

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 241

THE HOLY CITY

“And there came unto me *one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues*, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will *show thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife*. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that *great city, the holy Jerusalem*, descending out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:9-10).

The agent who shows John this vision is one of the seven “vial-angels,” one of those who had poured out the seven last plagues. Having charge over the seven last plagues does not seem, to the natural mind, to be an obvious qualification for a messenger who is to act as guide to the glorious city of God. But in reality, it is! This is very appropriate, indeed! It reminds us of the fact that there is a connection between those judgments and the appearing of the holy city, New Jerusalem. Those judgments upon the carnal man, and upon the carnal religious systems of man, Mystery Babylon, had their positive purpose of preparing a holy people to reveal the glory, the holiness, and the power of the New Jerusalem!

Concerning the seven vial-angels we read, “And I saw *another sign* in heaven, great and marvelous, *seven angels having the seven last plagues*; for in them is filled up the passion of God” (Rev. 15:1). This verse reveals the deep mystery the Holy Spirit now reveals to the called and chosen elect of the Lord. John speaks here of “another sign,” that is, a similitude, something like a parable, and this sign is in contrast with all the other signs he previously beheld in spirit. The sign which he now sees in the heaven of the Spirit is both great and marvelous. It is, in other words, awe-inspiring and wonderful! And no wonder: for the sign which he now beholds is of the greatest importance. It cannot be looked upon or understood without moving us deeply and filling our hearts with overflowing wonder and joy. John sees the seven angels of God’s presence which have appeared again and again throughout the Revelation, and here again they are operating in the unique action the Holy Spirit sets before John in his visions. They are prepared to pour out the seven vials or bowls of God’s passion!

John beholds seven angels, or messengers. And although, without doubt, the sight of these seven shining heavenly messengers positioned side by side is already breath-taking — for they are glorious and beautiful, resplendent in their appearance, pure, radiant, dazzling, and powerful —

yet their purpose and message is still more majestic and sublime! These are the seven messengers who bear the *seven last plagues*. Evidently they do not have the seven plagues of themselves, but the power of these seven plagues is *given them*, and they now hold this power. They possess the power of pouring out these plagues into the earth-realm, the carnal and soulical religious realm of man, and completely devastating it — for the destruction implied in these plagues is complete. We have only to recall that we are dealing here with spiritual realities represented in the form of *signs* and *symbols* to understand the great truth revealed in this scene — the seven messengers in their symbolism represent a seven-fold message, ministry, dealing, and moving of God by His Spirit and by His Word to bring an end to the soulical power of man's natural life and the soulish religious realm of man. The messengers are seven in number, the number of completion and fullness, signifying that by their seven plagues the work of God's wrath or passion shall be fully fulfilled, finished, and completed in a people. All the soulical operations in the lives of God's dear people, all the self-hood, every vestige of the believer's own mind, will, emotion, desire, and inclination to religiosity shall once and for all and forever be brought to its end! Seven is the symbol of completion of the kingdom within the Lord's people! Seeing that in the order of John's visions this wonderful work had already been accomplished in God's firstfruit company, the manchild, the 144,000 on mount Zion, it follows that this dealing of God is now ready to come upon the masses of the Lord's people who still walk in a carnal realm and serve the Lord in the carnal church systems of man, religious Babylon. The firstfruit company have "come out" of Babylon, but for the masses of believers who remain there, they are "partakers of her sins, and receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4). Seven is the symbol of the complete triumph of the kingdom of God in the lives of God's own people!

Furthermore we read, "And the *seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues*, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles" (Rev. 15:6). The ministry of the symbolic "seven messengers" streams forth from the precincts of the ark within the temple — from the very throne of God — from the very heart of God — the heart-throne of mercy and judgment. Never forget it! The seven plagues come *out of the temple!* "Know ye not that *ye* are the temple of God?" It should be plain to any thinking mind that when we look at these seven last plagues we are not seeing something that is coming from nature, nor from armies of men, nor from the Russians, the Chinese, or the Islamic extremists, nor from a nuclear holocaust, nor from some ecological disaster, nor from some alien attack from outer space, nor out of the bottomless pit, nor from the mouth of the great red dragon, nor from the antichrist in Israel, for these plagues are things which proceed from the very GLORY IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD, that is, from the MIDST OF GOD'S CALLED AND SEPARATED ELECT! Those who pour out these vials are clothed in pure white linen which the Revelation itself identifies as THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SAINTS! The vials are indeed judgment vials — and is it not the *saints* who shall **judge the world!** Oh, yes! It is a *ministry!* Judgment is coming out of God's temple in the heavenly places of the Spirit where we sit together in Christ Jesus, but keep in mind, my beloved, nothing breaks forth out of the temple of God that has not been first *inworked into* that temple! Ah, yes, His judgments always BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD!

