, and we can have this life only by believing into the Son's name (20:31). The eternal life is in the Son, and the Son is the life; thus, the life and the Son are one. Since eternal life is in the Son and is the Son and since the Son and the life are one, the person who has the Son has the life, and the person who does not have the Son does not have the life (1 John 5:11-12). For those who have received Christ the Son by believing into Him, Christ Himself is life (Col. 3:4). It is with this eternal, wonderful, and marvelous life that the believers in Christ are regenerated; it is with this life that we are being sanctified, renewed, transformed, and conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God; and it is through this life that we will be glorified with the Triune God as our eternal glory (Rom. 8:2, 17; Heb. 2:10; 2 Thes. 1:10).

With respect to the believers, the eternal life has three stages, and these stages are in three ages: the present age, the church age (Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:13); the coming age, the kingdom age (Matt. 19:16-17); and the eternal age, in the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center (Rev. 21:1-2; 22:1-2, 14). Through the grace of God, we have been justified by faith in Christ, and our sins have been forgiven and cleansed; this provides the basis for God, in His righteousness, to regenerate us by dispensing into us the divine life that makes us the children of God (John 1:12-13). Because of God's righteousness, our regenerated spirit—the human spirit born of and mingled with the life-giving Spirit—is life (Rom. 8:10). If we set our mind on the spirit, our mind will be life (v. 6). Furthermore, if we allow the Spirit of the One who raised Christ Jesus from the dead to dwell, to make His home, in us, the Spirit will impart the divine life into our mortal bodies (v. 11). In this way, we, in the present age, may have a rich enjoyment of the eternal life. If we are diligent and faithful to enjoy the divine life today, the eternal life will be a reward to us in the coming age of the kingdom; otherwise, we will suffer loss and not share the privilege of reigning with Christ as His co-kings for a thousand years. After the age of the kingdom, all the believers, whether or not they overcame during the church age and reigned with the Lord in the kingdom age, will have the eternal enjoyment of the eternal life, for all the believers will have become organic parts of the New Jerusalem—the consummate, eternal corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ.

The universally popular concept of spending eternity in an abode in heaven distracts the believers from the present (this age) and also from the future (kingdom age) experience and enjoyment of eternal life. This aspect of heaven is the great distraction from God and His economy; it is the issue of accepting the erroneous teaching that having eternal life equals going to heaven when we die. John 3:16 is often cited in support of this mistaken understanding. Yes, God gave His only begotten Son as an offering for sin (v. 14; Rom. 8:3) so that by believing into Him we may have eternal life. But this eternal life is not an unending existence in heaven. According to 1 John 5:11-12, eternal life is in the Son, and according to John 11:25 and 14:6 the Son Himself is this life. Nevertheless, preachers and Bible teachers persist in misleading the believers by claiming that to have eternal life is to go to heaven and live there forever close to the Lord.

**A**s an illustration of this pervasive, yet false, concept, we may consider a message entitled "How to Have Eternal Life." It is significant that the title does not read "How to Go to Heaven." If the writer had been faithful to the Word of God, he or she could have pointed out that eternal life is the life of God, that this life is in the Son and is the Son, that the way to have eternal life is to have the Son, and that to have eternal life by believing into the Son is to possess, through regeneration, the uncreated, divine, eternal life for our present (as well as eternal) experience and enjoyment. However, this is not the message conveyed in "How to Have Eternal Life," which opens this way: "Did you know that the Bible tells how you can know for sure that you have eternal life and will go to be with God in Heaven?" (1). Here we have the mistaken identification of having eternal life and going to be with God in heaven. The message conveyed here is that eternal life equals everlasting existence in heaven. That this is an accurate assessment of the writer's intention is proved by the first sentence in the second paragraph:

Heaven (Eternal Life) is a free gift....And because Heaven is a gift, like any other genuine gift, it is not earned or deserved. Therefore, no amount of personal effort, good works, or religious deeds can earn a place in Heaven for you. (1)

There you have it: Heaven equals eternal life, and to receive the gift of eternal life is to receive the gift of heaven.

