

14. NEW JERUSALEM

John gives us a symbolic description of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2 – 22:5) because the city is heavenly, that is, it is in a different time/space dimension to our planet Earth. Our immediate destination after the resurrection is not just “heaven”, but the holy city that comes down out of heaven. Those who come out victorious from the Great Tribulation will dwell in God’s city, New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12). Jesus said he would write the name of the city on them (as a sign that they are permanent residents).

In Galatians 4, Paul discusses two covenants, one of law and the other of grace. He shows his surprise that some of them preferred to be under the law as slaves rather than enjoying the freedom of being God’s children and his heirs by grace. Unbelieving Jerusalem is in slavery with her children, but the Jerusalem that is above is the mother of the righteous. Paul doesn’t go into detail, but he suggests that there is a city in heaven which is the future abode of the righteous (Gal 4:26).

Abraham was looking forward to this city that has (permanent) foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Heb 11:10). The faithful desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one (Heb 11:16). The author says that believers will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). They have no lasting city here in this world but we seek the city that is to come (Heb 13:14), New Jerusalem.

The author of Hebrews gives us more detail. He tells Christians they have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. In this city there are innumerable angels, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (born-again believers), God, (the judge of all), the spirits of the righteous made perfect (the righteous dead), and Jesus (whose sprinkled blood brings forgiveness and atonement (Heb 12:22).

As seen in Hebrews, the New Jerusalem community consists of God, Jesus, angels, and the redeemed; saints of both OT and NT eras. The redeemed are there as God’s people in their resurrection bodies. There is no more death, crying, or pain. The saints are glorified; they are now immortal and will reign with Christ forever and ever.

The redeemed are a kingdom of priests and will reign over the Earth during the millennium. How life will be in the heavenly realm is a mystery but various clues are scattered throughout the NT. In the parable of the ten coins, a nobleman (the Messiah) went into a far country to obtain kingship for himself, and then he returned. He rewarded one of his faithful servants, saying he would have authority over ten cities, and another would receive authority over five cities (Lk 19:11-19). In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus tells the righteous that they will inherit the kingship that has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mt 25:34). We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation waits eagerly for the revealing of God's people (Rom 8:17-19). To the Corinthian Christians, Paul says: Don't you know that the saints will judge the world? And, "Don't you know that we are to judge angels? (Cor 6:2-3).

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks three times about "where I am" (Jn 12:26, 14:3, 17:24). Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, my Father will honor. 'Where I am' is present tense. Jesus was talking about a place where he was currently present, but not the place where he was talking to his disciples. Jesus spoke about being in the Father and the Father being in him. He said he can only do what he sees the Father doing. As God, Jesus is omnipresent and he was always conscious of his presence with the Father. His servants would one day experience this also. They will one day be where he is, in the Father's presence. Christians must follow Jesus now in the world, but one day they will be with him in the heavenly realm.

Jesus said he was going away to prepare a place for his disciples (Jn 14:3) and he would come again to take them to be with him, "so that where I am, there you may be also." He has gone to prepare a place for us. Many assume that he is talking about heaven, but he did not mention heaven, he only said that his Father's house had many rooms. This event will occur when Jesus returns, at the resurrection and rapture of the saints. When Jesus returns to earth, he will *bring* with him his people who have died (1 Thess 4:14). Their bodies will be resurrected and reunited with their souls, and the living saints will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air and so they will be with the Lord forever. There is no mention here or in John 14 of the believers being taken off to heaven; rather the Lord will descend with

his saints (Zech 14:5b, 1 Thess 3:13). New Jerusalem is a city that has been prepared in heaven for us, but it will descend from heaven to Earth. This is our future home. It is heaven in the sense that it is in the heavenly realm.

In John 17, Jesus prays to the Father for his community, the Messianic monarchy. He wants them to be united with him and the Father so that *the world* may believe that the Father sent him. He has given the saints the glory that the Father gave him and he wants them to be where he is so that they will see the glory that the Father gave him before the foundation of the world. Where will this happen? Where will the believers see Jesus' glory and share in Jesus' glory and be one with him and the Father, so that the world will come to know that the Father loves him and his disciples? Not here on Earth before Jesus returns and it won't happen in heaven, because the world is not in heaven and the Bible doesn't say that we are going to heaven. It will happen in New Jerusalem immediately after the resurrection, in the city that he is preparing for us, the city where the spirits of the righteous made perfect already are (Heb 12:22), the city that Abraham was looking forward to and where he is right now. When we all rule the world with the Messiah, living in a glorious city in the sky, the world will know that it is Jesus and the saints who have been glorified with resurrection bodies and that kingship of the world is now in their hands.

