

The New Jerusalem

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-14

REVIEW

I. WHAT HEAVEN IS

II. WHERE HEAVEN IS

III. WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE

A. A General Overview

1. By Ezekiel

2. By John

a) Heaven's throne The book of Revelation mentions the throne of God thirty- nine times. It is the focal point of heaven, and from it emanates flashing, brilliant light.b) Heaven's temple Revelation 3:12 says there is a temple in heaven, which the saints never leave. It is an immense, infinite, eternal temple. In fact, the Lord Himself and the Lamb are the temple (Rev. 21:22). In the eternal heaven God will spread His infinite presence over His people as a temple.

LESSON

B. A Specific Focus

1. The new heaven and earth

Revelation 21 describes in more detail what heaven is like by describing the new heaven and earth. In the universe the stellar bodies, moons, and planets compose the present heaven, and we occupy the earth. Some day God will renovate the universe and make a new heaven and earth.

a) Prophesied The Old Testament prophets spoke of that renovation. Through Isaiah God said, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create" (65:17-18). In Isaiah 66:22 God says, "The new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me, declares the Lord."

Quoting Psalm 102:25-27, Hebrews 1:10-12 says, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; they will perish, but Thou remainest; and they all will become old as a garment, and as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end." Some day God will change the present heaven and earth.b) Created By the time we reach Revelation 21, the Battle of Armageddon has been fought, the thousand-year, earthly reign of Christ has come to an end, and at the great white throne God has sentenced Satan and all the ungodly to eternal hell. Then the whole universe, except hell--wherever it is--is dissolved and God will create a new heaven and new earth that's so magnificent no one will remember the first. In 2 Peter 3:13 Peter describes it: "According to His promise [Psalm 102; Isaiah 65-66] we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." Since Satan fell, the earth and the first two heavens have been under God's curse. In Genesis 3:17 God says, "Cursed is the ground because of you." Job 15:15 says, "The heavens are not pure in His sight." Isaiah 24:5 says, "The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants." We live in a polluted universe, but God is going to remake it.c) Illustrated Peter said we're to know "this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4). Those men reason that there has never been a cataclysmic judgment on the earth, so why should they expect

one now--which is as logical as saying, "I know I'll never die because I haven't yet." Verses 5-6 continue, "When they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water." Those who say there has been no cataclysmic judgment on the earth, forget (perhaps purposefully) about the Flood, when God drowned the entire human race, sparing only Noah and his family. Prior to the Flood, a canopy of water encircled the earth, protecting it from the sun's ultra-violet rays. Because of that protection, plant life flourished, and men and animals lived hundreds of years. But because of man's sin, God caused that canopy to inundate the earth. Peter is saying that the Flood illustrates the day when God will renovate the entire earth again but in a much greater way than the Genesis Flood--He will destroy the whole earth. Verses 6-7 say, "The world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." Verse 10 says, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." Atomic science has demonstrated to us that such destruction can occur. By splitting the atom man unleashed the potential for unbelievable destruction--a chain reaction of atomic explosions could literally disintegrate this earth. Our earth has tremendous potential for fire. We live on the crust of a fireball; most of the earth's approximately 8,000 mile diameter is molten flame. The earth's core is a flaming, boiling, liquid lake of fire, which when it gets too close to the earth's crust, bursts through as a volcano. Some day God will unleash His power and destroy the whole universe with fire. d) Described Revelation 21:1 speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth." The Greek word translated "new" (kainos) stresses that the earth God will create will not just be new as opposed to old, but also that it will be different. Paul uses the same Greek word in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." The quality has changed. The new heavens and earth will, like our newness in Christ, will be glorified, free from sin's curse, and eternal. I can't tell you what the new heaven will look like but we do know that there will be no more tempests, thunderbolts, or demons. Today our earth has spots of beauty, carpeted with grass, flowers, crops, and shady trees, spanned by snow-capped mountains, and flowing with crystal streams. Nevertheless it's marred by disease, death, pollution, and the miseries of godlessness. But our present "heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat" (2 Peter 3:12). Then God will create "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (v. 13). Only then will the universe stop groaning under the curse of sin (cf., Rom. 8:19-22). Every believer will live in that new earth. Matthew 5:5 says, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." It will then be unnecessary to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven because He will reign on earth. In Revelation 21:1 John adds, "There is no longer any sea." That is an intriguing statement that can be interpreted several different ways. Some Bible scholars think it means there will be no national boundaries. Others point out that the sea symbolized fear to the ancients, so they believe the absence of sea implied the absence of fear. Both are true. In the new heaven and earth nothing will make us afraid, and nothing will separate us from other people. In Revelation 22:1-2 John says that the only water in heaven is the "river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming 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." Coming out of God's throne and flowing down heaven's main street is a crystal-clear river. There will be no more boundaries, separation, or mysterious, violent seas.

