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FUTURE ETERNITY IN THE NEW HEAVEN & THE NEW EARTH

In addressing God King David asked and answered the question: what is man that You are mindful of him? See Psalm 8:4-8 and also Psalm 144:3-4. David's point was that in our present state we are extremely insignificant. As David said elsewhere, at his best state man is altogether vanity (Psalm 39:5). By contrast, God's creation is evidence of the staggering powers of God's mind. Consider that this universe contains multiple millions upon millions of stars, including huge super-sized stars known as "red supergiants" which are vastly greater than the sun in our solar system; and yet it is all composed of molecules and atoms that are so minute and tiny that they are invisible to the human eye.

God created this whole universe from "building blocks" that are too small for our eyes to even see. In fact, we need electron microscopes with **a magnification of ten million times** in order to "see" atoms and molecules. This degree of magnification (i.e. 10 million times) would enlarge a matchstick that is one tenth of an inch wide to a width of over 15 miles! While we can intellectually acknowledge this type of magnification, in practical terms it is beyond our ability to really grasp. It is truly staggering!

Yet God first conceived the concept of these atomic particles, and then created these microscopic building blocks without ever having to use an electron microscope. From these minute building blocks God then built all matter, including vast stars that are multiple millions of times greater than our Earth. And it is totally beyond our abilities to grasp the number of ATOMS that make up this universe! It is truly a mind-boggling creation.

This whole creation is a very powerful testimony to the absolutely awesome powers of the great Almighty Creator God.

AND YET GOD IS GOING TO BURN UP THIS ENTIRE UNIVERSE!

Why will God do that?

LIMITATIONS TO OUR UNDERSTANDING

Most of us are familiar with Deuteronomy 29:29, which says:

The **secret *things* belong** unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.

There are clearly many things that God has hidden from us human beings for any number of reasons. At this time those things are simply not our business to know. But there is also a positive side to this statement. As Moses said: **those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children**!

In this context Moses was speaking about things that GOD has revealed to us human beings. So this statement here has a very clear message, which is this:

ALL THE INFORMATION GOD HAS PROVIDED IN THE BIBLE IS THERE FOR A PURPOSE! NO INFORMATION THAT GOD HAS PROVIDED IS INSIGNIFICANT!

When some information is freely provided in the Bible by God Himself, then God intends for us to use that information in order to gain a better understanding of God's plan and purposes. It is not God's intention that our understanding is to be limited to the specific statements which God has made. No, God intends for us to use our minds, **to process the information God has provided** and to then reach sound conclusions to further our understanding.

God's revelation to us in the Bible consists primarily of three things: first of all God provides a certain amount of **information**. Secondly, God has given us human beings some clear **instructions** (commandments, laws, judgments, etc.). And thirdly, God also provides many **principles** in order to guide our thinking regarding how to apply the instructions He has given us. Now by utilizing two of these three things, information and principles, **God expects us to grow** not only in grace, but also in knowledge and in understanding (see 2 Peter 3:18).

On top of that, we human beings typically want to know more than God wants us to know in this age. And that includes wanting to know about the future that God has planned for us. We speculate about how the prophecies are going to be fulfilled. But at the same time God Himself has also clearly provided for us quite a bit of information about the things God has planned for those who will be in His Kingdom. And God has provided that information to give us the opportunity to gain a better understanding.

As the title of this article indicates, I want to look at the things God has planned for all future eternity for those who will be in His Family after the time of the lake of fire. Now certainly, the things I will discuss in this article involve a considerable amount of speculation on my part. However, my speculations are not based on arbitrary wishful thinking. I do not have a personal agenda of any kind. I simply want to understand all the knowledge that God has made available to us through the Bible. Thus the speculations I will present here are based primarily on two things: **information** that God Himself has freely provided, especially in Revelation chapters 21 and 22, and on the application of **principles** that God has revealed in various places throughout the Bible. And you can then judge for yourself whether or not I am "rightly dividing the word of truth" (see 2 Timothy 2:15).

So what kind of a "world" do you expect once God has created the new heaven and the new earth? What will things be like? What indications does the Bible give us in this regard? I suspect that your expectations for the new heaven and the new earth differ considerably from my expectations for the new heaven and the new earth. I am convinced that the new heaven and the new earth are going to be vastly different from what we in the past have always imagined. In the rest of this article I will present the reasons why I believe this to be the case.

THE PRESENT UNIVERSE

Let's start by looking at Romans chapter 8, where Paul speaks about the time when the Family of God will be established. And in this context Paul briefly speaks about this whole universe. Here is this section of Scripture.

For the earnest expectation of **the creature** waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For **the creature** was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, Because **the creature** itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that **the whole creation** groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 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. (Romans 8:19-23)

In these five verses the Greek noun "ktisis" is used four times. Three times it is translated as "**creature**" and once as "**creation**". In fact, of the 19 times which this Greek word "ktisis" is used in the whole New Testament, in the Book of Romans alone it is used 7 times. In Romans 1:20 it is translated as "**creation**"; in Romans 1:25 it is translated as "**creature**"; and in Romans 8:39 it is translated as "**creature**".

The biblical Greek word "ktisis" literally means: **the created thing**, without distinguishing whether that "created thing" has life (i.e. a creature) or whether that "created thing" does not have any life (i.e. a creation). So both "creature" and "creation" are technically speaking correct translations for the word "ktisis".

It is the context that will always tell us whether this word should be translated into English as "creation" or as "creature". Now if a translator himself does not correctly understand the context of the passage he is translating, then it is also very easy for that translator to translate "ktisis" incorrectly. And that is precisely what we have in the KJV for Romans 8. Notice the ASV translation of verses 19-22, where this mistake has been corrected, as it has also been corrected in other translations.

For the earnest expectation of **the creation** waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For **the creation** was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that **the creation** itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that **the whole creation** groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (Romans 8:19-22 ASV)

It is nonsense to say, as the KJV implies, that the earnest expectation "OF THE CREATURE" waits for the time of the first resurrection (which is when the sons of God will be "manifested"). Paul wasn't speaking about what the people in this world expect to happen, because the people in this world have no idea that God is building a Family. In these verses here Paul is speaking about the physical creation, i.e. the whole universe, and its fate. That's clear from verse 22, where even the misguided KJV translators could not avoid translating "ktisis" correctly as "creation"! The inclusion of the word "whole" (Greek here is "pasa", the feminine form of "pas") makes it impossible to translate this as "creature". It is talking about the whole creation.

So now let's look at what Paul was really saying here in Romans. We'll examine one verse at a time.

For **the earnest expectation of the creation** waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Romans 8:19)

In leading up to this verse Paul had already explained that those in the first resurrection will be "children of God" (Romans 8:16) and "joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). So now in verse 19 Paul states that **THE WHOLE CREATION HAS A CERTAIN "EXPECTATION"**. Paul is obviously speaking figuratively.

However, the question is: EXACTLY **HOW** IS THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE SONS OF GOD" GOING TO AFFECT THIS WHOLE CREATION?

Can you understand that Paul's statement itself IMPLIES something for this whole creation? It implies that this present universe is in some way inadequate, that it has certain weaknesses, which weaknesses and inadequacies this creation is "expecting" to be remedied by the establishment of the Family of God.

Can you see that?

In the next verse Paul addresses the weakness which the whole creation "expects" to be resolved. Notice:

For **the creation** was made subject to **vanity**, not willingly, but **by reason of him** who hath subjected *the same* **in hope**, (Romans 8:20)

The Greek word here translated as "vanity" is "mataiotes". Most modern translations render this here more appropriately as "**futility**". So first of all this verse tells us that this whole creation, **the whole universe, was created subject to futility**. The reason why this creation is subject to futility is because, NO MATTER WHAT ANYBODY CAN OR WILL DO, this universe will decay! And nobody can stop that decay, because that is the way God created it! This decay is inevitable and unavoidable! There is no way in which this deficiency can be remedied. That's what "subject to vanity" refers to.

The words "**not willingly**" tell us the following: God DID very deliberately create a universe that would unavoidably decay. But that was not because God wanted a universe that would decay. God really wants a universe that will never be subject to decay. So the only reason God DID create a universe that was destined to decay is because God did so with **the explicit hope** that this frail universe (frail because it cannot avoid decaying) would provide the best possible environment in which to test both angels and human beings for a part in God's plans for all future eternity.

This universe is not what God really wants, and it never has been what God really wants! It is only the training ground for achieving God's ultimate purposes. We need to understand that there is absolutely no way that God would have created THE REAL UNIVERSE, the one in which God Himself plans to spend all future eternity, as long as there existed even the slightest possibility, however remote, that anybody's actions could foul up any part of that perfect universe!

So when God planned to test first the angels and then human beings, then God also created an environment, this present universe, as **a suitable training ground for that testing**. This earth provides the testing ground for human beings, and the universe in general provided the testing ground for the angels.

From the very moment when God created this present universe, including this planet Earth, at which point in time all the angels shouted for joy (Job 38:7), it has always been God's intention to burn up this whole universe once the periods of testing had been completed. From its very inception this present universe was destined to "die" (i.e. to be blotted out).

Now understand a principle:

The very fact that the present creation consists of elements that are combustible is PROOF that God, already at the very moment that God was creating it, INTENDED TO EVENTUALLY BURN UP this universe!

You see, God the Father will never live in an environment that is capable of decay! So God will simply not live for all future eternity in an environment that is made up of elements like carbon and hydrogen and oxygen and iron and gold and silver and uranium and plutonium and mercury and lead and potassium and calcium, etc., all being elements that are subject to breaking down and changing under certain circumstances.

God is not about to spend future eternity in an environment that is composed of physical elements that are subject to decay or break-down! This universe was already destined to perish the very moment it was created. And it was only created in the first place in order to make possible the testing of angels and of human beings. But once those testing periods are completed, then this present universe, AND ALL THE ELEMENTS OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED, will be permanently destroyed.

Can you grasp this?

There is a lot of information in Romans 8:20, isn't there? Let's continue.

Because **the creation itself** also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8:21)

"Bondage" refers to slavery, and "corruption" refers to the inevitability of decay. This entire physical creation, of which we are a part, is in slavery to decay. By contrast, the "liberty" of the children of God is that we will be incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:52-54; 1 Peter 1:4; 1 Peter 1:23; etc.). Incorruption is identified with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53).

In Romans 8:21 Paul is telling us that the new heaven and the new earth will be incorruptible, which means that the new heaven and the new earth cannot possibly be composed of any of the elements that make up our present universe, all of which elements are capable of being corrupted and burned, provided the temperature is high enough.

Can you see that Romans 8:21 requires the new heaven and the new earth to be totally incapable of corruption, which means that they cannot possibly consist of any of the elements that we today are familiar with? **Incorruption is not something that can be achieved by utilizing any of the elements that exist in our present universe.**

Let's continue with the next verse.

For we know that **the whole creation** groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (Romans 8:22)

This is a very graphic picture which the Apostle Paul has presented to us in this verse. Paul is obviously speaking figuratively. But what attributes in the whole creation did Paul have in mind when he made this statement? Paul is pointing out that **what is destined to happen to man is also destined to happen to the whole creation**. That is his point!

So in the same way that physical mortal human beings must be changed into immortal spirit beings, IN THE SAME WAY this whole present physical universe which is subject to decay must be replaced by a new creation that will be incapable of decay. All the stars in this universe are in the process of decaying.

A PHYSICAL CREATION WILL NEVER BE THE PERMANENT HOME FOR A FAMILY OF SPIRIT BEINGS, THE FAMILY OF GOD!

If the new heaven and the new earth really did consist of any of the elements with which we today are familiar, which it will not, then the new heaven and the new earth would also continue to "groan and travail in pain"! It is the physical nature of our present universe that is the cause of this "groaning and travailing in pain", and that is totally independent of any of the actions of human beings or angels. Even if no human being had ever sinned, this universe would still be "groaning and travailing in pain". That's the nature and the limitation of a physical creation.

Let's look at the last verse in this section that refers to the creation.

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. (Romans 8:23)

God doesn't do things halfway. Thus in the same way that we are waiting for the time to be changed into immortal spirit beings, so likewise the whole creation is waiting for the time when it will be changed so that no single component of the new creation will ever be capable of either combustion or break-down or decay or nuclear reactions.

This same point is also made in Psalm 102.

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of **the earth**: and **the heavens** *are* the work of thy hands. **They shall perish**, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and **they shall be changed**: (Psalm 102:25-26)

Right here in the Book of Psalms we are told that the heavens and the earth shall "perish" (the Hebrew verb "abad" here literally means "be driven away") and they shall be "changed" for a completely new type of universe. There will never again be a physical creation based on the elements which make up our present universe.

God's plan is far more complex and all-encompassing than we tend to believe. Let's be sure that we don't limit God!

Let's now look at the Book of Revelation.

THE SETTING AT THE END OF REVELATION CHAPTER 20

Let's notice the end of chapter 20.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into **the lake of fire**. (Revelation 20:15)

The lake of fire burns up everyone who is not recorded in the book of life, and it will also burn up everything physical. This entire universe will be burnt up. That is the time when the wicked will be "ashes" under the soles of the feet of those in the Family of God (Malachi 4:3). The wording in Malachi 4:3 is intended to convey a vivid picture; in actual practice the ashes themselves will also burn up completely, so that eventually nothing will remain, not even "ashes". Everything will burn up completely. Then it will all be "as though it had never been" (see Obadiah 1:16).

Obadiah 1:16 is a principle that applies to EVERYTHING in this present existence! Not only will the incorrigible wicked and the memory of them be permanently blotted out, but everything physical will disappear, and thereafter those physical things will never again be remembered. That means that there will never again be either a physical form of life, or even any physical elements like carbon and gold and oxygen, etc. Everything in existence today will then be blotted out and expunged from memory. That's what will happen at the time of Revelation 20:15.

This lake of fire (possibly nuclear chain reactions on a incredible scale?) will engulf the entire universe, something which we in our present state cannot possibly picture to any degree of accuracy. It will be the most staggering event since the day when God created the whole universe, something that is way beyond our present limited comprehension. And God will provide "the fuel" for that fire.

The Apostle Peter also spoke about that time in his second letter.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which **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**. (2 Peter 3:10)

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? (2 Peter 3:12)

Peter has used the word "heavens" to refer to the entire universe. And Peter is clearly speaking about a time when this entire universe, our earth included, will cease to exist. It will all be burned up by fire.

So back to the end of Revelation chapter 20.

When the lake of fire burns out there will be nothing physical left, no stars, no planets, no atmosphere, no ashes, no gases, no oxygen or hydrogen molecules, nothing. There will be spirit beings (God the Father, Jesus Christ, all the human beings who have been changed into the children of God, and all the angels) and nothing else. (Satan and the demons will be separated, and we need not consider them here at this point.)

God the Father and Jesus Christ are the sources of all light. And so at that point in time all the members of the God Family and all the holy angels will be in brilliantly-lit emptiness. There is nothing at all, except that there is light everywhere. And that light radiates from God; it is not the result of any physical combustion or nuclear reactions.

That is the setting when chapter 21 starts.

And I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**: for **the first heaven and the first earth were passed away**; and there was no more sea. (Revelation 21:1)

Now before we examine this verse let's backtrack a little to make sure we understand this correctly, and that we don't ascribe any unintended meanings to the things we will read in this chapter.

WHY GOD GAVE JOHN SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

Right at the start of the Book of Revelation John tells us that this book consists of three things:

Who bare record of **the word of God**, and of **the testimony of Jesus Christ**, and of **all things that he saw**. (Revelation 1:2)

In the Book of Revelation we have:

1) The words of God the Father

2) The words of Jesus Christ

3) The words of the Apostle John

(COMMENT: The words of angels are spoken on behalf of either God the Father or Jesus Christ. So we need not consider them separately.)

Now these three things are not all equal. For example: the words of God the Father and of Jesus Christ are infallible, but the words of the Apostle John are not infallible. In plain language, the words of the Apostle John (i.e. his descriptions of the things he saw) are quite subjective and not infallible at all. Had God given this Book of Revelation to Peter or James or Matthew or Paul to record, some of the descriptions of "all things that he saw" might well have been worded rather differently from the way John described the things he saw.

John's descriptions of the things which he saw are quite subjective, based on John's own perceptions;

and **that is precisely what God intended**, a rather subjective description of the things God would show John in visions.

God gave John the following instruction in verse 11.

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, **What thou seest, write in a book**, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. (Revelation 1:11)

Once again we see that God very specifically wanted John to provide his own subjective descriptions for the things he would see. God specifically wanted John to use his own words in describing these things, rather than writing down God-given descriptions for the things John would see. There is a clear reason why God wanted the Book of Revelation to present subjective descriptions. The only things that God wanted recorded objectively, from God's point of view, are the words of God the Father and the words of Jesus Christ. Everything else is recorded from the perspective of a man, so that it would be understandable to us human beings.

That is the principle of parables. At times God explains things not from God's perspective but from our human perspective, so that we can at least understand a little bit. Jesus Christ elaborated on this point in John chapter 3. After trying to explain to Nicodemus the concept of what it means to be "born again", Jesus Christ said the following:

If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, **if I tell you *of* heavenly things**? (John 3:12)

Believing is based on understanding. And here Jesus Christ was saying: you are simply not capable of understanding how God thinks about all these things. That is why I present spiritual understanding (i.e. "heavenly things") to you in the form of analogies to physical things, things that you really should be able to comprehend. But even then you still have a hard time trying to understand those physical analogies.

Now here is the thing we need to understand.

CHRIST'S STATEMENT HERE IS TRUE FOR ALL OF GOD'S COMMUNICATIONS WITH US HUMAN BEINGS!

Almost everything that God has revealed to us human beings throughout the Bible is presented not from God's "heavenly" perspective, which point of view we are simply not capable of understanding at this point, but from an "earthly" perspective. We wouldn't understand if all God did in the Bible was to tell us "of heavenly things".

God does not live in a physical environment. And so God communicates with us in terms of things we can understand, and not in terms of things that would be incomprehensible to us. The way God does this is TO COMPARE the way things are in God's non-physical environment to various things in our physical environment. And so, for example, God compares the two witnesses to "olive trees" and to "candlesticks" (Revelation 11:4); Jesus Christ compared the Kingdom of God to many different things in the parables He gave.

That brings us back to Revelation 21 and 22.

It is totally beyond our human capacity to understand anything at all about the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem **if those things are presented from a "heavenly" point of view**! So in order to help us understand at least a teeny weeny little bit about these things God decided to present

this information to us from an "earthly" perspective. Revelation 21 and 22 are a practical application of John 3:12.

God couldn't possibly describe the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem to us from God's own perspective, because that would have been incomprehensible to us. Therefore God decided to deliberately present to us a description of those things from a human perspective. Yes of course, that perspective presents a picture that is somewhat flawed and inadequate when compared to the reality from God's point of view; but at least it will be somewhat meaningful to us human beings.

Put in plain language:

If God had described the new heaven and new earth in God's own words from God's own perspective, then we wouldn't understand any part of it. And that is why God gave John a vision of these things and then in effect told John:

Now I want you to describe the things you will see in your own words, not from My point of view, but from your human point of view. And it doesn't really matter what particular analogies come to your mind, John, when you see these things in visions, because any analogy to any physical things in your present world will fall short in one way or another. So go ahead and use whatever analogies come to your mind to describe the things you will see. That's the main thing I want to accomplish with the visions I will give you.

Consider this:

Analogies and parables can NEVER accurately convey all of the truth. Analogies ALWAYS fall short in some regards. At best analogies can approximate a picture of the reality that is being discussed.

