

AFTER THE MILLENNIUM - NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

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A few years ago, I was driving on an expressway toward a major United States city. Patches of ice covered the road here and there, but the drive had gone well. Suddenly a car in front of me spun out of control. Startled, my mind froze for a moment on an awful vision. I could see several automobiles crashing together, seriously injuring or killing many of the passengers.

Fortunately, an accident was avoided, but the vision had a profound effect on me. It made me a more cautious driver, especially on that day.

An incredible vision

What if we all could have a vision that would motivate us to really obey God and become like Him? What would it be worth spiritually?

Centuries ago, one of God's servants had a vision so moving that he tried to worship the angel who gave it! That same vision had a tremendous effect in the lives of the ancient patriarchs. Just what was it that drove them so powerfully to overcome the pulls of the flesh and obey God?

The vision of the new heaven and earth given to the apostle John (Rev. 21 and 22)!

Abraham, the "father of the faithful," was driven by this vision to leave his homeland in his old age and sojourn in unfamiliar territories in obedience to God. Abraham knew what lay at the end of his journey, and became the person to whom God gave some awesome promises.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Why? What motivated him? "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10).

There it is! Abraham saw in vision the same city John describes.

Abraham knew that at the return of Christ, we, with him, would inherit the Kingdom of God. He knew of our future spirit bodies, described in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, and groaned as we do to receive this promise (II Cor. 5:1-4). Abraham had vision. He had faith, without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

In our efforts to please God, we, too, should adopt, in faith, the goal His servant Abraham did. Think of it! We all anticipate the restoration of the government of God to earth and rulership with Jesus Christ. We all desire this time of world peace and abundance during Christ's 1,000 year reign.

However, do we overlook an important part of our inheritance - New Jerusalem? For many Christians, New Jerusalem is a vague concept and they don't anticipate it eagerly. This incredible city is coming to the new earth and can be a powerful source of inspiration for us now.

The setting

The study of the new heaven and new earth is fascinating. Sometimes in our limited thinking we see no further than the Millennium. But to God the Millennium is only a day, a mere fraction of eternity (Ps. 90:4, II Pet. 3:8). We are going to spend a "day" in the Millennium, but we will spend forever inhabiting the new heaven and the new earth!

To get a better understanding of New Jerusalem we must go to Revelation 21 and 22. Laid out for us are the details that provided such inspiration for God's people before us and that will provide the ultimate joy for us when this city is established.

When will we see New Jerusalem? The context of Revelation 20, preceding Revelation 21, reveals the answer. In Revelation 20 we are told about the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and the saints. After this comes the Great White Throne Judgment, during which the multitudes of people who died without knowledge of the true God will be given a chance for salvation.

After the Millennium and the judgment period the new heaven (or heavens, as it is rendered in scriptures such as Isaiah 65:17, 66:22 and II Peter 3:13) and the new earth will be established.

Who will be there?

With the establishment of the new earth comes the holy city, New Jerusalem. It is pictured as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). Whose Bride will she be? The Bride of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (verses 9-10, John 1:29).

The Bride of Christ - New Jerusalem - is pictured as the saints resurrected at His Second Coming (Rev. 19:6-9). During the Millennium and judgment phase of God's plan of salvation, other saints will be added to God's Family. They will either have access to or live in New Jerusalem. Therefore, New Jerusalem is called the Bride of Christ since its inhabitants will include the Bride.

This is God the Father's gift to His Son, Jesus. He will join Jesus Christ in ruling the universe from this location (Rev. 21:3). The "men" mentioned in this verse will already have been made members of the God Family.

What a wonderful picture - God the Father, Jesus Christ, the resurrected saints and other spirit beings such as, the 24 elders, the beasts before the throne of God and the angels, all united in harmony, peace and love in a beautiful environment beyond human imagination!

One of the Bible's most inspiring scriptures describes a time of "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (verse 4). How wonderful is the plan of God! No wonder Paul said, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and

his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). We can look at this aspect of New Jerusalem and rejoice greatly.

Christ Himself promised that all things will be new. He is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8) and promises this inheritance of new life and new opportunity to those who overcome (Rev. 21:7). But some, unfortunately, won't make it:

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (verse 8).

Why must these be rejected? They simply don't have the right character to be happy or to make others happy. So God will mercifully remove them from the scene by destroying them and their misery for eternity.

The city's appearance

What does this great city look like? It defies human imagination. Containing the glory of God and illuminated like a jasper stone, it glows in deep, rich, blue-green tones with the transparency of crystal. The walls have 12 gates, with the names of the tribes of Israel written upon them and 12 angels present. There are three gates in each of the four walls. The 12 foundations of the city wall contain the names of the 12 apostles (verses 11-14).

The angel who measures the city gives its dimensions in terms of the reed (12 1/2 feet). New Jerusalem is 1,500 miles in length, breadth and height (verse 16)!