2. The New Jerusalem

a) Its preparation In Revelation 21:2 John says, "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." "Made ready" seems to imply that the new Jerusalem had already been completed. John doesn't say that he saw it being created but "coming down out of heaven from God." Since God dwells in the third heaven, we can conclude that He has prepared this city to eventually become the capital city of the final state. Apparently when

the new heaven and earth are finished, the new Jerusalem will come down out of the third heaven, where it will have already been completed. When Christ told His disciples that He was going away to "prepare a place" for them (John 14:3), He may have been referring to that incredible city.

b) Its identification(1) The capital of heaven There are three Jerusalems: the historical Jerusalem, the millennial Jerusalem, and the eternal Jerusalem, which I believe will be the capital city of eternity. It is not heaven; it is the capital city of heaven. It's a city "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). The writer of Hebrews says, "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus" (12:22-24).

(2) The dwelling of Christ's Bride The New Jerusalem is described "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). One of the greatest ways to express beauty is to liken something to the beauty of a bride. Such a designation reminds us that the church, Christ's Bride, will dwell there. Revelation 19:9 tells us that when the saints convene in the Lord's presence, they will attend a marriage supper. In Revelation 21:9-10 an angel says to John, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." Although the New Jerusalem is uniquely identified as the bride's city because of the church, I believe the saints of all the ages will be there: Old Testament saints, the church, and Tribulation saints. But if that is true, why did John uniquely identify it as the bride's city? The book of Revelation was written to comfort the persecuted church. Persecuted Christians in the first century read about a city that belonged to them and were given comfort and hope.

c) Its description In Revelation 21:9-10 we saw that an angel took John in a vision to a mountain on the new earth from which he could watch God's masterpiece, the capital city of the infinite heaven, descend from God out of heaven.

(1) The glory of the city John described the city as having the "glory of God" (v. 11). The essence of the eternal heaven is that God's glory is manifest in it. Isaiah 60:19 says, "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory." Revelation 21:23 says, "The city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." God Himself will light all of the infinite heaven, particularly the sparkling celestial jewel called the New Jerusalem. In verse 11 John tries to describe it: "Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal- clear jasper." When I was growing up, I used to go roller skating in Pasadena. Hanging in middle of the rink was a sphere covered with small, mirrored squares. When lights were aimed at it, the whole rink flashed and sparkled with light. In a mundane way that may picture what John was trying to communicate: he saw the eternal city coming down from heaven, and it resembled a sparkling, crystal, diamond-like stone blazing with the glory of God's very nature. And the splashing light of God's glory literally covered the infinite universe with breathtaking beauty.

(2) The design of the city In Revelation 21:12--22:5 John attempts to describe the indescribable.

(a) Its walls Verse 12 says, "It had a great and high wall." The wall probably symbolizes security and protection. In ancient times people expected cities to be safe and secure. Revelation 22:14-15 says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." So the walls and gates testify that some can enter and others cannot. The wall is "seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements" (v. 17). Along the wall were "twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names are written on them, which are...the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel" (v. 12). Since the gates of the bride's city are named after the tribes of Israel, exhibiting God's eternal covenant relationship with Israel, that leads us to conclude that Old Testament saints will live there. Apparently twelve is the number of perfect symmetry: twelve gates, twelve angels, and twelve tribes (v. 12), twelve foundations, twelve apostles (v. 14), twelve pearls (v.

