

SOME QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE NEW JERUSALEM

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The mass of humanity and even many believers are completely unaware that the Bible teaches that the redeemed of the ages will someday have their eternal abiding place on this earth after it has been purified by fire and re-established in holiness. At this time a magnificent literal celestial city shall come down from heaven to earth and this city, New Jerusalem, shall be the center of all human life, the abiding place of the Church, and the very dwelling place of the throne of God and of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

The purpose of this study will be to examine some of the key questions concerning this future metropolis. It is the hope of the writer that prayerful contemplation of this topic will enlarge the vision of the believer to see that,

since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him (Isa. 64:4).

It is to be greatly regretted that Emanuel Swedenborg and his Church of the New Jerusalem have so left sound exegesis of the Scriptures for doctrines of their own making that their writings on this topic shed upon it only allegorizing darkness and no light whatsoever.¹

WHERE SHALL BELIEVERS SPEND ETERNITY?

After the yet future Second Coming of Christ and the following thousand year period of His millennial reign the Bible clearly teaches that this present earth is to be burned by fire and the planet then re-established anew by God (Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:7; Isa. 65:17, 66:22). After the "new heaven" and "new earth" God causes a new city, "New Jerusalem" to descend out of heaven down to earth (Rev. 21:2, 10).

This New Jerusalem is seen to be the eternal dwelling place of the members of the Church. In fact, it is essentially synonymous with the Church and is therefore referred to by the identical names by which the Church is known. Thus the city is called, "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9) which names clearly point to those believers who comprise the Church (Heb. 12:22-23; Eph. 5:22-33).

Here "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, . . ." (Rev. 21:3). Here the redeemed shall "reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5) amid the very presence of Christ and His throne in an atmosphere where there is no sin, tears,

or death, but only joyous holy service and freedom (Rev. 21:3, 4, 8, 22-27; 22:1-5). O what blessedness!

Revelation 21:24-26 speaks of nations walking in New Jerusalem's light, and the kings of the earth bearing their glory into her perpetually open gates. From this it appears that while the city New Jerusalem shall be the focal point of the earth's habitation, the entire renewed globe, upon which there is no longer any sea (Rev. 21:1), shall be inhabited by redeemed and righteous nations which have free access at all times to the holy city.

The fact that the city's twelve gates are named for the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12-13) and the twelve foundations for the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14) points out that even in that future day (1) the people of God shall be a unity, and (2) yet a distinction between the Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church shall be observed.

WHEN DOES THE NEW JERUSALEM DESCEND TO THE EARTH?

The time of this wondrous event seems clearly to be indicated by the Book of Revelation as after the millennium soon following the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth. That this is true seems certain from more than one line of argument.

First. --The position of the vision of the descent of the city within the Book of Revelation itself argues favorably for this view.

The Apocalypse, following the pattern of Rev. 1:19, treats in order (1) "the things which thou (John) hast seen," i.e., the vision of the risen Christ in Revelation chapter 1; (2) "the things which are," i.e., the seven churches of the Church Age seen in chapters 2 and 3; and (3) "the things which shall be hereafter," i.e., the future dispensations of the Tribulation, the Millennium, and the Eternal State. According to our premillennial futuristic viewpoint, by Rev. 21:2 when the holy city, New Jerusalem, is actually seen descending from heaven, the Church Age, the Tribulation, and the Millennial reign will all have been dealt with in the Apocalypse in their respective chronological positions. First the Church Age was treated in Rev. 2-3, the Tribulation was next dealt with in Rev. 4-19, and the Millennium was seen last in Rev. 20. In Rev. 20:1-21:1 the events following Christ's second coming are marching forward in strict chronological succession, viz., the binding of Satan, the thousand year reign of Christ, the loosing of Satan, the final rebellion, the judgment upon the rebellious ones and the doom of Satan, the second resurrection and the great white throne judgment, and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth. Then, in the next verse, Rev. 21:2, the next sight is the descent of the holy city coming down from heaven!

Thus, since event after event appears in strict chronological succession from Christ's coming as judge, Rev. 19:11-21, through the events of the millennium and the start of the new earth, Rev. 20:1-21:1, the event next listed in the following verse, the coming of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:2, presumably ought to be taken as the next event in chronological order unless there is a scriptural indication that this is not so. Here there is no such indication anywhere! In other words, the coming of the city immediately follows a series of final events

which are listed in rigid chronological order, and it must be included in this series unless evidence can be shown to prove that the series terminates its chronological rigidity between verses 1 and 2 of Rev. 21 without giving any indication to this effect.