Another case of identifying heaven with eternal life is the article entitled "Assurance of Heaven": "Would you like to be absolutely certain that if you were to die right now that you would go to heaven?" (1). In an attempt to provide this coveted assurance, the writer quotes 1 John 5:13, which speaks of knowing that we have eternal life. The article goes on to claim that knowing that we have

eternal life is the same as knowing that we will go to heaven when we die: “God cannot lie, and He promised everlasting life to all through Jesus, who is the Savior from sin. Isn’t it wonderful to know that with Jesus as your Savior you will spend eternity in heaven” (1). Contrary to what the Scriptures reveal, this article would have its readers believe that everlasting life equals eternity in heaven and that the assurance of heaven consists in knowing that we have eternal life.

The same view is enunciated by D. James Kennedy in *Truths That Transform: Christian Doctrines for Your Life Today*. In his penultimate chapter, “Heaven, the Life Hereafter,” Kennedy perpetuates the erroneous idea about the Father’s house in John 14:2. Heaven, we are told, “is also called a house: ‘In My Father’s house are many mansions’” (154). Kennedy is convinced that we can know with assurance that we are going to heaven, and this certainty, he suggests, can be found in the Bible. “If you are going to heaven, there is one way that you can tell: You know it. For these things are written ‘that ye may know that ye have eternal life,’ the Scripture says (1 John 5:13)” (160-161). Again, having eternal life is the same as going to heaven. According to the theology expounded in *Truths That Transform*, to know that we have eternal life is to know that we are going to heaven.

**T**here is a problem with using 1 John 5:13 to advance the view that having eternal life is identical with going to heaven: Such an understanding is in keeping neither with the entire context of the book of 1 John nor with the revelation in the Gospel of John.

The subject of 1 John is the fellowship of the divine life (1:3, 6-7), and this Epistle opens with a declaration concerning the Word of life (v. 1) and with an apostolic testimony to the truth that the life—the eternal life—was manifested (v. 2) through Christ’s incarnation, a divine fact strongly emphasized by John in his Gospel (1:14). The eternal life in 1 John 1:2 is not everlasting existence in heaven. Rather, the eternal life

denotes the divine spiritual life...*Eternal* denotes not only duration of time, which is everlasting, without end, but also quality, which is absolutely perfect and complete, without any shortage or defect. Such an expression [*eternal life*] emphasizes the eternal nature of the divine life, the life of the eternal God. (Recovery Version, 1 John 1:2, note 3)

This understanding of *the life* and *the eternal life* should govern our interpretation of other references to the divine life in 1 John. In 2:25 John says, “This is the promise which He Himself promised us, the eternal life.” *He Himself* refers to both the Son and the Father in verse 24; this indicates that the Son and the Father are one (John

10:30). The life promised in 1 John 2:25 is the eternal life in 1:2, the life that was manifested by the incarnation of Christ. The promise related to this life was made in the Gospel of John, in verses such as 3:15—“Every one who believes into Him may have eternal life”; in 4:14—“The water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water gushing up into eternal life”; in 6:47—“He who believes has eternal life”; in 10:10—“I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly”; in 11:25—“I am the resurrection and the life”; and in 17:3—“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ.” The Father has this life in Himself, and “He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself” (5:26). Now “the Son gives life to whom He wills” (v. 21) by laying down His soul-life (*psyche*) for the sheep that they might have the eternal life—the life that is the Son of God Himself. Therefore, the Lord Jesus could say, “I give to them eternal life” (10:28). In none of these verses does *life* or *eternal life* refer to heaven; in every case *life* and *eternal life* denote the life of God, the uncreated, divine life.

