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THE NEW EARTH

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen.

After a close brush with death a boy said in relief, "My home's in heaven, but I'm not homesick." Like him, many feel that at death heaven is a preferable alternative to the "other place," but that it runs a poor second to the reality and stimulus of life here and now. If the views many have about the hereafter were true, this feeling would be justifiable. But from the descriptions and hints Scripture provides, what God is preparing for the redeemed to enjoy so outshines the life we live now that few would hesitate to give up this world for the new one.

The Nature of the New Earth

A Tangible Reality

The first two chapters of the Bible tell of God's creation of a perfect world as a home for the human beings He created. The Bible's last two chapters also speak of God's creating a perfect world for humanity—but this time it's a re-creation, a restoration of the earth from the ravages sin brought.

Over and over the Bible declares that this eternal home of the redeemed will be a real place, a locality that real people with bodies and brains can see, hear, touch, taste, smell, measure, picture, test, and fully experience. It is on the new earth that God will locate this real heaven.

Second Peter 3 tersely summarizes the scriptural background of this concept. Peter speaks of the antediluvian world as "the world that then existed" and was destroyed by water. The second world is "the earth which now exists," a world that will be cleansed by fire to make way for the third world, "a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (verses 6, 7, 13). The "third" world will be as real as the first two.

Continuity and Difference

The term "new earth" expresses both a continuity with and difference from the present earth. Peter and John envision the old earth cleansed by fire from all defilement and then renovated (2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1). The new earth is, then, first of all, this earth, not some alien place. Though renewed, it will remain familiar, known—home.

That's good! It is, however, new in the sense that God will remove from the earth every blemish sin has caused.

The New Jerusalem

The New Jerusalem is the capital city of this new earth. In the Hebrew language, Jerusalem means "city of peace." The earthly Jerusalem has seldom lived up to its name, but the name New Jerusalem will accurately reflect reality.

A Connecting Link

In one sense that city links heaven and the new earth. Primarily, the term heaven means "sky." Scripture uses it to refer to **(1)** the atmospheric heavens (Gen. 1:20), **(2)** the starry heavens (Gen. 1:14-17), and **(3)** the "third heaven," where Paradise is located (2 Cor. 12:2-4). From this connection of "heaven" with Paradise, it became synonymous with Paradise, the place of God's throne and dwelling. Hence, by extension, Scripture terms God's realm and rulership and the people who willingly accept His rule the "kingdom of heaven."

God answers beyond all expectations the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" when He relocates the New Jerusalem to Planet Earth (Rev. 21:1,2). He not only refurbishes the earth, He exalts it. Transcending its pre-Fall status, it becomes the capital of the universe.

The Physical Description

John uses romantic terms to convey the beauty of the New Jerusalem: The city is like a "bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). His description of the physical attributes of the city portray to us its reality.

1. Its light.

The first specific attribute John noticed as he viewed "the bride, the Lamb's wife" was "her light" (Rev. 21:9,11). God's glory illuminates the city, making the light of sun and moon super-fluorous (Rev. 21:23,24). No dark alleys will mar the New Jerusalem, for the walls and streets are translucent and "there shall be no night there" (Rev. 21:25). "They need no lamp, nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light" (Rev. 22:5).

2. Its construction.

God has used only the very finest materials in building the city. The wall is of jasper, a "most precious stone" (Rev. 21:11,18). The foundations are adorned with twelve different gems: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst (Rev. 21:19,20).

These gems are not, however, the primary building material. For the most part, God has made the city—its buildings and streets—of gold (Rev. 21:18,21), using that precious metal as freely as people now use concrete. This gold is finer than any now known, for John calls it "pure gold, like clear glass" (Rev. 21:18).

Twelve gates, each made of a single pearl, grant access to the city. "Pearls are the product of suffering: a tiny irritant slips inside an oyster's shell, and as the little creature suffers, it transforms that irritant into a lustrous gem. The gates are of pearl. Your

entrance, my entrance, God provided at infinite personal suffering as in Christ He reconciled all things to Himself."

