

IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

by

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CHAPTER TEN

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN HEAVEN

Revelation 21:1-27

Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, tells them that when Christ “**shall have abolished all rule and all authority**” and “**put all enemies under His feet,**” “**when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.**”

The Millennial Kingdom on earth—complete at the end of a thousand years—is to be succeeded by the Kingdom of God “**in Heaven.**” The same earth that crowned Christ with thorns and crucified Him on Calvary will be compelled to “**crown Him Lord of all,**” and for a thousand years acknowledge His complete supremacy. The Father who gave Him to earth, to contest with Satan its supremacy, will one day receive from His conquering hand the Kingdom accomplished, and forever set it in the heavenlies.

It is particularly popular in our day to speak of Heaven as a subject altogether beyond the reach of man’s mind, and to treat it as if our revelation regarding the same was so incomplete that to declare any philosophy of Heaven is to deal in nothing better than fanciful dreams.

John Watson, in “*The Mind of the Master*” says, “Were it possible to place the fool’s cap on one of our most sublime ideas and turn immortality itself into an absurdity, it is done when a vulgar imagination has peddled with the details of the future, and has accomplished a travesty of the Revelation of John . . . Within a limited range science and philosophy are prophets on the unseen, but at a point they leave us, and we stand alone, fascinated, before the veil. No one has come from the other side and spoken with authority save Jesus.”

Without reference to the intended strictures of Watson upon those that believe in the literal acceptance of much of the Revelation, let it be remembered that in the last sentence of this quotation from him we find a complete warrant for our study.

True, no one has come from the other side and spoken with authority “save Jesus”; but it is equally true that He is the one whose words all students of Revelation are studying. The Apocalypse opens with this sentence: “**The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants.**”

What Jesus has to say of Heaven is not to be despised by those that would be His true followers, nor neglected in the study of those that would understand the goal to which the Son of God, through the whole millennial period is moving.

The twenty-first chapter of the Revelation is what the Son of Man has to say upon finalities; and it involves the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth: the Capital City in Heaven and the Inhabitants Above and Below.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (21:1). This brief statement, studied in the light of other Scripture, is wonderfully comprehensive. It compasses Heaven, Earth and Sea.

THE PRESENT HEAVEN IS TO BE PURIFIED

Evidently the word **“heaven”** as here employed, does not refer to that spiritual state for which the saints of God are set, but rather to the first heaven, or the upper atmosphere. With the same fires by which the earth is to be refined this heaven is to be cleansed (Matthew 5:18). We doubt not that Dr. Seiss is justified in describing it as thereafter a **“heaven which will no more robe itself in angry tempests, nor blackness; neither flash with the thunder bolts of wrath, nor cast forth plagues of hail, nor rain down fiery judgment.”** We believe also that the explanation of these physical improvements is found in a further suggestion of the same author—viz., **“It will no longer give lurking place to the devil and his angels.”**

At present Satan is **“the prince of the power of the air.”** On Scripture authority it seems that he has access not alone to the heavens, but into the very presence of God, and that he enjoys the dear delight of bringing railing accusation against God’s people, and visiting upon the earth every curse of which his cunning and power are capable. But it will be remembered, among the visions of John, there was witnessed war in heaven, **“Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”** Then it was that **“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them.”** (Revelation)

If the new earth will be complete when Satan is driven from it, and the Father’s reign is without a rival, so the new heavens are accomplished by the archangel’s conquest and the banishment forever from them of the adversary of God and men. Such a heaven will be a fit and glorious canopy for the earth renewed in righteousness.

THE PRESENT EARTH IS DESTINED TO PERISH

Jesus often spoke of the fact that Heaven and earth would pass away (See Matthew 5:18, Mark 13:3 and Luke 21:33).

Peter, in his second epistle (3:7-14), says, “**But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up . . . Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.**”

But let it be understood that when we employ the word “**perish**” we do not mean “*annihilation.*” The Greek term compassing this thought simply suggests “*great changes*” and involves a “regeneration” rather than an extinction. The same apostle—Peter—speaking of Noah’s day, says, “**The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished**” (II Peter 4:6), but it did not become extinct!

It is doubtful whether either science properly understood, or Scripture, properly interpreted, admits of the annihilation of anything; but they both recognize such changes in form as mean the passing of the old and the introduction of the new. The writer of Ecclesiastes, therefore, was not mistaken when he said, “**One generation goeth and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever,**” neither was the Psalmist creating a theological conflict when he said, “**Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth forever.**” The regenerated man “**put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.**” With him, “**old things pass away, and all things become new**” yet he retains the same body! Paradoxical as it may seem, he is the same man; yet another man—a renewed man.

So there shall be “**a new earth,**” and the righteous shall dwell in it forever (See Psalm 37:29.) “Redemption” means “recovery,” and that recovery will be complete. Originally the earth rejected God the Father; and later, it crucified Christ the Son. In its millennial age it will crown Christ Lord of all; and for its eternal future it will re-enthroned the Father. Certain writers have attempted both to imagine and depict the glories of this globe when it shall come again under the benignant reign of God; but we confess to the failure of Milton, and are fully persuaded that no language can present to the human mind our “Paradise Regained” with “**God in all and over all.**”

THE SEA OF OUR PRESENT KNOWLEDGE SHALL ALSO PASS

The statement of the Apocalyptic writer is “**and there was no more sea.**” Four interpretations have been put upon this phrase, with the preponderance of biblical testimony in favor of the fourth.