**I**t is this life that John speaks of in 1 John 5: “This is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son” (v. 11). On the one hand, the testimony of God is that Jesus is His Son; on the other hand, the testimony of God is that He gives to us eternal life. This life is in His Son and thus is inseparable from the Son. If we would have the eternal life which is in the Son, we must have the Son by believing into Him and receiving Him into us (John 3:15-16; 1:12-13). “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:12). Notice the emphatic use of *the life*, a phrase that denotes the unique life, the life of the Triune God.

Because the life is in the Son (John 1:4) and the Son is the life (11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4), the Son and the life are one, inseparable. Hence, he who has the Son has the life, and he who does not have the Son does not have the life. (Recovery Version, 1 John 5:12, note 1)

The life that is in the Son is the life that we now have by having the Son, and John assures us in verse 13 that we may know that we have eternal life, for we “believe into the name of the Son of God.” This is a reflection of John 20:31: “These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name.” Knowing that we have life in the Son, we may receive a further word of assurance: “This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). The true God is eternal life:

*This* refers to the God who has come through incarnation and has given us the ability to know Him as the genuine God and be one with Him organically in His Son Jesus

Christ. All this is the genuine and real God and eternal life to us. All that this genuine and real God is to us is eternal life to us, that we may partake of Him as everything to our regenerated being. (Recovery Version, 1 John 5:20, note 8)

Whereas our Father God longs for us to partake of Him in Christ as our life and our everything for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, countless preachers are distracting the believers from the promise of eternal life by propagating a threefold error: by teaching that eternal life is everlasting existence and not the life of God itself, that having eternal life is the equivalent of going to heaven, and that the enjoyment of heaven as eternal life is the believers' eternal destiny. Eternal life is not heaven—it is God Himself in Christ dispensed into our regenerated human spirit (John 3:6). Oh, that the children of God would turn from the great distraction—going to a dwelling place in heaven—and turn to God, who is life, and to the gospel of God, through which God grants us repentance not unto heaven but “unto life” (Acts 11:18).

by Ron Kangas

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## Coming Down Out of Heaven from God

*And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

The revelation of this book is composed of signs. Because of the profundity of the great and important matters in this book, it is difficult for man to speak of them exhaustively in plain words. Thus, all these matters are symbolized and depicted by signs, such as the lampstands, signifying the churches, and stars, signifying the messengers of the churches (ch. 1); Jezebel, signifying the degraded, fornicating Roman Church (ch. 2b); jasper and precious stones, signifying life and the redeeming God (4:3); the Lion and the Lamb, signifying the overcoming and redeeming Christ (ch. 5); the four horses, signifying the gospel, war, famine, and the spreading abroad of death (ch. 6a); the universal woman, signifying God’s redeemed throughout the generations, her child, signifying the strong, overcoming ones among God’s redeemed, and the dragon, the serpent, signifying the cruel and subtle Satan, the devil (ch. 12); the beast out of the sea, signifying Antichrist, and the beast out of the earth, signifying the false prophet (ch. 13); the harvest, signifying the people growing under God’s cultivation, and the firstfruits, signifying the ones who ripen early among those who are growing under God’s cultivation (ch. 14); Babylon the Great, signifying Rome, in both its religious aspect and its material aspect (chs. 17—18); and the bride, signifying the saints who are mature and are prepared to be Christ’s counterpart (ch. 19a). Besides these, there are many other signs. The final sign, which is also the greatest, is the New Jerusalem, signifying the composition of the totality of God’s redeemed saints throughout the generations, who have been regenerated, transformed, and glorified. It is not a material, lifeless city but a corporate living person as the bride, having Christ, such a wonderful person, as her husband (v. 2).

The New Jerusalem is a living composition of all the saints redeemed by God throughout all generations. It is the bride of Christ as His counterpart (John 3:29) and the holy city of God as His habitation, His tabernacle (v. 3). This is the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22), which God has prepared for us and which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob long after (Heb. 11:10, 16). This is also the Jerusalem which is above and which is our mother (Gal. 4:26). As the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem comes out of Christ, her

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