

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE END

New Heaven and New Earth

Revelation 21

Mark Vroegop

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." 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, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 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— on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 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. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 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 (Rev. 21).

Over twenty-five years ago, our family left for a long road trip with our annual summer vacation. Our typical summer vacation involves camping in northern lower Michigan, but my wife was seven months pregnant. So, we opted for a quaint cabin in Copper Harbor, Michigan, at Gitchee Gumee Bible Camp. (Yes, that's the name!)

The trip from Holland to Copper Harbor was about fourteen hours, and our twins were three years old. This was before iPhones, iPads, and drop-down video players. We built up the trip, and we tried to plan for this torturous journey. It didn't go well. And the main reason was that one of our twins kept saying, "I want to go on our trip." He kept saying it with great levels of discontentment and frustration. We desperately tried to convince him that we were on our trip. At McDonalds we said, "Hey bud, we're on our trip." Nope. He still said it. When we crossed the Mackinaw Bridge, "Look, we're on our trip." Nope. It only made him more frustrated. There were tears. We just couldn't figure it out, and it made the fourteen hours seem like FOREVER.

By hour thirteen, we gave up. I think we may have just turned the music up to drown out his complaining and hope he'd fall asleep. (Please, don't judge me!) After this grueling and exhausting trip, we finally arrived in Copper Harbor. Before we checked into our cabin, I decided to drive down a side road to get a glimpse of Lake Superior. As we approached a boat ramp, the vast expanse of the lake was in front of us. And from the back seat we heard, "Look, it's my trip!" Water! That's what he meant.

In his little brain, the trip meant water. When he thought of vacation, that's what he had in mind. And that perspective shaped everything about our journey.

Let me give you a word to consider: heaven.

What comes to mind when you think of heaven? Is your first instinct to think about what won't be there, like sin, death, and sorrow? Does your heart quickly go to emotions like peace, joy, and contentment? Do you think about heaven like a special place where you feel at rest and complete?

You may not realize it, but your view of heaven and eternal life is powerful. It is deeply motivating. What you think about heaven affects how you live every single day. One of the reasons we gather on the first day of the week is because we believe that Jesus is coming again. His resurrection was the first, and we are waiting for ours.

We're coming to the end of our study of Revelation, and today we are looking at Revelation 21 which provides one of the most glorious explanations of heaven in the Bible. Throughout our journey, we've read a lot about judgment and the dark activities of the devil. But today we behold a glorious, triumphant, hopeful, and encouraging vision.

If you are a Christian, you should read this chapter and say, **"Look, it's my future!"**

Let's take a look at this text and see how our new world and new home are described.

New World (vv. 1-8)

Chapter 21 begins by highlighting the word “new.” However, what John sees is a world that is not entirely different from the present one. Revelation 21 could have described another planet or another dimension as if the entire created world as we know it is abandoned. But that’s not God’s plan.

Instead, Revelation 21 points to a new world that is a renewed version of the present one. Or maybe a better way to say it would be that it’s the restoration of the world back to God’s original intention. This new world is similar. There is a heaven and an earth. The categories and reference points are the same. But it’s fundamentally different. It’s new.

This may be similar to how we should think about the glorification of Jesus after the resurrection. It’s still him with wounds and scars, but he’s fundamentally different. This breaks down a bit because the difference between Jesus and everything in the world is the presence of sin. Jesus knew none of that. However, there’s something similar and yet radically different about this new world.

I could imagine that the new heaven and the new earth are familiar but better. It’s a place where we’ll be human in ways that are natural, but now they’ll be complete. I mention this because one of the mistakes we can make with Revelation 21 is making it too otherworldly. The vision here is to help us not just imagine what our future home will be like, but also to connect to it in ways that we can understand and feel right now.

Verse 1 tells us that John saw “a new heaven and new earth.” We’ll learn more about this new world in a moment. But the first description we’re given is what this new world is not: “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more” (v. 1). Remember that the sea was often a symbol of evil, chaos, and the realm of satanic opposition. That whole system is gone.

