

# The Gospel in Revelation

Can you visualize that?! There will be so many people in the kingdom of heaven that we won't be able to count them all. That means there will be room enough for you and me. What a wonderful truth, offering endless hope—everyone who *will* may have a place in heaven. The saved will come from every corner of the earth, not just from select religions or denominations: “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11, NKJV).

Heaven will be awesome. All kinds of people will be there, and we will have all eternity to visit, fellowship, learn, and ask all of our questions.

## Living for Eternity

There is one final landmark in this new earth that we must consider. It is a tree—bigger even than the mighty Redwoods in California. Those trees are so big you can drive a car through them; but this tree is so big it has a river running through it. “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 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 22:1-3, NKJV).

This is the tree of life. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they ate freely of its fruit. Once sin arose in the garden, God wisely withheld the tree's fruit so that sin would not be immortalized. “. . . lest he [Adam] put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. . . . So He drove out the man” (Genesis 3:22, 24).

God's plan is to restore this tree's life-sustaining fruit to us, that we may have eternal, never-ending life. Eternity! Have you ever taken the time to consider what eternal life is really all about? Have you ever tried to grasp it?

Imagine, for the sake of illustration, a ribbon of beach stretching off into the distance, with yellow-white, sun-bleached sand as far as the eye can see. A seagull lands on that beach and picks up one grain of that sand in its beak, and flies inland. One thousand years later, it returns to the same beach and picks up another grain of sand, and then flies inland. Again and again this process is repeated, one grain of sand at a time, one thousand years at a time, until the entire beach is emptied of every grain of sand. Taking just one grain every thousand years, it would take that lone seagull millions, perhaps billions, of years to empty every grain of sand from that beach. As millions and billions of years pass, eternity is just beginning. This is the kind of time that eternity is all about. Now, let's revisit that question asked in the book of James: “For what is your life? It is even a vapor [a mist] that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14, NKJV).

Consider this from another perspective. The Bible says, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Let's say a thousand years pass in eternity. According to this biblical ratio, only a day would go by, just twenty-

four hours. We could call this “eternal time” because it will go on and on and on, and never end. In the context of “eternal time,” one thousand years will seem like just one day.

Now let's break this formula down a step further. If 1000 years = 24 hours, then 100 years (1/10 of that 1000) would = 2.4 hours, or 2 hours and 24 minutes. In other words, to live to be 100 years old would be the equivalent of living for 2 hours and 24 minutes in our eternal-time formula. No wonder the Bible describes this present life as just a vapor.

But sometimes life doesn't seem like only 2.4 hours. Do you remember when you were just a little tyke and time seemed to stand still? You couldn't wait to be 16. When you reached 16, you wanted to be 18. At 18, you longed for 21. Now maybe you've reached forty and you wish you could be 21 again. Well, someday, according to God's plans for our future, we will be one thousand years old. And then one million years old, then one billion, then one trillion, then one quadrillion, and one quintillion . . . And it doesn't even stop there, not when we have eternal life. We will reach one sextillion, one septillion, one octillion, one nonillion, one decillion, and one whatever-comes-next in man's reckoning. “Google plex” is as far as mankind has numbered, probably so named because this number is so large that it googles the mind. But even after google plex, we will still have eternity. It will stretch on and on beyond any human ability to reason. Some day you and I, and anyone who accepts God's purpose for their future, will live for eternity. Can you grasp that? What a prophecy! This is why the apostle Paul could say: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

The streets of gold or the mansions of plenty *might* be enough to eclipse the sufferings of this present world. But the promise of future glory with Him is enough. Just the fact of eternity is enough to put to shame all of this world's greatest trials and worst sufferings.

Let's touch on one last prophecy, found in Revelation 22. The Bible says of the redeemed: “They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4, NKJV).

We are going to see the face of God. We are going to see the face of the One who is responsible for our redemption. What do you suppose His face will look like? Not the physical features, but His expression. What do you suppose the eyes, the brows, the countenance of God will say to us? I imagine it will say something like this: “I am so happy that you are here. I am so glad that you chose to believe in Me as your Savior. I know you had a tough time, but I love you so very much. And if you were not here, there would be an empty spot in My heart for all eternity.” He will whisper this in our ears as He hugs us and holds us in His arms for the longest time. And as we feel His warm embrace and the tears of His love, we will know then that God wanted us to be saved far more than we could even comprehend, much more than we even wanted it for ourselves. We will know then, what we now see dimly, that truly God is love.

# Preludes of Hope

## Vapor Life

Flipping through a magazine one day, I happened onto something truly amazing. They call it “Seagaia,” and it is an indoor beach in Japan that holds up to 10,000 people at a time. It has fresh-water, surfable waves, chirping bird sounds, an artificial volcano and a piped-in breeze. The roof is retractable and the temperature is controlled. It sits 440 yards from the (real) Pacific Ocean, and some say it's as good as the original, if not better.

If sitting half-naked on a beach is not your thing, then perhaps you might be interested in what was featured on the next page. It was called SSAWS (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter Snow), also in Japan. SSAWS is a giant mechanical centipede that nightly lays down fresh powder on over 1600 feet of routinely groomed ski slope, reaching as high as 25 stories.

Sports cars, dream houses, indoor beaches and ski slopes, wealth, power, popularity, success. What is your idea of seventh heaven? Stretch your imagination to its exhaustible limit, think of every possible luxury you've ever seen or heard about, and then read a verse that will make your wildest dreams of perfect heaven look like fool's gold.

