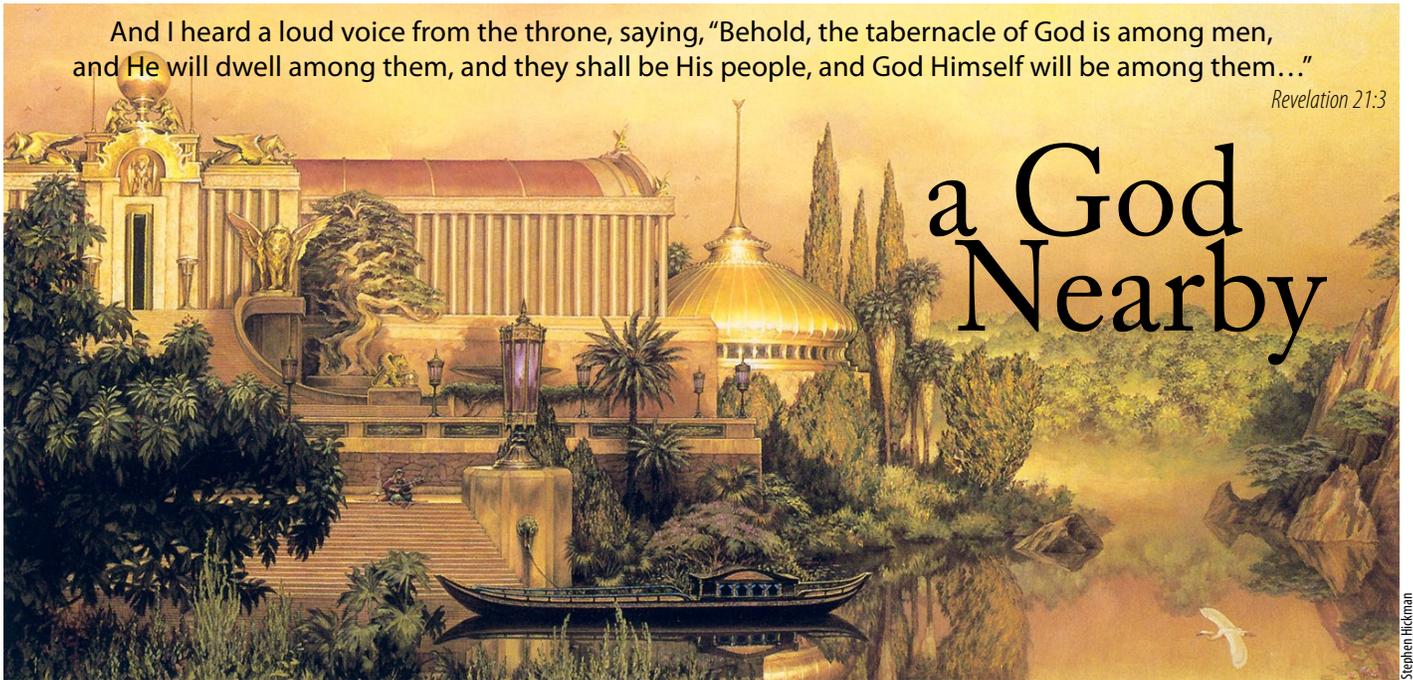


And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..."

Revelation 21:3

a God Nearby



Stephen Hickman

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A GOD LIKE JEHOVAH. There has never even been a *god* like Jehovah.

The distinctive hallmark of all other gods in history has been their irreducible distance from those who worship them. Perhaps here and there a statue of a deity's imagined likeness would be erected in a temple or on a street corner, but the *actual* god would be somewhere else—assuming, of course, one believed in the fact of his or her being at all. A chasm of separation was fixed between god and supplicant, and it could not be spanned.

Not only were these gods ineffective, they were beyond reach.

But Jehovah is and always has been different. The first couple enjoyed His company in the garden. When Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Daniel's three friends, the mother of Samson and Elijah needed encouragement or correction, God in the person of the pre-incarnate Son visited them. Audibly. Visually. Personally.

In the first tabernacle, Israel's portable worship center, there was no statue of Jehovah; there was Jehovah Himself "tabernacling" upon the mercy seat.

"You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will

give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

Exodus 25:21-22

His Son later, in the flesh, gave Nicodemus and us the mind-boggling explanation for Jehovah's inordinate, supernatural intimacy.

"For God so loved the world..."

John 3:16a

There it is. That is what sets Jehovah apart from all the pretenders. He loves us. He so loves us that He sacrificed His own Son for us, and because of that sacrifice God once again tabernacles—dwells—in us in the form of the Holy Spirit.

But even all of that is just the beginning. After all the listening and answering, after all the visits, after all the intimate indwelling—after all of that, the expressions of God's love are not yet exhausted.

God loves us so much that He has chosen to spend His eternity not with us in *His* home, heaven, but with us in our home, earth.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

Revelation 21:1

At a time known only by Father God, the present earth will be replaced by a new earth. And onto that new earth there will descend

from the new heaven a brand new Jerusalem.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:2

The members of the eternal Godhead, all of whom could live anywhere they like, have chosen to spend their eternity future on earth, in the midst of their people. In the final pages of the last recorded prophecy—the furthest into the future the Lord shares with us—we learn that He chooses as His permanent residence a city on earth, dwelling—"tabernacling"—in the midst of His people.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4

When man is unable to make himself righteous, God makes Him righteous by the death of His own Son. And when man is unable to build his own eternal city, God says, "Here, I'll build it for you, and I will even live there *with* you."

"For God so loved the world..."

