

Episode 266

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We're continuing our series in the end times today. And today is another episode of celebration. A couple episodes ago, we talked about the second coming of Christ, where finally the event we've all been waiting for in terms of end times events. And then also another episode on the millennial kingdom, the thousand year reign of Christ, where we'll live under the perfect king, the perfect government, the perfect world, so to speak.

Shea Houdmann

Today, Jeff, the managing editor of BibleRef.com, and Kevin, the editor-in-chief of Got Questions Ministries, are joining me today to cover the last two chapters of Revelation, kind of the last of the last things, but also the beginning of what continues forever. That's the new heavens and the new earth. And there's so many interesting, fascinating things in these two chapters. There's streets of gold, there's pearly gates, there's a tree of life, there's a river, there's no more seas. What does that mean? But we don't want to get lost in the forest and missing the trees, so to speak. Or did I just say that backwards? Doesn't matter. But the point is, this is where we will spend eternity. For those who have trusted in Christ as Savior, we will spend eternity on the new heavens and the new earth.

Shea Houdmann

So reading this chapter, these two chapters, really corrects some of our thinking. The whole idea of us floating in the clouds playing harps is nowhere to be found. To think that we're just spiritual beings hovering in wherever is like, no, there is a new earth, a new physical planet where we will inhabit physical bodies for eternity. So lots of correctives in here. But again, the focus of these chapters is this is the most glorious place we could possibly imagine. This is where Christ has been spending this time. I go to prepare a place for you. This is the place he's been preparing. So Kevin, tell us everything there is to know about the new heavens and the new earth.

Kevin Stone

Well, how much time do we have? We could spend a lot of time talking about the glories of the new heaven and new earth. We do know that the current heavens, the current earth, will pass away. Jesus said so in Mark 13, verse 31, heaven and earth will pass away. In contrast, his words will never pass away. But then we, in the book of Revelation, Jesus sitting on the throne, he says, I'm making everything new. And part of what is being made new is

everything. It's the new heavens and the new earth that are mentioned several times in scripture, including Isaiah 65, 2 Peter 3, and things like this.

Kevin Stone

I like going back to Genesis, though, and taking a look at what we had originally, what we lost, and how God is going to be restoring it. So in those first two chapters of Genesis, we have a very orderly account of how God created everything that is in those six days. Then he rested on the seventh day. And then he had a plan for his creation. And he gives his plan to the people that he had made, Adam and Eve, who were created in his own image. And he gives them four tasks. He says, first of all, you need to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth. So there was multiplication. Then he says to them that they need to subdue the earth, have dominion over it, and then to work and keep the garden and to obey his commands.

Kevin Stone

All of these things are given to Adam and Eve, and they are living in a veritable paradise, Eden, this garden that had been prepared by God for them. It was the perfect environment. They had these tasks to fulfill, and then they messed up. They failed, seems like almost right away. We don't know how long they were in Eden, but they fail at two of those tasks. They do not have dominion over creation because they let the serpent in, and they listened to the serpent who was offering an alternative to God's word.

Kevin Stone

So the serpent starts whispering these lies. He gives them a falsehood. And instead of taking dominion over the serpent, they are allowing the serpent to be affecting them negatively. And then they disobey God. They partake of the tree that God had said, that one is off limits. That one belongs to me. You leave that one alone. All the rest are yours. So they disobey God.

Kevin Stone

And then the other two tasks that they were given become a struggle. As God is meeting out the curses in Genesis chapter three, we see that Eve is going to be having trouble now with the multiplying task because her childbearing is going to be painful. She's also going to be at odds with her husband. Battle of the sexes begins. And then Adam is going to have trouble with the cultivating task because now he's got to deal with thorns and thistles. Never had those spring up before, but here they are. And so death enters the world along with sin. Adam and Eve are banished from the garden of Eden and separated from God. Things look pretty bleak, but this shows the goodness of God.

Kevin Stone

This shows the character of God, that he does not leave them without hope in Genesis chapter three, because we see that he comes to them and he finds

them, even though they were trying to hide from him. He clothes them with animal skins. So there's a hint of sacrifice. And then he bars their access to the tree of life, which was actually a mercy. They are not going to live forever in their sinful condition.

Kevin Stone

And then he makes this promise in Genesis 3.15. He promises the seed of woman who will crush the serpent's head. In other words, there's coming someone called the seed of woman who is going to deal with the very source of sin, going to destroy that source of sin. And so this is God's plan from the very beginning, that Adam and Eve had failed in their tasks, but God has a plan to restore all that they had lost. And that promise of the seed of woman is really what drives the rest of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation. It's all about that seed of woman, how he is coming, how he fulfills God's plan, how he restores all things in the end. And it's a beautiful picture, beautiful plan that culminates in the new heavens and the new earth.

