

Heaven: The Eternal Kingdom

Rev. 21:1 - 22:5

- I. Three heavens talked about in the Scripture
 - 1) The atmosphere – Genesis 1:8
 - 2) The universe - Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 40:22
 - 3) Dwelling place of God - 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 (Revelation 2:7 equates “paradise” with the “New Jerusalem” - Revelation 22:2)

- II. Saints hope of a heavenly city
 - 1) Hebrews 11:8-10; 12:22; 13:14
 - 2) Galatians 4:26
 - 3) Isaiah 65:17 (probably referring to millennium)
 - 4) Isaiah 66:20-22

- III. Jewish sources for a heavenly Jerusalem
 - 1) “Not only on the face of this earth is there a Jerusalem, called in Hebrew *Yerushalayim Shel Matta* (‘Jerusalem the Lower’), but also in heaven is there such a city: *Yerushalayim Shel Maalah* (‘Jerusalem the Upper’).
Zev Vilnay, Legends of Jerusalem, page 156
 - 2) “In these legends the heavenly Jerusalem is the archetype of the good to come, which will be revealed to all at the redemption of the world. At present she hovers above the earthly Jerusalem, even when the latter lies in ruin or sin, but only the most righteous can see her, in moments of grace. In Christian tradition, she is described at the end of the New Testament as descending out of heaven perfect and complete at the consummation of history, while Jewish legends emphasize the building from below to actualize the heavenly Jerusalem.”
Yitzhak I. Hayutman, Realizing the Heavenly Jerusalem, The Academy of Jerusalem Monographs - #3 (March 1995)
 - 3) The *Babylonian Talmud Berakot 17a* speaks of *Olam-ha-Ba* (the world to come) in this way: “...no eating and drinking, no begetting of children, no bargaining, no jealousy and hatred, and no strife; but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the effulgence of the *Shekinah* (‘Presence of God’).” This is obviously a reference to what we would call the eternal kingdom, or heaven.

IV. Different views of Revelation 21:1 - 22:5

1) The eternal kingdom and the millennial kingdom

A. Revelation 21:1-8 speaks of the eternal kingdom

B. Revelation 21:9 - 22:5 is a retrospective look back at the millennial kingdom

Revelation 21:24-26, it is argued, is a parallel passage to Psalm 72:10-11; Isaiah 60:3, 10a, 11-12; 66:10-12 where it seems to be teaching that "nations" and "kings" saved in the Tribulation and who go into the Millennium bring their "glory" into the earthly Jerusalem.

C. The suggestion has been made that the New Jerusalem has in sight believers and is always viewing the eternal state. When the earth is mentioned and its occupants it has in sight the millennial kingdom.

"When the occupants of the city are described it must be seen that they are in the eternal state, possessing their eternal inheritance, in eternal relationship with God who has tabernacled among them. There will be no change in their position or relation whatsoever. When the occupants of the earth are described they are seen in the millennial age. They have an established relationship to the heavenly city which is above them, in whose light they walk. Yet their position is not eternal nor unchangeable, but rather millennial."

J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology, pg. 580

D. Problems with these views

In the Millennium

In Rev. 21:9-22:5

Duration is 1000 years -
Revelation 20:1-7

Duration is forever and ever
Revelation 22:5

Terminated by release of Satan
Revelation 20:7

No termination point
Revelation 22:5

Sun and rain
Isaiah 30:23-26; Zech. 14:17

No sun and rain
Revelation 21:23

Sea is in existence
Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10; 14:8
Ezek. 47:8,15,17,20

No more sea
Rev. 21:1

A glorious millennial temple
Haggai 2:6-9; Ezek. 40-48

No temple
Revelation 21:22

Jesus is reigning in the city
of Jerusalem on the throne
Zechariah 14:8-9; Isaiah 9:7

God and the Lamb are present and
on the throne in the New Jerusalem
Revelation 21:22-23; 22:1,3

Curse is still present
Isaiah 65:20

No more curse
Revelation 21:4; 22:3

False worship is not tolerated
and strictly enforced
Zechariah 14:16-119

True worship only and forever
Rev. 22:3

"By some interpreters, the New Jerusalem of chapter 21 has been assigned to the Millennial Kingdom of chapter 20. But this view must be rejected for various good reasons: First, it would seriously violate the literary order of the book, by reverting to a description of the Millennium after what is admittedly an account of the last Judgement in 20:11-15, which follows the Millennial Kingdom. Second, in the new condition described by chapter 21 there is neither sin nor death, but in the Millennium both are present. Third, in the language of 20:1-22:5 there is a constantly recurring note of eternal *finality* which would be entirely inappropriate for the Millennial Kingdom which is transitional in character -- a 'thousand years' in length."

