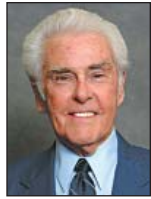


# God's promise of a new home

In his commentary on Revelation, Edward A. McDowell, former professor of New Testament interpretation at Southeastern Baptist Theological



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Seminary, rightly declares that our text is from a “strange book, and to many, a closed book” (p. 1). McDowell maintains that if we take the trouble to learn the historical setting at the time that the apostle John wrote to the churches of Asia Minor, the message of the book can become more relevant to our own generation.

What was the occasion for the writing of the book? “Why were God’s people allowed to suffer? How long would their blood be unavenged? Was God upon his throne exercising control over history? Did God care for his people?” John, led by the Holy Spirit, wrote a message “of encouragement and hope and ultimate victory for those who were loyal to Christ” (p. 7).

Because of being written in the symbols of the apocalyptic literature familiar to the recipients of the letter, various authors have published strange interpretations of the book to defend their own theological and doctrinal perspectives on it. We will be examining only a brief section of the letter, but it details the end of history and the coming of a new heaven and new earth – the time of the fullness of God’s rule and reign.

**Our new home will include us in the family of God (Rev. 21:1-3).** Since Revelation depicts the picture of the climax of history, chapter 20 reports the opening of the books that contain the records of all the dead who will stand before the Judge at the Great White Throne. The redeemed from all ages are written in the book of life but those who were not recorded there were cast into the “lake of fire.”

Our text for this lesson introduces us to the promise of a “new heaven and new earth” in which all of the elements of the old earth and heaven

will pass away. An interesting comment is that “the sea was no more.” Some interpretations have related the sea to the uncontrolled chaos that storms at sea can cause. It has also been identified with the Aegean Sea, which separated John from his friends in Asia because the Isle of Patmos upon which he was exiled was in the Aegean Sea.

As Isaiah predicted, “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth, the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy” (Isaiah 65:18). More will be said about the New Jerusalem in 21:9-27, but John declares that because of God’s creativity, “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

If in our own anticipation of God’s future for us we can claim the promise of a new family relationship with our Father in heaven, we can endure with greater endurance the tensions of our contemporary life. This was John’s intention for his friends in Asia.

**Our new home will be perfect (Rev. 21:4-5).** We all recognize that we have no such perfect home now since we have all of the stresses, illnesses and deaths that complicate our life. In our new home, however, “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21:4).

Since the promised life will be a spiritual life, it can be hard for most of us to visualize what that life will be like. But McDowell’s guidance speaks clearly to our hopes and dreams. “They comforted and inspired the persecuted and brokenhearted of John’s day; they have comforted and inspired millions who since their day have known the pangs of heartbreak and sorrow. They have a meaning for every saint who knows or will know the cruel ways of suffering and the dark days of death” (p. 208).

God’s promise is that these blessings are given freely. “To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the

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spring of the water of life.”

“This thirst for God is opposed to the unbelief and vice which quench it, just as the victorious life is contrasted with the craven spirit which shrinks from the hardships and demands of faith” (James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine, The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, p. 480).

**Our new home is based on our relationship with Christ (Rev. 21:6-8).** In this section, the Almighty God speaks directly to John through the Holy Spirit. He first of all affirms his eternal existence and then he reaffirms the family relationship when he declares, “I will be his God and he will be my son.”

But then God identifies the eternal price to be paid by those who reject him now and in the future. “These unpleasant words of the Seer, . . . appearing in the midst of glowing words about the life to come, should serve to remind us that there is a definite relationship between the life to come and the life that now is” (McDowell, p. 210).

This does not mean that our works save us because our new life in the new home is the gift of life from the grace of the Christ to whom we commit our lives in faith. However, our works do tell the world something of what our faith is intended to show about our commitment. Salvation is God’s gift completely since we cannot earn it, but salvation is to be demonstrated in life even in the troubled times in which John’s recipients were living.

We celebrate our future life when we sing, “There is a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar, for the Father waits over the way, to prepare us a dwelling place there.” This is God’s promise to us today.

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