New Jerusalem is the holy city that comes down from heaven. It is called the heavenly city because its origin is in heaven and it is heavenly in nature, since it is in a different dimension to the created order. It is New Jerusalem that we should think of as our future destination, while the Earth will be our continuing place of ministry. God the Son is the Creator of the physical universe and also its Sustainer. He is the Savior of the world and also its Heir. In other words, the world and the whole physical universe are the Son's project, with the Father in the background as sovereign over all. John says the dwelling place of God will be with mankind, not that the dwelling place of mankind will be with God. God will leave his traditional dwelling place in heaven and join us as we rule the Earth. The Platonists and their disciples the Amillennialists don't like this idea, because they regard the world as corrupted and not a fit place for God to be associated with, but God plans to show the world and the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm that by his manifold wisdom he has won the battle against evil by saving the Church, a truly representative community from all of humanity, and given them the

privilege of ruling the world during a new peaceful and righteous era, called the kingdom of God or the Messianic reign.

Details of the saints' future existence are not explained, whether it be their life in the Holy City or their ministry on planet Earth. We know that they will have supernatural resurrection bodies so that they can commute from one dimension to the other and that there will no longer be death, pain, or tears. God will be their God and they will be his people. The city will be glorious and have no need of the sun or moon, it will be completely self-sufficient. The nations on Earth will walk by its light, they will submit to the Messiah's rule and bring their wealth to it.

The terrestrial kingdom and the eternal kingdom

Yes, there are two kingdoms: a physical, earthly, temporal, Messianic kingdom that lasts for a thousand years, and a heavenly, eternal kingdom. The Messiah, God's regent, is the promised king of the former, which is also called David's kingdom. God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is king in the latter. A transition occurs when the Messiah hands over his temporal kingdom to God the Father after having put all enemies under his feet, including human tyrants, spiritual tyrants, and death itself (1 Cor 15:24-28). This happens at the last judgment at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:11-15).

Heaven and Earth flee from God's presence because they have served their purpose. God created them as a good place for mankind to live and to display his wisdom and power. Then the evil one, Satan, stepped in and made it evil so that the history of the world and its inhabitants is tragic and sordid. But the righteous one, God, will step in to rectify the situation having known all from the beginning and having determined how it would finish. He has put everything under the Messiah's feet and made him head over everything. The Messiah is God and one with the Father. He is also man and united to his body which is the Church, the totality of those from every tribe and nation and language, who are righteous, holy (the saints), and the servants of God. The climax of God's activity is that he and his Son and the redeemed will reign together eternally.

Let us look at Bible passages about the terrestrial kingdom, which Jesus called the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Even the

temporal kingdom is spoken of as lasting forever, but for people of Bible times, that meant as long as the Earth exists.

2 Sam 7:16 Your (David's) house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. ... There will be no end to the extent of his reign and of peace. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

Dan 2:44 In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up an everlasting kingdom that will never be destroyed or left to another people.

Dan 7:14 The Messiah was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion; it'll not pass away, and his kingdom will never be destroyed.

Dan 7:18 The saints of the high places will receive the kingdom and possess it forever, yes, forever and ever

Dan 7:27 The power and greatness of all the kingdoms on Earth will be given to the people of the Most High. Their kingdom will never end and all rulers will serve and obey them.

Mt 5:3, 5 Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ... Blessed are the meek for they'll inherit the earth.

Lk 1:32b-33 The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he'll reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.

Rev 11:15 The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Rev 22:5 They won't need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they'll reign forever.

In all these verses, it is the Messiah who rules, and sometimes the saints rule with him. In all but the last verse, the inference is that they are ruling from David's throne over the Earth, and in all but Revelation 20:4-6 the reign lasts forever. In Revelation 20, the reign is for 1000 years.

Jesus said we would sit with him on his throne (Rev 3:21). The Davidic throne is not eternal, like all thrones, it gets absorbed into the succeeding throne, and in this case, it gets absorbed into God the Father's throne in the eternal state. The important point is that after Jesus has surrendered his kingship into the Father's hands, he continues to reign with the Father while acknowledging his authority. The throne is called the throne of God and the Lamb, and it is added that his servants will serve him (Rev 22:3), and then that they'll reign forever and ever.