

Mouw, Richard J.. *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. 131 pp. \$14.00.

### **Introduction and Summary**

Richard Mouw's book, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, explores this question, "What will heaven be like?" Simply by following the vivid descriptions in Isaiah 60, Mouw unfolds a vision of heaven from this mysteriously glorious chapter. He takes in turn, word pictures from Isaiah to direct his chapters, and give a basic framework to his writing. In all these chapters, Mouw gives meaning to otherwise enigmatic phrases, and in the process deftly helps the reader have a clearer understanding of heaven.

Mouw's explanation and interpretation of these images fill most of the pages of his book. He focuses on, for example, the ships of Tarshish (v.9), the procession of kings streaming through the holy city (v. 11), the milk of many nations (v.16), and the luminescent glow of the city (vv. 1, 3). As Mouw addressed these celestial depictions in detail many personal thoughts formed envisioning the New Heaven and New Earth. As Mouw wrote, comprehension grew and desire swelled for the glorious city of God. The following are simply thoughts that proceeded from the biblical stimuli covered by Mouw.

### **Analysis**

In the first chapter, "What are the Ships of Tarshish doing Here?" Mouw makes a case for the heavenly city as being central to the believer's conception of heaven (17, 19). Citing apparent confusion and misperceptions of the world to come, he begins his development of the

heavenly city by explaining why the payload of gentile ships is being unloaded in the streets of the New Jerusalem.

It is an amazing thought that the wealth of the Phoenicians is being delivered to the people of God. Is this right? Is this good? What are contents being deposited? Should the cargo of these ships be destroyed? Should the supplies be procured and appropriated for use in the New Heavens and New Earth? What are the ships of Tarshish doing in the New Jerusalem? This is the problem Mouw probes.

Adding relevance to these questions are others. What will become of art, technology, science, industry, literature, music, athletics, and theater in heaven? Are they destroyed and forgotten? Are they so tainted with evil that they must be eradicated from God's holy abode? Or are they stored up in museums as things and events of a bygone era, illicit for the holy city, but worthy of remembrance and instruction? Or are the inventions of mankind and the creation of his hands somehow valuable for the new world? Called to be stewards of God's world, what will be done with all that God has entrusted to humanity?

Mouw shows how Isaiah 60, with its reference to the ships of Tarshish, begins to answer these questions. He writes, "We have grounds for looking for some patterns of continuity between our present lives as people immersed in cultural contexts and the life to come," thus affirming that the world as it exists today will not be totally annihilated in the age to come (19). Rather, Mouw taking his cue from Isaiah, "pictures the Holy City as a center of commerce, a place that receives the vessels, goods, and currency of commercial activity" (20). Still citing Isaiah, he lists animals, precious metals, spices, lumber, and vegetables as items brought to the store houses of God's holy city (20). In short, it seems that the material goods of

this world will be carried into the next world, and so it is that the ships of Tarshish will be carrying these goods.

This simplistic explanation however is complicated by another account of the Phoenician merchant vessels in Isaiah 2. Here, instead of submissively bringing goods to the holy city, they are described as being burned. What does this mean? Does this contradict the explanation laid down thus far? Mouw would not think so, and he adequately draws the tension between these two accounts—Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 60—so that in the end a healthy balance is established to affirm the discontinuity between ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow.’

Moving next to the spectacle of the kings going through the holy city (v.11), Mouw continues to explain the scene in Isaiah 60. By critiquing various perspectives on this verse, Mouw argues for the judgment of all events in history and the vindication of the righteous and the judgment of the righteous. Instead of seeing these officials as “‘saved’ political rulers” (47), Mouw sees them as military leaders and sponsors of the arts and sciences from all nations (50). For this was the Ancient Near Eastern understanding of the king. Consider David as prime example military leadership, and Solomon a worthy representative for increasing the arts. Mouw asserts that “the kings of the earth will bring ‘the wealth of the nations’ into the Holy City” (48). Thus when God brings judgment on all the wicked rulers down through the ages, each will have to restore to the Holy City that which they wrongly acquired at the expense of others (56-57).

As he explained this “political reckoning” (56), I could not help but think of Marcy Sacks, my favorite college professor. She deeply loved the concept of justice. Yet, she failed to recognize Christ as the only one just and the true justifier. This chapter would greatly aid this Jewish woman to see the reality of God’s justice. It would help her see the big picture of God’s

plan for meting out justice. In other words, the sense of vindication for injustice present in the world today will one day be reconciled when the kings come marching into the New Jerusalem.

Moving from ships, to kings, to the light of the Celestial City, Mouw offers a helpful perspective on the world to come; one that makes the engaged readers take notice of how he might live differently today. For ultimately, *When the Kings Come Marching In* is a book about culture—God-ordained, manmade, temporary and eternal culture. Mouw deftly crafts an argument for the place of culture in this age and the next, finally ascribing to heaven a culture derived from this world that is greater, purer, and higher than anything seen thus far. Yet, he argues that the creation that man stewards will also find itself in the New Heaven and New Earth, and thus add color to the glory of God eternally resplendent.

### **Conclusion**

Mouw's book is full of such engaging material. It is not hard to imagine why, he has chosen to write on a chapter that bears explanation and is filled with imagery that is hardly discussed in everyday conversation, though the longings of the human heart surely touch on the continuity and discontinuity between the things known in this life and what might still be cognizant in the next. Mouw's book is an excellent read. Much like George Eldon Ladd's *Gospel of the Kingdom* in its Biblically saturated, yet devotionally written style, Mouw's little book conjures up images of heaven from the Scriptures and not personal fancies, and in the process wonderfully encourages the believer to think on heavenly realities, and in the process nourish and sanctify your soul.