Second.--Theologically and logically, the descent must be after the millennium and soon following the establishment of the new earth.

Rev. 21:3-5 provides the context of the coming of the celestial city, and the words of these verses are uttered only in light of the new relationships between God and redeemed men which although started at Calvary only come into final fulness with the advent of the New Jerusalem. At the coming of the city, God now dwells in manifest presence with born again man forever on earth. So Rev. 21:3-5 declares,

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. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

If the descent of the city were at any time prior to the rebellion at the end of the thousand year millennial period could it be then said, "There shall be no more death" (Rev. 21:4)? The answer is obvious! The statement, "There shall be no more death," can only come after the Great White Throne Judgment, which itself follows the millennium, for the judgment of the Great White Throne is specifically called, "The Second Death" (Rev. 20:14)! Thus, the earthly advent of the New Jerusalem is at a time when death is past, and therefore it clearly must be placed after the millennium and the judgment of the Great White Throne!

Third.--Could this city descending amid the declaration, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5), possibly be part of the former order which is to be entirely done away with (Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:7; Isa. 65:17; 66:22)? The answer is, of course, No. New Jerusalem is clearly and unmistakably part of the new eternal order! Then it must clearly follow the millennium and the ordering of the new heaven and earth.

WHAT WILL BE THE EXTERNAL ASPECTS OF THE CITY?

The description of the city's size found in Rev. 21:16 shows that it has a square base and that its length, breadth, and height are all equal in measurement. Thus the city may either be a cube or a square-based pyramid. The suggestion that the entire city is a huge Holy of Holies, cubical in shape as was the sacred inner sanctuary of the Temple (1 Kg. 6:20), perfectly fits the truth that this city will be the very place in which God makes His dwelling.² Yet Larkin's point has merit, that the comparatively short wall of 144 cubits (Rev. 21:17) nicely and aptly goes with a pyramid shaped city but seems awkward if the city is a rigid cube.³

The city's measure of 12,000 furlongs (Rev. 21:16) has every aspect of being the literal size of the city even though the figure 12,000 has symbolical significance. The number 12,000 was no doubt chosen because it is a product of the governmental number, 12 (twelve apostles, twelve tribes;--i.e., the divine number, 3, multiplied by the number of the world, 4), and the square of the number of fulness, 10. Expositors are divided as to whether this is the length of one wall of the city or the measurement of its entire circumference. In either case the size of the city is immense.

If the 12,000 furlongs are the length of merely one side, and if 400 cubits of 1.824 feet per cubit equal one furlong,⁴ then the city will be 1600 miles to a side with an area of 2,560,000 square miles.

If the 12,000 furlongs are the circumference, then each side is 3000 furlongs or 400 miles in length. In this case the area is still immense for a city, although only 1/16th of the former figure, i.e., 160,000 square miles.

An idea of the size of New Jerusalem may be had by comparing it to the city of London. By their 1956 census the city of London proper contained 3,273,000 inhabitants (not to be confused with Greater London which contained 8,270,400 inhabitants) in 117 square miles.⁵ If the city of London were one with a perfectly square base as New Jerusalem will have, its dimensions would be about 10.8 miles to each side (i.e., $10.8 \times 10.8 = 117$)! Populated at the same capacity, New Jerusalem with 3000 furlongs or 400 miles to one side would contain a population equal to:

$$\frac{3.3 \times 10^6 \text{ people}}{117 \text{ square miles}} = \frac{X \text{ people}}{160,000 \text{ sq miles}} ; \text{ Here } X = 4.51 \times 10^9 \text{ people};$$

or 4,510,000,000, i.e., over 4 1/2 billions of redeemed people! This is more than the entire world population of today and it does not even take into consideration the gigantic height of the celestial city!

If New Jerusalem has 12,000 furlongs to each side, then populated like London, it would contain $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 16$ billion people, or 72 billions of redeemed people! Again this figure does not take into consideration the enormous height of the New Jerusalem! It must be remembered that New Jerusalem will not contain even one person out of the lost multitudes. Also, if the larger dimension of the city is the true one, i.e., if the 12,000 furlongs are the length of one side rather than the circumference, it must be noted that to this day 72 billions of people have most probably (almost to a certainty) never yet lived since the earth began! God's city will be breath taking in every way!