Jeff Laird

Those new heavens and new earth, it's fun to think about the idea of them being new. We talked about all these things happening in Revelation and the things that happen in the tribulation are pretty awful. We hear about mountains of fire and water being turned into poison and seas being turned to blood and giant earthquakes. And I think at one point John says something about all the mountains are gone and there was no more sea and just everything is completely obliterated. And then God comes and creates new heavens and new earth.

Jeff Laird

And what he puts on there is the really fun part of this, because we don't just live on this Playdough remolded surface that he gives us. But John talks about seeing a city coming down from heaven, which is new Jerusalem. And as we were saying, if we want to get really technical and pedantic about wording, it's the new Jerusalem where believers in Christ will spend eternity. That's the actual place that we're supposed to be spending with God for forever.

Jeff Laird

And we don't just get to be restored to what you were talking about, Kevin, in Eden, where we have direct relationship with God and ease of life and so on and so forth. But this is actually better. Eden was called very good. New Jerusalem is going to be as close to absolute perfection as a created being can experience. Now, there's a whole list in Revelation about all the things that won't be there anymore that I'm sure we'll get to. But this new Jerusalem is this completely new experience, something we've just never had, never experienced before.

Jeff Laird

And the descriptions that John gives are really interesting because you can tell that there's a part of him that's struggling to describe things that are sort of indescribable. We notice, for example, he talks about seeing certain materials that the city is made of. And he says, you know, gold that's clear like glass or jasper that's glass. Well, gold is not clear and neither is jasper. And John knows that. He's just trying to find some way to be able to describe this. And the city is also enormous. The way he describes it, if we convert to modern units, he basically says that it's 1400 miles wide and long, and then in some sense, in some way, 1400 miles tall. So this is an absolutely massive, massive place.

Jeff Laird

And in there, all of our needs are taken care of. There's not going to be death, pain, crying, et cetera, direct relationship with God, where as an engineer, I find some of that stuff interesting as people sometimes get a little bit hung up on those details. They get a little bit, a little bit too concerned with, I need to know exactly what new Jerusalem is going to look like and be like. And there's, there's all sorts of different options that that 1400 miles on a square side could be a perfect cube. Uh, for those who like the board from Star Trek, that's either a good thing or a bad thing in your mind. So it could be a perfect cube. It could be an approximation where it's just a very large city that has those dimensions. It could be a pyramid, which would be 1400 miles on the square sides. And then 1400 miles tall at the peak could be something more like a skyscraper.

Jeff Laird

I think that last one's pretty unlikely because in John's era, the only massive buildings that he was used to seeing either looked like cubes or pyramids, that there just wasn't technology to build what we would consider skyscrapers today. And I'm pretty sure that if John saw something that was that drastically different from the shape of other buildings and cities, that he probably would have said something about how it looked.

Jeff Laird

So lots of stuff that we read in scripture. That's interesting. Lots of stuff we read that we, we sometimes read into. If you really want to get speculative, some people have noted that the New Jerusalem landing on earth, he says he sees it coming down from heaven. So there's some people who suggest that this could be a city that's sort of in orbit, a satellite around new earth. It's possible that this is partly or mostly underground so that it doesn't unbalance the planet. There's all sorts of different ways to look at it, but it's going to be huge. It's going to be massive. If you, if you do the math on it, if it's 1400 miles

as a cube, that's 2.7 billion cubic miles, that's room for quite a few people. Even if it's a pyramid, it would be a third of that size. So when people wonder, you know, how are we going to have room for all the people in heaven? Well, it doesn't really matter probably how many people are coming out of the end times and from the old and new testaments, there's going to be enough space in there.

Jeff Laird

So the technical stuff, the physical stuff is interesting, but all of it is basically so speculative that there's really no, no hard answers. And fortunately, none of those answers really mean much of anything. It's going to be good. And as good as it gets, no matter what it looks like.

Kevin Stone

Yes, exactly. And thinking of those dimensions and how, how vast the city is going to be putting that together with Jesus' parable of the wedding feast, where the King says, I want my wedding banquet hall to be filled. So go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come in. I, I want everybody to be there. This is, this is the heart of God. And it's a huge, huge place. And God has huge, huge grace.