A GREAT AND HIGH MOUNTAIN

"And there came unto me *one of the seven angels* which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, *Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife*. And he carried me away in the spirit to a *great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem*, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:9-10).

"And there came *one of the seven angels* which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, *Come hither, I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth*

upon many waters...so he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy...and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT” (Rev. 17:1,3).

There are two women, a harlot and a bride. It was “in the spirit” that John was “carried away” and *saw* — he received the deep spiritual understanding of who and what the harlot is and who and what the bride is. And I do not hesitate to tell you that if you see what John saw, and understand by the spiritual mind as John understood, and declare to the Lord’s people in the church systems the truth about the harlot and the bride, you will certainly be accused of being “carried away!”

John beheld the harlot in a wilderness of spiritual desolation. He saw the holy city, the bride of the Lamb, from atop a great and high mountain — a high and exalted place in the kingdom of God. If the city is literal then the mountain is literal. I can walk up its slopes and touch it with my hands. But the writer to the Hebrews informs us that “Ye are *not* come to the mount that *might be touched...*but ye *are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...*” (Heb. 12:18,22). There can be no doubt that these inspired words reveal to us the great truth that the high mountain upon which the heavenly, or spiritual Jerusalem sits, is the heavenly and spiritual mount Zion, the mount that *cannot be touched* by the flesh! The old Jerusalem was a literal and physical city which was situated upon the physical mount Zion. Can we not see by this that the Old Testament type was *literal*, whereas the New Testament reality is *spiritual*. The city is a people!

In both cases, when John saw the harlot and when he saw the bride, the angel said to him, “*Come hither, I will show unto thee...*” These words take on new depth of meaning when we understand that in the book of Revelation the word “come” always signifies AN INVITATION TO REVELATION. The whore and the bride are two women; the invitation goes forth to come and see by the spirit what they mean, and I can assure you, my friend, that it requires a REVELATION FROM GOD to see either! The true church of Christ is called a *mystery*. She is presented as a *virgin*. She is called a *bride*. Finally, she is displayed as a *city*, the New Jerusalem, the city of peace, righteousness, glory, and divine order. The woman riding the beast is called a *mystery*. She is not a virgin, she is an *harlot*. She is not an espoused wife, she is the *paramour* and *mistress* of the kings of the earth. Finally, she is that great *city* which is called Babylon, the city of confusion, filthiness, and fleshly disorder.

These prophecies present two broadly contrasted WOMEN, identified with two broadly contrasted CITIES, one reality being in each case, doubly represented, as a WOMAN, and as a CITY; the harlot and Babylon are one, the glorious bride and the heavenly Jerusalem are one. May the Spirit of the living God enlighten the eyes of all who read and give understanding, giving abundantly of the spirit of wisdom and revelation that each may be able to discern and easily differentiate between that VIRGIN CHURCH without spot or wrinkle, and that filthy HARLOT SYSTEM, full of names of blasphemy, with her multiplied sects and denominations, with her abominable false doctrines and idolatrous practices, who seduces the inhabitants of the world with the unspeakable lie that she is, herself, the bride of Christ. One would certainly think that God’s people would respond to the invitation to revelation whereby the Spirit says, “*Come hither, and I will SHOW YOU,*” and that they would look with anointed eyes and readily see the difference between the virgin and the harlot, but such is not the case. Would God that all men could see the hidden mystery of Christ and the church! Would God that all men could see the hidden mystery of the bride of Christ! Would God that all men could see that this hidden mystery has nothing to do with the tradition-ridden system which all men everywhere believe to be THE CHURCH!