A recent issue of Time (April 2, 1965) reports that a new 100 story building is now being planned for Chicago. The lower section of 45 floors is to be devoted to offices while the upper section of 55 floors will contain apartments where common people will make their homes! Seven floors are to do nothing but park automobiles amid the building. The building will have its own shopping centers, restaurants, etc. within it. If the holy city from heaven utilizes its

height in any such manner, the population which can be housed staggers one's imagination!!! The very fact that New Jerusalem is called a "city" (Rev. 21:2, 10, 16), rather than a "land" or "country," seems to imply that it will be densely populated! And yet, the entire earth will be populated!

In addition to all of this, the walls of crystalline jasper, the twelve apostolic foundations garnished with precious stones, the twelve "pearly gates," and the gold and glass interior make this holy city an abiding place prepared by the Son (Jn. 14:2,3) of superabundant beauty and grace (Eph. 3:20-21)!

WHAT WILL BE THE INTERNAL ASPECTS OF THE CITY?

The redeemed within the earthly city from above will dwell where the manifest presence of God is! "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with them, . . .," says Rev. 21:3. The very throne of God Almighty and of the Lamb will abide here (Rev. 21:22; 22:3)! The saved "shall serve Him" and "shall see His face" (Rev. 22:3,4)! The source of illumination of the gigantic city will be a supernatural manifestation of the glory of the Lord. No artificial illumination, not even so much as a candle, will be required (Rev. 21:23; 22:5). This light will be eternal so that there will be no night there, just constant day (Rev. 21:25). Thus, with the curse of sin banished forever (Rev. 22:3) we may infer that those within the city with their resurrection bodies do not require dark night skies for sleeping.

The beauty of the city is described in the language of appearance--i.e., how it looked to John. This is how it will look to us! The general appearance of the city is one of "pure gold, like unto clear glass" (Rev. 21:18). John, who lived his last days in Ephesus, a city with a world famous ornately decorated and columned main street, the Arkadiane, especially noted the great main street of the divine metropolis in its glittering gold resplendence (Rev. 21:21). No Temple was present because God and the Lamb were personally within the gates (Rev. 21:22)! In fact, in incomprehensible majesty, the sacred account recites,

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve fruits, and yielded her fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:1,2)

This sight shall be the abode of countless multitudes and multitudes. Nations are seen walking in the light of this city, and kings are observed bringing their glory into it (Rev. 21:24, 26). The gates are forever open showing that absolute freedom and security exists. God has by that time purged every evil being from the scene (Rev. 20:7-15) so that no human will enter the city but those written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). Nevertheless, God has an angel assigned to each gate (Rev. 21:12) so that a complete feeling of security and joy cannot help but fill the breast of all of the holy inhabitants. So shall the blessed ones be occupied in continual joy in their occupations by which all "shall serve Him" (Rev. 22:3) and yet at the same time themselves "reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5, 1 Pet. 2:9).

CONCLUSIONS

Here it is fitting to bring to mind certain final thoughts:

(1) There is a grand reward awaiting all those who today suffer for Christ. For in that day,

. . . God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Rev. 21:4)

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. (Rev. 22:4)

(2) All of the infinite joys yet in store for the redeemed to enjoy for eternity are part of salvation, God's free gift by grace through faith by means of Christ's finished work at Calvary's cross (Mk. 10:45; Eph. 2:8-10).

(3) The opportunity to drink of the water of life which proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in New Jerusalem is still open today. For the Revelation in its last chapter offers the last invitation of the Bible for sinners to accept Christ when it says,

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Rev. 22:17)

DOCUMENTATION

1. Emanuel Swedenborg, The Apocalypse Revealed. Vols. I-II. Trans. by J. Whitehead. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1949.
2. G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," The New Bible Commentary, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), p. 1197.
3. Clarence Larkin, The Book of Revelation (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1919), pp. 204-05.
4. F. C. Thompson, The New Chain-Reference Bible, 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Kirkbride Bible Co., 1957). Section 3533, p. 142.
5. Collier's World Atlas and Gazetteer (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corp., 1958), pp. 206, 332.