“But as it is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him’” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

You can't see it. You've never heard about it. It's not like anything you've ever imagined. It's not like anything *anyone* has ever imagined. Loosely paraphrased, “What God has for you is beyond your wildest dreams!”

According to the Bible, this present world and all it has to offer pales in comparison with future realities. The wealth and fame, the honor and gain of this world is nothing compared to our future. We tend to limit our hopes to this world because we haven't seen anything better. Eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard and we can't imagine it, so why bother? It is not reality, or is it? Consider the text that follows the verse we just read: “But God hath revealed them [better realities] unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

## The Gospel in Revelation

Study No. 10

# The Gospel in Revelation

## The Deep Things of God

People often think of prophecy as a message of future gloom and doom. Prophecy is about the future, no doubt, but it comes from a God who “loves us and released us from our sins by His blood” (Revelation 1:5, NAS). Prophecy touches on the “deep things” of God, those parts of Him that reach down to the deepest needs we have—the need to be free and the need to be loved. It also tells us who we are, where we came from and where our true destiny lies. The Word of prophecy causes us to set our sights forward onto an eternal hope that this world simply cannot offer. It tells us how a God of love who honors our freedom feels about us and reveals the plans He holds for our future:

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’ says the Lord, ‘thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope’” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

Now *that* is good news! In the midst of human hopelessness, God says, “I love you; I have a hope and a future for you.”

The foundation of Bible prophecy is this message of God’s love: He loves the human race; its future and hope are sure. In fact, prophecy reveals that we have an eternal destiny. This present life is only temporary, a mere stopover. It is a point of time in which we view our potential and choose to accept or reject it. The Bible describes this present life as short, temporary and vanishing:

“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14, NKJV). “You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (NIV).

To understand more fully what God has for us that makes this life just a short interruption in His plan, we need to journey back to our beginning.

## In the Beginning

In the beginning “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31, NKJV).

Creation enveloped this planet in clear, fresh, life-giving air, not the polluted miasma we breathe into our lungs today. All was new and pure. Rolling hills and green meadows blanketed the earth, and flowers of every size, shape and color bloomed to tantalize the senses. There were no concrete jungles of plastic plants and barren tableaux of existence. Life abounded. The waters were clean and crystal clear, teeming with all manners of gilled and finned and webbed creations. Mankind held sweet fellowship with all the animals, and we had lasting companionship with each other. There was no fear, no death and no pain. Every heart was satisfied; no need went unmet.

Before sin entered the picture, God’s original creation was very good. It was better than that indoor beach with its retractable roof and controlled temperature, and that indoor ski slope groomed with fresh powder every night. It was beyond the imagination of our wildest dreams. But then came the thief: “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10, NKJV).

Sin interrupted God’s plan. Death, pain and suffering were never part of the

future God planned for us. They are our enemies. The thief entered to destroy our perfect peace, but there’s more, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, NKJV).

The Bible promises restoration from sin. It promises salvation from sin’s guilt, sin’s power, and sin’s effects. That means forgiveness, wholeness and life—good life, happy life, and abundant life without end. The enemy of our peace will be vanquished. Every vestige of sin will be consumed, even death: “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26, NKJV).

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, NKJV).

“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53, NKJV).

And then what? Will heaven really be the solitary, isolated dreamscape we image when we think of an afterlife—cloud-floating and harp-playing for the rest of our days? Will eternity be simply an endless nothingness of boredom? No way! Consider what the Bible says about eternity: “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, NKJV).

## A New Earth

Heaven will be a *new* heaven and a *new* earth inherited by us—a world made over, perfect and radiant, never again to fall under the curse of sin. This new earth is to be our home. That means life, activity, fun—the very experiences we know now, only millions of times better because they will be without sin. Let’s get practical. A blind man’s eyes will be free from the effects of sin—he will see. A lame man’s legs will be free from the effects of sin—he will walk. Our bodies will be free from the effects of sin—we will be strong and healthy, forever. “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy” (Isaiah 35:5-6, NIV). “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick” (Isaiah 33:24).

No more cancer eating away the life; no more AIDS ravaging the body; no more back, head or joint pain that causes us to complain. “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

So turn off that TV. Park that car. Cancel that appointment. Call in sick (because you are—spiritually). Shut that door, Mr. Executive, and don’t take any calls for the next 24 hours. Just wait on the Lord. Let God speak His wonderful truth to your innermost being. Listen as His still small voice promises you the

reality of eternity—“I have a future for you. I have plans of peace, not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

No, heaven will not be just an endless infinity of floating on clouds and strumming harps. Heaven will be a real place with real activities in real, newly restored bodies. Heaven is actually going to be on this earth made new: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17, NKJV).

Did you catch that? The new heavens and the new earth are going to be so spectacular, so awesome, so wonderful, that this present world with all its gadgets and attractions will not even come to mind. This planet will become the new center of the universe. God Himself is going to dwell here with us. This is the message of the book of Revelation. This is the message of prophecy: “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’” (Revelation 21:2-3, NKJV).

What kind of activities will we enjoy? And what else does God promise us?

“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them” (Isaiah 65:21-23, NKJV).

No more children for trouble, parents. No more midnight calls to dread, or casualties of war to mourn. No more gangs, drugs, terrorism or hate: “The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:8-9, NKJV).

Even the animals will dwell safely one with another. “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (Isaiah 11:6-7).

Eternity will be a happy, happening place with lots of people, children and animals, and God wants you to be there. In giving Himself for our sins, God has made an endless provision for our salvation. The book of Revelation underscores this provision when it describes in chapter 7 the number of people who will eventually be saved: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).