

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 9b
The Incredible Journey
Of The
Church Age Believer
May , 2003

INTRO: Well, we have now come to the final message of the Pilgrim's Progress. I have not read a book or heard messages or come across any other material that covers life here and now to the new heaven and new earth from a chronological, personal perspective. Interestingly, sometimes when we speak of these future things it all seems a big mystery to us so, when we think of heaven there it all seems to come to an end. Then, to justify our lack of understanding anything beyond that, we quote from the Scriptures this verse, "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him.'" That seems to give us a reason why we know so little about what lies ahead. But I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians 2:10, the verse following the one just quoted and notice what the Scripture goes on to say: "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit." So, if we diligently study the Scriptures, in which the Spirit reveals these future things to us, we can understand things far beyond the simple fact that we go to heaven after we die.

We have considered the Church age believer's pilgrimage in four phases: Phase one, from initial salvation to death or the rapture; phase two, from the rapture until we are prepared to return to earth on white horses; phase three, from the return to earth until we go back to heaven; phase four, the return to the new earth. In phase four we have been considering the new heavens and the new earth. We have seen what changes take place and what will and will not be on the new earth. This morning we consider the new Jerusalem, and we will seek to describe it (read 21:1a).

3. The New Jerusalem

a. Its function

The first question we might pose is, "What is the function of this city?" In 21:3 it says first of all that the *tabernacle* of God will be there. The word for *tabernacle* is the word *skeenee*. That is the word that describes the moveable tabernacle that Israel built during their wilderness journey. When this part is described in the permanent temple, it is called the *naos*. Now if you look at verse 22 you will see that the tabernacle, *skeenee*, and the temple, *naos*, refer to two different

things. The New Jerusalem is the *skeenee*, and God and Jesus Christ are the *naos*.

I have wondered why this city would be called the *skeenee*, and not the *naos*. Why is it not rather described by the permanent *naos*? Well, I think it may well be because this is the movable city. It was built in heaven, not on earth. It was moved from heaven to earth. That is best described by the word *skeenee*. And so it will function as the dwelling place of God Almighty.

b. Its dimensions (21:16)

In 21:16 we find that its length and width and height are equal. It is 12,000 furlongs each direction. That is 1500 miles. That allows two possibilities for its shape. It could have either the shape of a cube or a pyramid. So some Christians have speculated that it will be shaped like a pyramid. But the pyramid shape is totally foreign to Scripture, and Egyptian in style. But the cube shape is very significant in Scripture. The Holy of Holies was cube shaped. It was 10x10x10. And so I have no doubt that the cube shape is correct.

Time does not allow us to consider any details of the OT tabernacle and temple. But in the tabernacle there were two rooms. The first was 10x10x20. It was the holy place. The second was the most holy place and it was 10x10x10. It was in this cubicle room with equal measurements in every direction that God came to dwell with Israel. In Exodus 25:8 God said to Moses, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." That is exactly what we have here; the dwelling place of God.

c. Its foundations (21:14)

This city is well described, even its foundations are described. Hebrews 11 is the hall of faith. This chapter recites many of the martyrs of the OT. Among the reasons why they would allow themselves to suffer martyrdom is that they were seeking a homeland. This world was not their home (11:14). Hebrews 11:16 says they desire a better country and for this reason God is not ashamed to be called their God. And then verse 16 says that God has

prepared a city for them. The ultimate city is the one we are looking at here in Revelation. But Hebrews 11:10 points out one aspect of this city that caused Abraham to desire it, and that is because it has foundations (11:10). This city will endure forever.

Now look at Revelation 21:14 (read). It says that the wall of this city has 12 foundations! And on the 12 foundations were the names of the 12 apostles. I find it amazing that the 12 apostles should be inscribed on these foundations, rather than the twelve tribes of Israel. Maybe this explains Hebrews 11:39-40 which says, "And all these (OT saints), having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." The 12 apostles stand for the Church as the 12 tribes stand for Israel. It is simply amazing that the 12 apostles names should be found on the foundation stones of this city! That alone tells us how tremendously important the Church is in the plan of God.