The Spirit is calling us up to a “high mountain” apart (a higher realm in God) from which we can behold the bride, the Lamb’s wife. She is the holy city, the New Jerusalem. When John looked within the gates of the glorious city, he beheld another aspect of the revelation of God’s many-membered Christ. Everything John describes in types and symbols is in reality the magnificence, magnitude, glory, and power of Him who fills the city with Himself. It is a city without a church, that is, having no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it! Even as the Lord Himself fills the city, so also we dwell *in Him* so that we worship in the temple of His presence and life, dwelling in union as the Lamb and His wife. The Spirit was revealing to John the totality of the Godhead dwelling in One, even a many-membered One. It is the *family* of God! The bride is there as the favored, the choice one of the Lamb; the siblings are there, all who have been purified and made white in the blood of the Lamb; and the sons are there seated upon the throne with Christ. The revelation is just this — We, my beloved, are being drawn, by the Spirit, into oneness with God. Oh, the wonder of it!

One of the keys to understanding the mysteries of the Revelation is to understand why it was written. Like most of the scriptures, the book of Revelation is one of those writings that has been the subject of deep superstitious speculation and carnal minded foolishness which is of no spiritual benefit to those who approach it that way. Tradition makes the word of God of no effect, saith the Lord! Nowhere in all of the scriptures are fairy tales, legends, myths, and superstitions fabricated more than out of the book of Revelation! I grew up hearing that there was a city in space, a *square star*, discovered by some unnamed and unknown astronomer, moving toward the earth from a distant part of the universe. I grew up hearing this as the *gospel truth!*

I was taught that the word of God says that there is a city coming down from heaven, and immediately the carnal mind assumes that it is a huge monstrosity floating down from space which someday will land on the earth like a bump on a little boy’s head. Having minds that are darkened by ignorance of divine mysteries, these have not spiritual understanding. Their comprehension of spiritual realities is not unlike that of the Pharisees who were offended, disturbed, and angered when Jesus said, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53). Understanding only with human logic they interpreted His words as a suggestion of *cannibalism!* They were unable to see beyond the letter of the word to grasp the deep spiritual truth of which He spake. Just as Jesus spoke of His *spirit* and His *word* under the symbols of His *blood* and His *flesh*, so the apostle John described the heavenly origin and character of the *bride of Christ* under the figure of a *city* coming down from God out of heaven.

The bride of Christ is not a physical city of gold and stones and streets and gates. The bride of Christ is a *people*, a spiritual people in union with Christ by spiritual life. John says that this city is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. He introduces this glorious city as a bride brought to relationship with her bridegroom. A bride is one who is deeply in love with her bridegroom, submitted and joined in the intimate union of that love. That is why in the Revelation we see the *woman* giving birth to the *manchild*. No one can become a *son* until first he has experienced what it means to be a part of the *bride!* Thus it is brideship that gives birth to sonship! It is as we truly fall fiercely and intensely in love with Christ, submitting to His Lordship, learning His ways, and knowing Him in intimacy of fellowship and vital union, that we receive the seed of God by which we can be birthed out of this relationship into the further and higher reality of *sonship to God*. The sons take on the spiritually masculine characteristics of Christ, in His authority, power, and dominion, thus becoming the *corporate body of the Bridegroom*. The New Jerusalem city is prepared as a bride adorned for her *husband*, and it is from this union of life that the manchild is birthed. Yet we cannot truly separate between the city bride and the manchild who sits upon the throne, for the throne of God is *in the city* and it is from

that throne that the river of Life pours forth for all creation! Thus the Lamb, the city, and the sons are all of ONE LIFE. These are great and eternal realities within each of us as we follow on to know the Lord and fulfill His purpose in restoring creation to God. Isn't it wonderful!

“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...” (Rev. 3:12). The name of the city of my God is New Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a compound Hebrew word meaning “founded peaceful.” I will write upon you the name of the city — I will write upon you the *establishment or kingdom of peace*, the rule of the peace that comes through the government of God. For God to write upon us the *name* of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, means that He inscribes in our very nature the peaceful and governmental characteristics represented by this glorious city of God!