Just as meaningful today as the list of materials that went into the construction of the city is the fact that the angel who showed the city to John measured its walls. That they could be measured, that they have height and length and thickness, conveys to the modern, data-oriented mentality the city's reality.

3. Its food and water supply.

From the throne of God in the center of the city flows the "river of water of life" (Rev. 22:1). And like a banyan tree with multiple trunks, the tree of life grows "on either side of the river." Its twelve fruits contain the vital element the human race has gone without since Adam and Eve had to leave Eden—the antidote for aging, burnout, and simple fatigue (Rev. 22:2; Gen. 3:22). Those who eat the fruit of this tree need no night in which to rest (cf. Rev. 21:25), for in the new earth they will never feel tired.

Our Eternal Home

The Bible makes clear that ultimately the saved will inherit this earth (Matt. 5:5; Ps. 37:9,29; 115:16). Jesus promised to prepare for His followers "dwelling places" in His Father's house (John 14:1-3). As we have noted, Scripture locates the Father's throne and heavenly headquarters in the New Jerusalem, which will descend to this earth (Rev. 21:2,3,5).

City Home

The New Jerusalem is the city for which Abraham looked (Heb. 11:10). Within that vast city Christ is preparing "mansions" (John 14:2), or as the original word indicates, "abiding places"—real homes.

Country Homes

But the redeemed will not be confined within the walls of the New Jerusalem. They will inherit the earth. From their city homes the redeemed will go out into the country to design and build their dream homes, to plant crops, and harvest and eat them (Isa. 65:21).

At Home With God and Christ

On the new earth the promise Jesus made to His disciples will find eternal fulfillment: "That where I am there you may be also" (John 14:3). The purpose of the Incarnation, "God with us," will have finally reached its goal. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). Here the saved have the privilege of living in the presence of the Father and the Son, of fellowshiping with them.

Life in the New Earth

What will life on the new earth be like?

Reigning With God and Christ

God will involve the redeemed in the affairs of His kingdom. "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him....And they will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:3-5, NIV; cf. 5:10).

We do not know the extent of their rule. However, we may safely assume that as an important part of their role in the kingdom, the redeemed will serve as Christ's ambassadors to the universe, testifying to their experience of God's love. Their greatest delight will be to glorify God.

Physical Activities in the New Earth

Life in the new earth will challenge the most ambitious for eternity. The glimpses of the categories of activities available to the redeemed there whet our appetites, but do not even begin to delimit the possibilities.

We have already seen the scriptural promises that the redeemed will "build houses and inhabit them" (see Isa. 65:21). Building implies design, construction, furnishing, and the potential for remodeling or rebuilding. And from the word "inhabit" we may infer a whole spectrum of activities relating to daily life.

The underlying motif of the entire new earth existence is the restoration of what God had planned for His original creation. In Eden God gave the first human beings a garden to "tend and keep" (Gen. 2:15). If, as Isaiah said, in the new earth they shall plant vineyards, why not orchards and grain fields? If, as Revelation indicates, they shall play harps, why not trumpets and other instruments? It was, after all, God Himself who implanted in humanity the creative urge and placed them in a world of unlimited potential (Gen. 1:28-31).

Social Life in the New Earth

We will realize no small part of our joy in eternity in relationships.

1. Friends and family.

Will we recognize our friends and family after we have been glorified, changed into Jesus' image? After Christ's resurrection His disciples had no trouble recognizing Him. Mary recognized His voice (John 20:11-16), Thomas His physical appearance (John 20:27,28), and the disciples from Emmaus His mannerisms (Luke 24:30,31,35). In the kingdom of heaven, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still bear their individual names and identity (Matt. 8:11). We may safely assume that on the new earth we will continue our relationships with those we know and love now.

In fact, it is the relationships that we will enjoy there—and not just those with family and current friends—that makes heaven our hope. Its many material benefits "will seem as nothing compared with the eternal values of relationships with God the Father; with our Saviour; with the Holy Spirit; with angels; with the saints from every kindred, nation,

tongue, and people; and with our families....No more shattered personalities, fractured families, or disrupted communion. Wholeness and wholesomeness will be universal. Physical and mental integration will make heaven and eternity the perfect fulfillment."