21), and twelve kinds of fruit (22:2). John records there "were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west" (v. 13). Gates imply that people leave and enter the city. Don't think that city contains us forever; we have the infinite universe to travel, and when we do, we will go in and out through those gates. Verse 14 says, "The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." God is identifying Himself with His new covenant people. Notice that Jesus Christ is referred to as "the Lamb"--He will forever be known by His sacrificial name.

(b) Its measurements In verses 15-16 John says, "The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod [probably about ten feet long] to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal." John describes the city as a perfectly symmetrical, fifteen-hundred mile cube. In Solomon's Temple the Holy of Holies was a cube of twenty cubits (1 Kings 6:20). The New Jerusalem is the Holy of Holies for eternity. According to Revelation 21:16 the New Jerusalem is 1,500 miles long, wide, and high. That means it contains 2.25 million square miles, amazing when you consider that Greater London is 621 square miles. The city of London is one square mile and has a population of about 5,000. On that basis, the New Jerusalem would be able to house over 100 billion people! It is large enough for the few who find the narrow way (Matt. 7:13-14), but it won't confine them. This cube, having the same dimensions as the distance from Maine to Florida, apparently has multiple levels and millions of intersecting golden avenues. It is a place of incredible majesty and beauty.

(c) Its materials Revelation 21:18 says, "The material of the wall was jasper [a transparent, diamond-like stone]." The transparent stone will allow the glory of God radiating from the center of the city to shine through. Verse 18 continues, "The city was pure gold, like clear glass." The gold we're familiar with is certainly not clear. What John saw must have sparkled with a brilliance and glow that had a golden tone but was still crystal clear. In addition, in our glorified bodies our perceptions will be different--something could be both solid and transparent. In His glorified body Christ walked through a wall. Both Ezekiel and John describe much of heaven as being transparent. The radiance of God's glory reflects the beauty of His presence through every diamond facet. Verse 19 says, "The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst." Those colored jewels, along with the transparent glass, diamonds, and golden hue, form a picture of unbelievable and indescribable beauty. God has planted within us a love of beauty--and heaven's surpassing beauty will satisfy that love forever. Verse 21 adds, "The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." John doesn't tell us how big the gates are, but each is one pearl.

(3) The distinctions of the city (a) Its temple John says, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple" (v. 22). Heaven's temple is the presence of God. (b) Its light Verse 23 says, "The city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." The presence of God and the Lamb will light the entire city. In fact Isaiah said, "The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed" (24:23). Revelation 21:24 adds that "the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it." John is saying that even the kings of the earth will give up their glory for the glory of heaven. All nations will walk in the light of God's presence, and all men, regardless of their position, will bow to His glory. (c) Its security Verse 25 says, "In the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed." In an ancient city the gates were shut at night to protect the people from robbers, bandits, and invading armies. Gates that are always open speak of perfect security and protection. Verse 26 says, "They shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it"--nothing will rival God's glory. (d) Its citizens In verse 27 John says, "Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying,

shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (cf., Rev. 22:15). Only those who put their trust in Christ will enter that great city.(e) Its refreshmentsIn Revelation 22:1-2 the angel shows John "a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming 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, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." In Eden there was a beautiful river that watered the garden, and here we find that in the New Jerusalem a crystal-clear, celestial river flows out of the throne and through the middle of the city. Psalm 46:4 says, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God."Imagine what a river meant to someone living in a barren place like Palestine. It was a welcome place of comfort and rest, refreshment and sustenance. A river meant cool water to a mouth parched by the desert heat. The New Jerusalem will be the epitome of everything precious--a city, a river, and trees. Imagine the joy of someone who lived in the desert finding a tree with fruit!In heaven we will eat for enjoyment, not sustenance. The Greek word translated "healing" is *therapeia*, which we get the English word *therapeutic* from. John is saying that the leaves of the tree of life promote the enrichment of life--they are for the pure joy of eating. The water of life is for the sheer joy of drinking. No food will be needed in heaven, but all will be enjoyed.(f) Its fellowshipThe apostle John continues, "There shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever" (vv. 3-5). First Thessalonians 4:17 says that after the rapture "we shall always be with the Lord." Seeing His face (v. 4) implies intimacy, communion, and fellowship. Having His name on our forehead speaks of His ownership.John is saying that sinners will fellowship intimately in the presence of a holy God forever. Christians speak of being with the eternal God, of having intimate fellowship with Christ, of being joint heirs with Christ. They assert that they will judge the world and rule with Christ. All those statements would be blasphemous if God had not promised them to us.