This also applies to the things God has revealed in the Book of Revelation. To paraphrase John 3:12, Jesus Christ could have introduced Revelation chapters 21 and 22 by saying: "I will tell you about these things in "earthly" terms because you wouldn't understand at all if I told you about them in "heavenly" terms.

Without getting involved in a technical discussion of the biblical Greek words "oida" and "horao", which both have connections to the form "eidon", we can say that the Greek word "oida" means: **to see**, **to perceive with the eyes**. Thus this word is also used to convey the meaning of the verb "**to know**". In the Book of Revelation this Greek word "oida" is used in 68 verses, where it always conveys either various forms of the verb "to see", or the concept of "to know".

So without getting too technical we can understand that the verb "to see" in its various forms is used in 68 different verses in the Book of Revelation. In at least 33 of those 68 occurrences it is translated as "I saw" in reference to the Apostle John. Outside of chapters 2-3, where it is always translated as the verb "to know", this Greek word mostly means "to look" or "to see" or "to behold". It always implies knowing based on what has been seen.

The point is this:

In the Book of Revelation there is a great emphasis on John telling us what he saw, the things he observed, as evidenced by the large number of times this Greek verb is used. John clearly fulfilled God's instruction to write down the things he had seen. And he wrote those things down in his own words.

To make this quite clear:

Instead of God dictating a description of the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem to John, God avoided that approach by telling John to use his own words to describe the things John would see. And many of the specific details in John's descriptions didn't really matter one way or the other; they simply represented the best way one specific human being (i.e. John) could describe the things he had seen, for many of which there were no adequate words in any human language.

Now let's go back to chapter 21.

REVELATION CHAPTER 21

Here is verse 1 once again.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for **the first heaven and the first earth were passed away**; and there was no more sea. (Revelation 21:1)

This tells us that the present universe will at that point in time have disappeared completely. That point is reached when the universe-wide lake of fire has burned up everything and nothing is left.

At that point in time God creates a NEW heaven and a NEW earth!

God deliberately did not provide the description of this new universe in God's words. Instead God (in effect) said to John: "**what does this look like to you, John?** Go ahead and **describe it**". Irrespective of the inherent properties of that new universe, what could John possibly have said, other than "I saw a new universe"? What other options did John have? None!

Keep in mind John's own understanding and perception of the universe. At that point in time nobody understood the major distinction between stars and planets. The only thing that was known in this regard was that the planets were "stars that changed their positions in the night sky", which made them unreliable for sailors to use for navigational purposes. Thus the planets were known as "deceiver stars", or "wandering stars" (see Jude 1:13), the Greek expression being "asteres planetai". But they were still thought of as stars, because just like the stars, the planets also appear to give off light. And John was not at all aware of the fact that in our present universe there are many heavenly bodies (i.e. planets) that don't have any light of their own, that there are many other bodies like our earth and our moon out there.

Furthermore, at John's time nobody had any real concept of the relative sizes of the earth and sun and moon and stars.

So when John saw the new heaven and the new earth, John had no way of knowing whether the new earth was the same size as the present earth or whether it was larger than the present earth. Similarly, John was not in a position to even comment on whether the new heaven also contains planets or not, because John did not know that there was a difference between stars and planets. And furthermore, John didn't understand by what process the sun and the stars in this present universe give off light (i.e. that the light they give off is the result of nuclear chain reactions, that every single star is in effect "a lake of fire"). So John was also not in a position to comment on any distinctions between the light that heavenly bodies will have in the new universe when compared to the light which stars in this present universe give off.

John's understanding of the present universe was quite limited, and so he was not in any position to describe the technical differences between the present universe and the new heaven. And that is

precisely what God wanted from John, a very general description of what it will be like. All John could do is comment on distinctions that were obvious to him, John, with his particular level of understanding of the present universe. **His observations are practical** without being technical. And so in the following verses John highlights a number of distinctive points that made an impression on him. But those "distinctive points" actually tell us much more than what they may appear to tell us on the surface.

So let's continue.

CONTINUING WITH REVELATION CHAPTER 21

When John said "**there was no more sea**", that is what John happened to notice for the new earth. But what this point really tells us is that there will not be any physical water (i.e. H_2O) anywhere in the new universe! That is because the elements hydrogen and oxygen will no longer exist! (We'll look at the "pure river of water of life" later.)

This statement is really the first hint that the new universe will not be composed of any of the elements that make up our present universe. Once God has burned all of them up, **none of those elements will ever be re-created again**. That is ALWAYS a principle with God, that once GOD has burned something up in a lake of fire (not to be confused with "fire from heaven" which at times is only a short-term measure), then it will never exist again! With God a lake of fire conveys **a sense of finality**. That is why at Christ's return "the beast" and "the false prophet" are thrown into a lake of fire (Revelation 19:20), to indicate that **these two individuals will NOT come up in the second resurrection**; they will never exist again.

That is also why at that same time Satan is NOT cast into a lake of fire; at that time **Satan is only cast into an abyss**, a place of restraint like a prison (Revelation 20:2-3), because Satan will be briefly released a thousand years later. And when Satan after that short release is bound again, THEN he is also cast into a lake of fire (Revelation 20:10), to indicate that from then onwards Satan will never again exist in a free state; from then onwards Satan and the demons will spend all future eternity in "the blackness of darkness" (Jude 1:13), for all intents and purposes permanently blotting them out from God's sphere of existence. This is all based on the principle that God uses a lake of fire to permanently blot out both living beings and inanimate objects. And so the new universe will not be built from atoms and molecules with which we are familiar today, because they will all be permanently destroyed in the lake of fire.

Now notice the next verse.

And I John saw the holy city, **New Jerusalem**, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared **as a bride** adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2)

John sees a city which is identified as the New Jerusalem. Later he will tell us the size of this city, which is immense. At this stage we have the following scenario:

After the present universe had disappeared completely, John had first seen a new universe with presumably vast numbers of heavenly bodies, one of which is singled out as the new earth. We might also keep one other point in mind, and that is this: at no point in this entire vision is John ever engulfed by darkness. He does not "see" (i.e. perceive) the presence of darkness anywhere in the new heavens. He is always in the light, and he is always able to see clearly. In fact, that entire new universe will be filled with light, so that there will not be any darkness anywhere in the new heavens. There will never again be even the possibility of shadows anywhere in the new universe. Can you grasp this? There is no

room for shadows anywhere in God’s future creation.

James mentioned this point.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from **the Father** of lights, **with whom is no** variableness, neither **shadow of turning**. (James 1:17)

Shadows are an impossibility anywhere in the future environment God has planned. Think about that for a moment: never again will there be a shadow anywhere in the new universe. Later I’ll discuss why that will be the case.

Now in verse 2 John sees **a huge city** coming out from somewhere amongst all those new heavenly bodies, and it comes down to the new earth. John’s first impression of this city is that it is extremely beautiful. Now the city itself is not the bride; **this city is simply compared to a bride**, because John is so overwhelmed by the sheer beauty of this city.

However, this analogy of "as a bride adorned for her husband" also tells us right here that this city will be the home for Jesus Christ, the husband, and those in the first resurrection, the bride. That is why the name "New Jerusalem" belongs to all those who will be in the first resurrection (Revelation 3:12).

Let’s continue.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, **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. (Revelation 21:3)

This statement is not something John himself thought of or had seen. This is a message from God, very likely spoken by an angel. So God is here revealing that the New Jerusalem will be **the home** of God the Father for all future eternity. This is the time when Jesus Christ "delivers up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:24). From then onwards God the Father will always be present with the Family of God on the new earth. And He will always be the Supreme Head of that Family.

The Greek word here translated as "**tabernacle**" is "**skene**", and the verb "**He will dwell**" is "skenosei", the future active indicative of the verb "**skenoo**". As we can readily see, these two words "skene" and "skenoo" come from a common root. The point is that our English word "tabernacle" makes us think of some kind of building or structure or enclosed space, be it a tent or be it a more permanent type of structure. But that is not the primary focus of the two Greek words used in this verse.

The verb "**skenoo**" (sometimes "skeneo") basically means: **to reside**, **to live somewhere**, **to dwell**, without necessarily focusing on residing in some kind of building or structure. The focus is on general location rather than on some specific enclosed space.

This verb "**skenoo**" is used in the following four verses in addition to this use in Revelation 21:3.

John 1:14 = "the Word was made flesh and **DWELT** among us".

Revelation 7:15 = "He that sits on the throne **SHALL DWELL** among them".

Revelation 12:12 = "Rejoice you heavens and you that **DWELL** in them".

Revelation 13:6 = "... to blaspheme ... them that **DWELL** in heaven".

The word for "tabernacle" (i.e. "skene") is used mostly to refer to some kind of enclosed structure (a tent or some building) for the simple reason that **this is the common human experience**; everybody lives in some or other structure to be sheltered from the elements. So any human being who "dwells" anywhere has some kind of enclosed structure to dwell in, since people don't just live "out in the open".

However, that does not mean that when the word "tabernacle" is used in reference to where God resides, that it then automatically also has to infer some kind of structure or enclosed space. The word focuses on what the individual is doing (i.e. residing somewhere) without necessarily addressing the circumstances of such "dwelling" (whether it is in a temple or palace or tent or in the open without any kind of enclosed space at all, etc.).

We might also keep in mind that while we are told that "the Word ... dwelt among us", Jesus Christ Himself said "the Son of man has not where to lay His head" (see Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58). In other words, during His ministry Jesus Christ's "dwelling" didn't involve any buildings or fixed structures. We might keep this thought in mind as we go along.

So as we proceed don't assume that the word "tabernacle" has to automatically infer some kind of building or enclosed space when it is used in reference to God. Don't view the existence of God in terms of our human experiences.

Let's move on.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be **no more death**, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for **the former things are passed away**. (Revelation 21:4)

Verse 4 is still a record of what the "great voice out of heaven" had said. When it says that there will never again be death, it also means that **there will never again be any decay**! There will never again be any break-down of anything! That's the principle of the ten commandments, right?

When the commandment says "you shall not kill", we understand that this also includes a requirement for us to control any thoughts that might lead to "the spirit of murder" (see the whole of Matthew 5 for an exposition of this principle, especially Matthew 5:21-24). The principle here is that with God **anything that might lead to something wrong** (in the Matthew 5 context that would be wrong thought processes) is also included in the prohibition of that particular wrong action. So likewise, the statement that there will be no more death obviously implies that there will also never again be any form of break-down that could lead to death or destruction.

Now this statement "there shall be no more death" must mean that there are no physical elements in that new heaven and new earth, because the physical elements of our world are always subject to decay and break-down and destruction (i.e. death). **None of the elements which make up our present universe are compatible with the statement "there shall be no more death".** This goes way beyond the matter of never again having any mortal creatures around; it really means that the building blocks for mortal creatures, i.e. physical elements, will also no longer exist.

The total removal of all pain and suffering and disappointment and discouragement and despondency and doubt makes the same point. Pain, as referred to here by God, is a part of our physical creation. And the removal of all pain necessitates the removal of all the physical elements which make up our world. Otherwise the possibility of pain has not been eliminated.

The statement "the former things are passed away" confirms this assessment. "The former things" is a reference to this present PHYSICAL universe. This statement tells us that every atom and every

molecule that existed in this present universe will have "passed away". We commonly use the words "passed away" as a euphemism for death because they refer to a departure. And the physical elements will all have departed, never to return. So the new heaven will not be composed of physical matter.

Let’s continue.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, **I make all things new**. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (Revelation 21:5)

These are the words of God the Father! And they are infallible! Now when God the Father says: "I make all things new", then that means that NOTHING that existed before will be a part of that new creation! Right here we are told in plain language that all of the elements which make up our present universe will be annihilated, to never exist again! No more hydrogen or oxygen or gold or carbon or nitrogen, etc.

Right here God is telling us in the plainest of terms that the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem will not be composed of any matter with which we today are familiar. The new heaven will be "new from scratch", a totally new design built from totally new "building blocks"! Don’t ever make the mistake of thinking of the new heaven as nothing more than "an upgrade" of the present universe.

Let’s continue.

And he said unto me, **It is done**. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (Revelation 21:6)

The statement "it is done" means that **THIS REPRESENTS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GOD’S PLAN! AT THIS POINT THE PLAN GOD SET OUT TO ACHIEVE WILL HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED!**

The Family which God set out to create will be complete. And the living environment which God has planned for that Family will also have been created. The plan is complete. What lies ahead then is future eternity for a vast Family of God beings, who all share the same goals and the same value system, which is another way of saying that they will all be of one mind.

Revelation 21:1-6 has very rapidly taken us through the general details of what will happen, in the process getting somewhat ahead of the story. And so the next two verses come back to our time now. Having presented the overall picture to John, God now issues an admonition to all of us living before the second coming of Christ.

GOD’S ADMONITION

Notice verse 7.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Revelation 21:7)

In a sense this statement "he shall inherit all things" sums up all of the rewards mentioned for overcoming in the messages to the seven eras of God’s Church in chapters 2-3. The question is: HOW do all those who overcome and then become a part of the Family of God inherit all things? **How does that happen?**

When we are changed into sons of God, then God gives us free access to **the Family’s wealth**! That’s

what an "inheritance" involves, being granted access to the wealth of a family, right? Now what is the wealth of the Family of God? The greatest wealth of the Family of God is an endless and inexhaustible supply of power, known as "the spirit of God" and as "the Holy Spirit"! So the statement "he shall inherit all things" is another way of saying that "he shall have **unlimited and unrestricted access to** utilizing the power of **the Holy Spirit**". That is the real basis of the inheritance of God. And the extension of that is the inheritance of "the new heaven and the new earth", implying free and meaningful access to all parts of God's creation. The following section of this chapter and into the next chapter elaborates further on this inheritance.

At this stage consider also one important distinction. In this scenario of inheriting we have the following situation: An "heir" receives access to wealth that has been generated and produced by someone else! An heir is not the individual who himself produces wealth; he simply has free access to the wealth someone else has produced. God the Father is the One who produces the wealth which we as sons of God will inherit; but we ourselves are not the ones who produce or generate that wealth. It all comes from God the Father.

The statement "I will be his God and he shall be My son" sums up the relationship that will exist for future eternity, a willing and joyful submission by all to God the Father. More on this later.

Verse 8 is a warning and an admonition for people in this age today. We need not focus on it in our context here. So let's move on to verse 9.

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 shew thee the bride**, **the Lamb's wife**. (Revelation 21:9)

The first thing to notice here is that God concludes the Bible with exactly the same approach with which He started it back in Genesis. Notice the same approach in both places.

1) **In Genesis chapter 1** and **up to Genesis 2:3** we have a very brief discussion of the creation, including the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27) and the first Sabbath (Genesis 2:2-3). THEN the account backtracks to the time before the creation of Adam (Genesis 2:5), followed by an account of Adam's creation (Genesis 2:7) and then Eve's creation (Genesis 2:21-23).

2) **In Revelation 21:1-1-6** we have a brief discussion about the creation of the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem, culminating in the statement "it is done". THEN the account backtracks to the time before the coming down of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10), followed by the New Jerusalem coming down (same verse), and then various details about that city right up to Revelation 22:5.

Can you see that God employed this same approach in both cases, of first giving the greater overall picture, followed by some backtracking in order to supply certain additional details? This already tells us that this is going to be the end of the Book, the end of God's revelations for this present age, by employing the same approach with which God started His revelations to mankind.

As far as Revelation 21:9 is concerned, we need to recognize that this is a backtracking for the purpose of providing more details.

Next, it should be obvious that referring to New Jerusalem as "the bride" of Jesus Christ is simply a figure of speech. In this comparison the name of the city is used in place of the inhabitants of that city. That's like "Jerusalem and all Judea" going out to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5), an obvious reference to THE PEOPLE of Jerusalem and Judea going out to John the Baptist. And as Revelation 21:2 already

pointed out, this city is "**LIKE**" a bride, the meaning of the Greek adverb "hos" used in that verse.

However, here is something else this tells us.

It is clear that "the bride" is a reference to the 144,000 who make up the first resurrection, referred to as "His wife" here and also in Revelation 19:7. So when the New Jerusalem is referred to as "the bride", then this is one more statement that shows that **permanent residency in the New Jerusalem** will be restricted to those 144,000 in the first resurrection, those who comprise "the bride of Jesus Christ", obviously in addition to God the Father and to Jesus Christ. Nobody else will ever become a permanent resident (citizen) of the New Jerusalem; all other God beings will only come into the New Jerusalem as "visitors".

If any other member of the God Family would at some later point also become "a permanent resident" of the New Jerusalem, then that would automatically make that member of God's Family a part of "the bride". But "the bride" has a very restricted membership, which is clearly limited to 144,000. So therefore no other members of the Family of God can ever at some later point achieve "permanent residency" in the New Jerusalem.

We see two distinctive rewards for all those in the first resurrection, which rewards identify the first resurrection as "a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35). First of all, for the millennium and the 100-year period those in the first resurrection will reign with Jesus Christ as kings and priests. Secondly, for future eternity in the new heaven those in the first resurrection will have the privilege of being the only permanent residents of the New Jerusalem, obviously in addition to God the Father and to Jesus Christ. These two things identify the first resurrection as "a better resurrection".

Let's continue with the next statement.

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me **that great city**, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, (Revelation 21:10)

John is "carried away to a high mountain" so that from a distance he can get a **better perspective** of this magnificent city. That "high mountain" is not on the new earth but somewhere in space away from the new earth, so that John can see this whole process somewhat objectively from a perspective like the one Jesus Christ will have. This city comes "out of heaven", meaning that it emerges from amongst the vast multitude of heavenly bodies that comprise the new heaven. It comes down "from God" because at that point God the Father Himself has not yet descended to the new earth.

From here onwards John gives us a description of the New Jerusalem. Now what do we expect from this description that John gives us? Do we expect a scientific presentation, which accurately identifies all of the various substances John sees in the New Jerusalem? Hardly! All that John could possibly do in describing the things he saw was to do so in terms of things with which he, John, was familiar. The entire description which follows is nothing other than John's attempt to describe a spiritual creation in terms of the physical world with which John was familiar.

This is why God Himself did not provide this description. God does not want us to have a description that is technically correct in every aspect; God only wants us to have a subjective description of what that New Jerusalem will look like from a human point of view. So expect this description from John to raise more questions than it answers. That is God's intent. This is assuredly a part of the approach that "**now we see through a glass darkly**, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12), that approach being to give us just a vague and general picture, one that leaves many questions still unanswered.

Keep in mind also John's reference to "that GREAT city". Those are not idle words. Shortly John will tell

us the staggering "greatness" of that New Jerusalem.

Now let's look at John's description, keeping John's obvious limitations in mind.

Having the glory of God: and **her light** *was* like unto a stone most precious, even like a **jasper** stone, clear as crystal; (Revelation 21:11)

Now what does the expression "having the glory of God" mean to you? Can you try to picture what John actually saw that motivated him to use this expression "the glory of God"? Perhaps this expression makes you think of the description of Jesus Christ's glory in the Book of Ezekiel? The point is that God the Father will be in the New Jerusalem, and that city will be full of light, just like the whole new earth and the whole new heaven will be full of light.

Next, exactly how can the light be like a jasper stone? The Greek word here translated "**jasper**" is "**iaspis**", and this Greek word in turn was derived from the Hebrew word "**yashpheh**", which means "glittering". It was applied to a gemstone of various colors, including various shades of green. Both, the Hebrew word and the Greek word are associated with the stone we know as "jasper" primarily because these words sound similar to our word "jasper".

Next, if you try to understand this as a description of some building materials, then you have a problem. Physically it is totally inappropriate to compare jasper and crystal. The one is transparent and the other is not transparent, and these two substances (jasper and crystal) really have very little in common.

