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B0616 – April 23, 2006 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 50 – The New Heavens and the New Earth

This morning I want to start with an interpretive principle called “progressive revelation”. We have to interpret the Bible by taking into account “progressive revelation”. Has anyone ever heard of that and can you tell me what it means? It basically means that God’s revelation in the Bible did not come all at once but over time. You and I have the Genesis through Revelation but imagine if you were Abraham. What was your Bible? Your Bible was Gen 1-11. That’s all the revelation you had about God and you were supposed to live in light of that revelation; that would be what you were responsible for. Now, when you read and study the Bible you have to keep this in mind. For example, you can’t assume that the people living in the time of Christ had the gospels or the epistles or Revelation. They didn’t have that. The last book they had was Malachi, the seal of the prophets. You can make some bad interpretive errors if you don’t keep this in mind. Second, this affects the way we interpret Scripture. What we have to do is interpret in terms of what the author intended. We can’t assume, for example, that Isaiah knew everything John the Apostle knew. So, we have to interpret within that framework. Later revelation can never change previous revelation. It can enhance or add more detail but it can never change the normal interpretation of previous revelation. It is very common for people reading the Bible today to make this error. They just read later revelation right back into prior revelation and make huge errors and you’re going to be very confused at the start today if you don’t respect this principle because I want to talk about the New Heavens and the New Earth and you already have in your mind what you think that is and what I’m warning you about is reading your idea of the New Heavens and New Earth from Rev 21-22 back into some OT verses that mention the New Heavens and New Earth.

I. THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

While there is a tremendous amount of revelation concerning the Kingdom there is relatively little regarding the New Heavens and New Earth. Two passages allude to it (Ps 102:25-26; Isa 51:6). Four passages mention it explicitly (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev 21:1). Two explicit references, Isa 65:17 and 66:22 both mention physical death in the context (cf Isa 65:20; 66:24) which seems to conflict with the description of the New Heavens and New Earth in Rev 21:4 which says there will “no longer be death”. As such, I take Isa 65 and 66 to refer primarily to the Kingdom though in some cases it may look beyond the Kingdom to the Eternal State.ⁱ Isaiah seems to see the Kingdom merging into the Eternal State. There seems to be both continuity and discontinuity between the Kingdom and the Eternal State, all of which Isaiah lumps under the term New Heavens and New Earth. We know that the Davidic throne and Davidic kingdom will last forever (1 Chron 17:10b-14). But, at the same time we know that after the Kingdom the heavens and earth will vanish (Rev 20:11) and after the Great White Throne John saw a new heavens and new earth for the first heaven and earth passed away and there is no more sea. So, there are some things that will cross over from the Kingdom into the New Heavens and New Earth (e.g. Davidic Throne, Davidic Kingdom, Regenerate-Resurrected People) while the rest will completely vanish and then God will create an entirely new creation.ⁱⁱ Why does the Bible use the term New Heavens and New Earth to refer to the Kingdom and Eternal State? The reason seems to be that God’s creation of the New Heavens and New Earth does not come all at once but in two stages. The first stage begins during the Tribulation when the present heavens and earth are renovated. This climax of this renovation is described in Rev 16:20.

1. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found (end of Tribulation)

The second and final stage is a new creation revealed in Rev 21:1

2. The first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea (after the 1,000 years)

So, this explains to me why the term New Heavens and New Earth can be used of both the Kingdom and the Eternal State after the Kingdom. The other reference, 2 Pt 3:13 I also take to refer to the Kingdom. There is no doubt that Peter is referring back to the Isa 65 and 66 passages which spoke of the New Heavens and New Earth, both of which included death. Since both 1st and 2nd Peter were written to Jews they would have immediately thought of Isa 65 and 66 which they interpreted to refer to the Kingdom. At this time they did not know how long the Kingdom would last on this earth. All they

knew was that it was promised to be theirs forever. They would have to wait until John received the Revelation in 96AD to know that the first phase of the everlasting Kingdom would be limited to 1,000 years after which point there would be the destruction of that heavens and earth and the creation of a New Heavens and New Earth without death (Rev 21:4). So, what they would have from Revelation is that the New Heavens and New Earth comes in two phases, first the 1,000 year Kingdom and then the Eternal State. Both are the New Heavens and New Earth but we have to interpret within context and using the principle of progressive revelation.

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH



To further prove the point there are both similarities and differences between the Millennium and the Eternal State or what John’s Revelation calls the New Heavens and New Earth. We can compare and contrast these differences quite easily.

New Heavens and New Earth	
1st Dimension – 1,000 years	2nd Dimension – Eternal
Millennium	Eternal State
Sea (Ezek 47:8, 11)	No sea (Rev 21:1)
Longevity of life but still death (Isa 65:20; 66:24)	No death (Rev 21:4)
Old Jerusalem (Zech 14:1-8)	New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 9ff)
A renovation (Rev 16:20)	All things new (Rev 21:5)
Temple (Ezek 40-46)	No temple (Rev 21:22)
Sun (Jer 31:35)	No sun (Rev 21:23)
Day & Night (Jer 31:35; Isa 62:6)	No night (Rev 21:25)
Abundance of fruit but no tree of life	Tree of life (Rev 22:14)

We don’t have much more of a picture of the New Heavens and New Earth than this. What we do have is a lot of revelation regarding the New Jerusalem and that’s what I want to look at now.