"The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages...—these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed."

2. Marriage?

Some of Christ's contemporaries related the case of a woman repeatedly widowed who had had seven husbands in all. They asked Him whose wife she would be after the resurrection. It takes but little imagination to see the endless complications that would be introduced if the marriage relationships of this earth were renewed in heaven. Christ's answer reveals the divine wisdom: "In the resurrection they neither marry; nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:29,30, KJV).

Then will the redeemed be deprived of the benefits now associated with marriage? In the new earth the redeemed will not be deprived of any good thing! God has promised that "no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11). If that is true in this life, how much more will it be true in the next.

The quintessence of marriage is love. The epitome of joy is in the expression of love. Scripture says, "God is love," and "in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (1 John 4:8; Ps. 16:11). In the new earth no one will lack for either love or joy or pleasure. No one there will feel lonely, empty, or unloved.

We can trust that the loving Creator who designed marriage to bring joy in this present world will have something even better in the next—something that will be as superior to marriage as His new world will be to this one.

Intellectual Life in the New Earth

Mental restoration.

"The leaves of the tree [of life] were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2). The healing Revelation speaks of means more than "cure"; it means "restoration," since no one there will ever become sick (Isa. 33:24, 20). As they eat of the tree of life, the redeemed will outgrow the physical and mental dwarfing that centuries of sin have brought about; they will be restored into the image of God.

Unlimited Potential

Eternity offers unlimited intellectual horizons. In the new earth "immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to

admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body."

Spiritual Pursuits in the New Earth

Apart from Christ, everlasting life would be meaningless. Throughout eternity the redeemed will ever hunger and thirst for more of Jesus—for greater understanding of His life and work, for more communion with Him, for more time to witness to unfallen worlds about His matchless love, for a character that reflects His more closely. The redeemed will live for and with Christ. They will rest, fully satisfied, in Him forever!

Christ Himself lived to serve (Matt. 20:28), and He called His followers to the same life. Working with Him now is, in itself, rewarding. And the relationship it engenders offers in addition the greater blessing and privilege of working with Him on the new earth. There, with great joy and satisfaction, "His servants shall serve Him" (Rev. 22:3).

Although the redeemed will have the opportunity of investigating God's treasure house of nature, the most popular science will be the science of the cross. With intellects restored to the acuity God intended them to possess, and with the blindness of sin removed, they will be able to perceive spiritual truth in a way they can only long for here. They will make the subject of salvation—a subject that contains a depth, a height, and a breadth that surpasses all imagination—their study and song throughout eternity. Through this study the redeemed will see ever greater vistas of the truth as it is in Jesus.

Week by week the saved will meet together for Sabbath worship: "'And from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the Lord" (Isa. 66:23).

There Shall Be No More...

Every Evil Eradicated

Some of the most cheering promises about the new earth concern what will not be there. "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, KJV).

All these evils will disappear forever because God will eradicate every form of sin, the cause of all evil. Scripture mentions the tree of life as part of the new earth, but not once does it include there the tree of knowledge of good and evil or any other source of temptation. In that good land the Christian will never have to battle the world, the flesh, or the devil.

The guarantee that the new earth will remain "new" despite the influx of immigrants from the sin-polluted, old Planet Earth is the fact that God will exclude the "vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars" (Rev. 21:8, NIV; 22:15). He must—for whatever sin enters, it ruins.

"Every trace of the curse is swept away....One reminder alone remains: Our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, upon His side, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought. Says the prophet, beholding Christ in His glory:

'He had bright beams coming out of his side: and there was the hiding of his power.' Habakkuk 3:4, margin... Through the eternal ages the wounds of Calvary will show forth His praise and declare His power."