Here is the key:

This, and also what follows, is John's attempt to describe a spiritual creation, composed of substances that don't even exist anywhere in this present universe, in terms of physical substances with which John was familiar. John didn't have any adequate words at his disposal to accurately describe many of the things he saw. And when John did the best that he could, he came up with a description that is ambiguous and confusing, to say the least. AND THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT GOD WANTED!

John was really trying to describe a spiritual creation, a creation which has been freed from the bondage of corruption. That is what we should get from a combination of these two attributes here. Perhaps John was thinking of the color green when he used the word "jasper" here? If so, then we have a picture of the New Jerusalem radiating a light that may be some shade of green but it is also transparent like clear crystal. Whether this transparent green color also applies to the buildings (i.e. if there are any buildings?) in the New Jerusalem is not clear?

However, it is not God's intention to give us in this age an accurate picture of the New Jerusalem! God's main intention is to whet our anticipation for what lies ahead, while at the same time making clear how vastly superior God's actions and powers are to anything we could even conceive. We cannot even grasp the things God has planned.

REVELATION 21:12

Let's continue.

And had **a wall great and high**, *and* had **twelve gates**, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: (Revelation 21:12)

Now keep in mind the perspective John has established. John is viewing all this from a high mountain at a distance of perhaps a million or more miles away, a distance from where **he can see this whole new earth in perspective**, and this huge city coming down to the new earth. The size of the city makes clear that he must have **a vantage point that is extremely far away**.

Unlike the Apostle John, you and I have the benefit of being familiar with photos and movies and cameras zooming in to and zooming out from a subject. We've seen movie scenes shot from airplanes and from helicopters where a subject is seen from very near and then it fades into the far distance, and vice versa. So let's try to picture what the Apostle John saw.

In a moment we'll see that this city is about 1,500 miles long and wide and high. Now what vantage point do you need to have in order to see that a city, which covers an area of over 2,000,000 square miles, actually has only 12 gates? To put this into perspective: if you were to look down on a city that covers more than one half of the entire Unites States, a city the base of which would extend from Winnipeg in Canada south to Corpus Christi on the Gulf of Mexico, and then eastwards into the Atlantic Ocean to form a square, just what kind of vantage point would you need to realize that this city has only 12 gates?

And why would you refer to the wall around this huge city, which wall is 144 cubits high (i.e. about 72 YARDS high) as "great and high" when the city itself rises into the sky to a staggering height of 1,500 MILES? Can you picture a city that is 1,500 miles long and 1,500 miles wide and 1,500 miles high with a wall around it that is a mere 72 yards high, and then referring to that wall as "great and high"? The height of that city surely makes any wall that is a mere 72 yards high look very small indeed, don't you think? And John looking at all this from a very far away "great and high mountain" would normally not even be expected to notice such a wall. So what is this telling us?

For us mortal human beings there is a huge distinction between seeing something the size of a car or some furniture item from ten feet away, and seeing that same object from perhaps five miles away. In fact, in this example we wouldn't be able to see the object at all from five miles away. But that is not how "seeing" works in the realm of spirit beings. God could give John a vision of the New Jerusalem from millions of miles away, and yet John could clearly see the minutest details as if all those things were just ten feet in front of him, because that is how seeing works with God. God can be billions of light years away from us somewhere in outer space, and yet He can see us when we are praying on our knees just as clearly as if He was present in the room with us at that moment. **Distance never affects God's vision.**

And that is also how God gave this vision of the new heaven and new earth and New Jerusalem to John. Distance did not affect the clarity and precision of what John was able to see. So in one statement John can describe an enormously huge city, obviously viewed from a vast distance away; and in the next he can describe a wall as great and high, not in comparison to the dimensions of that city, but in comparison to other city walls that he, John, was familiar with, equally obviously viewed from fairly close proximity.

Let's continue.

On the **east** three gates; on the **north** three gates; on the **south** three gates; and on the **west** three gates. (Revelation 21:13)

These 12 gates are named after **the 12 tribes of Israel**. How does that tie into the whole picture? In Revelation chapter 7 we see the 144,000 people in the first resurrection being divided up into 12 groups of exactly 12,000 individuals each, and **each group is assigned the name of one of the tribes of Israel**. Together these 12 groups make up "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

The word "Israel", in addition to having been the name God gave to the man Jacob, also has a very specific meaning. The word "Israel" means "**to as a prince** (i.e. **as a RULER**) **have power WITH God**" (see Genesis 32:28). The word "Israel" in fact perfectly describes all of those who will be in the first resurrection, those who will rule with Jesus Christ as "kings and priests" for a thousand years (Revelation 5:10 and Revelation 20:4).

There is a major difference between "the nations of Israel" on the one hand, and "the Israel of God" on the other hand. In practical terms these two groups have little in common, other than the fact that a large number of those who will comprise "the Israel of God" will have come from the physical nations of Israel. God's original intention, it seems, had been that almost all of those who will make up "the Israel of God" would have come from the various tribes of Israel. **That original intention God announced when He changed Jacob's name to Israel.** But when the nations of Israel rebelled against God time and time and time again, then God dropped this intention and replaced it with one where those in "the Israel of God" may come from "all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Membership of the physical nations of Israel depended on nothing more than being able to trace one's ancestry back to the original tribes of Israel. Membership of the Israel of God, on the other hand, has nothing at all to do with a person's genetic line of descent. Membership of the Israel of God is based solely on a person's total and unconditional submission to God, on "following the Lamb (unconditionally!) whithersoever He goes" (Revelation 14:4).

So God divides the 144,000 people in the first resurrection into 12 groups of exactly 12,000 each, but completely independent of the ethnic origins of the individuals involved. The key is that God assigns everyone in the first resurrection to one of these 12 groups **AS GOD SEES FIT**! The principle of "NOW HAS GOD SET THE MEMBERS **EVERY ONE OF THEM** IN THE BODY AS IT HAS PLEASED HIM" (1 Corinthians 12:18) applies completely to which of the 12 tribes God assigns every single person in the first resurrection. Simply because someone in the first resurrection may have descended from the tribe Manasseh, that does not at all mean that therefore that individual will be in the tribe of Manasseh in the Israel of God! Not at all!

The Israel of God has nothing at all to do with the physical nations of Israel. It has everything to do with everyone in the Family of God being placed for all future eternity in the precise configuration that pleases God. Consider that the 12 apostles, all of whom were from the tribes of either Judah or Benjamin or Levi, will sit on thrones over the 12 tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Clearly God has no problem with having a non-Reubenite sit on a throne over the tribe of Reuben, and having a non-Zebulunite sit on a throne over the tribe of Zebulun, and having a non-Simeonite sit on a throne over the tribe of Simeon, and having a non-Gadite sit on a throne over the tribe of Gad, and having a non-Asherite sit on a throne over the tribe of Asher.

Consider that, amongst others, the two pairs of brothers Peter and Andrew and James and John were all from the tribe of Judah, but only one of them could possibly rule over the tribe of Judah, while the other three Jews in this foursome would of necessity have to rule over tribes to which they themselves did not belong.

None of the 12 tribes get to choose the ethnic background of the one who will sit on a throne over their tribe. Neither do any of the apostles get to choose which tribe they will rule. Everyone will be placed in the exact positions as it pleases God. And **that applies to everyone in the first resurrection**, not just to the 12 apostles.

The ethnic background of individuals is at most a very minor consideration in that process. The location

within the body (read: placement within one specific tribe in the Israel of God) depends on how God assesses the character of the individual involved, rather than God being swayed by the genealogical background of the individual. It is not the Israel of the man Jacob, but the Israel of God that is involved in the New Jerusalem.

Back to Revelation chapter 21.

THE GATES AND THE WALLS

The 12 names for the 12 gates are the same ones as in Revelation chapter 7. Those 12 names are: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph and Benjamin. The reason why the names of these 12 tribes are on those 12 gates is probably because each gate will lead to the area that is set aside for that particular tribe of the Israel of God within the new Jerusalem. We might also note that the sequence of these tribal names in Revelation chapter 7 does not follow the birth sequence of the sons of Jacob. So God doesn't place any special importance on "rank by physical birth" for the Israel of God.

I have no way of knowing that the following picture is actually correct. So consider it as a total speculation. Here is how I picture this. If you take a large square and divide it into 16 smaller squares all of equal size, then you have three vertical lines and three horizontal lines going through the large square, right? It would look like one quarter of a chessboard. That configuration gives you 12 equal squares around the inside perimeter of the large square, one for each of the 12 tribes, and a medium-large square, consisting of four small squares, in the center. Look at a chessboard to picture this.

The center made up of the four innermost small squares (that center would still be 700 - 750 miles long on each side) would be the inner area reserved for God the Father and Jesus Christ and those around Their thrones, and suitable for when the entire Family of God (i.e. including "the nations of them which are saved") gets together to worship the Father and to be together for specific occasions. (If you don't have a chessboard you can draw a square like that on a scrap of paper in just a few seconds, and divide it into 16 equal blocks, to get an idea of what I am trying to suggest.)

The point is that the shape of the New Jerusalem shows that God really does like squares for certain constructions. Very possibly this picture is not correct? And it is not of any importance to me. It is simply one effort to try to understand what God has planned.

Anyway, let's continue with the next verse in the discussion of the New Jerusalem.

And the wall of the city had **twelve foundations**, and **in them** the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:14)

Here we need to keep a number of things in mind. For a start, it is the wall, not the city, that has 12 foundations. Now the foundations of a wall are usually not visible. So how could John possibly see that the names of the 12 apostles (and John would have seen his own name there) were on those 12 foundations?

The point here is that this is not speaking about "foundations" at all, as we think of foundations!

In our world a foundation is something that goes beneath the surface. It goes into the ground! Anything that sits on top of the ground is usually not a foundation for a building. For us a foundation is primarily a

substructure upon which a building is built. And it is not visible to anyone (unless the building happens to be built upon a rock).

But Revelation 21:14 is not speaking about any kind of substructure at all! Here it is all visible and above ground. The whole huge city, including the wall around it, has come down from God the Father (Revelation 21:2) and it then sits on top of the ground of the new earth. Nothing is built into the ground on the new earth, neither the wall nor the city nor anything else. There is no cavity prepared on the new earth for the foundation of that wall to slip into. Everything is above ground and visible.

So we need to recognize that here the word "foundation" is not used with the meaning that it has in our present physical world. **In our world a foundation supports the weight of the structure above**. But in the New Jerusalem there is no underground weight-bearing involved for these "foundations". John is describing what he saw with the only words that were at his disposal, and "foundation" was the best word he could think of in this context.

Next, why are the names of the 12 apostles on those 12 foundations? A wall forms a defense; it is a means of protection. And what is "protected" inside those walls is the group that makes up the first resurrection. So by naming the 12 foundations after the 12 apostles, this is telling us that the 12 apostles were responsible for preserving and disseminating the knowledge of Jesus Christ's ministry, that they fulfilled the instruction to teach the things Jesus Christ had taught them to "all nations" (Matthew 28:19). It is an acknowledgment that the ministries of the 12 apostles form "the foundation" for the New Testament Church of God.

As an aside, which name will take the place of Judas Iscariot amongst those 12 names: **Matthias** (Acts 1:26) who technically replaced Judas but about whom nothing at all is known, and who is never mentioned again, **or Paul**, called later to be an apostle, or in Paul's own words "one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8), and who was used mightily by God to help build that New Testament foundation of God's Church? I don't know the answer here, though I am inclined to see Paul, who "labored more abundantly than they all" (1 Corinthians 15:10), taking the place of Judas in that list of 12 names.

THE DIMENSIONS

Now we come to the measurements for the New Jerusalem.

And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure **the city**, and **the gates** thereof, and **the wall** thereof. (Revelation 21:15)

In verses 9-10 one of the seven angels responsible for pouring out the seven last plagues talked to John and took John AWAY to a very high mountain. That same angel now again speaks to John. John has given no indication that he has moved away from that distant "high mountain"; yet he gives the impression that he himself is now standing right in front of the city wall together with this angel. How did John get to be right there where the angel would do the measuring? Or is John in fact observing this from a great distance, while being able to speak to someone who has moved to the wall of the city? In our prayers we can talk to God over enormous distances; so perhaps the same was true here in this vision, that John could communicate with this angel over a very long distance?

Anyway, the city is measured first.

And the city lieth **foursquare**, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with

the reed, **twelve thousand furlongs**. The **length** and the **breadth** and the **height** of it are equal. (Revelation 21:16)

So first of all we see that the base of this city is a perfect square. The Greek word here translated as "furlong" is "stadion", which referred to an eighth of a mile. Now the English furlong is 220 yards, whereas the Roman furlong was slightly shorter at about 205 yards. So in round numbers the "12,000 furlongs" amount to 1,500 miles if we take the English furlong, or close to 1,400 miles of we take the Roman furlong.

In this present age it doesn't really make a difference whether the New Jerusalem is 1,500 x 1,500 x 1,500 miles in size, or whether it is "only" 1,400 x 1,400 x 1,400 miles in size. The real point is that this is A HUGE CITY, whichever length we accept for a furlong.

These dimensions make absolutely clear, beyond any shadow of doubt whatsoever, that the new earth cannot possibly be the same size as our present earth! A city that reaches from 1,400 - 1,500 miles into the sky cannot possibly exist on this present planet. Consider that the boundary between this Earth's atmosphere and outer space is generally considered to be at an altitude of about 70 miles. So can you picture a city, the height of which extends about 1,400 miles further into outer space than the upper limits of our atmosphere?

These dimensions for the New Jerusalem were provided by God to tell us that the new earth will be vastly greater than our present earth. I personally suspect that the new earth with be close to the size of our present sun, though I obviously cannot prove this view. Anyway, here is my reason for this belief.

Malachi chapter 4 starts out with the lake of fire that will burn up this present universe (Malachi 4:1). Nothing is left after that fire. From Revelation 21 we understand that what comes next is the new heaven and the new earth. So now notice the next verse.

But unto you that fear my name shall **the Sun of righteousness** arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. (Malachi 4:2)

Now don't be confused by the similarity between the words "sun" and "son" in English. That similarity is pure coincidence. The word "sun" actually has nothing to do with the word "son", nothing at all! In the Hebrew text of Malachi 4:2 the word translated as "**sun**" is "**shemesh**". The Hebrew word for "**son**" on the other hand is "**ben**". So in Hebrew there is no play on these words, as may seem to be the case in English.

The next verse in this context, Malachi 4:3, again speaks about the lake of fire, in which the wicked will be burnt up. So here is the situation: verse 1 and verse 3 very clearly speak about the lake of fire which will burn up this entire universe. And right within this context we have a reference to "the SUN of righteousness". WHY? Why did God select this particular imagery? Exactly WHAT is it that "rises up" after this universe has disappeared?

Well, it is the new heaven and the new earth that "rises up" after the destruction of the present universe. Now one of the most outstanding characteristics about the new earth is that "there shall be no night there" (Revelation 21:25), and with that city rising about 1,400 miles or more into the sky this must mean that there will be no night anywhere! And when there is no night anywhere, then there is also "no need of the sun, neither of the moon" (Revelation 21:23). There will never be any "night" anywhere in the new heaven.

So in Malachi 4 in the context of the creation of the new universe God tells us that the "sun" of righteousness will arise. And in Revelation 21 in a discussion of the exact same context God tells us

through the Apostle John that there will not really be a "sun". What in fact "arises" at that point in time is **the new earth**!

Yes, the expression "the Sun of righteousness" may well be a coded reference to Jesus Christ. But WHY did God choose this particular imagery in this particular context? Could it perhaps be a veiled hint that the new earth, on which God the Father and Jesus Christ will always be present, replaces the sun in our present configuration, not only by providing permanent light, but also by being the same basic size as our present sun?

Look at this from another perspective.

When God created the present universe, God already had the plan that this universe would eventually be burned up. Now in that original creation WHY did God make our present sun the size that it is? Why didn't God make it bigger or smaller? Could it be that God determined the size of our present sun based on the size God will give to the new earth, which new earth will certainly replace the present sun as the source of light? (i.e. God's presence on the new earth will be the source of all light.)

Consider also John's earlier comment that Jesus Christ's face shines "**as the sun in his strength**" (see Revelation 1:16). This was already a hint that God the Father and Jesus Christ will with their presence replace the sun in God's new creation.

Anyway, I personally suspect that the new earth will be about the size of our present sun. And if the new earth turns out to be the size of our present sun, THEN a city that rises 1,500 miles into the sky will not in any way detract from the sphericity of the new earth. To put this into perspective: the sun has a diameter of about 865,000 miles. Let's say that the New Jerusalem rises into the sky to a height of 1,500 miles. If that new earth was represented by a circle of 4 inches in diameter, then the New Jerusalem would rise about one one-hundred-and-fiftieth part of an inch from the surface of that 4-inch diameter circle. Look at a ruler. Many rulers are divided into one-sixteenth parts of an inch. Look at how small one-sixteenth of an inch actually is. Now picture trying to divide that one-sixteenth of an inch into nine or ten equal parts, and then make a mark on the 4-inch diameter circle you have drawn on a scrap of paper, to represent the height of the New Jerusalem.

The point is this:

Viewed from outer space a city that reaches 1,500 miles into the sky of an earth that has a diameter of 865,000 miles is hardly noticeable. It doesn't even distract from the roundness of a body that size. Consider looking at our present earth from a million miles away in outer space. Mount Everest is insignificant from that perspective. Yet Mount Everest, viewed relative to the size of our present earth, is almost 10 times greater than viewing the New Jerusalem in relation to an earth with a 865,000 mile diameter.

For our present sized earth the New Jerusalem presents an insurmountable problem, but for a new earth the size of our present sun the size of the New Jerusalem presents no problems at all.

Keep one other point in mind.

There is no way that God the Father and His Family will for all future eternity live in "cramped quarters"! The new earth will provide ample "elbow room" for the entire Family of God. God is not like us! When we build something then frequently it is only a question of time before we enlarge that building, or add new wings or additional floors, because we did not anticipate certain growth and increases. God doesn't work that way. God plans ahead. And so both, the new earth specifically, and the new heaven in general, will be large enough to cope with any theoretical future developments for the Family of God.

Here’s one other thought you might consider.

The fact that God has the names of the 12 apostles written on the 12 foundations of the wall around the New Jerusalem suggests to me that God actually waited until the conclusion of Jesus Christ’s ministry before finalizing His plans for the New Jerusalem. All of the apostles were free moral agents, and God gave them the freedom to be faithful or to drop out. Recall Jesus Christ’s question to His apostles in John 6, when many disciples "walked no more with Him" (John 6:66). Jesus Christ asked them point-blank: "will you also go away?" (John 6:67). This implies to me that at that point in time any of them could have dropped out; Jesus Christ was not asking a rhetorical question.

So I suspect that at that point in time God’s plans for the New Jerusalem had also not yet been finalized, at least not to the details regarding which names would be recorded on which foundation. However, it seems equally clear that since the time of the Book of Revelation (around 100 A.D.) the plans for the New Jerusalem have been finalized. So the detailed plans for this city were perhaps only finalized around 3,000 years before that city will actually come into existence, while the general overall plans for the new earth almost certainly go back to the time when God created this present universe, i.e. the time when God determined the size of our sun.

Anyway, let’s be sure that we don’t try to limit God’s existence to something the size of our tiny planet called "Earth". Our Earth is after all one of the smaller bodies in the present universe.