II. THE NEW JERUSALEM

A. It's Creation

The new Jerusalem is only mentioned in Rev 3:12 and 21:2ff. In Rev 3:12 God promises the church age overcomer that He will write the name of the new Jerusalem on his forehead. This gives you the right to live in that city. But when will this city begin to exist?

Some theologians and Bible teachers have thought that the new Jerusalem already exists during the Millennial Kingdom and will float above the earth and be the abode of resurrected saints. They would take John 14:1-3 "in My Father's house there are many mansions..." as referring to the place where we will live during the Millennial Kingdom. This is difficult to maintain because the language of Rev 20:11 and 21:1 indicates a complete vanishing of the prior creation, both heaven and earth. Thus, it is apparent that the new Jerusalem is a part of the new creation and not the old. Thus, it could not exist during the Millennium.

So, it seems that the new Jerusalem is created along with the new heavens and new earth after the great white throne judgment. Originally it is in the new heaven but then John sees it descending out of (*ek*) heaven from (*apo*) God in Rev 21:2. The city has been made ready as a bride for her husband (Rev 21:2). In verses 9-10 this is given more explanation.

Revelation 21:9-10 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

The word for "bride" here is *numphe* a very specific word for "bride" and differs from the word used of Christ's "bride" in Rev 19:7, *gune*, which could also be translated "wife". Now, I have no doubt that the bride of Christ in Rev 19:7 is the church because we're the only ones resurrected by that time (apart from Christ (1 Cor 15:23), a token of Jewish saints (Matt 27:52), and the two witnesses (Rev 11:11-12)). OT saints have to wait till the return of Christ to receive resurrection bodies (Dan 12:1-2) but we return with Christ. But here in Rev 21:9 you see that both "bride" (*numphe*) and "wife" (*gune*) are used together of the same entity. And then in verse 10 the angel carries John away in spirit and shows him the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. So, here the city

itself is identified as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”. So, the figure is of a “bride-city” and it “captures two characteristics of the new Jerusalem: God’s personal relationship with His people (i.e., the bride) and the life of the people in communion with Him (i.e., the city, with its social connotations).”ⁱⁱⁱ So, the bride is both the people of God and the place of their habitation, the new Jerusalem. The two are so closely associated they cannot be separated and can both be called the bride or the wife.

B. It’s Description

First, God will “tabernacle” (*skene*) among men. This is the Shechinah Glory, the visible manifestation of God. All the saints “shall be His people”. Past tears from emotional turmoil connected to the prior creation will be wiped away. There will be no death, no mourning, no crying, no pain. Those were all a part of the first heavens and earth that have passed away.

God will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. That is, He will quench our spiritual thirst leading us to springs of living water where we will partake freely of the riches of divine revelation of which there will be no end. We will each be His son. No unbelievers will be present but they will be in the lake of fire, which is the second death. Our habitation will be the new Jerusalem which has no connection with the old Jerusalem. It is a holy city without any sin. It will be adorned with the glory of God. Her brilliance will be like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. The city will shine with a brilliance unimaginable.

1. The Wall

The city will be surrounded by a great and high wall. The wall may either be 216 feet tall or 216 feet thick, probably the latter. The wall will be made of jasper and will have twelve foundation stones; jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. These stones will be adorned with every kind of precious stone and on each foundation stone will be the name of one of the twelve apostles (Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Matthias).

2. The Gates

The city will have twelve gates. These are gate-towers, extremely large, three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. Each gate will be made of a

single pearl with an angel attending each and the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel written on the gates (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher; cf Gen 35:23; Ezek 48:31-34).

3. The City

There's debate about the city's orientation. Some say it is shaped like a pyramid with a four cornered base and others a cube. I hold that the city is laid out as a square, a perfect cube: length, width and height of 1,500 miles each for a total volume of 3,375,000,000 cubic miles. The city was pure gold, like clear glass. The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. There is no temple in it for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. The question is "who are the nations?" The strongest evidence leans to a startling conclusion; they are the saved who survive the Millennial Kingdom without dying. There is no mention of a resurrection for these individuals but some transformation takes place so that they are like Adam and Eve in the garden before the fall. Thus, they will be unresurrected individuals who will inhabit the new earth in Paradise restored, throughout eternity (Rev 22:1-5). These will be the one's over whom the resurrected will reign (Rev 22:5). There will be no night, it will always be day and the gates of the city will never close, denoting freedom of access to God. Nothing unclean shall enter it because of the eternal separation of good and evil.

There will be a river, clear as crystal coming forth from the throne of God and the Lamb. This river will run right down the middle of the street and on the banks of both sides of the river will be the tree of life which will bear twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree will be for the health of the nations. Since the nations are those millennial saints who are transformed into the original state of Adam and Eve they will need the tree of life to sustain their health just as Adam and Eve did. But this time there will be no Fall, no curse, no sin period.

ⁱ Some also take Rev 21:1-8 as referring to the Millennial Kingdom.

ⁱⁱ Some claim that the verb "make" (*poieo*) in Rev 21:5 is not the same as create (*ktizo*) and thus it is not a new creation but simply a re-making of the prior heavens and earth. But this argument is nullified by the fact that the two verbs are used interchangeably in Matt 19:4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 442.

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