Jeff Laird

Yeah. When you read revelation talking about every tribe, nation, people, and tongue, you know, the dimensions, we just gave 14, a 1400 mile cube, 2.7 billion square miles. I mean, we talk about population densities around here. If I told you that there were 10 people per square mile, you'd say that's pretty, that's pretty open. You know, that's a fair amount of space for people, you know, and that would mean that you could have 27 billion or 2.7 billion people in here with huge amounts of room. So even if the new Jerusalem is filled with 30, 40, 50, 80 billion souls, then there's still plenty of space for everybody.

Jeff Laird

I think some of that stuff kind of misses the point. Again, I'm not so sure that we're, I'm not so much worried about knowing exactly the specific foundation dimensions. I don't think there's building inspectors in the new heavens and the new earth. I don't think anybody's worried about easements or exactly where the boundaries lie. You know, it's big, it's nice. That's kind of, you know, that's kind of the main point, but everything that we see in there just speaks about God's amazing abilities. Everything we read in there, the presence of a river of life and, you know, the tree of life and the light comes from God specifically, and there's nothing bad in there anymore. And the nations come and go and all this, all this great stuff that we hear about it. It's, I like it when people talk about reflecting Eden, but like you were saying, Kevin, Eden had its own properties and its own conditions, new heavens and new earth, new

Jerusalem is better. We're getting back all the things we lost in Eden, but then we're also taking a step even further forward. And it's helpful to remember that because that is part of God's plan for us. So when we ask about why would he allow the fall? Why would he allow this? Why would he allow that? Well, there's an end in view here that's actually better than what he started us off with. So he knew what he was doing when he got it going.

Shea Houdmann

I love that point. And don't want to deal with just misconceptions in this episode, but so many misconceptions about what heaven will be like. People describe, it's a restored Eden. It's like, yes and no, because there wasn't a ginormous city in Eden. There's nothing like that. So it's heaven on earth. So like, well, yes and no, because there's a new heavens and a new earth and it will be a physical place. There's a physical city with physical dimensions. There will actually be a earth, a planet that we are living on. How that connects with the city, we don't know.

Shea Houdmann

And Jeff, I love what you said. You can hear John struggling.

I got nothing about how to describe what I'm seeing here. I mean, he's doing his best. Obviously, no complaints. What he's describing is so beautiful. I can't imagine, I wouldn't even be able to name 12 jewels, let alone know what, which color each one was. And I love the idea that it's gold, but it's not gold. What's the point of, what's the value of gold in that sense? So just not get focused on the wrong things.

Shea Houdmann

But Kevin and I like what you just said, describing it. This is the culmination. This is the end of all things. And also the beginning of all things. It's restored to what God originally intended, but even above and beyond that, it's even better than what God originally intended. And so powerful just to think about, Kevin, let me ask you this. Why do you think we tend to get so focused on all the other end times events? Obviously this is, I don't remember which episode this is, but you've done lots of episodes on the antichrists and beasts and marks and plagues and seals and trumpets and bowls. And we get so many questions about that. And interestingly, so few questions about what's heaven going to be like? What's it really going to be on the new heaven's earth? Why is this place so wonderful? Why do you think our attention seemed to get so distracted on the other things, the end times, rather than all of the end times is actually leading us to the glories of heaven described here in Revelation 21 and 22?

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I think it's probably a combination of things. One is Bible doesn't have a whole lot of detail about the eternal state, as we call it, the new heavens and the new earth. We have a brief glimpse of it there in the end of Revelation. And I think our theology textbooks kind of reflect that proportion as well. If you pick up any theology textbook about the end times or whatever, the majority of it is going to be spent on all of the bad stuff that happens. The tribulation time, the coming of the antichrist, the fall of Babylon and all the rest.

Kevin Stone

Speaking of, the devil has his city, Babylon, which is destroyed in God's judgment. God has his city, the new Jerusalem, which lasts forever and ever. And what a contrast there.

Kevin Stone

But yeah, I think we're not taught a whole lot about the eternal state and how this glorious city, the new Jerusalem. So, we end up focused on all the really lurid stuff that's in Revelation, all of the really attention-grabbing plagues and disasters and all of that. There's a certain sensational draw there, admittedly.

Kevin Stone

But I think, yeah, our focus should probably be more of what good things God has planned for us. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. And I think that passage from the Psalms will definitely be fulfilled there in the new Jerusalem.

Kevin Stone

Yes, Eden had four rivers that are mentioned there in Genesis. But in Revelation, we've got the river of the water of life that is flowing from the throne in the heart of the new Jerusalem. We have the tree of life in Eden, but it looks like we have a forest of trees of life. In Revelation, it's like they're on both sides of the river. The tree of life is growing. And so, yeah, it's like Eden, but better. Everything is perfect. And I love the continuity that we have in Scripture and going from this world to the restored earth, the remade earth. We still have the planet. We still have God's presence. And we still have our physical bodies. They've been resurrected. They've been glorified. God made us human, and we're going to continue to be human through all eternity. And that's not going to change.