Next, in the past most people have generally assumed that the New Jerusalem has the general shape of a pyramid. I don’t believe that this assumption is justified. While a pyramid shape is perhaps a possibility, it isn’t by any means a necessity. Forget about the speculation that the man Job was the builder of the Great Pyramid. Maybe he was the builder and maybe he wasn’t the builder? But either way, **the pyramid shape is basically a pagan development**! Satan saw to it that pagans around the world built pyramids. I don’t believe there is anything godly about the shape of a pyramid. (By the way, we have the image of a pyramid on one side of our one dollar bill.)

Furthermore, there is nothing in John’s description in Revelation 21 and 22 that implies a pyramid shape. The pyramid shape is something people have reasoned into this account. It makes sense to the carnal mind (note!) that God supposedly sits on top of His whole Family. And that is the way carnal rulers have tried to present themselves ... sitting alone high up over everyone else.

However, that is not the picture John saw earlier in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 4:2-4 we see that the "24 elders" all sit on the same level as God the Father. They normally commune with God face-to-face, rather than God looking down on them and these "elders" looking up at God. This is clear from the observation that currently there are 24 seats around the throne of God. Normally these "elders" would sit on those seats. For certain occasions those "elders", who all have "crowns of gold" on their heads (Revelation 4:4), fall down before God to worship God. But the rest of the time they sit before God.

This pyramid approach is also challenged by the fact that Jesus Christ will sit with God the Father on the Father’s throne, and all 144,000 in the first resurrection will at times sit with Jesus Christ on His throne (Revelation 3:21). This approach doesn’t really fit into the pyramid concept, does it? Let’s be honest here. (The 144,000 sitting with Christ on His throne is figurative, and is probably intended to apply to the time of the millennium, but it represents a situation where they interact with Jesus Christ on Christ’s level.)

A pyramid structure isn’t all that conducive for person-to-person interaction. Rather, a pyramid structure implies **numerous** different levels. So are the people who believe in a pyramid structure really expecting God to structure the 144,000 individuals in the first resurrection (they will be the only ones to

permanently reside in the New Jerusalem with God the Father and Jesus Christ) into 20 or 30 or more different hierarchical levels, like a pyramid?

When we are told about God the Father that "the tabernacle of God is with men, and **He will dwell with them**" (Revelation 21:3), then this implies to me a much closer interaction than a rigid top-down pyramid structure with dozens of different levels. Consider that in the transfiguration vision the three apostles saw Jesus Christ talking face-to-face with Moses and Elijah, which again doesn't portray a pyramid from-the-top-down relationship. It is face to face.

Here is the point:

There is no question that God the Father and right next to Him Jesus Christ will always, without exception, be supreme within the Family of God. This is a point I will discuss very forcefully later. But that status doesn't have to be represented the way carnal human beings would present it ... by building a huge office tower to themselves and then occupying the top floor to let everybody know they are the greatest. That approach almost implies that if God didn't sit at the very top, then the other members of the Family might perhaps forget that God the Father is supreme! And that is surely a ridiculous idea.

Now perhaps the New Jerusalem will have a pyramid shape? I doubt it, but I don't know. I myself believe that the New Jerusalem could equally well be a perfect cube, or even adapted somewhat from a cube. I don't believe that the new earth is going to be rotating on an axis. The whole new heavens will revolve around the new earth. God doesn't rotate around His creation; no, His creation is going to revolve (and individually perhaps also rotate?) around God. At least, that is what I suspect will happen. I do not mean to imply that anyone will occupy a position above God the Father. But I question that there is only room for one Being at the very top level of that New Jerusalem, because that approach would isolate God the Father to some degree, and thus be at odds with the statement "and He will dwell with them". Anyway, as I mentioned earlier, John's descriptions of the things he saw raise more questions than they provide answers. And that also applies here.

One last consideration in this regard:

In the Temple which Solomon built, the Holy of Holies, also called "the oracle", was intended to represent God's dwelling place. This Holy of Holies was **a perfect cube**. It was 20 cubits in length and 20 cubits in breadth and 20 cubits in height (see 1 Kings 6:20). It is quite clear that the Holy of Holies was not in the shape of a pyramid. So why should the New Jerusalem have to be in the shape of a pyramid?

Let's move on to the next verse in Revelation.

And he measured **the wall** thereof, **an hundred *and* forty *and* four cubits**, *according to* the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. (Revelation 21:17)

So the 6,000 mile-long wall around the New Jerusalem will be about 72 yards high, a height that is dwarfed by the 1,500 mile height of the city within that long wall. Can you picture looking at this city from say 20 miles away? To your right and to your left the wall goes on for hundreds of miles. Looking up, the city seems to stretch endlessly towards the outer heavens. And the 72-yards-high wall in front of the city seems to be ever so small. Think of looking at lower Manhattan Island from across the river; and then picture the Manhattan skyline being encircled by a small 10-foot high wall. What kind of impression would such a 10-foot wall around Manhattan make on you? Wouldn't it seem quite insignificant in that context?

As a matter of interest, the Great Wall of China is mostly only about 10 yards high. So this wall around

the New Jerusalem is about seven times higher than the Great Wall of China.

The point is that there are some things about this wall around the New Jerusalem that we don't understand. While under other circumstances a 72-yards high (65 meters) wall would make a very powerful impression on us, when viewed against the backdrop of a 1,500 miles high city such a wall would normally hardly be noticed. Yet before God that wall is obviously highly significant. So there are more things here that we can't really understand.

Consider one other point. This long wall which is about 72 yards high has 12 foundations. But for the actual city which is 1,500 miles high John did not mention any foundations at all. **So WHY did John not mention any foundations for the city** which has a height of about 1,500 miles? And if a wall that is 72 yards high has 12 foundations, how many foundations would you expect for a city that rises 1,500 miles into the sky? Wouldn't you expect far more foundations for such a city?

So now let's look at the Apostle Paul's reference to the foundations of this city.

WHAT ABOUT HEBREWS 11:10

Even though John here in the Book of Revelation does not mention any foundations for this city, Paul tells us in Hebrews 11 that this city does have foundations.

For he looked for **a city which hath foundations**, whose builder and maker *is* God. (Hebrews 11:10)

In this verse Paul is speaking about Abraham. Now you can search the entire Old Testament and you will not find any reference to "foundations" in connection with Abraham's life. Paul's statement here is thus **not based on any biblical information** to which Paul would have had access. This means that Paul himself thought up this statement regarding Abraham. **Paul was not quoting anything or anyone** when he made this statement. Instead, this is a statement which Paul himself made very confidently, based on his own personal understanding of the story of Abraham.

So the question is:

Exactly what was Paul trying to say when he made this statement about Abraham?

Hebrews 11:10 is a part of the Bible and without question THE INTENT for this statement IS TRUE! But Paul was not trying to say what we usually think he was trying to say. The problem is not Paul's statement here in Hebrews 11:10. No, the problem lies with the meaning that we tend to attach to Paul's statement. We usually try to attach a meaning to this verse that is foreign to what Paul was actually trying to tell us.

It is imperative that we establish exactly what Paul intended to say with this verse. So let's do that.

The Greek word translated "**foundations**" in this verse is "**themelios**", the common word for "foundation". It is the same word which is used for the 12 foundations of the wall. In the New Testament this Greek word is used with two meanings: it refers to literal foundations for buildings, and it is also used **figuratively** to refer to **the actions of men** forming a foundation.

Now the way to establish what Paul intended to convey here in Hebrews 11:10 is to examine **every single verse in which Paul used this Greek word "themelios"**. If we can establish that Paul always used this word "themelios" with only one meaning, then we can also confidently establish the meaning

Paul intended here in Hebrews 11:10. So here are the facts.

Paul used this word "themelios" exactly 9 times. Below are **all 9 verses** where this word "themelios" appears in Paul's writings, including the verse we are examining. I have highlighted the relevant statement in each of these verses in bold text for easier recognition.

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, **lest I should build upon another man's foundation**: (Romans 15:20)

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, **I have laid the foundation**, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For **other foundation can no man lay** than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now **if any man build upon this foundation** gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; (1 Corinthians 3:10-12)

And are **built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; (Ephesians 2:20)

Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:19)

Nevertheless **the foundation of God standeth sure**, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (2 Timothy 2:19)

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again **the foundation of repentance** from dead works, and of faith toward God, (Hebrews 6:1)

For he looked for **a city which hath foundations**, whose builder and maker *is* God. (Hebrews 11:10)

These are the only places where Paul ever used the word "themelios". In all 8 of the verses with the word "themelios" which precede the verse we are examining, Paul has used this word to refer to THE ACTIONS OF PEOPLE AND **NOT TO A LITERAL FOUNDATION!**

Paul has used "themelios" to refer to people living **A GODLY LIFE** (the foundation of repentance, and laying in store for themselves a good foundation), and to apostles and prophets **DOING THE WORK OF GOD**, and to **THE PROMISES GOD HAS GIVEN US** (the foundation of God stands sure).

But at no time has Paul used this word to refer to a literal foundation made out of stones or bricks or soil. Even Paul's reference to a foundation of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and stubble is only a figurative use.

In Paul's writings the meaning of this Greek word is ALWAYS figurative.

And Hebrews 11:10 is no exception to this usage!

To say that Paul intended to refer to literal foundations for a spiritual creation, the New Jerusalem, would mean that Paul would have had to suck that information out of his thumb because there was no possible source for Paul to obtain such information. AND PAUL DIDN'T DO THAT!

Let's consider **one objection** some people may raise. Some may say: well, **Paul was taught personally in visions by Jesus Christ**. So how can you know that Jesus Christ didn't reveal some information about the foundations of the New Jerusalem to Paul? The answer to this suggestion is as follows:

1) First of all this is an attempt to desperately find something to support the things we have assumed to be true. There is no way to biblically support such an assertion. It is only wishful thinking.

2) Next, such a claim totally misses the purpose for which God gave Paul visions and personal teaching and instructions. The purpose for Jesus Christ teaching Paul personally was simply "to bring Paul up to speed". That's all it was!

3) Specifically, Jesus Christ did NOT give Paul any information that was not known to Peter and the other apostles. God is NOT the author of confusion, something that Paul himself told us (see 1 Corinthians 14:33). This means that God would certainly not have given Paul any information that Peter did not also have, so that Paul could theoretically have told Peter: "Listen Peter, Jesus Christ actually told me some things about the New Jerusalem that He didn't even tell you. So you will just have to accept my word for it". No, God doesn't work that way.

4) That is precisely why God waited until all the other apostles had died before God gave this Book of Revelation to John, to avoid confusion. God will never simultaneously give some information to one of His servants, information that nobody else yet understands, while at the same time giving other information to a different servant of God, information that nobody else, including the first servant, yet understands. To do so would be confusion!

To give "servant A" some information that "servant B" does not yet understand, while at basically the same time giving "servant B" other information that "servant A" does not yet understand may seem to be very democratic; but that is simply not the way God has ever worked.

5) If someone wishes to appeal to the case of Jethro giving Moses some advice, that doesn't mean that God was somehow working through Jethro and not through Moses. We should also recognize that when God gives information to one specific individual at a time, that does not mean that that specific individual has the best understanding on all issues, because that is not at all the case. Let's consider an example.

I strongly believe that God used Mr. Herbert W Armstrong to reveal a great deal of information to the people of God. And at that point in time I don't believe that God was revealing additional new information to other people in the Church. HOWEVER, that does not mean that Mr. Armstrong necessarily had the best understanding on every single issue. He didn't have the best understanding on every issue and he wasn't infallible.

6) Other people could research subjects that didn't even require "divine revelation" and sometimes reach better conclusions than Mr. Armstrong. For example, in the matter of counting correctly for Pentecost at the time when we kept Pentecost on a Monday, what was needed was not "divine revelation" that Sunday is the correct day for Pentecost. No, all that was needed was to very objectively examine the Hebrew text of Leviticus 23:15-16, to see that Mr. Armstrong's way of counting was flawed. Similarly, in the matter of using or not using the Jewish calendar, what is needed is not more "divine revelation" to establish the utter inappropriateness of the present Jewish calendar. No, all that is needed is an objective and factual examination of the biblical and historical and physical facts that are there for all to examine, to realize that the present Jewish calendar is at odds with God's instructions.

7) Consider that King David and other leaders frequently listened to advice and counsel given by other men. Those other men didn't have more contact with God than David, but they did have a better understanding on certain issues. So likewise, Mr. Armstrong didn't have all the best ideas, but he was nonetheless the one individual God was working through during Mr. Armstrong's time.

8) When Paul confronted Peter regarding the matter of fellowshipping with non-Jews, it wasn't a case of Paul having access to some divinely revealed information that Peter had not been aware of. No, it was

simply a case of Paul having a clearer understanding on that issue based on information that was freely available to both Peter and Paul.

However, any claim about "the foundations for the New Jerusalem" would have been on a completely different level, because that type of information cannot be reasoned out from anything else we have in the Bible.

9) When Jesus Christ DID give some inside information to only three apostles (Peter, James and John at the transfiguration), then Jesus Christ also VERY CLEARLY said: "tell the vision to no man UNTIL the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:9). That was for a very short period of time. However, from the time of Jesus Christ's resurrection onwards, that information was to be shared with others! And so we have it recorded in the New Testament.

10) It is inconceivable to me that as long as Peter was alive, to whom Jesus Christ had said: "... I will build My Church ... and I will give UNTO YOU the keys of the kingdom of heaven ..." (Matthew 16:18-19), that God would somehow give another man (i.e. Paul) some inside information about the foundations of the New Jerusalem, which information God was not giving to Peter.

The Greek text of Matthew 16:19 makes quite clear that Jesus Christ made this statement to Peter alone and not to all of the apostles because Jesus Christ used the singular throughout this statement. Thus:

"I will give UNTO YOU ..." = Greek "soi" = second person dative SINGULAR;

"whatsoever YOU SHALL BIND ..." = Greek "deses" = second person SINGULAR;

"whatsoever YOU SHALL LOOSE ..." = Greek "luses" = second person SINGULAR.

Jesus Christ's whole statement in Matthew 16:19 is addressed to Peter and not to all of the apostles. In English we can read the pronoun "you" as both singular and plural. However, this ambiguity does not exist in biblical Greek, and Matthew 16:19 is addressed to Peter alone. This matter is not really the subject of this particular article, and so here I don't want to get involved in other passages like Matthew 18:15-20.

The only point I really wish to make here is that with a clearly preeminent position for Peter, it is inconceivable that while Peter was alive that Jesus Christ would have divinely revealed additional information to Paul, which information would have been unknown to Peter.

So the reasoning that Paul knew about "the literal foundations for the New Jerusalem" from his private contacts with Jesus Christ is flawed.

Now let's get back to Hebrews 11:10 and see what Paul really wanted to tell us in this verse.

For a start, Paul is speaking about the city which God will build. That identifies the city as the New Jerusalem. Did Paul even know that this city's name will be "New Jerusalem"? Perhaps he did? In Galatians 4:25-26 Paul refers allegorically to two Jerusalems: first to the "Jerusalem which now is" (Galatians 4:25) and then to "Jerusalem which is above" (Galatians 4:26).

However, if Paul knew that the name is going to be "New Jerusalem", he certainly didn't let on that he knew it; and he didn't use that name in any of his writings. This makes me suspect that God did not reveal this name until He revealed it to John when John had his visions. And if Paul didn't even know the correct name for the New Jerusalem, it is extremely unlikely that he knew any other specific details about the New Jerusalem. I don't believe that Paul was even trying to present any specific details about

that city; in his own mind he was making a very general comment.

Next, **Paul was trying to create a contrast** for Abraham's situation. The contrast is as follows: In Hebrews 11:8 Paul states that in faith Abraham followed God's instructions and walked away from what could have been a secure lifestyle for this present life. In the next verse, Hebrews 11:9, Paul emphasizes that Abraham then lived without any physical security, in tents in a strange country. Abraham's home during that time did not have any kind of foundation at all; it was just a tent! Paul's point is that Abraham was not looking for any security or sense of permanence in this physical life. He lived life as a stranger in the land to which God had brought him. This lifestyle was an expression of Abraham's faith.

Having painted this picture, Paul then in the next verse presents **the stark contrast**! Abraham was not particularly concerned with physical security and stability in this life because Abraham very confidently looked forward to a reward from God in the life to come. Without knowing any details about the New Jerusalem, Abraham looked forward to a future in the Kingdom of God.

Paul's use of the expression "he looked for a city which has foundations" is presented in the light of Abraham in this physical life living in environments where he never had any real foundation. All that Paul meant with the expression "he looked for a city which has foundations" is: **he looked for a city WHICH IS SECURE!** IT IS REAL! THE FUTURE GOD HAS IN STORE FOR US IS SECURE! It is not some "pie in the sky" wishful thinking. It is real!

That (security) is what "a foundation" stands for when the word is used figuratively. A literal foundation is supposed to make a building secure. And Paul's use of the word "themelios" here is also intended to convey certainty and confidence and security. And this is a perfectly acceptable use of the word by Paul, **as also clearly illustrated by all the other times Paul used this word**.

However, Paul had no idea whether the New Jerusalem has 1 or 7 or 12 or however many foundations, if any at all. And **Paul did not know more about the New Jerusalem than John**. Paul did not have any information about the New Jerusalem whatsoever that the Apostle John somehow didn't receive.

So here is the point that we should keep in mind regarding Hebrews 11:10.

IF there are any other references anywhere to literal "foundations" for the city New Jerusalem, THEN we could perhaps likewise apply this verse literally. BUT IF there are no references anywhere else to a literal foundation or foundations for the New Jerusalem, THEN we need to reserve judgment on this matter before reaching the conclusion that the New Jerusalem also has literal foundations. Hebrews 11:10 should not be our sole authority for reaching the conclusion that the whole city named New Jerusalem must have multiple foundations.

We'll come back to this reference later. For now let's continue in the Book of Revelation.

REVELATION 21:18

Here is this verse.

And the building of the wall of it was *of* **jasper**: and the city *was* **pure gold**, like unto **clear glass**. (Revelation 21:18)

This is John's attempt to describe a completely different "world" in terms of things with which we today are familiar. But John is describing things that are not composed of jasper or gold or clear glass; those

things are nothing more than the best possible comparisons that came to John's mind when he saw this vision. But these comparisons obviously fall short.

This is why God did not describe the New Jerusalem Himself in God's own words! God couldn't have used words like "jasper" and "gold" to identify the building materials of the New Jerusalem, because that city is simply not made of jasper and gold! So God wanted John himself to think of suitable comparisons to describe this city. God wanted John to write down his perception of that city, rather than writing down "the cold hard facts" about the New Jerusalem. Can you understand the real purpose why God wanted John to present a description in John's own words?

Listen!

When we speak about "gold", chemical symbol "Au", we mean a heavy yellow metal. Anything that resembles "clear glass" cannot possibly be "gold"! There is no difference between "gold" and "pure gold"; either way it is a yellow metal. The element "Au" is not transparent like clear glass.

John is describing a creation that is not composed of any elements found in our present universe! What could John do? He saw an indescribably beautiful city which could not possibly be adequately discussed with any of the words that were at John's disposal. There are no words to correctly identify any of the building materials that God the Father will use in constructing the New Jerusalem, because those "building materials" don't even exist anywhere in our present universe; they have been reserved for that future creation when God "makes all things new".

Now in that vision God did NOT "suggest" any of these descriptive words and expressions to John. They were John's own words. The building material John saw in this vision was the most precious substance John had ever seen. It didn't look like the yellow gold John was familiar with; but John could perceive that it was far, far more precious than any substance John had ever seen. And John felt compelled to try to convey this inherent great value of the building material. So he called it "pure gold".