The New Jerusalem coming down from the heavens of God's Spirit is revealed to be a city *foursquare*, that is, a *universal city* that reigns over and blesses all men unto the four corners of the earth! There are other meanings concealed in the term “foursquare” which we will consider at another time. The best way to come to an understanding of the true meaning of the New Jerusalem, is to go back and consider its shadow, the Old Jerusalem. Jerusalem of old was the capital city of the national Israel; and as the old order was but a type and shadow of the new, therefore the New Jerusalem must be the capital city, or the ruling element in God's Israel today, which is Christ's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, and of which our Lord said, it “is not of this world.” In other words, the New Jerusalem is the ruling class, the kings and priests and judges unto God: those who have followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth and have attained to the highest position of honor and might and true greatness in the Spirit. It comprises those who will reign with Christ upon His throne, and those who will enlighten, nurture, feed, and bless all humanity with the life of Christ. God's called and chosen elect, therefore, whether bride or sons, who supremely love Christ, who are submitted completely and only to His Lordship, who are accounted worthy to suffer with Christ and through our trials, testings, and provings grow up into Him in all things, ARE the New Jerusalem which shall rule over God's infinite realm forevermore, and all nations and peoples shall eventually walk in the light of this city, and shall enter through its gates to partake of the water and the tree of Life!

Thus we see that the New Jerusalem, contrary to the driveling childishness that is taught in the church systems, is not a fanciful monstrosity some fifteen hundred miles high which some day will come crashing down out of the clouds to rest upon the earth, throwing it out of balance and off its course. God made this earth complete and as it should be long, long ago. He created it a perfectly functioning reality, and “nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it” (Eccl. 3:14). Truly, unspiritual men can invent many fairy tales, and alas, all seem intent upon calculating the expanse of this city in cubic miles or cubic feet as though it were nothing more than a huge metropolis slightly more wonderful than those at present on earth! One speaker waxed eloquent about the size of the mansion each inhabitant would possess, replete with a golden bathtub and fountains and other such nonsense. Until our spiritual minds are able to grasp the great truth that the body of Christ *is* the temple of God and the city of God and that every room or mansion in that temple and that city is a *living son or daughter of God*, a literal habitation of God through the Spirit, we have understood nothing at all. Only the Spirit of God can make this a living truth in the hearts of His people!

If John were describing an actual city as we know cities, it would, of course, have some very wonderful features! We all know that the quality of our drinking water in many cities today leaves something to be desired, and in some places on earth the water supply is horribly polluted,

but this city would have the best, cleanest, purest drinking water anywhere with the addition of its magical powers — the ability to give you *eternal life!* And a very unique tree growing by the city's river, its water supply, would *conquer all disease* — no one would ever get sick! Instead of dirty streets with rough, cracked pavement and full of potholes, this city would have smooth, shining streets *paved with gold!* The size of this city would be the most astounding thing of all. It would be laid out in a square with 1500 miles on each side. But even more amazing — making the former World Trade Center look like a shabby room in a cheap hotel, the height of this city would also be 1500 miles! The wall around it at its base would be 216 feet high. And the building materials! The foundations for the wall would number 12, in which would be very fine and expensive jewels. Admittedly — a city with life-giving water, medicinal trees that cure every disease, buildings and streets of gold, walls of jasper, gates of pearl, and garnished with dazzling jewels would be a fabulous city indeed! Any banker trying to appraise it all would never find a number high enough. I would have no objection to living there! If that were really what the Holy Spirit is communicating to us in these scenes I would want to be among the first in line to reserve my mansion!

Imagine describing a modern skyscraper to a person in remote Africa who has never seen anything more than a small mud hut with a dirt floor and a thatched roof. How would you describe the soaring steel, the thousands of windows, or the high-speed elevators? The angel in John's vision had an even harder job communicating to the Lord's people! How do you describe *spiritual realities* to *carnal minded* people? Only the Holy Spirit can do this! But His practical method is to first picture spiritual realities in terms of things we know on earth: banquets and music; seed and harvest; rivers and trees; mountains and fortresses; temples and cities; armies and horses; swords and shields; shoes and clothing; birds, lambs, and beasts; mansions, walls, and streets of gold. All these are word pictures, not to be taken literally. They are God's way of giving us the nearest hint of what He means in our present understanding. But it gets all confused when people try to interpret it out of spiritual immaturity.