In verse 2 we see the main image of the text: “the holy city, new Jerusalem.” We’re going to dig deeper into this metaphor and its meaning in the second half of this sermon. For now, just take note that this new city is “coming down out of heaven from God” (v. 2). The source and direction matter. This new city is coming from God, which means there’s divine purpose. And it’s coming toward the earth.

In some respects, it would make more sense for the earth to go up to heaven. The broken world being renewed should be taken out of its realm and into a new one. But that’s not the case here. The movement is to bring heaven down, not the earth up. Redemption and renewal are the themes, not escape or removal. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

The city is also described in glorious terms: “as a bride adorned for her husband.” The city has the same glory as that of a bride walking down the aisle. The entrance of this city is stunning and glorious, a movement that points to an even deeper union that is coming.

In verse 3 there’s a divine declaration:

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. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).

From the seat of divine authority comes the assurance of God’s presence and the removal of the painful effects of sin. The promise of God’s presence is the deep longing of every Christian human being—to have God be with us, to dwell with him, to be his people, and for him to be our God. These are not four distinct experiences; they describe a single reality that relates to belonging or home.

Think of the closest human relationships like marriage, family, friendship, and church. They have elements of these four characteristics. Think of a moment when you were with someone, felt safe, formed an identity, and felt complete. That is such a deep longing in the human soul designed ultimately for God. This new world will create a depth of wholeness and completeness in us that we presently crave.

What’s more, this new world will be marked by the absence of tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain. It’s an incredible statement, isn’t it? Imagine a world where the fundamental orientation of the world has been eternally changed. It’s not just that these things are removed, they are “no more.” Do you remember being a child without knowledge of how broken the world is? Do you remember the joyful optimism, running around a playground, joyful “glees” over butterflies, and unbridled excitement. Think of a world with only “Welcome!” and no goodbyes. Think of a world filled with “Wow!” and no “Uh oh.” A world full of only goodness with no limits. There is no end because you are living in the end, the completion of God’s good plans.

C.S. Lewis helps us with how he describes Narnia in the last battle. Here’s what he wrote:

It is as hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia as it would be to tell you how the fruits of that country taste. Perhaps you will get some idea of it if you think like this. You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there may have been a looking-glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of that sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking glass. And the sea in the mirror, or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time there were somehow different—deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know.

The difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia was like that. The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can’t describe it any better than that: if ever you get there you will know what I mean.

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed, and then he cried:

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in!"¹

Then we heard another announcement (v. 5) that reinforces what we read before. The new heaven and the new earth aren't just happening. They are being declared: "Behold, I am making all things new." These are the words that fit with this new world. They are trustworthy and true words, meant to help motivate real Christians to carry on with perseverance and trust.

Another announcement follows that also includes a promise and a warning (vv. 6-8). God announces that his redemptive work is completed and finished based upon his authority as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. The promise is offered to the thirsty and the one who conquers (v. 6-7). They will receive the water of life without payment, and "I will be his God and he will be my son."

But there's also a warning. Remember that this book was written to motivate God's people to be faithful to the end. Therefore, we receive these words:

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

This new world is glorious because of what's not there: sin, death, sorrow, and pain. It's a renewed world that fulfills our deepest longings and cravings. It's a complete world where God dwells with his people. It's a pure world with those whose faith is genuine. Whose lives weren't perfect, but who were not characterized by the kind of actions that do not fit with the kingdom of God.

The Revelation of Jesus is meant to woo you in righteousness and warn you away for sin. Looking at the future helps you know how to live now—further up, further in.

New Home (vv. 9 -27)

The remaining verses narrow our focus from the new heaven and the new earth to the new city—the home of God's people.