It also seems quite clear that in seeing this vision John's thoughts went back to **the instructions God had given to Moses**. In Exodus 25 we find the instructions regarding the construction of the ark of the covenant and the table for the "shewbread". In 8 verses in this chapter alone we find the expression "**pure gold**" (see Exodus 25:11; Exodus 25:17; Exodus 25:24; Exodus 25:29; Exodus 25:31; Exodus 25:36; Exodus 25:38; Exodus 25:39). Next, the High Priest's special clothes also included "**pure gold**" (see Exodus 28:14; Exodus 28:22; Exodus 28:36). The account of the actual construction of the ark of the covenant and the concomitant items is found in Exodus chapter 37. There the expression "**pure gold**" is found in 9 different verses (see Exodus 37:2; Exodus 37:6; Exodus 37:11; Exodus 37:16; Exodus 37:17; Exodus 37:22; Exodus 37:23; Exodus 37:24; Exodus 37:26).

Furthermore, John would also have been familiar with the references to pure gold in **the Temple** which Solomon had built. Specifically, Solomon had covered not only **the entire Holy of Holies** with "**pure gold**" (see 1 Kings 6:20), but he had in fact "overlaid **the** (**whole**) **house** within with pure gold" (1 Kings 6:21).

Now what John saw in this vision didn't really look like gold at all. If anything, it looked more like crystal. But from the descriptions of the Tabernacle and also the Temple of Solomon John knew that "pure gold" was the dominant material in the presence of God. And therefore John identified this precious building material in his vision as "gold". But John also wanted to make clear to his readers that he didn't mean the type of pure gold with which we are familiar (i.e. the heavy yellow metal), and therefore he added the expression "**LIKE UNTO CLEAR GLASS**".

This tells us that what John saw was transparent! So here is the point we should understand from this.

Are you ready for this?

THERE IS NO SUBSTANCE IN THE NEW HEAVENS WHICH IS NOT TRANSPARENT TO GOD! THERE IS NOTHING IN EXISTENCE AND THERE WILL NEVER BE ANYTHING IN EXISTENCE WHICH CAN SOMEHOW BLOCK GOD'S VIEW! NO MATERIAL CAN BLOCK THE LINE OF VISION OF SPIRIT GOD BEINGS!

In this vision of the New Jerusalem God gave John a glimpse of what it will be like to look at everything with the eyes of a spirit being. And that is why everything is "clear like glass". There will only be spirit beings in existence at that point in time. And nothing can stop the line of vision of any member of the God Family.

It is a mistake to try to identify the materials John mentions in his vision with materials that we today are familiar with. In God's environment there is no room for physical material substances. When God created the mineral with the chemical symbol "Au" (i.e. gold), it was not God's intention that that particular mineral would have an eternal future. Before God the element "Au" (gold) has no more value than the element "C" (carbon) or the element "Ca" (calcium) or the element "S" (sulfur) or the element "O" (oxygen), etc. **The value which all of these physical elements have is firmly restricted to this present physical existence.**

So the best way that a human being (i.e. John) could describe the appearance of the new earth and the New Jerusalem was to compare them to the most precious things he was familiar with in this present world, but to then add the rider that it is also all transparent like clear glass. That rider is intended to distinguish these things in the new universe from the very things in our present universe to which John is comparing them.

Let's move on.

And **the foundations of the wall** of the city ***were*** **garnished** with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation *was* jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. (Revelation 21:19-20)

Foundations in our world are buried under the surface. But what John saw here was above the surface of the ground; it was all visible to John who described what he saw. So John is not speaking about "foundations" at all! These are certainly not foundations within the laws of physics that we are familiar with in our present universe; they are not there to absorb weight-bearing stress! They are there to provide decoration and beauty and symbolism, attributes that are never valid for any real foundations in our present universe. These "foundations" here are all above the surface of the ground! These are not at all "foundations" by our understanding of the word "foundations".

Consider the things John actually saw in this vision.

He saw a new earth which was perfect and complete. It did not have a huge gaping hole in it for the equally huge city that was coming out of space, and the base of which was going to be carefully maneuvered into that huge gaping hole. In other words, in order for the New Jerusalem to have any kind of "foundation" at all, there would have to be a pre-existing huge hole on the new earth, so that the foundation part of the New Jerusalem can be plopped into it.

When the New Jerusalem comes to the new earth, then there is no digging or excavating of any kind. No, the New Jerusalem is set down on the surface of the new earth. Neither the walls of the city nor the

city itself in any way goes down into the "ground" of the new earth. The whole structure comes down from God and is set down on the surface. Nothing is buried below the surface, and in the New Jerusalem there will not be any "basements".

It should also be clear that these 12 substances are NOT the same as the "jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius", etc. with which we are familiar within our existence! John is COMPARING the 12 transparent foundations he could see to these 12 precious stones with which he was familiar. That's all! And John probably chose these 12 stones as comparisons because of 12 different colors that he could identify in these foundations.

In plain language: John was COMPARING the 12 foundations he could see to these 12 precious stones. It is only a comparison. John couldn't possibly tell us what those 12 substances really are because there are no words in our languages for those 12 specific substances, since they do not yet exist. This was only a vision!

The next verse also makes clear that John is comparing the unknown to things with which he was familiar.

And the **twelve gates** *were* **twelve pearls**; every several gate was of one pearl: and **the street** of the city *was* **pure gold**, as it were **transparent glass**. (Revelation 21:21)

It should be self-evident that these gates are not pearls at all, as we understand the word "pearls". The word "pearl" in this verse is a translation of the Greek word "margarites", which comes from the Greek word "margaros" which means "a pearl oyster". So John really did use the word that refers to "a pearl that was produced in an oyster". But obviously these twelve gates in the wall of the New Jerusalem were not produced inside any oyster shells! Therefore they cannot really be "pearls". There is absolutely no way that they can be "pearls" that were produced by oysters.

Next, what did John really see? Were the 12 gates he saw **perfect circles**, like pearls are perfect spheres, of perhaps 20 or 50 or 70 cubits in diameter? Or were the 12 gates rectangular in shape, the traditional shape of gates, but made out of material that looked like **mother-of-pearl**? Again we have more questions than answers.

Next, we are told that just like the city so also the street of the city was made of pure gold which was transparent like glass, a physical impossibility in our present universe. Notice also that the only references to "a street" in both chapters (i.e. Revelation 21 and 22) are in the singular case. Revelation 21:21 and Revelation 22:2 both refer to **ONE STREET AND ONE STREET ONLY**!

The three gates on each side of the New Jerusalem seem to infer at least three roads going from west to east and another three roads going from north to south? Alternatively, the 12 roads from the 12 gates could all converge on the center of this city, like the spokes of a wheel? However, John twice refers to "**the street**", singular. And he never uses the plural "streets". WHY did John not tell us about other streets in the New Jerusalem? For that matter, will spirit beings actually travel "on streets"? Why? And how many streets does this incredibly huge city actually have? What purpose will the street or streets in the New Jerusalem actually serve if spirit beings can travel faster than the speed of light? Or will spirit beings all gear-down into first gear when they enter the New Jerusalem, somewhat like motor boats being forced to travel at a crawling pace as long as they are within a certain distance from the shore of a small lake? There are again more questions than answers.

Let's continue.

And I saw **no temple** therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Revelation

21:22)

The purpose of a temple was twofold. It was to provide a dwelling place for God and it was also a means of providing access to God. So when God the Father and Jesus Christ are always present in the New Jerusalem, then this means that access to God the Father is automatically available to anyone who comes into the New Jerusalem. So from that perspective in the New Jerusalem the need for any temple has been completely eliminated.

Now in spite of the above statement God the Father and Jesus Christ are NOT "a temple"! This is very obviously a figurative statement, just like comparing the New Jerusalem to "the bride" of Jesus Christ is a figurative statement. Wherever God is present there is no room for "a temple", since a temple only represents access to God. That is the principle of 1 Corinthians 13:10.

But **when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away**. (1 Corinthians 13:10)

To paraphrase this principle here, when the reality comes then the representation is done away. So when God the Father and Jesus Christ are present in person, then anything that represented access to God is done away. Thus there cannot be any temple in the New Jerusalem for the purpose of providing access to God.

That leaves the other purpose for a temple, which was to provide a dwelling place for God. This brings us to the next point.

Up till now I have simply assumed that there will be numerous "buildings" in the New Jerusalem, simply because that is what we expect when we hear the word "city". However, Revelation 21:22 presents a rather different picture.

A temple is simply the building in which God resides or is present. Now since there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, this must mean that **there is no building of any kind in the New Jerusalem that is dedicated to God the Father's presence**, because if there was any structure in the New Jerusalem that was dedicated to God's presence, then that "structure" would automatically be "the temple".

Paul explained that God does not dwell in "temples made with hands" (see Acts 17:24). And during the millennium Jesus Christ will dwell in a Temple "not made with hands"; see Ezekiel chapters 40-48, especially places like Ezekiel 43:1-7; Ezekiel 44:1-4; etc. for details. That will be the time when Jesus Christ rules over physical human beings. But once God's plan has been completed and there are then only spirit beings around, THEN there will again be no temple at all for God to dwell in. That's what Revelation 21:22 is telling us.

Now if there isn't any specific structure in the New Jerusalem that is dedicated to God the Father's presence, the obvious question is: **are there in fact any buildings at all in the New Jerusalem?** Do you follow?

It doesn't make sense to have buildings for "mansions" (see John 14:2) for those in the first resurrection, when there isn't even a single building that serves as "a mansion" for God the Father. If there really was a "mansion" for God the Father, then that "mansion" would automatically be the temple.

If God the Father and Jesus Christ take the place of the temple, as this verse tells us, then why would there be any buildings at all in the New Jerusalem? A careful reading of chapters 21 and 22 shows that **John does not make any reference to any buildings at all**! All John does is tell us the dimensions for the New Jerusalem, and we then ASSUME that this city must surely be filled with buildings.

All we are capable of doing is assuming that the city New Jerusalem must surely be somewhat like the cities we are used to, just in a vastly superior way.

However, exactly what purpose would buildings in the New Jerusalem serve? Will everyone in the first resurrection need some kind of "office space", or "bed rooms" or "banqueting rooms" or "recreational rooms"? What purpose would ANY BUILDING serve in the New Jerusalem, given the fact that there will not be any temple for God the Father and for Jesus Christ?

Have God the Father and Jesus Christ existed in buildings for past eternity? Are buildings a new concept for God, something God had not previously considered for His own existence? And just who would occupy any buildings in the New Jerusalem ... clerical staff? WHY would spirit beings desire to dwell in "buildings" of any kind?

A careful reading of Revelation 21-22 shows that there will be a city with a wall around it. And that wall will have 12 foundations and 12 gates. The indication is that the city will have one street; if there are other streets they are not directly mentioned. There will definitely not be a temple for God to dwell in, and no buildings of any kind are mentioned. And without buildings just how does this city attain a height of approximately 1,500 miles?

I don’t know the answers. But I believe that IF John had seen any buildings at all, especially high ones reaching endlessly into the sky, then he surely would have recorded "what he had seen", because that was God’s clear instruction to him. His comment that there is no temple suggests to me that John didn’t see any buildings at all. What does John’s comment suggest to you?

Now I find it impossible to picture a city of this staggering size, and then there isn’t a single building worth mentioning in that city? What is a city supposed to be like if there aren’t any buildings in that city? And on top of that the city and the street are transparent. How can the city be 1,500 miles tall without any buildings in it?

Now IF there are no buildings in the New Jerusalem, THEN that explains why there is no reference to any "foundation" or "foundations" for the New Jerusalem. Since foundations for the New Jerusalem would NOT be needed for "weight-bearing" purposes, therefore any foundations for the city would only be there to represent some or other symbolical meaning, or they would be for ornamental purposes. But if there is no ornamental or symbolical value that God wishes to express through "foundations for the city", then why would this city even have "foundations" as we think of foundations?

These are some of the reasons why I mentioned earlier that we should reserve judgment regarding the intended meaning of Hebrews 11:10. Let’s be careful that we don’t ascribe more importance to a casual statement in Hebrews 11:10 than we do to John’s detailed discussion of this subject in Revelation 21-22.

Anyway, again there are far more questions than answers. That’s because we are still physical, and these two chapters describe an environment that God will create for spirit beings. It is beyond our present comprehension. We are not really capable of conceiving "how God lives"!

But here is the point.

When God devised the plan to create physical human beings, God also created a staggeringly beautiful and incomprehensibly intricate physical creation. It was perfectly suited to make man’s existence a pleasure, though we human beings have fouled up most of what God provided. (Satan and the demons did the same to the whole universe ... foul up what God had created.) This tells me that when God changes us human beings into His children, THEN God will once again create a staggeringly beautiful

creation, but this time aimed at making the existence of spirit beings a sheer pleasure (Psalm 16:11).

AND NOTHING IN THAT NEW CREATION WILL REMIND US OF THE FORMER CREATION!

WHAT ABOUT "STARS"?

Let's now look at the next verse.

And the city had **no need of the sun**, neither of **the moon**, to shine in it: for **the glory of God** did lighten it, **and the Lamb *is* the light thereof**. (Revelation 21:23)

This is speaking about a completely different universe to the one we have today. The statement "the city had no need of the sun" really means that **the whole new earth has no need of the sun**. It will be a completely different creation.

ALL LIGHT EVERYWHERE in the new heaven and in the new earth will come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. There will be no "lakes of fire" in that new universe, which is another way of saying that there will not be any stars that produce light as a result of nuclear chain reactions. Instead of stars being the sources of light, all light in the new heaven will come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. They are the sources of light not only for the New Jerusalem, but for the whole universe. And there will not be a single cubic inch of darkness anywhere in that new universe. The entire universe will resemble a brightly lit room.

Light is nothing other than an expression of one of God's inherent attributes. God has always been the source of all light. Consider how often light is used in reference to Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John alone. Christ's mere presence is "the light that shines in darkness" (John 1:5). Christ is "the true light" (John 1:9). Christ is literally "the light of the world" (John 8:12) because all light comes from God the Father and from Jesus Christ; and there is no other source of light anywhere. These comparisons between Jesus Christ and light are only made because He really is the source of light.

Now notice one other point. From Revelation 21:1 to Revelation 22:5 the Apostle John presents us with his description of the new heaven and the new earth. Have you ever noticed that nowhere in this description does the Apostle John refer to "stars" or to "a star"? That's because there aren't going to be any "stars" in the new heaven! Stars are bodies that are "on fire", and I don't believe that there will be any fires or nuclear reactions anywhere in the new universe.

Notice verse 1 again.

And I saw **a new heaven** and a new earth: for *the* **first heaven** and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. (Revelation 21:1)

The Greek text in this verse reads "**ouranon kainon**" for "a new heaven" and "**protos ouranos**" for "the first heaven". (There is no definite article in the Greek expression for "first heaven"; it is really a case of English grammatical syntax expecting the definite article here, and so the translators rendered this appropriately as "the first heaven".)

Now let's look at the Greek word "ouranos" (i.e. "heaven"). This word does NOT necessarily infer the presence of any stars or any planets. It appears to be derived from the Greek word "oros" which means "a mountain". "Ouranos" literally means "**the vaulted expanse of the sky**", whether that sky includes any objects (like stars and planets) or not. It comes from the word for "mountain" because it implies the

sense of "elevation, being high up", etc.

So here is the point:

AT NO STAGE HAS JOHN ACTUALLY TOLD US WHETHER OR NOT THE NEW HEAVEN WILL CONTAIN ANY "STARS"!

I know that your prejudice just like my own prejudice simply assumes that there will be "stars" in that new universe. And that may well be the case? But the "cold" facts are that John has not at any stage said anything about any stars. It is up to us to infer the presence of stars for that new universe. After all, what else could there be in the new heaven?

Now maybe John didn't comment on any "heavenly bodies" because he didn't know how to describe them? Maybe John didn't see any other bodies aside from the new earth? Maybe God didn't want John to see any other heavenly bodies? I don't have the answers here, because just like you I obviously have not seen the vision that John saw. So all we can do is make inferences based on our own particular personal biases. But we don't have any factual information (i.e. statements from John) to reach any firm conclusions.

Consider the following option.

If the city and the street and the foundations of the wall in the New Jerusalem are going to be transparent like glass, what if THE ENTIRE NEW UNIVERSE is also going to be transparent to godly eyes? Obviously that boggles our minds. But what do you expect when you are trying to understand the future plans of the incredibly powerful Almighty Creator God ... something easy? Is God limited to just improving somewhat on the present universe? Just what does God mean by saying "**behold, I make all things new**"? Can that "new" include things that are totally beyond our capacity to grasp in this life, things that don't even exist at this point in time, like totally new building blocks to replace our present system of elements that are composed of atoms and molecules?

It surely is beyond our understanding when we are told that at God's right hand "there are pleasures for ever more" (Psalm 16:11). Just what kind of an existence has God planned for His Family? We make a huge mistake when we try to think about future eternity in God's presence in terms of the reality we experience today.

As I indicated earlier, there is no place in the universe that is hidden from God's view. God can be on the other side of the earth, or the other side of the sun for that matter, and still very clearly see us whether we are in New York or in Sydney, Australia. No star and no planet can block God's vision. There truly is no place to hide from God's view. Now IF every member of the Family of God will have that ability to see things on the other side or a star or a planet, what would be the point of making those stars and planets "solid" to block someone's (whose?) vision?

Obviously I cannot prove this. But I strongly suspect that in the new heaven all heavenly "objects" (i.e. in place of the stars and planets in the present universe) will be transparent to the eyes of spirit beings. And since there will not be any creatures with "physical eyes" around anywhere, it follows that how the new heaven is seen with the eyes of spirit beings will be THE ONLY REALITY! There will not be anyone around to give us an assessment of what the new heaven looks like when seen through physical human eyes.

Our present sense of vision is very limited. I mentioned at the start of this article that God created molecules and atoms and electrons without ever needing to look through some microscope.

Consider the following point. All of us already have the ability to look right through millions upon millions of molecules, right? How many molecules of air are there between our eyes and the trees we are able to see 200 yards away? Billions of them! Yet none of those molecules of air impair our vision of what is located 200 yards away ... we look right through all of those billions of air molecules. We can also look right through molecules of clear glass, and none of those molecules block our vision.

So why would it be strange if the Almighty Creator God created all substances in the new universe to be just as transparent to spirit eyes as are the molecules of gas and of glass to our human eyes?

Consider the element carbon. Human eyes normally cannot see through a layer of carbon. However, when that element carbon is combined with oxygen in the forms carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, then our human eyes can look right through the carbon present in that gaseous form. So sometimes we can look through millions of carbon atoms (i.e. when they are bound up in carbon dioxide), while under other circumstances we cannot look through millions of carbon atoms (e.g. a thin film of coal dust).

Why would it be strange if in a creation designed to be the eternal home for the Family of God all the construction materials are transparent? In the context of the New Jerusalem John repeatedly tells us that the materials he saw were "clear" (see Revelation 21:11; Revelation 21:18 and Revelation 22:1). Something is like gold but at the same time it is also transparent. This is obviously talking about things beyond our human range of perception.

Anyway, again I don't have the answers. And there are surely far more unanswered questions which John's descriptions here raise, than there are answers.

Now the fact that God instructed John to write all these things down for us to read shows that God intends for us to think through all the information here. God wants us to at least try to understand these things, even if those efforts lead us to more questions than answers.

Consider one other point in this regard.

In Genesis 1:1 we are told that God created "the heavens", plural. But in Revelation 21:1 John tells us about "a new heaven", singular. In Genesis 1:14 God said "let there be lights", plural. And in Genesis 1:16 the stars are specifically identified. But in Revelation chapters 21-22 no stars are mentioned, and the word "light" is only used in the singular. (The word "star" in Revelation 22:16 is a reference to Jesus Christ and not to some "star" in the new heaven.) And the only source of light mentioned for the new earth is God Himself. There is no indication in the whole account that there are any other sources of light in the new heaven besides the light that emanates from God the Father and from Jesus Christ.