Notice a puzzling verse in Matthew 11:11 (Read verse). How could this be true? The context is that of prophets. We might read as follows, "Among those prophets born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is the least prophet in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." What makes one prophet greater or lesser than another? It is his message. Why is John the Baptist greater than Isaiah or Jeremiah or even Daniel? His message is greater. All who prophesied before John said, "The Christ will come some day." John's message was yet greater. He said, "He is here." One day John the baptist and two of his disciples stood watching Jesus as He walked. And John said to his two disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Here He is. No prophet had ever yet been able to say that.

Now, what makes the least prophet in the kingdom of heaven greater than John the baptist? Well, again, it is his message. The OT prophet said, "He is coming." John the Baptist said, "He is here!" The least prophet now can say, "He came, He died, He was buried, He rose again and He has returned to heaven. His work on earth is finished." The first

people in the world to publish that message were the twelve apostles and their names are inscribed on the foundations of the New Jerusalem. No doubt that these 12 foundations with these twelve names will forever remind us of the foundational truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now consider what these foundations were made of (read Rev. 21:19-20). Some believe that the colors of these stones are those of the rainbow.

d. Its walls

Well, above these beautiful foundations, rose a high wall. 21:12 tells us it had a great and high wall. Verse 17 tells us this wall is 144 cubits, that is some 216 feet. Scholars are not agreed if the wall is 216 feet thick or 216 feet high. Most seem to prefer that as its height.

Now notice in verse 18 that the material for the wall is jasper. Jasper is found in various colors, but I believe red is the predominant color. Maybe that will be an eternal reminder that all the redeemed were purchased by the blood of Christ.

e. Its gates (21:12-13)

And so, let us look at the gates of this city (read 21:12-13). We sing a hymn called, "He The Pearly Gates Will Open." The title of this hymn speaks of these gates. Notice in verse 21 the reference to the pearls. Now one simply must ask the question, "Why gates of pearls?" When I consider the pearl two thoughts immediately present themselves to my mind: problems and perfection. A pearl begins with a problem, a problem which will not leave but eventually becomes one of the worlds most ancient symbols of perfection according to Encyclopaedia Britannica. Notice Acts 14:21-22 in this connection. Surely these pearls speak of how one comes to enter this city but now all of those trials and difficulties portray only beauty. The problems have been covered with layer upon layer of beautiful pearls.

When I get to this city, there are several questions I want to ask. First, why are the apostles names on the foundations rather than on the gates. Second, why are the twelve tribes of

Israel not on the foundations? Then there are two things I want to check out. First, I know 11 names I will find on the foundation, but what is the 12th name? Is it Matthias or Paul? Do you care to guess before we get there? The second thing I want to check out is which 12 names will be on the gates? If you wonder why I want to check that out, find all the occurrences of lists of the 12 tribes of Israel and then you will know why I want to check this out.

f. Its street (21:21)

Now let's look at the street of this city. Only two references are made to the street in this city. It is interesting that in the two occurrences of the word *street* in these chapters, both are in the singular (21:21 and 22:2). Maybe it is in reference to one main street. However that may be, this street is made of pure gold, like transparent glass.

One of our men told me he read a cartoon about a man who could not stand dying without taking his possessions along. And so he sold all he had and exchanged it for gold. And so when he died, he came to this great city and one of the angels asked what he was carrying in his suitcase. The angel asked for the suitcase, opened it up and looked at this bar of gold and said in dismay, "Pavement. You brought some pavement?"

g. Its light

One of the outstanding features of this city is its light, and the source of it. Every city has a light source but no city has a light source like this one (read 21:23). Now when we spoke of what would not be in the new heavens or on the new earth, and I mentioned the things that would not be there, I did not say that there would be no more sun or moon, nor does the Scripture. Notice that it says that this city has no need of the sun or moon. The reason for this is, because the glory of God illuminates it and Jesus Christ is its light.

Notice further that it says in 22:5 that there will be no night there. Now it is important to note where "there" is. It is not speaking of all of the new heavens or the new earth. "There" means in the

new Jerusalem. This verse further says, "They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light."