This section begins with an angelic messenger who was involved in the judgment of another city: Babylon. This angel invites John to see the bride, the wife of the Lamb (v. 9). When John is carried to a high mountain, he sees the bride—it's the holy city of Jerusalem (v. 10). This is where God's people live.

It's interesting that it's not a garden. The first location of God's presence was in the garden of Eden. But now we see the presence of God in a beautiful city, described as having the glory of God with a radiance like a beautiful jewel (v. 11). Wicked Babylon is replaced with beautiful Jerusalem. Everything that a city represents is now redeemed. What was bad and evil about Babylon has been replaced with the epitome

¹ <https://gavinortlund.com/2008/07/14/favorite-narnia-moments-5-home-at-last/>

of goodness and beauty. God redeems and renews what sin has marred. What was so wrong about the system of Babylon is now made right in the presence of God.

The city is described with a historical perspective of God's work. The twelve gates are guarded by angels and named for each of the tribes of Israel (v. 12-13). And the foundation of the city is marked by the names of the twelve apostles (v. 14). Here is the union of Israel and the church—Old and New Testament.

New Jerusalem is measured (vv. 15-16). It's a perfect cube. In the Old Testament, the other well-known cube was the Holy of Holies in the temple and tabernacle. That was where God met with his people. And now the whole city is the Holy of Holies. What's more, the city shines with stunning brilliance (vv. 18-21). John is grasping at the description of jewels to capture the beauty of what he's seeing. It's impossible.

Beyond the history and the description, John doesn't see a temple (v. 22). Cities always included places for worship. But in this city, there is no need to gather in a location to pray. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are there! They are the temple!

What's more, there is no need for the sun or moon to shine because the light for living comes right from the Lamb himself (v. 23). Think of that. Every day the people walk around the city and everything they see is because of the light from the Lamb. Their practical experience in New Jerusalem is directly connected to the Lamb's provision of light.

The city bustles with activity as the nations enter the city and as kings bring their glory into it (v. 24). It's a global city with resplendent beauty. Because there is no sin in the world, the gates are never shut (v. 25). It's never dark. There's nothing to fear.

While the nations stream into the city (v. 26), nothing unclean or anyone who is detestable or a liar will ever enter or compromise it. Why? Because they are not around anymore. Who lives in this beautiful place that is filled with God's glory? "... those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (v. 27).

This glorious new home is reserved for those who have turned to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, whose sins are covered, and who belong to Jesus. They live in perfect fellowship with him. This isn't the end of the story. It's just the beginning of eternity.

Implications

What a glorious chapter! It's filled with such encouragement and hope, isn't it? Revelation 21 is the end for which God is now pursuing redemption. So, what are a few implications of this passage?

Reflect: This text provides an opportunity for us to reflect about what we believe. Or maybe a better way to say this is: Who do we believe in? Heaven is not the destination of everyone just because they are human. There are two eternal destinations: heaven and hell. Both are real. Both are eternal.

Revelation 21 shows us the glorious environment of living in God's presence. But this is only available to those whose sins are forgiven because of their relationship with Jesus.

Connect: We can connect what we see in the future with where we live right now. The new heaven and the new earth are the future for Christians. It's where our deepest longings will be finally satisfied. But getting a taste of that now points to what is to come. Whenever we experience something that is deeply fulfilling (a meaningful conversation, a great meal with friends, spontaneous laughter, a beautiful sunrise or sunset, a sense of peace), these point us to another realm. Don't miss the opportunity to connect your life to the one yet to come.

Persevere: Why is this chapter in the Bible? It's here to give Christians the ultimate target for life. It shows us that while our present life is hard, filled with sorrow, and affected by sin, that it's only a matter of time until Jesus returns to make all things new. Faithful Christian living means keeping my eye on the horizon for what is coming.

Revelation 21 is full of assurance, hope, and completeness. It makes our soul slow down, take a breath, and rest.

It's a chapter that should joyfully stun us. As we read it, we say: "Look! It's my future."

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