THE "NATIONS" OF THEM THAT ARE SAVED

Let's continue in Revelation 21.

And **the nations of them which are saved** shall walk in the light of it: and **the kings of the earth** do bring their glory and honour into it. (Revelation 21:24)

Now we are getting to the really interesting part. There is a lot of information in this short verse.

This is speaking about a time when the present universe no longer exists. There are no more physical mortal human beings in existence. The present earth is the home for mortal human beings, the family of man. And the new earth will be the home for immortal spirit beings, the Family of God. This verse tells us

the following things:

The Family of God consists of three groups: the first "group" consists of two Beings who have always existed, i.e. God the Father and Jesus Christ; the second "group" consists of the 144,000 individuals who will be in the first resurrection; the third "group" consists of "a great multitude which no man could number" (see Revelation 7:9), made up of all the people who will have come from the time of the millennium together with those from the second resurrection.

I expect the total number of individuals in the Family of God to run into multiple billions of individuals. However large the Family of God will be, I know that it will consist of an immensely huge number of spirit beings.

When we have children, be it only one or two, or be it as many as fifteen, we easily keep track of that number. But if the number of children is very large, e.g. 12 or 15 as was sometimes the case in earlier generations, then we need to do some structuring to cope effectively. For example, we may group some of the girls together to share one or more rooms, and we then also group some of the boys together to share one or more rooms. We may have to figure out some structure regarding who sits where at mealtimes. We may have to have rules regarding which bathroom facilities in the house are for the boys and which facilities are for the girls, etc.

The point is: **a large family requires a certain amount of structuring** in order to function effectively and efficiently. And that is precisely what God will do.

God the Father will structure His entire Family of multiple billions into groups, where each group is referred to as "a nation". After all, that's how God structured the human family in the first place. As Paul explained, "**He has made of one blood all nations of men** for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). And this is exactly the same way God will structure the Family of God, into different groups called nations. However, that structuring within the Family of God will not be based on ethnicity, as is the case on the human level.

The leaders of each of these groups or "nations" will each be designated as "the king" of that particular group or nation. Those groupings don't have anything to do with the ethnic backgrounds those individuals had during their human lives. Placement within each group will once again be determined by God the Father's wishes. When Paul said "**NOW** has God set the members **EVERY ONE OF THEM** in the body as it has pleased him" (1 Corinthians 12:18), then this certainly also applies to **the detailed structure of God's entire eternal Family**. There is no way that any human being can know in advance into which group (read "nation") God is going to place him or her, simply because they have a certain ethnic background.

I personally doubt that any of "the nations of them which are saved", which will comprise the overwhelmingly greater part of the Family of God, will be identified with any of the names of any of the nations that exist in our world today, or for that matter, that they will have any kinds of connections to any nations in this present world! We need to realize that in the Family of God it is going to be a case of "new names all around"! There will be **new names for everyone in the Family**, and that includes **new names for the nations** within that Family. The old names of people and of nations will be blotted out with the exception of the "national" names for those in the first resurrection. It was God Himself who determined that those who will be in the first resurrection will be called "the Israel of God".

So there will not be any nations with names like Finland, Iceland, China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, Germany, Italy, Paraguay, Bolivia, Egypt, etc. All of those names, along with all the other national names in existence today, will be blotted out before that point in time.

If the new earth will indeed be as large as our present sun, then it will also be populated by the entire Family of God. Those in the first resurrection will reside in the New Jerusalem, though they will not necessarily reside in "buildings". All the other members of God's Family will be structured into hundreds or even thousands (?) of nations, where each nation will have at least one city, and perhaps even a number of cities, where they will reside. So there will very likely be hundreds, if not thousands or even tens of thousands of cities scattered all around the new earth, all populated by spirit beings. None of them will approach the size and splendor of the New Jerusalem. But they will all be magnificent cities. Without the satanic spirit of competition there will never be an attempt by any of those nations to outdo the New Jerusalem. They will be content with the cities that they will create for themselves, based on instructions that God will give them. And on a regular basis the leaders of those nations will come to the New Jerusalem to bring honor and glory to God the Father.

All the light everywhere on the new earth and in the whole new heaven will emanate from the New Jerusalem, and therefore all these nations made up of the children of God "shall walk in the light of it".

Let's continue.

And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for **there shall be no night there**. (Revelation 21:25)

The gates represent access to God the Father. That access will never be blocked or denied. The access is always open and available. Now the expression "there shall be no night there" tells us that there will never be any darkness anywhere in the new universe. The absence of darkness is not limited to the New Jerusalem; it extends to every part of the new heaven. The only place where there will be any darkness at all is the place outside of that new heaven where Satan and the demons will be restrained for ever (Jude 1:13).

This statement "there shall be no night there" also tells us that this new heaven is vastly different from the present universe. The new heaven will not consist of solar systems, where "stars" provide the light for planets which would without the light from their particular star be immersed in total darkness, as is the case today.

Now consider this:

In this present universe the sun and the stars have always been the greatest sources of idolatry! The highest pagan deities typically represent "the sun god" and "the moon god". Pagans worshiped the stars. All of the planets in our solar system are named for pagan gods. Horoscopes are based on looking to the stars for guidance. "Stargazers and monthly prognosticators" (see Isaiah 47:13) were a powerful lobby of paganism. Astrologers were in the same grouping as magicians and sorcerers (see Daniel 2:2). The signs of the Zodiac epitomize demon worship!

In the new universe there will be nothing at all that will remind us of the old universe. Nothing will ever recall "what the pagans used to do"; those things will all be as though they had never been!

So in the new heaven there will be neither dark planets nor light-giving stars. That is why I have mostly used the expression "heavenly bodies" rather than the word "stars". And as already stated a number of times, there will be no darkness anywhere. Whatever heavenly bodies there will be in addition to the new earth, none of them will remind us of the stars in our present universe, because none of them will be lakes of fire (i.e. none of them will be sources of light). And neither will there be any heavenly bodies that will be totally or partially enveloped by darkness, as is the case with the planets in this present universe. When we as children of God at that point in time "consider the heavens" there will be nothing whatsoever that will remind us of this present universe or the pagan customs and practices that were based on it.

Obliterating this present universe and creating a completely different type of universe is a part of **blotting out the memory of Satan**, the rebel who had sucked "the third part of the stars of heaven" into his rebellion (see Revelation 12:4). Satan and the demons will be "in the blackness of darkness for ever", but that will take care of itself once it has been implemented by God. No son of God or angel will ever do "guard duty" in front of Satan's permanent prison. And Satan's miserable existence will never even cross our minds again; we will never devote any of our thoughts to Satan's existence in that permanently restrained condition. Nothing in the new heaven will ever remind us of Satan.

Let's continue in Revelation 21.

And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. (Revelation 21:26)

This is a repetition of what we saw in verse 24. John is emphasizing this because it made a powerful impression on him. There will be a constant stream of the children of God coming to the New Jerusalem from all the other cities on the new earth. There will be a great deal of interaction amongst the members of God's Family.

Let's see the next verse.

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27)

John addressed this statement as an admonition to his readers. Access to the New Jerusalem is limited to those who will have been changed into sons of God, as well as the holy angels. At that point in time those who lie or defile things or work abominations will not even exist; they will have been burned up in the lake of fire, as John had already told us in Revelation 21:8. So this statement here is made for emphasis, as an admonition for us today.

REVELATION CHAPTER 22

Now we come to the next verse.

And he shewed me **a pure river of water of life**, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Revelation 22:1)

Do you understand what this verse is telling us? This is not speaking about real water at all! There is a huge difference between "water" and "water of life". The expressions "water of life" and "living water" (John 4:10-11; John 7:38) both refer to the Holy Spirit, and neither expression has anything to do with real water. Notice how Jesus Christ explained this.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, **out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**. (But this spake he of **the Spirit**, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (John 7:38-39)

Jesus Christ was clearly not speaking about real water. And neither is Revelation 22:1 speaking about real water. However, here is the point we should always keep in mind:

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SOMETHING THAT FLOWS LIKE A RIVER!

Now let's be sure that we don't confuse **two different periods of time**.

1) Revelation 22:1 applies to the time of the New Jerusalem, which is on the new earth in the new heaven. **At that time** the Holy Spirit will flow from **two sources**: from the throne of God the Father and from the throne of Jesus Christ.

2) But during the millennium and the 100-year period there will also be a river of living water. And that is during the time of this present physical universe. **During that period** there will be **one source** for the Holy Spirit, and that one source will be from the throne of Jesus Christ. During this period it may be that the Holy Spirit may actually manifest in the appearance of physical water and flow just like physical water for the benefit of physical human beings? Thus when Jesus Christ starts to rule in Jerusalem at the beginning of the millennium we are told that a river of living water will flow from Jerusalem (i.e. from the presence of Jesus Christ) eastwards towards the Dead Sea (i.e. "the former sea") and westwards towards the Mediterranean Sea (i.e. "the hinder sea"). It will be the time when Jesus Christ is "king over all the earth". See Zechariah 14:8-9.

The point for this millennial period is that with the pouring out of the seven last plagues in the presence of Jesus Christ this earth will have been brought to the very brink of "utter destruction", where the extinction of all life would be inevitable if God did not intervene. So once Jesus Christ starts to rule in Jerusalem, then He initiates the Holy Spirit flowing around the whole earth like a huge river. It flows westwards into the Mediterranean, and then into the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and into the Atlantic Ocean and then into all the oceans around the world. At the same time it also flows eastwards from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea and then into the Red Sea and also around the world.

[COMMENT: This description is **for illustration purposes only**, since there will also be major changes in the topography of this Earth before Jesus Christ sets up His rule. Thus the above description is only theoretical and based on current landmass configurations. I have presented it purely to illustrate **what** will happen, without knowing the precise details regarding the exact route this healing will follow on an Earth with a changed topography. For that matter, I don't rule out the possibility of that river of Holy Spirit also flowing "uphill" to cover every single square inch of the entire Earth at the start of the millennium, to achieve a healing of every single spot on Earth.]

The point is that every place that is touched by this living water will be healed. So at the start of Jesus Christ's millennial rule this earth will be healed, starting in the area of Jerusalem, and radiating out from there in every direction until every place on earth has been reached and healed.

This statement in Zechariah 14 is further expounded in Ezekiel 47:1-12. Ezekiel 47:1 shows that this living water flows out from **the millennial Temple** where Jesus Christ will be residing during the millennium. In this Ezekiel passage this river was already 4,000 cubits wide (i.e. about 2,000 yards or about 1,800 meters) before Ezekiel got to the point where his feet could no longer touch the bottom of the river (Ezekiel 47:3-5). And the indication is that he wasn't even halfway across the river. So the implication in Ezekiel 47 is that this river will be perhaps 3-5 miles wide or wider? It will be **an enormously large river of Holy Spirit** flowing out from Jesus Christ for the purpose of completely healing this planet from all the effects of all the devastations of the 6,000 years that preceded the establishment of Jesus Christ's rule.

But this will all happen in the context of a physical creation. And in that context the living water may well look just like normal water? I don't know the exact details. But this living water will flow from Jerusalem during the millennium for the purpose of healing this Earth.

Now in Revelation 22:1 we have **a completely different setting**. There will not be a physical earth, and there will not be any destruction that needs to be remedied. And there will not be any sicknesses that need to be removed. The setting in Revelation 22:1 is a perfect environment whose only inhabitants will be spirit beings. So the purpose for that "**pure river of water of life**" will not be the same as the purpose

for the "**living waters**" during the millennium.

Let's examine the next verse in Revelation.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* **the tree of life**, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded her fruit every month: and **the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations**. (Revelation 22:2)

Once again this verse speaks about ONE street in the New Jerusalem. So we have the tree of life in the middle of the street and also on both sides of the pure river of water of life. There are a number of things to notice here.

First of all, **THIS IS THE REAL TREE OF LIFE!**

The tree of life that God placed "in the midst of the garden" back in Genesis in the time of Adam (i.e. Genesis 2:9) was a type of this tree in Revelation 22:2. And the trees in the Jerusalem during Christ's millennial rule (i.e. Ezekiel 47:12) are also a type of this tree in the New Jerusalem. In fact, the tree of life in Revelation 22:1 is the original inspiration for both "trees of life" that will have existed before the time of the New Jerusalem.

Now Ezekiel 47:12 sounds quite similar to Revelation 22:2. Notice:

And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all **trees for meat** (i.e. **food**), whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and **the leaf thereof for medicine**. (Ezekiel 47:12)

But the distinction between the trees in Ezekiel 47 and in Revelation 22:2 is this:

1) The trees in Ezekiel 47 will be for the benefit of mortal human beings.

2) The tree in Revelation 22:2 will be for the benefit of immortal spirit beings.

A clear understanding of the tree of life in Revelation 22:2 clarifies the precise purpose of the tree of life in Genesis 2:9. When God planted the tree of life in the garden in Eden, it was patterned after this tree of life in Revelation 22:2. This is the tree that holds the real key to understanding this whole subject.

This brings us to another major question.

IN THE RESURRECTION WILL WE BE "GOD LIKE GOD IS GOD"?

The short answer is both yes and no.

It really depends on what you have in mind when you ask this question. From one perspective we will indeed be "God like God is God". And from another perspective we will NOT be "God like God is God". Let me try to explain.

God is a certain type of immortal Spirit Being on a highest possible level, higher than the immortal angels. When God determined to build "the Family of God", then God set in motion a plan that would lead to the creation of immortal spirit beings on that same highest possible level. The members of "the

Family of God" will all have the same general appearance that God has (i.e. they will be "in the image of God"), and they will also all have the same type of mind that God has (i.e. they will be "in the likeness of God"). In addition they will also be able to exercise all the powers that God is able to exercise. They will have access to exactly the same powers to which God has access, and by which powers God does His work of creating. In this way God will have "reproduced", creating spirit beings that will be like God Himself, sharing God's existence in every way. This creation of "sons of God" will be the highest possible achievement for God. God cannot achieve anything greater than to create other independent spirit beings with totally independent minds who will have the ability to freely exercise **all the powers of God**. In this sense the created sons of God will be "God like God is God".

BUT THERE WILL STILL BE ONE MAJOR DISTINCTION!

There is one specific attribute which both God the Father and Jesus Christ possess that They cannot pass on to any created "sons". And in the sense of this particular attribute all the other members of the Family of God will NOT be "God as God is God". And this one specific attribute is linked to Revelation 22:2.

Let's go back to the huge river of living water that will issue from the throne of Jesus Christ during the millennium, as described for us in Ezekiel 47. That huge river pictures **the power of the Holy Spirit flowing out from Jesus Christ**. In analogy, the Holy Spirit is like a huge river that endlessly flows out from God.

Put in simple terms:

ONLY GOD THE FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST ARE THE SOURCES FOR ALL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT EXISTS! IT FLOWS OUT OF THESE TWO GODS IN AN ENDLESS STREAM!

The one major difference between God the Father and Jesus Christ on the one hand, and all the other members of the God Family on the other hand is that none of the other members of the Family of God can originate or self-produce the power of the Holy Spirit. They all will always have to TAKE IN that power of the Holy Spirit from an outside source before it can then also "flow out from them"! But God the Father and Jesus Christ generate their own power; They ARE the only sources of this power. And this will be the only sense in which we will not become "God as God is God".

Can you grasp this distinction?

Spirit beings have an immortal existence. **That immortal existence is independent of whether or not those spirit beings have any power at their disposal.** In fact, spirit beings (other than God the Father and Jesus Christ) do not have any inherent powers at their disposal at all! There is a distinction between their existence and their ability to perform powerful actions. No spirit being has any powers at all automatically.

In order to perform any powerful actions spirit beings need to have access to the source of power. And there is only one source of power in existence and that one source is the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit is not an independent entity. It is something that flows endlessly from God the Father and from Jesus Christ. That is why it is identified as both "**the Spirit of God**" (1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 7:40; 1 Corinthians 3:16; etc.) and also as "**the Spirit of Christ**" (Philippians 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11; Galatians 4:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18; etc.). And it is never identified as the spirit of anyone else. The expression "the HOLY Spirit" refers to either one or to both of these "spirits" (i.e. "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ").

Now we get to Revelation 22:2.

In this verse we have the picture of the immortal Family of God living for all future eternity. They will all be spirit beings. But only two of them are "the generators of power" and all the other members of the Family will be "the recipients of power", "the inheritors of power". Now THE WAY in which God will make His very own power available to all His children (i.e. they will "inherit" that power from God!) is by means of "THE TREE OF LIFE" and by "the pure river of WATER OF LIFE".

Let's look at this verse again.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded **her fruit** every month: and **the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations**. (Revelation 22:2)

The Greek word here translated as "healing" is "therapeia", which is formed from the Greek verb "therapeuo". Here in Revelation 22:2 the Greek word "therapeia" does NOT refer to "healing" at all! We are dealing with a mistranslation.

TWO SETS OF N.T. GREEK WORDS

To understand this matter clearly, we need to consider two sets of NT Greek words. Here they are:

THE FIRST SET OF GREEK WORDS:

- **iaomai** = the Greek verb which means "**to heal**";

- **iasis** = the Greek noun which means "**healing**";

- **iama** = another Greek noun which means "**healing**";

- **iatros** = the Greek word which means "**healer**" and "**physician**".

THE SECOND SET OF GREEK WORDS:

- **therapeuo** = the Greek verb which means "**to serve**";

- **therapon** = the Greek noun which means "**a servant**" or "**an attendant**";

- **therapeia** = the Greek noun which means "**service**" and "**well-being**".

When the focus of a statement is on "healing", it is clear that in the New Testament the main Greek word for healing is "**iaomai**". Examples where "iaomai" is used include Mark 5:29, Luke 6:19, Luke 8:47, Luke 9:2, John 4:47, John 5:13, Acts 3:11, Acts 9:34, James 5:16, etc. There is no question that "iaomai" is the correct word for the meaning "to heal".

Similarly, the word for "doctor" or "physician" is "**iatros**" and NOT "therapon". Examples where "iatros" is used with this meaning are Matthew 9:12, Mark 2:17, Mark 5:26, Luke 4:23, Luke 5:31 and Luke 8:43. In Colossians 4:14 Luke himself is referred to as "the beloved physician", and that is "the beloved IATROS".

The Greek noun "**iasis**" is used in verses like Luke 13:32 ("... I cast out demons and I do **CURES** today ...") and Acts 4:22 ("... this miracle of **HEALING** was showed ..."). This word clearly means "healing".

The Greek noun "**iama**" is used in verses like 1 Corinthians 12:9 ("... to another the gifts of **HEALING** by the same spirit"). This word also clearly means "healing".

This family of words based on "iaomai" all has to do with "healing". That brings us to the next group of Greek words.

There is no question that in practice the predominant use of the Greek word "**therapeuo**" in the New Testament refers to healing. This Greek word "therapeuo" literally refers to: "**the services of a THERAPON**", i.e. "the services of a servant or an attendant". So the point is that the primary meaning of this word is "to serve", and one specific area of service that is frequently involved in the New Testament use of this word happens to be the matter of healing. Of the 44 times this Greek verb "therapeuo" is used in the New Testament, it is used 43 times with the meaning of "to heal" or "to cure". However, it is also used one time in a context where it cannot possibly mean "to heal", and that is in Acts 17:25.

Neither **is worshipped** ("**therapeuetai**", a form of "therapeuo") with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (Acts 17:25)

This is a very interesting use of the verb "therapeuo" because it shows that when it is used in connection with God, then it can convey the meaning of **WORSHIP**! Or we could say that here it means "neither **is served** with men’s hands". This also ties in with the way the Greek noun "therapon" is used, which appears only once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 3:5.