Kevin Stone

What will change is this corruptible must put on incorruption. And the bodies that are designed to be living in this temporary world will be changed so that we will be fitted for life in eternity in a physical world. I'll just throw this in here too. One of the best descriptions that I've ever read about the eternal state is actually found in a work of fiction, C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia series. The last one is called The Last Battle. And in that book, there are

some descriptions of heaven, as it were, that are just very thought-provoking and I think beautiful in their depiction. So I would recommend C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*.

Jeff Laird

I think maybe one of the reasons that we focus so much on what you would call like the lurid details is because those are things that we can sort of wrap our minds around. So if you tell me that there's going to be a catastrophe on earth, I'm familiar with earth. So there's something in my mind that can imagine what it would be like if trees were burned or if people died from a plague or if there was a war or all these other things that can happen. I can even picture in my mind two people standing in Jerusalem and preaching and dying and coming back to life and things like that. I can wrap my mind around those.

Jeff Laird

Maybe part of the problem that we have is just that even we were saying John seems to be struggling to describe exactly what this is like.

So in our current non-glorified state, probably very difficult for us to fully wrap our minds around precisely what the experience is going to be on the other side of all of this. And that's another reason why people have so many questions like, what are we going to be doing in eternity? Is there work? Are there jobs? Is it just a worship service? Are we just sort of standing around?

Jeff Laird

And again, I think God probably doesn't give us a lot of details on those because some of those are just going to be beyond our capacity to really understand right here and right now. So when I read some of these things, I think of the things I don't know and I can understand. I try to remind myself of that, that probably part of the problem is he's describing things that I have no chance of understanding right now. I'm just getting a little bit of a preview.

Jeff Laird

I think also people have a tendency to feel like when it's the early parts of the book of Revelation, so to speak, the tribulation and things like that, there's some sense in which you can do something, you can prepare, you can change in some form or some sense. But there's sort of this instinctive understanding that once you get to the point of New Jerusalem, that absolutely none of this stuff is optional or up to anybody's control.

It's just going to be what it's going to be and makes it a little easier for people to not have as many questions about it.

Shea Houdmann

Obviously, we love questions and we're not in any sense, nor is my question focused on, we shouldn't be asking about the other end time stuff. We did a whole series on this, so obviously we're interested in it as well. But the eternal state, what Revelation chapters 21 and 22 describe so powerfully and how much of it is literal versus how much is just John's best effort at describing the amazing things that he's seeing, we don't know. But to say heaven is the most glorious place imaginable, it'll be the perfect residence for us in our glorified bodies to experience what God intended when He created us to have the perfect, uninhibited relationship with the Father through Jesus in the most glorious place imaginable, nothing to complain about.

Shea Houdmann

I think, Jeff, you mentioned earlier that the no-mores. Kevin has some thoughts on that as well. No more tears, no more sadness, no more death. Those things just can't even imagine a place like that because that's all we've ever known. Yes, that sounds wonderful, but ultimately, I don't get it because I've never experienced that before. I want that. I want to be there. But the full understanding and experience of it, we'll have to wait until we're actually there until we arrive.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I have a list here of the no-mores that are mentioned in Revelation 21 and 22, and there are seven of them. No more sea, there's a lot of questions about what that actually means. I don't think it means that there's no more water, that there's no more aquatic life. God created all of that, and I think that's going to remain. But no more sea, somehow there's going to be maybe no divisions among the continents, something like that, no divisions among mankind in this eternal state, in this redeemed state. No more death, though. This is pretty plain. No more death. It's going to be a time of life. No more mourning, no more weeping, no more pain, no more curse, and no more night because the Lamb is providing a perpetual day for us.

Kevin Stone

And then, several times in Revelation, God says, I will be dwelling with them. They will be my people, my possession, and I'll dwell with them. I will tabernacle with them. And this is going to be a restored fellowship, and this is what really makes heaven heaven, or this is what makes the new Jerusalem so wonderful. God will be there, and we will be in his presence forever.

Kevin Stone

My daughter just recently moved to Florida, and so let's say that I get on a plane to make a trip to visit her. Well, I can't get a direct flight, so they route me through Chicago. I have to stay there for an hour, and then they take me

on to my destination in Florida to see my daughter. If people ask me about the trip, I'm going to say, I'm going to Florida to see my daughter. And some stickler might say, well, what about, you didn't mention Chicago. I say, I'm not going to talk about Chicago because that's just a layover. That is a temporary stop on my way to where I really want to go. And I think as believers, our perspective needs to be, we need to try for this at least, to have the eternal destination in mind, have our ultimate home in mind.