Alva McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, pg. 507

2) The eternal kingdom (see Robert Thomas' "Who are the 'nations' and 'kings' of Rev. 21:24, 26?")

A. Some proponents of the eternal kingdom view suggest the "nations" and "kings" of Rev. 21:24-26 are people who survive the Millennium without dying and were transformed and given immortal, but not glorified, bodies to inhabit the earth throughout eternity.

"None of the earlier proposals [9] has any direct support. In fact, this is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent, but there is one further theory which seems to satisfy the available criteria best. This opinion holds that 'the nations' are composed of saved people who survive the millennial kingdom without dying and without joining Satan's rebellion and who undergo some sort of transformation that suits them for life in the eternal state. They will be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall (cf. Govett, Seiss). They will be unresurrected human beings who will inhabit the new earth, Paradise restored (22:1-5), throughout eternity. These will be the ones over whom God's resurrected saints will reign (22:5). Nations, peoples, and men on earth must continue in the flesh as Adam and Eve did before the Fall (Seiss)."

Robert L. Thomas, Revelation 8 - 22, page 478

"These verses [Rev. 21:24-26] have been a problem for the eternal-state-only view because they depict nations and kings of the earth walking by the light of the city and bringing the 'glory and honor of the nations into it.' Who are these 'nations' and 'kings'? One of the best answers for those who hold to the eternal-state-only position is that they are saved but unresurrected human beings who survived the Millennium without dying but were transformed (during the creation of the new heavens and earth) and given immortal bodies to inhabit the new earth throughout eternity. However, this explanation lacks any biblical support, and its proponents must concede that 'this is an issue on which the text of revelation is silent.'"

Randall Price, Jerusalem in Prophecy, pg. 316-17

B. Perhaps the best position is to see these verses as speaking of the eternal kingdom and all there will have glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 50-54). It is expected that all will have the same type of body as Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20-24)

1. "Heaven" or the eternal kingdom is made up of new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1) and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2).

✚ Why should we think that the only place of habitation in the eternal kingdom is in the New Jerusalem?

✚ Can't, and isn't it logical to believe, people also will be living on the new earth?

✚ Don't people today live in Jerusalem and the rest of the earth?

2. Why can't the "nations" and "kings" of the earth be glorified saints from Israel and the nations saved during the Old Testament period, Tribulation, and Millennium?

Nations were established in Genesis 10-11 with the incident at the tower of Babel. In the Millennium, when the curse is reversed, there are still nations (Isaiah 19:19-25).

✚ There is organized government in the Millennium. Why can't there be "nations" and "kings" (organized government) in the eternal kingdom?

✚ There is structure in the heavenly realm before the eternal kingdom is established (Michael is one of the "chief angels" - Daniel 10:13; 12:1; there are "armies in heaven" - Revelation 19:14; our Lord could have called "twelve legions of angels" - Matthew 26:53; and there seems to be some sort of protocol among principalities and powers - Jude 9; Ephesians 6:12).

✚ The "everlasting" nature of the millennial kingdom (Psalm 72:15,17; Daniel 2:44; 7:14; Isaiah 9:7) and the promise of it being 1000 years in length is reconciled when it is understood that Jesus' reign and kingdom "roll over" to the eternal kingdom.

"The reconciliation of the 'many days' with the idea of 'everlasting' will be found in the fact that, at the close of human history, the Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord will be merged into the Universal Kingdom and thus perpetuated forever (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)."

Alva McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, pg. 216

3. Living on the earth doesn't make anyone a second class citizen or just a visitor. Heaven is heaven. Access to all parts of the eternal kingdom is available at all times (Revelation 21:25).