And Moses verily *was* faithful in all his house, **as a servant** ("**therapon**"), for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after (Hebrews 3:5)

This is the correct meaning of "therapon". It means "as a servant" or "as an attendant". So while the verb "therapeuo" is certainly commonly used with the meaning "to heal", such "healing" is based on the services of a "therapon" and it is not based on the services of an "iatros". If that sounds confusing, let’s try to express this in plain English.

When "healing" is referred to by the word "iaomai", then it always refers to something that is done by "a physician". But when "healing" is referred to by the word "therapeuo", then it does NOT necessarily refer to the work of "a physician"; then it typically refers to the work of "a servant" or "an attendant". As Jesus Christ said: "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, **but to minister**" (see Matthew 20:28). So in this capacity Jesus Christ’s acts of healing fitted the word "therapeuo".

The physician ("iatros") is a specialist whose services are restricted to healing. The servant ("therapon"), on the other hand, functions in a far more general and broader capacity, where healing may AT TIMES be included in his functions. And so the activity of a servant ("therapon") has the broader scope, one of trying to achieve well-being, **even when there is no specific need for any healing involved**.

The words that are derived from "therapeuo" (i.e. "therapon" and "therapeia") also illustrate this approach. **These words are not really used to refer specifically to "healing".** We’ve already seen the one occurrence of "therapon". So now let’s examine the Greek noun "**therapeia**", which is used only four times in the New Testament. Those four places are: Matthew 24:45, Luke 9:11, Luke 12:42 and Revelation 22:2. To get a sense of what this word means in Revelation 22:2, we should look at the other three verses where it is used. So let’s do that.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his **household** ("therapeia"),

to give them meat in due season? (Matthew 24:45)

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his **household** ("therapeia"), to give *them their* portion of meat in due season? (Luke 12:42)

And the people, when they knew *it*, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and **healed** ("**iato**" a form of "**iaomai**") them that had need of **healing** ("therapeia"). (Luke 9:11)

Matthew 24:45 and Luke 12:42 refer to the same statement made by Jesus Christ. In both places "therapeia" is translated as "household". In this context the word "therapeia" has a meaning that is far more general than just "healing". I feel that here Jesus Christ was making the point that He, Jesus Christ, had set two different individuals in succession in a position with power over THE DOCTRINES of His Church. Those individuals, one good and one bad, were given a certain responsibility for **the "well-being" of the Church members**, by faithfully teaching them the true doctrines of the Bible. One servant did this faithfully and the other servant was evil.

Now in practice the doctrine of healing happened to be the first doctrine that the Church's new leadership after Mr. Armstrong's death attacked and discredited. But that new leadership went on to discredit dozens of other teachings as well. Instead of providing for the "well-being" of the Church, that leadership actively promoted the scattering of the sheep. And within the prophetic context of Matthew chapter 24 I believe the intended meaning of Christ's statement is best expressed more or less as follows:

"... Who is then a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord has made ruler over **the well-being of His people** (i.e. he has authority over the Church's teachings, including but not limited to the teaching about healing!), to give them (i.e. the Church) meat in due season (i.e. to teach them the truth)."

The point is, in Matthew 24:45 and in Luke 12:42 the Greek word "therapeia" undoubtedly includes the doctrine of healing. But equally clearly it is not restricted to that meaning. In these verses "therapeia" covers a far greater scope than merely "healing".

[COMMENT: When I first examined this Scripture about 15 years ago I thought that the primary focus was intended to be on healing. However, I have since come to believe that the intended application is far more general, certainly including the doctrine about healing, but not being limited to that narrow application. Time has demonstrated that the leadership which did away with the Church's doctrine about healing did away with dozens of other teachings as well. As they say, "the facts on the ground" show that the teaching about healing was just the start for the large number of teachings that were methodically discredited. So it seems inappropriate to attempt to limit the application to the subject of healing.]

Now **Luke 9:11** is very interesting. It uses the verb "iaomai" to refer to Jesus Christ's actions of healing people. And then it uses the noun "therapeia" to express a need. A suitable way to translate this verse is:

"... He spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and **healed** (a form of "**iaomai**") them that had need of **well-being** ("therapeia")."

Note that Luke 9:11 does not use the Greek words "iasis" or "iama", which would have been the logical Greek words to convey the specific meaning of "healing" in a context where the Greek verb "iaomai" is also used. Clearly the word "therapeia" is used in this verse with a more general meaning than the meaning of the words "iama" and "iasis".

And that "leaves" us with only Revelation 22:2.

REVELATION 22:2

Here is this verse once again.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded her fruit every month: and **the leaves** of the tree *were* **for THE WELL-BEING of the nations** (**of them which are saved!**).

God is here giving us an analogy, expressing what will happen "in earthly terms". To state this analogy plainly:

All members of the Family of God (excepting obviously God the Father and Jesus Christ) will on a regular basis replenish their supply of the power of God's Holy Spirit by "eating it" as the fruit and leaves of the tree of life!

We will all regularly have to replenish that power within us, like having to regularly eat our "daily bread" in this life, in order to stay strong. It doesn't affect our immortality; but it will affect the degree of power to which we will have access!

THIS IS THE REASON WHY GOD IN THE FIRST PLACE CREATED US IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE NEED TO EAT OUR "DAILY BREAD"!

Just because God created us as physical mortal beings, that does not mean that God had to create us to have a need to replenish our strength on a daily basis! Yes, God really could have created us as mortal beings, but without ever having to eat anything! Certainly, that seems strange if not impossible to our way of thinking. But that is because we cannot picture any realistic alternative. But try to understand this point:

God created us human beings with a need for daily food because God had already devised a plan whereby we would eventually, as spirit beings, replenish the power of God within us (i.e. God's Holy Spirit) on a regular basis by "taking it in"!

We are told that when we live by God's laws then the Holy Spirit "FLOWS" out of us (John 7:38, etc.). Now once it has flowed out of us by means of godly conduct, THEN IT ISN'T THERE ANY LONGER! And therefore we must then replenish it! That's what we already have to do in this life. And that is what God has planned for us for all future eternity!

Consider again Romans 1:20.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Romans 1:20)

There is an ellipsis in this verse. With the words that are implied, and which should be included, this verse reads:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead CAN BE UNDERSTOOD; so that they are without excuse: (Romans 1:20)

This principle is applicable far more often than we tend to realize. What this principle shows is that God started with a plan to achieve a specific goal. AFTER God had devised that plan, THEN God created the whole physical creation, with the intent that as much as possible this physical creation would point to the spiritual fulfillment towards which the whole creation is aimed. Many things in our physical creation reflect things that God will implement in the future spiritual creation.

So God created all physical life forms with a need for constant replenishment of "fuel" (i.e. we need to eat in order to stay alive). This should help us understand "the invisible thing" regarding the need we will have as sons of God to constantly replenish the power of God within us. And the method for replenishing the powers of God within us will be by taking in the fruit and the leaves from that tree of life.

This should also help us to understand why God's original focus with the first two human beings was almost exclusively on "TREES"! The garden God planted "eastward in Eden" (Genesis 2:8-9) focused predominantly on trees. And the tree of life in that garden was very prominent. And in providing food for mankind God's focus was: "of every TREE of the garden you may freely eat" (Genesis 2:16), because that is precisely the way it will be in the New Jerusalem. God's initial intention in Genesis was that man's sustenance would come primarily from trees.

Understand that when God created Adam and Eve, God already had the plan to make the powers of God available by means of fruit and leaves from the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. The key components of that plan were already in existence before Adam was even created. And so the garden in Eden mirrored that plan to a certain degree.

We need to understand that "healing" is a totally inappropriate way to translate "therapeia" in Revelation 22:2. "Healing" presupposes the existence of sicknesses or diseases. But that will not be the case in the New Jerusalem.

Now let's go back to something I mentioned earlier.

HEIRS DON'T GENERATE WEALTH

All those who are changed into spirit beings, to become a part of the Family of God, will be the heirs of God. Now being an heir presupposes that someone else generated wealth, and the heirs then receive access to that wealth which the other person produced. But the word "heirs" does not inherently imply any wealth production on the part of those heirs. Heirs are simply beneficiaries of someone else's wealth.

Now the greatest and by far most important "wealth" that God the Father and Jesus Christ share with One Another at this time, and have always shared, is the incredibly awesome power of the Holy Spirit, which both God the Father and Jesus Christ spontaneously generate in unlimited quantities. They also control access to that power in absolute terms. Nobody receives access to this awesome power without the explicit consent of God the Father.

The value of this awesome and endless supply of power infinitely exceeds the value of both, this present universe and everything in it, and also the value of the new heaven and the new earth. Nothing comes close to the value of this power. Everything else that could possibly be considered to be of value pales into insignificance when compared to the value of the power of the Spirit of God the Father and the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

So when we are told that we are the heirs of God (Romans 8:17), then this means that God will give us

free access to that power. That is the greatest gift or inheritance that God could possibly give to anyone. The gift ("inheritance") of that power will enable us to function just like God! We'll be able to do the things God can do ... and that is precisely what God intends, that all of us in the Family of God will be able to do all the things God can do.

But when we do use that power to function just like God, THEN that power within us is used up, and it flows out of us in our actions. And therefore that power within us needs to be regularly replenished. That's like eating a good meal today and then working hard to achieve desirable goals. And when we then work hard, we use up the energy which that "good meal" provided. And it doesn't bother us in the least to then eat again, does it? We don't somehow feel insecure simply because we know that tomorrow we will have to eat again, and the day after that we'll have to eat again. In fact, eating again is quite enjoyable, and we usually look forward to it.

Likewise, just because we will regularly have to replenish the power of God within us, by means of the tree of life, that isn't going to make us feel insecure or fearful or apprehensive. No, we'll be extremely appreciative of that constant free access to the power of God with an absolute and unwavering confidence in God the Father, that we will always be granted that access.

And not for us only, but also for all those who will reside outside of the New Jerusalem. That is why the gates are never shut, to maintain that unrestricted access to the power of God for every single member of God's Family.

This also ties in with one other statement made earlier in this account.

In Revelation 21:3 a great voice said that God the Father Himself "will be their God". Now why didn't that voice say that God Himself "will be their Father"? Why will God be "their GOD", when all of them (i.e. us) will also be "Gods"?

The point in this statement "and God Himself will be their God" is focused on the fact that **God will provide everything for them**! That is the function of a God, to provide for all those that He has created. And because God will provide free access to His very own power, therefore it is appropriate to also see this from the perspective of God also being "their God".

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF GOD

All spirit beings have immortal life. But as far as exercising power is concerned, apart from God the Father and Jesus Christ, no spirit beings are or ever will be "totally self-sufficient", any more than it is possible for any physical human being to survive indefinitely without any access to food.

This should also help you to understand the situation of Satan and the demons somewhat more clearly. They are spirit beings and therefore they will never cease to exist. But they do NOT have any inherent powers. None at all! All power comes from God. So IF God gives Satan and the demons access to a certain amount of power, THEN Satan can utilize that power to do certain things. But if God completely withholds that power from Satan, then Satan can do absolutely nothing!

Here's something you need to understand in regard to **the power to create**.

It is not a case that God can create because God is God, but angels cannot create because they are not God, and human beings can't create because they also are not God.

Yes, the power to create is a power of God. But THE REASON WHY it is a power of God is because creating is an expression of utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God. The way God creates anything is by making use of His own Holy Spirit.

Now God can choose to give angels (including Satan before his rebellion) access to that power, to the point of being able to do a certain amount of "creating". Creating is nothing more than putting the power of the Holy Spirit to work. Similarly, God can choose to give certain human beings access to that same power, so that those human beings are also able to do a certain amount of "creating".

Do you think that I have gone too far? Well, let's look at the words of Jesus Christ.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and **greater *works* than these shall he do**; **because I go unto my Father**. (John 14:12)

You need to understand that performing miracles is a form of creating! So when God has given any of His servants the power to perform miracles, then God was for all practical purposes giving them the power to create something.

If ye shall ask **any thing** in my name, **I will do *it***. (John 14:14)

Miracles are a form of creating something. When Jesus Christ fed the 5,000 men and then the 4,000 men (see Matthew 16:9-10), Jesus Christ was creating a lot of food by utilizing the power of God! When Elisha performed the miracle of multiplying one pot of oil into dozens if not a hundred or more pots of oil (see 2 Kings 4:1-7), then Elisha was using the power of God **to create** additional oil!

It is the same power whether it is used to create enough oil to fill a hundred pots, or whether that same power is used to create a lion or a dinosaur. Before God there is no difference in these two things. But we would rate creating an animal far more highly than creating a hundred pots of oil, right? But why should one be rated higher than the other?

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto **this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place**; and it shall remove; and **nothing shall be impossible unto you**. (Matthew 17:20)

What is moving a mountain to some other location? That is creating! What does the expression "nothing shall be impossible to you" mean to you? Performing miracles is a form of creating.

Now back to Satan.

When God gave Satan before Satan's rebellion access to a great deal of the power of God, then Satan was also able to use that power to perform certain works. And when Satan then rose in rebellion against God, Satan did so by using whatever measure of the power of God he still had access to.

Now QUITE POSSIBLY at that time God had not yet revealed to any of the angels that all the power God had given them would in due course run out? Perhaps God had not yet explained to the angels that the power God had given them would need to be replenished at certain times? **Perhaps this was the key component in the testing of the angels** ... that God wanted to see how they would behave if they thought that the powers God had given them were permanent, without ever needing to be replenished? If they felt secure that the powers God had given them were always going to be at their disposal, would they then still faithfully obey God? Or would they rebel like Satan?

Is that really any different from people deciding to smoke even though they know that sooner or later

they'll get cancer? They do it anyway, don't they? And even though people in their 20's know that they can die, that doesn't stop many people from taking any number of risks. They don't believe that it will happen to them. Could it be that Satan inspires man to gamble with death because Satan himself gambled with what God had given him, when Satan really should have known better?

When Satan rebelled, I suspect that it came as a real shock to Satan when he realized that the powers he had been exercising until then were leaving him. And the angels who remained faithful very possibly also didn't understand the need for constantly replenishing the power of God within themselves. Very possibly God has a different system (i.e. other than by means of the tree of life) for the way in which the power of God is constantly replenished within the righteous angels?

As far as understanding the invisible things by looking at the things we can see is concerned: We human beings lose physical power as we progress towards old age. Perhaps that is the way it happened with Satan?

Perhaps God gave all the angels, including Satan, an "initial dose" of the power of God to see them through to the time when their testing was destined to end, at which point they would suddenly have realized: "strange, but I don't seem to have as much power as I used to have?" (the human equivalent being "I guess I must be getting old"). And at that point God may have explained a system for regularly replenishing that power within the righteous angels?

Anyway, the point is this:

If God chooses to withhold all power from Satan, then Satan will continue to exist, but Satan will not be able to do anything at all. He will not be able to move a finger or move one inch forward or backwards. You know the account about King Jeroboam's hand "drying up" so that Jeroboam could not move his hand at all, right? See 1 Kings 13:4. God can do exactly the same thing to Satan.

Thus:

How much Satan is able to do depends totally on exactly how much power God makes available to Satan to utilize. At the one extreme is the amount of power to which Satan had access before his rebellion. At the other extreme is the absolute withdrawal of all power, so that Satan "can't move a muscle" (figure of speech).

Now when the time comes to banish Satan to "the blackness of darkness for ever", then God will withdraw virtually all power, if not absolutely all power, from Satan. Nobody will have to guard Satan and the demons, because they will simply not have the power to move out of that condition of "blackness of darkness".

When we are resurrected into the Family of God, and the New Jerusalem is established, then we will also see that river and that tree of life. And we will understand the process by which we will regularly have to replenish the power of God within our beings.

And something that will be very, very clear to every single member of the Family of God is this: Everyone will understand very clearly that ONLY GOD THE FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST are able to self-generate the power of God. Every other member of the Family of God will have to regularly take in that power (like regularly eating) before being able to "give out" (i.e. utilize) that power.

This one fact all by itself will make absolutely clear, without any doubts or reservations, that God the Father will ALWAYS be supreme, and that Jesus Christ will ALWAYS be right under God the Father in

authority over everyone else in the Family of God. And we will all joyfully accept that situation. Never will there be a spirit of competition in any member of the Family of God. And everyone will always gladly submit to God the Father and to Jesus Christ.

To make one point clear:

There is **a big distinction** between "**existing**" and "**having power**". We need to understand that on the spirit level the mere state of "existing" does not by itself entail access to any powers at all! On the human level a person can exist, yet be unable to move an arm or a leg. That human being has no powers at all (in the context of being able to move and to do things by use of muscle power), yet he exists. And on the level of angels, an angel can exist, but that existence by itself does not confer any powers at all on that angel. To be able to exercise any power at all that angel must be given access to power by God. Without explicit access to power that angel can do nothing, even though he exists.

There is much more to Jesus Christ's statements below than we tend to realize.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **The Son can do nothing of himself**, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. (John 5:19)

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30)

This is precisely what I am trying to explain here. During His human life Jesus Christ had "emptied Himself" of that ability to self-generate the power of God. Instead, during His ministry Jesus Christ received access to the power of the Holy Spirit the same way all other human beings may receive access to that power ... by praying to God the Father and by making the effort to draw close to God the Father. And Jesus Christ's statement "I can of my own self do nothing" is a statement that is factually correct for both angels and human beings.

Simply because we exist that does not mean that we can actually do anything, unless God also gives us that ability to do that specific "anything". I mention this because many of us tend to assume that certain powers automatically go along with a certain type of existence. Specifically, we tend to wrongly assume that all angels must have certain powers simply because they are angels. And so we think that Satan must automatically have certain powers, simply because he is a spirit being and all spirit beings supposedly have all those powers automatically.

But we forget that **EVERY SPIRIT BEING** (apart from Jesus Christ who is now at the Father's right hand) "**CAN OF HIS OWN SELF DO NOTHING**"!

The state of being an immortal spirit being does not confer any powers on Satan at all! And if God denies Satan access to any specific powers, then Satan simply will not have those powers. This is something that Satan does not want humanity to understand, that he is in fact totally powerless on his own. Satan has the ability to broadcast his rebellious attitudes (Ephesians 2:2), but **that's all he can do**! He doesn't actually have any real power "to do anything to us" UNLESS GOD GIVES HIM THAT POWER (as in the case of bringing calamities upon Job). Satan's main power against us is to influence other human beings "to do things to us". But **Satan himself can't do anything to us**!

NEVER OVERRATE SATAN'S POWERS! AND NEVER FEAR SATAN'S SUPPOSED POWERS! HIS POWER IS MOSTLY BASED ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE AGAINST US!

James 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:9 show that Satan does not have any powers that we are not capable of

resisting with God's help. And he will flee when we do resolutely resist him.

Now all people will understand this when God binds Satan during the millennium. That is explained in the Book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 14:15 we are told that God brings Satan down "to the sides of the pit", i.e. during the millennium. The next verse then says:

They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, *and* consider thee, *saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble*, that did shake kingdoms; (Isaiah 14:16)

In modern language, at that time when Satan is bound for 1,000 years we will look upon Satan with a certain amount of surprise bordering on incredulity and say: "is THIS really the guy who caused all these huge problems? Why, he doesn't have any power at all. Look at him, he can't even move a muscle."

Understand that Satan wants humanity to believe that he still has the powers which God has already taken away from him a long time ago. We are not to fear Satan.

The above information leads to one other point.