Imagine you had to describe the taste of ice cream to people who had never eaten anything but oatmeal. How would you do it? You could compare it to the best tasting oatmeal they'd ever eaten, and their mouths might water. But no oatmeal comparison could prepare them for the delicious taste of ice cream! Or suppose you had to describe the Eiffel Tower to tribal people who had never seen anything larger or grander than a tree. What would you say? You could compare it to the biggest, most impressive mud hut of their important chief, and that might impress them. But it still wouldn't capture the splendor of the Eiffel Tower! How then can the Holy Spirit describe heavenly things to earth-bound men who have never tasted nor seen the powers of the spiritual world? Ah, only when *heaven comes to earth* do we taste and see what it really is! Spiritual realities are all that scripture pictures — but *much more!* The understanding comes not by what we see with our physical eye or hear by our natural ear. Wonderful words were spoken at the very dawn of civilization, recorded in the oldest book of the Bible, which explain how spiritual truth and reality are communicated to man. "There is a *spirit* in man: and the *inspiration* of the Almighty *giveth them understanding*" (Job 32:8). Can we not see by this that the very being of man has a God-ward or divine side. This reveals man's capacity for God, for divine truths, for heavenly things, and spiritual realities. It is only the quickened spirit within man that knows how to take the word pictures from the natural world and *translate them* into the heavenly language and spiritual understanding. Should we instruct the natural mind forever concerning the things of the Spirit, it would never understand, for the natural man *receiveth not* the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are *spiritually discerned*. When God calls to man, He calls not to the outer ear of the natural mind. He makes no appeal to human wisdom or to human reason, but rather calls *to the spirit, the inner man, the human spirit*. He speaks things beyond the natural mind, the natural reason, and the natural

understanding. He speaks a language to the spirit that the outer man cannot comprehend nor understand. Therefore when a man reads a spiritual vision in scripture and can only see the outer, the physical, the literal of it, we can know that he has not seen nor heard anything *in the spirit and by the spirit*. But when we see the word picture of a golden street, the *spirit within* to whom the Almighty *giveth inspiration* will understand that gold stands for *divine nature*. And streets denote the *walk*. So to walk on the golden street means that I am *walking out the divine nature of God*. Isn't that better and higher by far than merely walking down a natural gold street! As I walk in the divine life of God I find I have a river in the center of my being, yea, out of my innermost being flows *rivers of living water!* Jesus said that this river *is the spirit*. As I walk upon the street of gold, as I walk out the divine nature, the river in me begins to flow, bringing life and healing and restoration everywhere it goes! Aren't you glad!

When you grow in God your revelation grows. There is no physical city anywhere with buildings and streets made of gold or foundations or walls made out of rare jewels. There never will be any literal city having walls of jasper or gates of pearl. This is our final dwelling place — when we have attained to our spiritual glorified state, come to perfection in Christ Jesus, and have *become* the holy city as the prophet has said, "...and they shall call *thee*, The *City* of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 60:14). Then we will not go to this city or that city or any city, but God Himself and His whole universe will be our dwelling place. We will be free, free from the limitations of the flesh, therefore free to live in God's vast universe as His shining city on a hill. What good would streets paved with gold be to us after we have come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ and our vile body has been changed and fashioned anew into a body like unto HIS glorious body? We will have no need to walk on streets or concern ourselves with walls or gates or any such thing. In His glorious body of resurrection Jesus certainly didn't need a road to get where He was going and He paid no attention to walls or locked doors at all! When He wanted to be some place He simply *appeared*. When He wanted to join some disciples walking on the road to Emmaus He simply *appeared* to them there. When He wanted to minister to His disciples in the hills of Galilee He simply *appeared*. He knew *no limitation!* When the disciples were fishing and He appeared to them on the shore, He didn't need to walk there, He was *just there*. Now, the only reason that gold and jewels are so attractive to us now is because we are still so carnal and can think only in natural, earthly terms. Those things have value to *earth-dwellers*, that is, carnal Christians who still "mind earthly things." But when one has attained to that place of the fullness of His stature, gold and jewels will be meaningless to us. Only the *true riches of heavenly, divine, spiritual wealth* will matter to us in the heavenly glory of God.

