

# *New Heavens and New Earth – Really!*

Thomas Robinson, *Living in Hope* 5, June 5, 2011

## *Revelation 21:1-5, 9-12, 14, 21-27; 22:1-2*

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a **new heaven and a new earth** [Isa 65:17; 66:22], for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the **holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**, prepared as a **bride adorned for her husband**.

<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”* <sup>4</sup> **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more** [Isa 25:8], *neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, *“Behold, I am making all things new.”* [Gen 1:1]

<sup>9</sup> One of the seven angels [said], *“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*

<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away **in the Spirit** to a great, high mountain, and showed me **the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God**, <sup>11</sup> having the **glory of God**, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with **twelve gates**, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of **the twelve tribes** of the sons of Israel were inscribed.... <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had **twelve foundations**, and on them were the twelve names of **the twelve apostles** of the Lamb.... <sup>21</sup> And the street of the city was **pure gold, transparent as glass**.

<sup>22</sup> And I saw **no temple** in the city, for its **temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb**. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no **need of sun** or moon to shine on it, for the **glory of God gives it light**, and its **lamp is the Lamb**. <sup>24</sup> **By its light will the nations walk**, and the **kings of the earth will bring their glory into it**, <sup>25</sup> and its **gates will never be shut by day** – and there will be **no night there**. <sup>26</sup> They will **bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations**. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is **detestable or false**, but only those who are written in the **Lamb’s book of life**.

**22:1** Then the angel showed me the **river of the water of life**, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the **tree of life** with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The **leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations**.

## *Romans 8:18-19, 21-25*

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with **the glory that is to be revealed in us**. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for **the revealing of the sons of God**.... <sup>21</sup> The creation itself will be set free from its **bondage to corruption** and obtain the **freedom of the glory** of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but **we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit**, groan inwardly as we **wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**. <sup>24</sup> **For in this hope we were saved**. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if **we hope for what we do not see**, we wait for it with patience.

## *Genesis 3:24*

<sup>24</sup> He [God] drove out the human, and at the east of the **garden of Eden** he placed the **cherubim** and a flaming sword that turned every way to **guard the way to the tree of life**.

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

<sup>1</sup> For we know that if **the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed**, we have a building from God, a **house not made with hands**, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to **put on our dwelling from heaven**, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may **not be found naked**. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being **burdened** – not that we would be **unclothed**, but that we would be **further clothed**, so that **what is mortal may be swallowed up by life**. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has **given us the Spirit as a guarantee**.

## 1 Corinthians 6:2-3

<sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the **saints will judge the world**? And if the world is to be judged **by you**, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that **we are to judge angels**?

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## Can You Imagine Heaven Descending to Earth?

The NT gives us many images to help us envision a future hope beyond this life. That future beyond imagining (1Cor 2:9) flows out of the resurrection of Jesus and gift of the Holy Spirit. Many traditional images are other-worldly: leaving this world behind, for a timeless realm of spiritual, disembodied, immortal souls. Rapture. I'll fly away to the sky, away from earth. Common assumption that the physical is corrupting, anti-spiritual, opposed to spiritual life. The NT is distinctive for its concrete, earth-centered images, in Revelation and elsewhere. Jesus "*descends from heaven*" to earth (1Thess 4:16-17). God does not get rid of earth but "*makes all things new*" in a new heaven and earth that unites the divided realm of God, physical and spiritual. John sees the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. Earth and Heaven become one as God makes his dwelling with his people, wiping away their tears.

## Death, Between, and Resurrection

We have so many questions. The trauma of death and grief, fear, and loss mark our lives. The body gets old, suffers and dies. Shouldn't we hope to get away from everything physical? God makes us physical beings with mortal life, but able to receive the Spirit of God, the source of eternal life. God alone is immortal, but the Spirit of God given through Jesus empowers even us mortals to receive eternal life and resurrection to new imperishable physical bodies. God intends completely to unite the physical and spiritual. (Rom 8:9-11; 1Cor 15:42-53) After physical death, the soul/life continues "*naked*," incomplete, in waiting ("*paradise*," "*with the Lord*") for the consummation of all things in the second coming, resurrection. Only at the resurrection does a new world of active life in a renewed creation begin. (2Cor 5:3; Lk 23:43; Phil 1:23)

## The Healing of Earth and Human Life

Look at the great vision that John was given. He sees a vast, complex set of images. A bride, a city, but a city like none other. The main thing he notices first is God's immediate presence. Humanity's story is one of separation/exile from God and God's life. Now God is with his people in a tender and intimate way. The way to the Tree of Life is reopened, new Eden. He sees a vast city, rich, complex, historic (tribes/apostles) that is also a great garden. Paul says that all of God's creation shares in the renewal (Rom 8:21). Civilization and nature united. Its gates never close and the glory of human nations flow in, healed by the trees of life. There is nothing static here, but rather ongoing life, healing, creativity, celebration.

## Are You Ready to Judge Angels?

In the midst of teaching the Corinthians, Paul asks, "*Don't you know that we are to judge angels?*" What God has in store is not just harps and floating on clouds. We may be called upon to face challenges that we can hardly imagine, with creativity we have yet to learn.