In 21:11 we have this light further described like this, "And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." Now light is an amazing thing. Encyclopedia Britannica says that light is such a basic aspect of the human environment that it cannot be defined by anything simpler to the senses than light itself. You cannot say, "Light is like..." and end the sentence with a simpler concept than light. Yet it is extremely complex. In this sense light is like the book of John, an apostle who makes much of Jesus light. The book of John is both very simple and extremely complex.

The Encyclopedia gives two fundamental properties of light. First it is energy. It is energy conveyed through empty space at extremely high velocity. When you have a small light darkness will quickly absorb its light and overcome it. It takes a lot of energy to produce light that will go a long distance. The second fundamental property of light is illumination. More information reaches the human mind through the eye, which is dependent on light for illumination, than by any other means.

And so, God and Jesus Christ are the light of this city. They will be a constant, never-ending source of energy and illumination.

h. Its beauty

What do you think this city will look like when we see it? It is interesting to me how the Bible describes this city. I propose to you that this city is indescribable. And so when John sees this city, and he wants to describe it to us he uses a metaphor. He says it is like something. Out of all the metaphors he might have chosen, it is interesting that he choose the metaphor of a bride. Look at it in 21:2 (read).

When we describe something by metaphor we say it is like this thing or like that thing. You will remember in John 14 Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." Now when John sees this city, the New Jerusalem, he describes it as a place prepared

as a bride is adorned for her husband. Part of the work Christ did in preparing this city for the Church, that is you and I, is to beautify it. It will be a city resplendent in beauty. If you want to catch the metaphor consider the next bride and her attention to her appearance. It is the desire of every bride to be just as pretty as possible. She does everything she can to look attractive. That is why this metaphore is used here. This city will be as beautiful as God can make it. What a sight it will be!

h. Its glory

The last descriptive aspect we want to consider of this city is its glory. No doubt, the beauty of this city will be part of its glory. In Revelation 21:10b - 11a John describes its glory like this: The angel, "...showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem (notice that it is a holy city), descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God..." Well, just how significant is that?

You will recall an OT account which happened in Samuel's time. Israel had gone to war against the Philistines. When things went badly for Israel they had the ark of the covenant brought to the battle. However, God was displeased with Israel and allowed the Philistines to capture the ark. If you have never read this story you will want to read it and the events that follow. When Eli, who was both judge and high priest of Israel heard the news of this capture he fell from where he was sitting and broke his neck and died. Two of Eli's sons had been killed in the battle as well. One of these sons, Phinehas' wife was expecting at this time. When she heard of the capture of the ark, her father-in-laws death and her husband's death she gave birth and died in the process. But before she died she named her son, Ichabod. That name meant, "The glory has departed from Israel."

In this New Jerusalem the glory of God is once again present with man and will never again depart. There will never be another Ichabod.

C. Completed, never, no never ever completed

And so we come to our last point in this series: How does phase four end? In each of the four phases we showed how

that phase commenced, that is how it began. Then we looked at how it continued and after this, how it was completed. It is fitting, since we have considered the completion of the other three phases, that we give at least a few seconds to the completion of this fourth phase. Here it is, "It will never, never, no never ever be completed. We have arrived at the eternal state!"

CONCL: And so, our study of this series is over but our journey has just begun.

Where The Roses Never Fade

I am going to a city
Where the streets of gold are laid,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
And the roses never fade.

Here they bloom but for a season,
Soon their beauty is decayed;
I am going to a city
Where the roses never fade.

In this world we have our troubles,
Satan's snares we must evade;
We'll be free from all temptations
Where the roses never fade.

Loved ones gone to be with Jesus,
In their robes of white arrayed,
Now are waiting for my coming
Where the roses never fade.

Close with Revelation 22:16-17

WHAT YOU MUST DO:

1. Admit your need (I am a sinner and on the way to hell.)
2. Turn from sin (repentance).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life. (Receive Him as your Lord and Saviour.)

WHAT TO PRAY: Lord, I know that I am a sinner and need forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sin. I am willing to turn from my. I now invite Jesus Christ to come into my heart and life as my personal Saviour. I am willing, by God's grace to follow and obey Christ as Lord in my life.