The Former Shall Not Be Remembered

On the new earth, Isaiah says, "the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17, KJV). Read in context, however, it becomes evident that it is the troubles of the old life that the redeemed will forget (see Isa. 65:16). They will not forget the good things God has done, the abundant grace by which He saved them, else this whole sin-struggle would be in vain. The saints' own experience of Christ's saving grace is the essence of their witness throughout eternity.

In addition, the history of sin forms an important element of the assurance that "affliction will not rise up a second time" (Nahum 1:9). Thoughts of the sad results sin has produced will serve as an eternal deterrent to anyone ever tempted to choose that suicidal path again. But while the events of the past serve an important purpose, heaven's atmosphere cleanses those terrible memories of their pain. The promise is that their memories will not evoke in the redeemed remorse, regret, disappointment, grief, or vexation.

Value of Belief in a New Creation

Belief in the doctrine of the new earth brings a number of very practical benefits to the Christian.

It Gives an Incentive to Endure

Christ Himself, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). Paul renewed his courage by contemplating the future glory: "Therefore we do not lose heart....For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:16,17).

It Brings the Joy and Certainty of a Reward

Christ Himself said, "Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12). Paul reiterates, "If any man's work abide,...he shall receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:14, KJV).

It Gives Strength Against Temptation

Moses was enabled to walk away from the "pleasures of sin" and the "treasures of Egypt" because he "looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:26).

It Provides a Foretaste of Heaven

The Christian's reward is not only future. Christ Himself, by the Holy Spirit, comes to the Christian and dwells in him as an "earnest" or down payment guaranteeing the blessings to come (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Christ says, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Rev. 3:20). "And when Christ comes He always brings heaven

with Him." Communing with Him "is heaven in the heart; it is glory begun; it is salvation anticipated."

It Leads to Greater Effectiveness

Some view Christians as being so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly value. But it is that very belief in the hereafter that gives Christians a solid base from which to move the world. As C.S. Lewis observed: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next....It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither."

"The wise man will give more care to the carving of a statue in marble than to the building of a snowman." The Christian, who plans on living forever, will naturally structure his life with more care (and thus impact society more constructively) than the person who thinks he's disposable, born only to be thrown away.

The "occupation with celestial themes, which the Holy Spirit fosters, has a mighty assimilating power. By it the soul is elevated and ennobled. Its field and its powers of vision are enlarged, and the relative proportions and value of things seen and unseen are more clearly appreciated."

It Reveals God's Character

The world as we now see it grossly misrepresents both God's character and His original plan for this planet. Sin has so damaged earth's physical ecosystems that many can scarcely imagine a connection between this world and the paradise portrayed in Genesis 1 and 2. Now a constant struggle for survival characterizes life. Even the life of the believer, who must do battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, does not accurately portray God's original plan. In what God has planned for the redeemed—a world untouched by Satan's influence, a world in which God's purpose rules alone—we have a truer representation of His character.

It Draws Us to God

Ultimately, the Bible describes the new earth in order to attract the nonreligious person to Christ. One person, on hearing that "the earth restored to its Eden beauty, as real as 'the earth that now is,' was to be the final home of the saints," where they would be "free from all sorrow, pain, and death, and know and see each other fact-to-face," strenuously objected.

"Why," said he, "that cannot be: that is just what would suit the world; that is just what the wicked would like."

Many "seem to think that religion, with...its final reward, must be something for which the world could have no desire; hence when any state of happiness is named, for which the heart of man, in his fallen condition, would truly long, they think it can be no part of true religion." Nothing could be further from the truth.

God's very purpose in making known what He has prepared for those who love Him is to attract individuals from their preoccupation with this world—to help them discern the value of the next and glimpse in the beautiful things prepared the Father's heart of love.

Forever New

In this old earth it is often said that "all good things come to an end." The best of the good news regarding the new earth is that it will never come to an end. Then will come to pass those lyrics from the "Hallelujah Chorus": "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever" (see Rev. 11:15; cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:27). And, Scripture says, every creature will join in the anthem: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. 5:13, KJV).

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all flow life and light and gladness throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."