The first is that of yesterday’s skeptics such as Reginald Campbell, who so far as it is an authority at all with them, see in it a mere suggestion of the removal of social barriers and the bringing of the nations of the earth into a common brotherhood.

The second, accepted by many lovers of Scripture, insists that the language involves annihilation, and that in the good providence of God, the vast spaces now occupied by the oceans, or the sea (for all the waters of the world are in one bed), covering as they do three-fourths of the surface of the globe, will be removed in that age in which the presence of God will not only mean light, but impart life; so that the monster that has wrecked the mightiest vessels will sweep the earth with storms no more, and the people that have been divided by her waves shall be brought into constant contact, and their affections will be cemented forever.

The third company of interpreters look upon this language as they do upon most of that found in this wonderful volume, as merely suggestive and symbolical. Robert Stuart McArthur has well voiced them by saying of this phrase: "Today the sea is not thought of as a line of separation, for now it is the highway of nations. Now on its surface go the great ships; and far down in its bed lie the cables which make the world a whispering gallery. But still on earth separations exist. It often places us on the earth at great distances from our friends; and then there is the sea lying between time and eternity which our friends cannot cross to come to us, nor we, when in life, to go to them. Although we listen ever so intently, we cannot hear their voices; although we wait there so patiently, we cannot see their forms. The cold, dark sea rolls between us and them. There is no cable at its bottom; there is no ship on its surface. Thank God, the day is coming when 'there shall be no more sea!'" To him, and all those agreeing with him, the reference is evidently to the day when God's people, gathered in Heaven, shall enjoy a brotherhood from which every barrier has been removed, the blessed association which knows no separations whatever.

But to us, the fourth suggestion is most in accord with the Word of God—namely, that the sea is to undergo a kindred change to that which is to be accomplished in the heaven and in the earth. Those characteristics that have made it the cruel monster most feared of men, are forever to pass.

In its depths war will be no more; the larger shall not feed upon the less; the peace akin to that which characterizes both heaven and earth will settle upon the sea also! Its rippling surface will no longer know the destroying storm, but be vivified and beautified by ambrosial breezes, and men shall no longer sink and strangle in the same and lie dead on its sandy depths, but shall travel it with as great ease as Christ walked the waters of Genesaret.

This, of course, must be true, since our risen bodies will not be subject to the law of gravitation nor subject to death at all.

In the beginning of God's creative acts it is written, "**In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is**" (Exodus 20:11). Unquestionably each of them was effected by the fall. Sin stained the heavens, scarred the earth, and made the sea sanguinary. But the time is coming when,

"every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, will be saying, Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing and the honor, and the glory and the dominion forever and ever" (Revelation 5:13).

THE CAPITAL CITY FROM HEAVEN

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

We shall not pause to debate the question whether this city is real, or whether this language is merely symbolical. That will not be determined by the arguments of men skilled in the oratorical art.

- Of Abraham we are told that **“He looked for a city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God”** (Hebrews 11:10).
- Paul declared of all saints, **“God hath prepared for them a city”** (Hebrews 11:16).
- To his disciples Jesus said, **“I go to prepare a place for you”** (John (14:2).
- **“We know that here we have my continuing city, but we seek one to come”** (Hebrews 13:14).
- And we have the promise to believers that they are to **“come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”** (Hebrews 12:22).

It will be ours, therefore, to search further the sacred scriptures to find out what we may regarding this—our glorious future home.

To three or four facts these few phrases call attention.

IT IS NOW IN THE PROCESS OF PREPARATION

“I, John, saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”

No true and capable bride presents herself to the groom until skilled hands have prepared her for that hour and appearance; and we shall not see this city, that is the bride of our Beloved, until she is **“made ready”** for the revelation.

Advocates of the great and glorious truth of the second coming of Christ sometimes grow impatient at His delay. Paul warned them that they would, and urged them to **“wait patiently.”** This they can well afford to do when they remember the work that now engages His hand and heart.

He has not only gone **“to receive for himself a kingdom and to return,”** but He has gone also **“to prepare a place”** for His own. If with a single word He can make a world, or a solar system, or a milky way, so great and glorious as to astonish angels and men, and, with a twist of his arm, fling it into space to go traveling on millenniums after millenniums, who can imagine the City that requires His thought and endeavor two thousand years, and we know not how much more? Truly it will be made ready, for **“its builder and maker is God”** (Hebrews 11:10).

ITS DESCENT IS PROPHETICALLY DESCRIBED

“I, John, saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

What its pedestal shall be we are not specifically informed. The New Jerusalem of the millennial period is to be **“exalted over the hills”** (Isaiah 2:2); and the Eternal City of the saints’ residence is spoken of as **“Jerusalem which is above”** (Galatians 4:26).