CONCLUSION

Years ago Lutheran J.A. Seiss wrote these beautiful words about the heavenly Jerusalem: "That shining is not from any material combustion--not from any consumption of fuel that needs to be replaced as one supply burns out; for it is the uncreated light of Him who is light, dispensed by and through the Lamb as the everlasting lamp, to the home, and hearts, and understandings, of His glorified saints. When Paul and Silas lay wounded and bound in the inner dungeon of the prison of Philippi, they still had sacred light which enabled them to beguile the night-watches with happy songs. When Paul was on his way to Damascus, a light brighter than the sun at noon shone round about him, irradiating his whole being with new sights and understanding, and making his soul and body ever afterward light in the Lord. When Moses came down from the mount of his communion with God, his face was so luminous that his brethren could not endure to look upon it. He was in such close fellowship with light that he became informed with light, and came to the camp as a very lamp of God, glowing with the glory of God.

"On the Mount of Transfiguration, that same light streamed forth from all the body and raiment of the blessed Jesus. And with reference to the very time when this city comes into being and place, Isaiah says, "The moon shall be ashamed and the sun confounded,"--ashamed because of the out-beaming glory which then shall appear in the New Jerusalem, leaving no more need for them to shine in it, since the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970 reprint], p. 499). Paul said, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Focusing on the Facts

1. Was the apostle John the first to mention the new heaven and earth? Explain.
2. When will the creation of the new heaven and earth take place?
3. What answer does Peter give those who deny a future cataclysmic judgment by arguing that one has never occurred (2 Peter 3:5-6)?
4. Explain why men and animals lived so much longer before the Flood than we do now.
5. What does "no more sea" probably imply?
6. According to Revelation 21:2 when is the New Jerusalem constructed?
7. How is the New Jerusalem identified?
8. The wall probably symbolizes _____ and _____ .
9. What is the significance of God's naming the gates of the bride's city after the tribes of Israel?
10. Describe the dimensions of the city.
11. How will the city be lighted?
12. What do all the citizens of the New Jerusalem have in common?
13. Describe the refreshments of the city.
14. What does the phrase "they shall see His face" imply (Rev. 22:4)?

Pondering the Principles

1. In 2 Peter 3 Peter graphically describes the certain destruction of the present heavens and earth. It's ironic that what many people focus on will all be destroyed. In fact, the apostle John uses that as part of his argument against loving the world. Read 1 John 2:15- 17, noting in verse 16 the three attitudes that are part of the world (Gk., kosmos, "world-system"). Do any of those attitudes characterize your life or values? Are you becoming attached to what will eventually be burned up? If the world has influenced your values and attitudes, obey John's directive: Stop loving the world because it "is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (v. 17). Ask God to change your values and attitudes and to conform them to His Word.
2. Revelation 22:4 points to the fellowship and communion we will enjoy with God in eternity. Unfortunately, many Christians think that such fellowship is impossible until then. But passages like 1 John 5:11-12 clearly demonstrate that eternal life isn't something that we receive after we enter heaven but is ours to enjoy right now. And in John 17:3 Christ mentions this vital aspect of eternal life: "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." As Christians we can commune and fellowship with God even now through prayer and the study of His Word. Have you neglected the wonderful privilege of communing with the eternal God? Take time now to rearrange your priorities so you can emphasize your relationship with God and not life's trivia.

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