

Our Future Glory

By Rev. J. Kortering

There are two places in which mankind will spend eternity, either in heaven or in hell.

It is in hell that the justice of God will be displayed in absolute righteousness. All through history God displays His hot displeasure against sin and against the sinner who continues in that sin. We need but cast a passing glance at the evidence: AIDS and venereal disease in epidemic proportions, young people, unable to face the realities of life, abusing drugs, social crisis in the inner cities, public morals slipping lower than the beast. This sordid display doesn't just happen, God has said, "The soul that sinneth shall die". When these monsters of immorality slip through death into hell, they aren't surprised, they only experience a greater degree of God's wrath which was always upon them. In the midst of this suffering, they will have to acknowledge that when God says, "The wages of sin is death", He means it.

In heaven the justice of God will blend perfectly with His mercy. All men deserve to go to hell, but God in mercy provided Jesus Christ as the mediator for His people. He descended into our hell with His terrible sufferings on the cross, that we might be spared them not only, but receive everlasting life in heaven. How blessed it is to believe in Christ.

THE PASSING AWAY OF THE PRESENT HEAVEN AND EARTH: We read in Revelation 21:1, 2, "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. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Mention of this new heaven and earth presumes the departure of the present heaven and earth. By heaven and earth is meant not only the sphere in which we live, surrounded by the atmosphere, the heavenly stars and the like, but also the place where the saints now abide before the throne of God. All of the present creation will be destroyed.

Scripture mentions this frequently. Consider Isaiah 65:17, "For behold I create new heavens and a new earth and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind." Paul mentions the same thing in Romans 8:19-22, "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God... for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now... because the creature also itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." Peter is very explicit on this, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in the which heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat and the earth also and all the works that are therein shall be burned up," II Peter 3:10-13.

We learn from these passages the following: (1) Real fire will melt the entire creation. (2) This destruction will not be annihilation of the creation, as if God will cause His creation to cease to exist, for then God would undo His work of ever creating, rather it will be a fire of purging. One can draw a comparison between this and purifying gold by fire. (3) This will be the fulfillment of the Old Testament prototype, the flood. Peter mentions this in II Peter 3:6, "Whereby the world that then was being overflowed with water perished". God created on the second day the firmament to divide the waters above from the waters below. These waters were especially created so that when the windows of heaven were opened at the flood, Genesis 7:11, there was sufficient water to cover the whole earth. The point that Peter makes is this, the first earth was suspended in the agent that destroyed it, viz. water, so also now the earth is suspended in the agent that will destroy it, viz. fire. "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," II Peter 3:7. God will unleash this fire at the end of the world and will destroy it as He did the first world by water. (4) Out of this purging, God will create by His mighty hand the new heavens and new earth.

THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH: With fond anticipation, every child of God likes to contemplate what the new heaven and earth shall be like. Speculation, however, must be replaced by contemplation of the divine revelation. On the basis of Scripture, we may observe five things about the future heaven and earth.

1. God will not create something essentially new. The creation will not be ex nihilo (out of nothing) like the original creation. The material for this creation will be the refined material that will come forth from the purging fire. The chief example of this is the resurrection body of our Lord. The material of His earthly body which was born of the virgin Mary underwent a change and came forth from the grave renewed and fit for this new heaven and earth. Thus it will be for the ground itself, the trees and other plants, the animals and all creatures.

2. The new heaven and earth will be more beautiful than the original creation. This is hard for us to understand as long as we are on this side of the grave. Even the Scriptural account indicates that the sabbath rest of the first creation week must have brought heaven and earth into beautiful harmony. Yet, all of this was a type, a picture of the heavenly Eden where the tree of life nourishes perfectly and the river of life quenches all thirst. Rev. 22:1-2.

3. A marked difference that will be true for the new heaven and earth is that they will both be united in one perfect whole. By virtue of creation, heaven and earth are now two separate and distinct worlds. We cannot look into heaven where the saints are, they cannot observe our lives here. When all things are new it will be different, "That in the dispensation of the fullness of time He might gather together in one, all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him," Ephesians 1:19. Angels, saints, creatures will abide together.

4. This unified creation will be marked by perfect harmony between all the renewed creatures. The prophet Isaiah anticipates this, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them and the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall feed together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox and the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:6) Paul reiterated this, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption in to the glorious liberty of the children of God." Romans 8:21

5. There will be no corrupting element to destroy this beauty and it will be impossible for the glory ever to fade away. Consider Rev. 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes... for the former things are passed away." "And there shall in now wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," Rev. 22:27.

THE NEW JERUSALEM John saw more than the new heaven and earth, he also saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, Rev. 21:2.

This new Jerusalem is not a picture of heaven as if the city is a place for someone in which to dwell. Rather, it is a picture of the glorified church as she takes her place in the new heaven and new earth. This new Jerusalem is "as a bride adorned for her husband".

During Old Testament times Jerusalem represented the church. Consider Psalm 48:2, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion," Ps. 122:6, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." Obviously this is not a city, but represents the church of the Old Testament. As such it portrays a beautiful picture of the church. Within a city one finds community of life wherein each citizen recognizes the need of others in order to survive and each must cooperate with the neighbor for mutual well being. Such is true for the members of the church.

This vision of the church as the New Jerusalem tells us three things about the glorified church. (1) The unity of the church will be perfect in heaven. Consider verse 16 of Revelation 21, "And the city lieth foursquare and the length is as large as the breadth... the length and breadth and the height of it are equal." This unity embraces all the elect from the ends of the earth not only, but embraces Christ in heaven, Rev. 21:3. (2) The church will be made perfect in a holy relationship with God. This is pictured in the beauty of the city, walls of jasper, gates of pearl, streets of gold, foundation of precious stones, Rev. 21:11-21. (3) This church will be truly catholic, that is, a gathering from all nations as God wills to save them. This is pictured in the walls, there is no need to keep enemies out, since all are destroyed. It symbolizes a limited number which God has sovereignly determined in election. The names of the 12 tribes are written on the gates, 12 apostles make up the foundation, the size is 12,000 furlongs. All this tells us that there is one church, including the seed of Abraham and the children of God in the new dispensation. All find their place in the new Jerusalem, the city which is the bride of Christ.

AN ABIDING GLORY: What purpose does this glorified church have as she takes her place in the new heaven and earth?

The beauty of the church is Christ, “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it for the glory of God did lighten it; and the Lamb is the light thereof,” Rev. 21”23. The eternal glory of the church is that God will make her beautiful in Jesus Christ.

This glory radiates back to God. Herein lies the purpose that God has for the exalted church in heaven. No one can add to God’s glory, we will gladly acknowledge in heaven, “For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory forever, Amen,” Rom.11:36.