THE BLASPHEMY OF SAYING THAT JESUS CHRIST IS A CREATED BEING

About a year ago I wrote a couple of articles in which I strongly opposed the teachings of unitarianism. To me the claims of unitarianism are as provocative as is a red flag to a raging bull. Those claims are just so incredibly offensive to Jesus Christ. Let me very briefly explain, because this ties into what we have just been discussing.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are the sources of all power that exists. Their spirits "flow" out of Them endlessly. This one feature distinguishes and will continue to distinguish God the Father and Jesus Christ from all other (future) God beings. No other son of God will ever attain unto that ability to self-generate the Holy Spirit.

Before His crucifixion Jesus Christ asked God the Father: "glorify You Me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world" (John 17:5). That "glory" was the ability to self-generate the power of the Holy Spirit, something Christ had always been able to do before His life as a human being. It is that ability that made Christ "equal with God" (Philippians 2:6).

Then when Jesus Christ after His resurrection said: "ALL POWER is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18), He was saying that **God the Father had restored to Him this ability** to self-generate an endless supply of the power of the Holy Spirit. Apart from God the Father, Jesus Christ is the only One who will ever be truly self-sufficient, without the need to take in any power from an outside source.

Now the teaching that Jesus Christ was at some point created by God the Father (a teaching of unitarianism) implies that Jesus Christ could not possibly have "all power in heaven and in earth"! It implies that it would indeed be "robbery" for Jesus Christ to be "equal with God" (see Philippians 2:6). This teaching in fact denies Jesus Christ the status of being able to generate the Holy Spirit Himself, also known as "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11). This teaching demeans Jesus Christ's true status. It is an enormous insult to Jesus Christ, and that is why that teaching is blasphemy!

Anyway, let's continue in Revelation 22.

REVELATION 22:3

Here is this verse.

And there shall be no more curse: but **the throne of God and of the Lamb** shall be in it; and **his servants** shall serve him: (Revelation 22:3)

John sees the thrones of God the Father and of Jesus Christ. But these thrones appear to be in the open; i.e. they are not in any building. We have already been told that there is no temple. So are there any buildings at all in the New Jerusalem? And why is the city so high if there are no buildings that go way up into the sky? And why doesn't John mention seeing any buildings? More questions.

The word "**servants**" is a translation of the Greek word "**doulos**". Normally we understand the word "doulos" to mean "a slave". However, in this verse the Greek expression "hoi douloi" is a reference to the sons of God, including all those in the first resurrection, who had reigned with Jesus Christ during the millennium.

The word "doulos" means "slave" primarily because it conveys the idea of "**PERMANENT SERVICE**". The word expresses the idea of a permanent condition. So when the sons of God are referred to as "the servants" of God in the New Jerusalem, this is intended to convey the idea of A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, one of always being there to gladly serve God, to carry out God's wishes, to always have Jesus Christ's attitude of "not my will but Your will be done" (Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42; Mark 14:36). And because that relationship will be permanent for all future eternity, therefore the word "doulos" is the right word to use here.

While we are talking about "buildings" we should also keep Revelation 3:12 in mind.

Him that overcometh will I make **a pillar in the temple of my God**, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him **the name of my God**, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* **New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven** from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name. (Revelation 3:12)

In this verse we are told that those who overcome will be made "pillars in the temple of my God". But in Revelation 21:22 we saw that there will not be any temple in the New Jerusalem. So the expression "a pillar in the temple of my God" is a figurative reference, indicating **a major support function**.

I mention this to show that the word "doulos" is not intended to convey a condition of slavery, but one of a permanent relationship of joyful service, one which is significant enough to also be referred to as "a pillar in the temple".

Notice the next verse.

And they shall see his face; and **his name *shall be* in their foreheads**. (Revelation 22:4)

The fact that this is a reference to those who will have God's name in their foreheads, shows that this is speaking about all the sons of God, rather than about the angels. So the sons of God are also referred to as "the servants of God". Let's never lose sight of this focus, lest we become puffed up in our own minds.

The important information John wanted to convey in this verse is that all the members of the Family of God will regularly see God face-to-face. This is a direct relationship, not one through priests or emissaries or other go-betweens. God the Father will have direct contact with everyone in His Family.

Let’s look at the last verse in this section.

And there shall be **no night there**; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and **they shall reign for ever and ever**. (Revelation 22:5)

There will be "no night" anywhere in the new heaven. God is the antithesis of darkness. This will obviously be a vastly different universe from the one we have today. Our present universe is mostly darkness with just small specks of light dotted all around (i.e. small when compared to the overall size of the whole universe). The new heaven will be a total reversal of present conditions. And there are indeed far more questions than answers about the future God has prepared for His Family.

Let’s also notice the statement that "they shall reign for ever and ever". So in one statement the focus is on serving God the Father, and in the next statement the focus is on reigning for ever. This is an illustration of the totally different approach towards ruling which Jesus Christ explained to His disciples.

But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But **it shall not be so among you**: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And **whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant**: (Matthew 20:25-27)

We see this principle exemplified in Revelation 22. The ultimate purpose of ruling is **to serve** those who are being ruled, unlike in this world, where the ultimate purpose of ruling is **to be served** by those who are being ruled. In the time of the new earth the greatest service of all will be performed by God the Father and by Jesus Christ, in the form of freely providing an endless supply of the power of God.

Freely providing access to that power is an enormous act of service! Every member of the Family of God will be a permanent recipient of God’s acts of service.

This verse concludes John’s description of the new heaven and new earth and New Jerusalem. The remaining verses (i.e. verses 6-21) are a general conclusion for both the Book of Revelation and for the whole Bible.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S THRONE

We know what a throne is in a human kingdom. It **represents the seat of power**. So when a king or emperor sits on his throne, he is showing off his position of power. There isn’t actually any power that literally comes from that throne; it is usually just a fancy chair that represents the ruler’s status. And that chair has in actual fact nothing to do with the power that ruler may have. That chair is just a symbol.

But that is not the way it works with God.

God has a throne because that throne becomes the vehicle for God to literally disperse His power abroad. God the Father and Jesus Christ self-generate the power of the Holy Spirit. It comes out of Them to spread throughout all available space. However, God has set it up so that the Holy Spirit does NOT usually spread from His person. Instead God has set it up so that **this incredible power disperses from THE SEAT that belongs to God**. And so THE SEATS (i.e. thrones) of God the Father and of Jesus Christ will be the visible sources of that power during all future eternity (see Revelation 22:1 again). Now the only reason this power can disperse from these two seats is because God the Father and Jesus Christ will be present on those seats. And these two thrones are not symbolical at all; they really are the literal seats of power for the whole universe, not inherently, but because God the Father

and Jesus Christ will be there.

The point is this: God the Father and Jesus Christ are the greatest servants in the Family of God. And they serve the entire Family by sitting on Their thrones, because that (sitting on Their thrones) ensures a constant supply of power for the rest of the Family of God.

Furthermore, **this also sheds more light on Satan's statement** "I will sit upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north ... I will be the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Satan wanted to sit on God's throne because Satan understood that God's throne is AN ENDLESS SOURCE OF THE POWER OF GOD! Satan knew that he needed to get access to that throne. What Satan did not understand is that if God ever leaves that throne (i.e. if Satan had really been able to knock God off His throne, an impossibility!), then that throne will also CEASE to be the source of the power of God.

Satan didn't understand that by itself the throne of God didn't give forth any power at all. He thought God's throne was the mother lode of all power. And so he needed access to it to sustain his rebellion against God. Had Satan understood that without God's presence that throne all by itself is just another seat, then he would have understood the impossibility of ever wresting power away from God.

Anyway, we should understand that there is much more to the thrones of God the Father and of Jesus Christ than being purely ceremonial.

Now there is one more thing we should look at. And that is the question regarding HOW God creates.

HOW DOES GOD CREATE SOMETHING?

This question may seem to be somewhat ambitious or even presumptuous? But the Apostle Paul has given us a very vital key in this regard. We've already seen that key, which is Romans 1:20. Let's consider this verse again.

For **the invisible things** of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* **his eternal power** and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Romans 1:20)

Paul tells us that **we can understand God's "eternal power"** by looking at the physical creation around us. This physical creation can help us to understand things that are invisible. Romans 1:20 is a very profound statement, which implies that there is much more that we can understand, provided that we can understand why God has done certain things **the way He has done them**.

God's "eternal power" is **the power to create**! So how can the physical world help us to understand God's creative powers?

Let's consider this whole creation and ask some questions.

As implied at the start of this article, today we understand that all matter consists of molecules which are composed of various atoms. The atoms, in turn, consist of protons and neutrons and electrons. Now instead of getting all technical about this, let's stick to describing this in very simple terms.

Here is one thing we need to understand very clearly:

GOD HAS NEVER AT ANY TIME CREATED SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING!

To create something out of nothing is magic, and God does not use magic! Magic is in reality a counterfeit of God’s creative ability. And of course, magic doesn’t really work.

When God creates something, anything, then God ALWAYS does so by utilizing "something"! That is true for when God created this present universe, and that is also true for when God created all the angels. And that is also true for when God creates "the spirit in man" for every single human being.

God always creates by using "something" to create "something else"! Now the "something" that God uses to create anything is not visible and it is not physical; but it is nonetheless "something" that is just as real as if it was visible and physical. However, because the "something" that God utilizes to do His creating is invisible to human eyes, therefore people tend to ASSUME that God somehow creates things out of nothing.

But that is simply not the case! There is far more to reality than what our human eyes are capable of detecting. That’s where Paul’s statement in Romans 1:20 fits in.

Now let’s look at what Paul tells us in Hebrews 11.

Through faith we understand that **the worlds** (Greek "the ages") were framed (Greek "were perfected") by the word of God, so that **things which are seen were not made of things which do appear**. (Hebrews 11:3)

Paul’s point here is that faith can help us understand God’s plan and God’s creation. In the last part of this verse Paul says: **the physical material elements that make up our present universe were not created from any VISIBLE substances or materials!**

What Paul means and clearly infers is that the visible material world was created from INVISIBLE building blocks. But Paul does not say or infer that the visible creation was made "out of nothing".

Now let’s get back to God. We saw in Ezekiel 47 that during the millennium the power of the Holy Spirit will FLOW OUT FROM JESUS CHRIST like a huge river. Likewise, in Revelation 22:1 we saw that the power of the Holy Spirit will for ever flow out from the thrones of God the Father and of Jesus Christ like a huge endless river.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are the sources of an endless supply of power, in the form of the Holy Spirit flowing out of them in an endless stream. Now we need to understand that the Holy Spirit has always radiated out from these two Beings, to the point where **every single cubic millimeter in the entire universe is completely saturated by the presence of that essence of power**.

That is the way it was even before God created this present creation, when space was still seemingly "empty". At a later point God then created living beings (human beings and animals) with the need to breathe in air, because air is "like the power of the Holy Spirit". So note!

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT LIKE AIR! IT IS AIR THAT IS LIKE THE HOLY SPIRIT BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME FIRST!

It is a matter of priorities. When God created this physical creation, then God patterned the creation of air after the Holy Spirit. God made it so that we will die physically if we don’t get any air, in order TO ILLUSTRATE that we will "die" SPIRITUALLY (i.e. ultimately) if we don’t get any Holy Spirit!

Next, God created it so that air will AUTOMATICALLY be present everywhere on earth, to illustrate that

God’s power, the Holy Spirit, is automatically present EVERYWHERE in the entire universe. Air is always present in any available space. We can go down into a coal mine and air is present, and we can climb a mountain and air is present. If we dig a tunnel through a mountain, then air automatically enters the tunnel we have dug out. God gave air this particular attribute of filling all available space because **that is the way the Holy Spirit is**; it permeates everything and there is no place anywhere in this universe where the Holy Spirit is not present to saturation point.

Next let’s ask ourselves: WHY did God fashion this creation so that everything physical can be broken down into **molecules and atoms**. WHY did God make atoms to be the way they are?

Consider all "solid" materials like a "solid" piece of steel, or a "solid" rock. To us both of these items are "rock solid", right? Yet when we examine those solid items under an electron microscope, we find that they are nothing more than masses of atoms and molecules. And when we look at the atoms, then we see that they are not "solid" at all. Atoms were erroneously called "atoms", a word that is derived from the Greek word "atomos" which means "indivisible". Since atoms can in fact be further divided into protons and neutrons and electrons, their name "atoms" is technically a misnomer. But it stuck anyway.

Anyway, science tells us that atoms consist of a nucleus (protons and neutrons) with A LOT OF EMPTY SPACE AROUND THE NUCLEUS, and then a number of tiny electrons which orbit around the nucleus at a furious speed. But **most of every atom is empty space**.

In analogy:

Think of this earth and a belt of 200,000 miles of space around it (still short of the moon which is close to 250,000 miles away). In this space we today have thousands of man-made satellites orbiting this earth. In our analogy an atom is like this whole space with a 200,000 mile radius. The Earth in the center of that space is like the nucleus of the atom. And the tiny man-made satellites orbiting the Earth at very high altitudes are like the electrons that circle around the nucleus of the atom. However, the greatest part of that huge ball with a 200,000 mile radius is empty space!

That is what an atom is like on the microscopic level, **a relatively great deal of empty space with a small nucleus and some very tiny distant satellites** whirling around that nucleus. And those protons and neutrons which make up that nucleus aren’t really "solid" either.

Yes, this is a simplistic analogy. But it illustrates the truth that on the smallest possible level every solid material consists of more empty space than "solid" space.

WHY did God make His creation like that? WHY didn’t God create it the way we would have created it? If we wanted solid substances then we would have created them as solid substances, right? But God didn’t do it that way. No, God created this physical creation with **AN ILLUSION OF BEING "ROCK SOLID"!** And we live our whole lives with that assumption, that "solid substances are solid". Yet there is nothing we can do to make a single atom "rigidly stand at attention without moving a muscle". There is nothing we can do to stop atoms from vibrating, even if that vibrating is on a level that is way beyond our human perceptions. **We cannot get atoms to ever "keep still"!**

So what do these "invisible things" tell us about God’s whole creation?

The point here is that on the smallest level **all matter behaves just like the Spirit of God**! It never keeps still and it is always on the move. So here is what we need to understand:

ALL PHYSICAL MATTER, INCLUDING OUR OWN BODIES, IS NOTHING OTHER THAN ONE SPECIFIC WAY IN WHICH GOD HAS PUT THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WORK! **MATTER IS A**

MANIFESTATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT! AND THAT IS WHY ALL MATTER BEHAVES LIKE SPIRIT ... NEVER KEEPING STILL! IT IS ALWAYS ON THE MOVE!

Whether we look at a small sheet of paper or whether we look at a mountain range like the Rockies, we need to understand that it is all composed of Holy Spirit. And so God can make it disappear by simply turning it, be it a piece of paper or be it the Rocky Mountain Range, back into its REAL building blocks, spirit essence. God can change matter back into spirit essence in an instant, and God can also utilize spirit essence to create any type of physical matter in an instant. God has made the things which we can see from something that is invisible to our eyes.

Now since God shows us the Holy Spirit as a huge river in Revelation 22 it seems to me that the Holy Spirit is actually something that spirit beings can see, even as spirit beings can see one another. I suspect that this power of the Holy Spirit is visible to spirit eyes.

One more thing that should very emphatically help us to understand that physical matter is nothing other than a specific manifestation of God's Spirit is THE INCREDIBLE POWER THAT IS LOCKED UP WITHIN EVERY SINGLE ATOM! It is a staggering power that holds all the electrons in their circuits around the nucleus of an atom, and it is a staggering power that holds the protons and neutrons together within the nucleus of an atom. We can have a small inkling of the scope of that power when we consider things like dynamite and the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb. All these explosions release a portion of the power that is bound up in physical matter.

The point is that the same power is bound up within the atoms and molecules of ALL physical matter; it's just that thankfully for most substances we are not able to release the greater part of that awesome power that is bound up in the molecules of those particular substances.

For example: **We** are able to release a certain amount of power from a mass of 100 pounds of plutonium, to create enormous devastation. However, **God** can release that same amount of devastating power from 100 pounds of sand or 100 pounds of water or 100 pounds of timber. The exact same energy that is bound up in plutonium is also bound up in sand and in wood and in water, but it is thankfully not accessible to us in those particular substances.

Simply because we are able to describe magnetism and electricity and nuclear fusion and fission and gravity, etc., that doesn't explain HOW magnetism and gravity and electricity came into existence in the first place. Our explanations simply assume their existence and the "natural" laws that regulate these things.

What we need to recognize is that all **these powers are simply various manifestations of THE REAL POWER which underlies everything**. That is the power of the spirit which flows incessantly from God. THE POWER which is bound up within this physical creation should make clear that this creation is nothing other than one particular manifestation of that power which flows from God.

Matter is one particular manifestation of the spirit essence that flows from God! And these are some of the things we can learn by looking at the physical creation, which is totally based on atoms and molecules which are mostly "empty space" and which lock up within themselves staggering powers.

Jesus Christ Himself hinted at that enormous power (i.e. like the power that is released by an atom bomb) when He said:

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, **If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed**, ye shall say unto **this mountain**, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and **nothing shall be impossible unto you**. (Matthew 17:20)

The point is: there is enough power tied up in the volume that is no bigger than a grain of mustard seed to blow a whole mountain into oblivion! That's because all physical matter is nothing other than one specific manifestation of the awesome power of the Holy Spirit.

Now let's consider one other simple analogy.

I have a computer with **a cordless computer mouse**. Without being "visibly" connected to the computer, I can have total 100% control over what is displayed on the monitor of my computer, simply by moving that cordless mouse and "clicking" it at certain times. I don't have to look at the mouse at all. I can fix my eyes on the computer screen, and without looking at my hand I can know exactly how to move that cordless mouse in order to move the cursor around the screen to any desired location. It functions just as if that cordless mouse was a part of me. And I can intuitively move that mouse in the right direction in order to achieve a desired result on the screen.

That is somewhat like what God does.

I have no idea how this happens, but I believe that God is intimately connected to all the power (i.e. Holy Spirit) that flows out of Him. It flows out, but it almost is as if it had never left Him. Somehow God retains total and complete control over all of the power that flows out from Him. So God can be in one location, and when God decides to move one of His fingers, then the Holy Spirit a billion miles away responds just like the cursor on my computer screen responds to every little movement I make with my cordless mouse.

Put in plain terms:

If I can make the cursor on the screen go up and down and left and right by simply moving the mouse that is two feet away from the monitor, then God can manipulate the Holy Spirit billions of miles away by simply "moving the mouse in His hand" in one direction or another. That's because all of the Holy Spirit that has flowed out of God hasn't ever ceased to have direct contact with God; it is still very much a part of God, and God can control it perfectly without having to be in close proximity to it.

Thus:

When God speaks and says "LET THERE BE ...", then that is like "clicking on the mouse" and an instruction is carried out. That instruction can apply to something that is in God's immediate environment, or it can apply to something that is billions of miles away.

The thing we need to understand is this:

Even though the Holy Spirit flows freely out from God, yet **it never ceases to be a part of God**. It always remains something over which God retains total control.

So when God gives us free access to His Holy Spirit, then God is truly sharing His existence with us! That is the magnitude of the inheritance God has reserved for His children.

Well, these are some thoughts on God's powers of creation and on the future God has indicated in especially Revelation chapters 21 and 22. And yes, I have speculated to a large degree. But I believe that God wants us to think deeply about all the information that He has given us in the Bible. And quite possibly I may need to change some things here or there in this article as more understanding becomes available. But we need to keep moving forward.

So as far as understanding God's plan and purposes are concerned:

You can stay as you are for the rest of your life, or you can change and grow in knowledge and in understanding. The choice is yours.

Frank W Nelte