If the law of gravity is not to control our risen bodies, neither may it be a factor in the future location of their dwelling place. The Lord who **“hangeth the world on nothing”** can sustain the New Jerusalem at any place of divine appointment. Then if it be above the earth, the light and glory from its open gates falling full upon the same, it may be to the **“new earth”** what the **“New Jerusalem”** on the mountains is to the millennial age.

John does declare distinctly, **“The nations shall walk in the midst of the light thereof, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it; the gates thereof shall no wise be shut by day, and there shall be no night there; and they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.”**

ITS FORM AND DIMENSIONS ARE MADE DEFINITE

There are those who reject a literal interpretation here, assigning as a reason that such a city would be too small to receive the saved of the past centuries, not to speak of the redeemed nations of the earth that are **“to go in and out”** at their pleasure. But such have either misinterpreted the Scriptures or have proven themselves poor at calculation.

Who can conceive even the meaning of a city twelve thousand furlongs in length and breadth, with the height equal to the length and breadth thereof?

A writer amazes his readers by his neat calculations and his comparisons: “Great,” says he, “was the city of Ninevah; so great that Jonah had only begun to enter it after a day’s journey. But it could be measured by four hundred stadia. What shall we say of a city that is twelve thousand stadia in each dimension—1500 miles in length, the same in breadth and height?”

Of it the author has written, “Its every street will be one-fifth the length of the diameter of the earth; and the number of its avenues, although a mile apart, will not be less than eight millions.”

No wonder the same writer exclaims, “Stupendous magnitude!” But we refrain and join with the poet in crying:

“O, Mother, dear Jerusalem,
When shall I come to thee?
Then shall my sorrows have an end,
When I thy joys shall see.”

THE INHABITANTS ABOVE AND BELOW

We employ the phrase, “Inhabitants above and below,” with intent. It seems fairly clear from this entire twenty-first chapter, studied as it ought to be in the light of other revelation, that both “**the new heaven**” and the “**new earth**” are to be the inheritance of the saints for all ages.

THE EARTH IS NOT TO BE DEPOPULATED AND ABANDONED

The arguments for “the on-going of the race” are neither insignificant nor unscriptural. “**throughout all ages, world without end**” (Ephesians 3:21) is the New Testament description of the unceasing generations promised by the Old (See Genesis 8:22 and 23 and 9: 8-16).

Not a few of us, while yet holding to the idea that the earth would be eventually destroyed, and Heaven would hold all the people of God, wondered at the words of the Lord such as found in Joel 3:20: “**But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation,**” and at Ezekiel 37:25-27, involving as it does the promise of an “**everlasting covenant**” with Israel that they shall be “**unceasingly multiplied,**” with God the Father tabernacling in their midst. But if the generations are to continue from age to age, forever, then we marvel at these words no more!

But human speech is limited, and if we consent with this Book itself that Jesus was its Author, we must still remind ourselves that He could not tell us all about the saints’ home. Human language is not adequate to the task. But even within its limitations what wonders has He wrought!

There arises before the believer’s eyes this matchless City, the wide and shining House of God; the symbol of which is golden streets, and, of its walls and gates, all manner of precious stones; the light of which is the Father’s face; the life of which is in fountain and river; the health and beauty of which are in heavenly and never failing trees; the fellowships of which are marked by no cowardice, sorcery, murder, pollution, or idolatry; the song of which is never hushed!

There, not a tear shall stain the face; not a death shall sadden the heart; there, no mourning shall ever be known, nor crying heard, nor pain endured, for the “**first things are passed away**”; and the One who sits on the throne, hath made “**all things new,**” and it is His House, and they are His children, blessed forever more! As the prophet, speaking for the Lord God, says, “**Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool**” (Acts 7:49). This Celestial City is the capital of God’s Kingdom—the city of all saints; the ends of the earth will be their inheritance and eternal felicity their portion.

At the conclusion of a discourse on the Millennial Reign an auditor remarked, “I never before had a true vision of life, nor was I ever made to feel that my life was of such infinite reach, nor so well worth the living!”

But here is a prospect bigger still—infinite in Its sweep, unthinkable in its experience of joy, eternal in its duration.

If the inhabitants of earth by faith can only get a glimpse of it, the very glimpse ought to affect regeneration, if indeed it be true that “**the goodness of God leadeth one to repentance.**” And more than a glimpse we could not have and live, such are the limitations of this life. The light from that world must not break upon us until the same God who hath prepared our inheritance hath also prepared us for it. That is why the poet hath said:

“We may not know how sweet its balmy air,
How bright and fair its flowers;
We may not hear the songs that echo there,
Through these enchanted bowers.

The city’s shining towers we may not see
With our dim earthly vision,
For Death, the silent warder, keeps the key
That opens the gates Elysian.

But sometimes when adown the western sky
A fiery sunset lingers,
Its golden gate swings inward noiselessly,
Unlocked by unseen fingers.

And while they stand a moment, half ajar,
Gleams from the inner glory
Stream brightly through the azure vault afar,
And half reveal the story.”

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