The city of God began in the beginning of God's dealing with men as a garden. The book of Genesis is probably the most important book of the Old Testament. The word "genesis" of course means "origin" or "beginning," and the book of Genesis gives the only true and reliable account of the basic entities and conditions of the universe and of life. Genesis yields vital information concerning the *origin* of ALL THINGS — and therefore the *meaning* of ALL THINGS! Let every man know that in the whole of the universe there is no greater truth than this one sublime truth: THE FUTURE IS BOUND UP IN THE PAST. A man's belief concerning his origin will inevitably determine his belief about his purpose on earth and his eternal destiny. The first book of the Bible reveals how ALL THINGS and ALL CONDITIONS and ALL STATES OF BEING came into existence. The very first words of chapter one declare, "In the beginning God created..." There is no doubt in my mind but that this marked the beginning of everything that exists in this present cosmos, throughout all the unbounded heavens, except God Himself who is "before all things" and "by whom all things consist."

There were many things begun all at the same time, as the manifold wisdom of God found expression in innumerable ways to bring forth into the realm of visibility the majestic purposes of God. It was the beginning of the *universe* and of *time* (Heb. 1:2). It was the beginning of every existing life form, even unto the principalities and powers of the heavens, referred to in scripture as *the hosts of heaven*. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all *the host of them*” (Gen. 2:1). “I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and *all the host of heaven* standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And there came forth a *spirit* and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him” (I Kings 22:19-22). “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of *the heavenly host*...and it came to pass, as the angels (messengers) were gone away from them...” (Lk. 2:13-15). It was the beginning of *man* (Gen. 1:26). It was the beginning of *Satan* (Gen. 3:1; Jn. 8:44; I Jn. 3:8). It was the beginning of *sin*, of *death*, of *conscience*, and the whole realm of *duality* — “good and evil” (Gen. 3:5-7). It was the beginning of the *redemptive* purposes of God in Christ Jesus (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 13:8). It was the beginning of the outworking of God’s great *plan of the ages* to reveal the fullness of Himself, through His sons, unto the entirety of the creation (Rom. 8:19-22; Eph. 3:9-11; Eph. 2:6-7). There is neither time nor space to enumerate all that is included within the scope of the “beginnings” in Genesis 1:1, but surely it can be summed up in just two words — ALL THINGS. “For by Him were all things created, that are *in heaven*, and that are *in earth*, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (Col. 1:16-17).

The first several chapters of Genesis lay a ground-plan for the entire revelation of God’s purposes in creation. As a piece of literature the story is sublime; magnificent in range, in profundity of design, and the unparalleled heights of spiritual understanding which it attains. I can confidently say that every revelation of Himself and His purpose that God has ever given from the foundation of the world is contained in those opening chapters of Genesis! There is absolutely no revelation of scripture, spoken by prophets or apostles, or revealed in the depths of the spirits of worshipping men who have come into holy contact with the presence and power of God, which cannot be found in *seed-form*, in *type*, *shadow*, *parable*, or *allegory* in this marvelous book. The entire plan of the ages is there portrayed. Each and every experience, situation, condition, capacity, and potential of mankind, with all the principles and processes by which God shall bring men to perfection in the image of God, is there set forth in awe-inspiring wonder. And nowhere is this more obvious than in the account of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden!

In that long ago beginning we read that “the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:8-9). The story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is the greatest parable in the Bible. It is supremely important because it explains the real nature of life here on earth. It tells us about ourselves, about our state of being, how we bring about the conditions in which we live, and what our eventual destiny is according to God’s plan. It is the blueprint of man’s experience on earth and his destiny in God. When you thoroughly understand the garden of Eden you will understand the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of the serpent and the beastly kingdom. This parable is placed at the very beginning of human history because it is the foundation upon which the whole plan and purpose of God is built. What happens to us is what happened to Adam and Eve. It is not just their story, it is indeed our very own story! The entire revelation of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, assumes an understanding of the great principles, characters, and events in Eden’s garden. The fact is, if one should read the book of Revelation without having first read the book of Genesis, the entire book would prove absolutely meaningless!