4. Just as Adam and Eve wouldn't have needed to eat of the Tree of Life to live forever before they sinned (death came through sin - Rom. 6:23) so there will be no need for the "leaves of the tree [of life] for the healing of the nations" to be used. Perhaps as the Tree of Life could give eternal life (Genesis. 2:9 and 3:22) but would not have been necessary in Adam and Eve's perfect state so the "healing leaves" can give life but won't be necessary because of the perfect state of all in the eternal kingdom.

5. "The word for 'healing' is *therapeian*, from which the English word *therapeutic* is derived, almost directly transliterated from the Greek. Rather than specifically meaning 'healing,' it should be understood as 'health-giving,' as the word in its root meaning has the idea of serving or ministering. In other words, the leaves of the tree promote the enjoyment of life in the New Jerusalem, and are not for correcting ills which do not exist. This, of course, is confirmed by the fact that there is no more curse as indicated in verse 3."

John Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, pg. 330

WHO ARE THE "NATIONS" AND "KINGS" OF REV. 21:24, 26?

- 1) They may be the nations and kings that exist during the Millennium and come to Jerusalem in accord with OT prophecy (Ps. 72:10-11; Isaiah 60:3, 11; 66:12). They then join Satan in his rebellion at the end of the Millennium. *The city now in view is the eternal city, though, not the Millennial city spoken of in the cited O.T. passages.*
- 2) These are the ones who follow the Lamb and resist the beast (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 12:5; 15:3; 19:16), and consequently enter the blessings of the new creation. *The problem with this explanation is its inability to show why they are not inhabitants of the New Jerusalem rather than occasional visitors.*
- 3) Another possibility is that the nations are those who belong spiritually, but not racially to the twelve tribes, and the kings are the martyr monarchs who reigned as successors to the heathen monarchs. *Yet, this is inadequate because it is unjustified to exclude Israel as one of the nations in this group of occasional visitors.*
- 4) A further proposal has been that these will be the renewed-earth nations, organized under kings, and saved through the influences of the heavenly city. *But to survive the Great White Throne judgement and enter the new creation, these nations would have to be saved **before** the abolishing of the old creation (20:11).*
- 5) These are the nations outside the city and on the new earth, whose names are in the Book of Life and who while on earth had striven against sin, but had not come to a knowledge of the Savior before the abolition of the old creation. *This proposal leaves unanswered the question of how they were in the Book of Life at the final reckoning (20:11-15) without a personal relationship with Christ, however. It also leaves the mystery of how they could have striven against sin without an alliance with the Lamb.*
- 6) They are nations that do not join with Gog and Magog in Rev. 20:8 during Satan's final rebellion. *This theory may be as good as far as it goes, but leaves open the question of whether these nations enter the eternal state in a state unchanged from their state in the old creation.*
- 7) This is a picture of universal salvation. The citizens of the city are those who were saved before the Great White Throne, and the nations and their kings are those who were not. *Yet this mention of access to the city for the Gentiles cannot teach universal salvation or even salvation of the majority of people (contra Morris). Such a scheme would nullify recent references to the lake of fire and brimstone as the eternal destiny of the lost (20:15; 21:8) and render meaningless the exclusion from the city spoken of in 21:27.*
- 8) The mention of the nations and kings is solely for the purpose of emphasizing the universality of the knowledge of God and that details regarding their identity are meaningless. *This approach dodges questions that deserves answers, however. It borders on the attributing of inconsistencies to the text as some have done (e.g. Moffat).*
- 9) Nations are saved Gentiles who are not part of the church. *But if they are saved, they have as much right to be inhabitants of the city as do saved Israelites & saved members of the church.*
- 10) *"None of the earlier proposals has any direct support. In fact, this is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent, but there is one further theory which seems to satisfy the available criteria best. This opinion holds that 'the nations' are composed of saved people who survive the millennial kingdom without dying and without joining Satan's rebellion and who undergo some sort of transformation that suits them for life in the eternal state. They will be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall (cf. Govett, Seiss). They will be unresurrected human beings who will inhabit the new earth, Paradise restored (22:1-5), throughout eternity. These will be the ones over whom God's resurrected saints will reign (22:5). Nations, peoples, and men on earth must continue in the flesh as Adam and Eve did before the Fall (Seiss)."*