Though the shape of the city is not clearly revealed, it apparently forms a cube. This is certainly in keeping with the "Holiest of all" that, as a section of the tabernacle and later the Temple, represented the throne room of God (Heb. 9:3). It was here that God manifested Himself (Lev. 16:2).

Another possibility is that the city is shaped like a pyramid, with God the Father and Christ appearing in the apex. The pyramidal structure is unique architecturally - the design may have originally come from God Himself. Other spirit beings may occupy areas at lower heights, depending on their status. Whatever the shape, New Jerusalem is a huge city. A spectacular example of God's handiwork is that the city itself is made of gold that appears as clear glass (Rev. 21:18).

The walls encompassing New Jerusalem are 216 feet high (assuming a cubit measures 18 inches). Supporting the walls are an array of beautiful stones. Visiting a gem dealer would help you appreciate the beauty of the jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprasus, jacinth and amethyst that are used (Rev. 21:17-20).

Though hard to imagine, each gate is made from a single pearl. That's quite a contrast to the small pearls we see today. A street is described as being made of pure gold having the transparency of glass. Since there are 12 gates, it seems logical that there are other unmentioned streets leading from the gates. The presence of God the Father and Christ are the temple, providing the light for, New Jerusalem. This is a departure from the heavenly

Jerusalem, which has a temple (Rev. 7:15), and seems to indicate that New Jerusalem will undergo changes before it arrives on the new earth.

This is not surprising in light of Christ's statement in John 14:1-3. He told His disciples that His Father's house contained many mansions. He was referring to the temple on earth - the Father's earthly house (John 2:16) - as a type of New Jerusalem. Christ is now preparing different offices for us to hold and places for us to inhabit once the 7,000-year plan for man is completed. God is preparing a home for His future Family!

Our reward

Christians from the present Philadelphia era of God's Church will gain entrance to and travel in New Jerusalem (Rev. 3:12). What a glorious reward for those of us qualifying for God's Kingdom! We will be pillars in New Jerusalem and bear the names of God the Father and Christ's new name. What is a pillar? A spiritual pillar is a leader in God's Work (Gal. 2:9). The clear indication is that we will be top leaders in God's government.

The kings of the earth are pictured as bringing the glory and honor of the nations into the city (Rev. 21:24-26). Thus we may conclude that not everyone will actually live in New Jerusalem.

A pure river of water will come forth from the throne of God. A street runs by this river, with the tree of life bearing 12 manner of fruits, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of this tree are used to heal the nations (Rev. 22:1-2).

The seventh verse of Revelation 2 reveals that spirit beings will eat of the tree of life, so the healing element of the leaves may be for members of the divine Family.

Why would spirit beings need healing? The word healing doesn't have to imply recovering from illness. It can be viewed in the sense of refreshing one's body. For instance, thirst can be "healed" by drinking tea, which is a product of leaves. God enjoys drinking wine (Judg. 9:13, Luke 22:17-18).

Thus far in history no one has had the opportunity to see God face to face (John 1:18). But God promises to eliminate this curse that has plagued man's relationship with God. We who are His servants will serve Him and see Him. What a wonderful privilege!

Our rulership with God the Father and Jesus Christ will be for eternity (Rev. 22:5). God has promised us all things (Heb. 2:8).

These incredible promises will come to pass (Rev. 22:6), though the details may not all be clear now. As Paul said, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor, 13:12). From God's point of view these prophecies will come to pass quickly. As the end-time generation awaiting the Second Coming, we will soon see Christ our King. Then it will be only a short period of time until we see the New Jerusalem!

Be spiritually diligent

John's vision of the new heavens and new earth affected him powerfully, and he attempted to worship the angel who delivered the vision (Rev. 22:8). But he was told by the angel, "Worship God" (verse 9).

This is the real message of the new heavens and new earth! We must strive with all our might to worship God in spirit and in truth. Science speculates about a future with less work, more leisure, advanced technology and electronic gadgetry. But Almighty God promises a time when He and His spiritual Family, headquartered at New Jerusalem on a new earth, will set out together to finish His creation in the rest of the universe. That is the incredible human potential!

God has given us this precious knowledge while the world around us gasps for its last breath. We should be motivated to purge out the spots and wrinkles from our character by setting our eyes on this revelation from Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:10-14). This is the effect this knowledge had on Abraham and the other patriarchs - they strove, through daily adversity, to perfect their character.

Thankfully, the vision of death and destruction I saw on the highway a few years ago didn't come to pass. It turned out to be false. But the vision of the new heavens and the new earth will come to pass - Christ's words guarantee it, and He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18).

Can you envision the reward God has for us? Can you live for it? Will it motivate you to perfect your character? If so, you will be a strong Christian awaiting the realization of the greatest vision known to man. That is very good news!