Kevin Stone

And people might say, well, what about all the trials and the difficulties, the pain that you are surrounded with right now? And I say, well, this world is just a layover. It's not going to last. This is only temporary. It's not the permanent home. I am on my way to the new Jerusalem. That's my destination. That's my focus, and that's what keeps me going. That's what gives me joy in this world. I'm not going to get all hung up on the layover. I'm going to keep my eyes on that city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Abraham, that's what kept him going through his sojourning in Canaan. And that's what keeps us as believers going, I think, through the sojourning here in this world.

Jeff Laird

The idea that we're using these no mores just to reemphasize the idea, I don't remember exactly when it was. I'm trying to think off the top of my head, but I think at some point in time in one of our podcasts, we were discussing theological things. I brought up the idea that a lot of what we learn about God and his nature actually comes in negative statements. He is not this. He is not that. He is not this. And I think that goes along with those no mores in the New Jerusalem. There are things that we can understand, and it's sort of easier for God to explain to us what it's going to be like by saying, here's a thing you do understand. That's not going to be there. Here's a thing that you do understand. That will not be there. Instead of trying to positively explain things that are sort of inexpressible, we get hints of it by saying things like, there's no more death, no more pain, no more tears, no more mourning. As you start to think of, okay, what would that be like when all those things come away to see what that would be like?

Jeff Laird

There's also things about that that are challenging. We do get questions from people about things like, is there going to be food in heaven? Is there going to be recreation in eternity? Are we going to still know each other the way that we knew each other? Marriage is one thing that people ask about. That's one that we're given a pretty specific answer, that marriage as we understand it

isn't going to exist. That seems to imply that there probably isn't going to be procreation in heaven as far as we know, as far as we can tell.

Jeff Laird

Sometimes people hear those no mores and those nots and think, but I like those things, or I want those things, and I need those things. Kevin, just like you were saying that when you're taking a layover to go somewhere, the layover is not the point. Where you're going is what you really want. I think the hard thing for us to realize is that whatever God is going to provide us with in the new Jerusalem is going to be the best possible thing that we could experience. Right now, it's hard for me to imagine being happy in a world that doesn't have A, B, or C. This thing that I like or this experience that I'm enjoying. It's okay for me to say that. I could say in honesty, I cannot imagine, let's say, a heaven without my pet. I can't imagine a heaven without my pet. That's different from me saying my pet absolutely has to be exactly like my pet is right now in heaven, or I can't imagine not having Mountain Dew. I can't imagine that, but that's different from me saying that when I've been glorified, when I've been perfected in that sense that I couldn't possibly understand. John talks about how one day he's going to appear and we will see him and we will be like he is. We will see him as he is and we will be like him.

Jeff Laird

I think part of what that means is that when we have that perspective, then we will be able to understand. Then we will know what's good and what's not, and whatever it is that we have will be perfect. When it says there's no more mourning, no more tears, that means that God's not going to put us in a circumstance where we're going to sit in eternity and go, oh man, I miss this or I miss that. If it's really, truly, eternally necessary for us to be happy, it'll be there. More likely, we'll have a perspective that tells us that what we now have is better.

Jeff Laird

Again, those questions are good. It's good for people to think about them, but ultimately we can always drive to that point that we don't really know some of those answers. We just know when God promises that it's going to be without anything negative, that that's exactly what he means.

Shea Houdmann

This world is not our home. Looking at 1 Corinthians where Paul was struggling to describe, here's what the glorified resurrection body will be like and he's just like, this is the best I can do. Just imagine we'll have a eternally glorified body perfectly designed for the perfect place He's calling us to in heaven. This current skin and bones is a rental so to speak where we, this is

not our permanent body. This is not our permanent home. Revelation chapters 21 and 22, we can't do it justice. The three of us just like assimilated John, we're trying to describe how wonderful, how amazing, how glorious it will be. We read Revelations chapters 21 and 22 to get the picture because the inspired word of God will always do a better job than us. But this is where our hope lies. This is where our eternal destination for those who have trusted in Christ as Savior. This is both a restored paradise but also even better. So many different things we could point to but read Revelation chapters 21 and 22. The new heavens and new earth should be what we are longing for even now not experiencing it, something that we are grateful for knowing that what our salvation ultimately results in. Glorified bodies and the most glorious place imaginable. Worshiping our glorious Savior.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast on what is the new heavens and new earth. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.