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## NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Many of can remember the unraveling of the Communist stronghold on the people of Eastern Europe. Most everyone will agree that this was great news. However. in the back of our minds we had this uneasy sense that the repression of liberty could quickly return. In other words. we were and should be still concerned that totalitarianism is not dead. Besides. if Communism were to go away there is always a strong possibility that something else, even something worse, could take its place. After all. this is the same old earth with the same old people who have motives that have been around for many centuries. The "powers and principalities" that Paul wrote of are at work today.

Will it ever change? In John's vision, he saw a dramatic and permanent change coming.

### REVELATION 21:1-7

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." <sup>6</sup> Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. <sup>7</sup> "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. Revelation 21:1-7 (NASB95)

It is difficult for us to know exactly what John meant by a "new heaven and a new earth". Heaven is the abode of spiritual beings. In the Jews' way of understanding, there were three levels of heaven. The third heaven was the dwelling place or abode of God. The second heaven was the realm between earth's atmosphere and the abode of God - what we might think of (physically) as outer space. This was the spirit realm where the "powers and principalities" operate. The first heaven is the realm of our dwelling or the air above the earth. You cannot tell from the text if the "first" heaven that is passed away is the first level of heaven or if the first refers to a chronological first and that all the heavens pass away. The first earth likely refers to the chronologically first earth.

John commented that there was no more sea. There are couple of ways to interpret the meaning of this observation. One obvious alternative is that the physical seas as we know them are no longer in existence on the new earth. A second alternative is that the "glassy sea" that surrounds the Throne of God is done away with so that there is no longer any separation between God and His subjects. Either way. we can likely conclude that the meaning of no more sea indicates an end of things that separate either people from people or people from God.

After this John saw a whole city descending out of heaven. This city is called the holy city, new Jerusalem. it was beautiful and fresh and spotless so that it reminded John of a bride dressed in the finest attire for her husband.

An angel gave a commentary on this happening to indicate that the dwelling place of God is now with mankind. There are many benefits from such an arrangement: no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain. Everything is new and nothing of the old life is left to give us trouble. The description given here is similar to the words that Paul used to describe the condition of the believer in II Cor 5:17 (If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are past away, behold all things have become new. This is a statement of a spiritual truth that we accept by faith. We are in a changing process and do not at every moment and in every situation realize or experience this condition. What we have by faith and in part we will have in actuality and in its entirety in the world to come. Just as the Old Testament experiences in the physical were a foreshadowing of what has come in the spiritual. what we have now by faith is a foreshadowing of what we will fully experience in the presence of God.

The central theme of this new existence, the New Jerusalem, is God Himself. He is the beginning and the ending and the source and provider of life Who makes it available to any that will come to God for this "water of life." There is also great reward for those that are faithful to God. These rewards are a results of the family relationship that results from having been born of God's Spirit. We will inherit all things and enjoy a relationship of being children (sons) of God. This condition of being with God and in a sonship relationship, having inherited all things would seem to be the culmination of God's plan. God Himself said "It is done."

#### **REVELATION 21:22-27**

<sup>22</sup>I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup>And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup>The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup>In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; <sup>26</sup>and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; <sup>27</sup>and 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. Revelation 21:22-27 (NASB95)

To the Jews, the thing that made Jerusalem so important was the fact that the temple of God was there. But John noticed that the New Jerusalem did not have a temple. No temple was needed because of the actual presence of God and the Lamb of God. To the Jew, he thought that he should go to the temple to worship. Christians realize that because God is in us that we can worship Him anywhere we are. We are the temple of God. The reality of that presence of God will be so strong in the holy city that we will realize that we are in God's presence all the time.

The presence of God is usually associated with light. In the writings of the Bible we find many references to light and darkness used to contrast the Kingdom of God and the influence of the devil. In the salvation experience itself, we often say that a person has come out of darkness into light. In John's vision of heaven and the throne of God, he describes the appearance of God as such that light emanates from Him. In the wilderness wandering of the Children of Israel, they were lead by the fire (light) of God by night and by a bright cloud by day. This brightness symbolized the presence or dwelling of God and was called the "shekinah". In this new Jerusalem, the shekinah or

presence of God will provide light for all the city. in fact there will be no night because of the brightness of His glory. There will be no need for sun or moon. The city gates will never be closed because of the lack of night time. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into the city. This speaks of the people from the nations that have been made righteous by the blood of the Lamb. The truly valuable citizen of any nation are those true Christians that love the Lord and show that love bringing relief to the hurting and assistance to the helpless and by helping others to find salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

There will be discrimination in that holy city. Not everyone will be allowed in. Things or persons that would defile or would do abominations or would make a lie are to be excluded. People that gain pleasure from doing such things would not enjoy heaven because these things will not be allowed there.

Through John's vision we can gain some appreciation of the glory of heaven and what it will be like to be in the presence of God. We can be assured that God, who created all things in the beginning will be there and in control when time runs out and He declares "It is done." We do not know exactly or even close to how it will be there. but we do have the assurance that it will be beyond our fondest hopes and dreams.