There is one thing about which God's people must be absolutely clear. The Bible is not primarily intended to teach history, biography, or natural science. It is intended to teach THE PURPOSES OF GOD AND SPIRITUAL REALITIES. It deals with states of being and the laws of spiritual activity; and anything else is only incidental. Each of the principle characters in the Bible represents a kind of nature, character, condition, or state of being that any of us may experience; and the events that happen to the various characters illustrate the consequences to us of walking in such realms of nature and character, either good or bad. Many of the Bible characters, such as Adam and Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, David, Peter, and Paul, are actual historical figures. They were real people who lived on earth and did the deeds attributed to them; nonetheless they represent to us kinds of natures, states of being, and actions revealed in their varying hues as their lives unfolded. Other Bible characters, such as the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, or the Great Harlot in the Revelation are, of course, fictional and never lived on earth as actual persons; but as parables and allegories they express inner conditions and states of being too, and always in a most graphic and effective manner!

When we come to the garden of Eden it is evident that this is more than merely a piece of real estate somewhere over in Mesopotamia! I do not say that it did not literally exist, but as parable and allegory it is superlative. We do know that no such place has ever been found, and among all the mass of ruins that archeologists have excavated in the area over the past two centuries no one has encountered the cherubim with the flaming sword to keep men out. Little wonder that men have sought for it; but they have sought for it in vain. Whatever its original nature, it was not intended to be preserved for the gawking eyes of the curious. The garden of God is something beyond a place located on this or any other planet. It is a STATE OF BEING! It is a higher existence for man than this cursed state we find ourselves in by physical birth. It is the state of being that man was in when he was first brought forth from the creative hand of God and placed here upon earth. It represents man — in the image and likeness of God! Man abiding in the presence of God! Man walking in human perfection with the incorruptible life of God available to him! Man as master and lord over all things! Man living above sin, sickness, pain, and death! Blessed realities, one and all! And yet — the garden also represents man together with all the factors and conditions, both internal and external, of being and environment, which ultimately were to ***lead to his ruin and alienation from God and His garden.***

In one sense, man *was* the garden. And yet, man was *in* the garden. The scriptures reveal it as a “garden within a garden.” The Hebrew word for Eden means “a delicate, delightful, pleasurable land.” The “garden” was eastward in Eden! Man in the garden reveals man both in a state of being and an environment — the two corresponding. All the conditions that surrounded man were also obvious realities *within man* himself. The original man with his nature, characteristics, capabilities, and potentials is what we are drawn to see in the garden of Eden. The external conditions of man's environment corresponded precisely with man's inward nature for either good or evil, life or death. This was man in the garden! It is a garden within a garden, a world within a world. Isn't the same true today? All the good and the evil we see in the outer world *originates* right in the hearts of men!

This great truth of man's state of being constituting the garden of God is one of the tremendous themes which courses its way like a mighty river through the scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. In the book of Revelation, just as the little serpent of Eden has grown through the ages to become a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 12:3-4; 20:2), so the little garden in Eden has finally *become* the shining, dazzling, glorious city of God — which city ***we are*** (Rev. 21:9-11; Isa. 60:1-2,14). It is enlightening to view the comparisons between the blessed Eden of old and the wonderful city of God.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

River flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10)

Gold in the land (Gen. 2:12)

Tree of life in the midst of the garden
(Gen. 2:9)

BDELLIUM and the onyx stone (Gen. 2:12)
21:19)

God walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8)

THE CITY OF GOD

River flowing from God's throne (Rev. 22:1)

Gold in the City (Rev. 21:21)

Tree of life in the midst of the City
(Rev. 22:2)

All manner of precious stones (Rev.
21:19)

God dwelling in the City (Rev. 21:3)

There is, however, a significant difference between Eden and the New Jerusalem. Eden is a representation of the "beginnings" of God's purposes on earth, whereas the city is the representation of the ultimate accomplishment of those purposes. We might say that Eden is the new born child, and the city is the full grown adult person. Furthermore, in Eden there is a serpent, and through the cunning of that serpent man was cast out. In the city there is no serpent, for through the dominion of Christ within ourselves, who is the last Adam, the serpent has been cast out! (Rev. 12:1-10). In Eden there is the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the city there is only the tree of life! The soil in this city is not conducive to the growth of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eden is man on trial. The city is man purified and perfected. Eden is man faced with the processings of God through choices and experience, through testings and dealings, for his own learning and development unto wisdom and holiness in maturity. The city is man established in the *mind of Christ* having overcome all things. It is the long and tedious route between these two points, my beloved, with which we are presently concerned in the working of God in this momentous hour!

To be continued...

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