

## PREFACE

Now after our hard slog through the seven-year Tribulation, the improved but decidedly not sinless Millennium, and the unpleasant but satisfying final judgment of the Great White Throne, we now come to the last two chapters of the Revelation, and certainly the most pleasant, joyful portion of the Last Things narrative.

**Read Revelation 21:1-5.**

## SOMETHING NEW FROM NOTHING

Verses 1-5 serve as a preamble of sorts, a summary of what is to follow, about the new heaven and new earth. One of the best arguments to refute the position (e.g., [Seiss](#)) that this “new” earth will be just the old one cleaned up, is found in Isaiah 65.

**Read Isaiah 65:17-19.**

The Hebrew word translated “create” is *bara* (lit., *br*), which always refers to divine creativity, and means something from nothing—*not* something from something else. As we saw in our previous session, everything that was before—*everything*—has now passed away. There is nothing from which to build something else. And that is precisely what God in the person of Christ Jesus does.

**Sidebar:** There are two predominate themes throughout the Eschaton: Israel and Christ. It is not that the church is not there, but it, along with its individual members, is not the lead, but *supporting* character. The final days are all about reestablishing the relationship between God and His chosen people—first through punishment and cleansing, then through exaltation.

The second theme is Christ. What are the important mile-markers, the dramatic high points in the narrative? They all are centered on Christ Jesus:

- It begins with the Rapture, Christ coming for His church.
- The Tribulation comes to an abrupt end with the return of Christ to earth.
- He then rules for one thousand years.
- Immediately after that, Christ Jesus judges the wicked.

And now we see Him as the One creating the new heaven and new earth, and the creation (or orchestrating the arrival) of the new Jerusalem.

*(v1)...and there is no longer any sea.*

This phrase, with its enigmatic placement, can be interpreted two different ways—neither of which cancel out the other. First, it can be taken literally: In the new world order there will be no need for the oceans. We may go about our daily lives today without giving this much thought, but life on earth now is decidedly water-based. Nearly three-fourths of this current earth is covered by water, vast seas that generate and influence the earth’s weather. Present human bodies are more water than anything else: our flesh is sixty-five percent water, and our blood is ninety percent water. Without water we die. Without water this earth would die. If we take this phrase literally—and there is no reason not to—the new earth will have a totally different hydrological and ecological system than the old (MacArthur).

Second, and I believe more important, is the metaphorical interpretation. Often gleaned only from the subtext of certain passages of Scripture is the idea of the sea representing evil, danger, and separation. We have seen it here in Revelation as the metaphorical birthplace of the beast, Antichrist (13:1ff), and one of the places from which the dead come (20:13).

But the wicked are like the tossing sea,  
For it cannot be quiet,  
And its waters toss up refuse and mud. (Isaiah 57:20)

It’s not that the sea is portrayed as evil, but to the ancient Hebrews especially it represented the perils of the unknown, something in the depths of which one might be forever lost.

Thus with both of these we see that the new earth will be created with very different ecological laws, and that on it there will be no evil, no sin. That is, we cannot describe it further, because in both respects we are talking about something utterly foreign to our experience. We have no concept of living without water or weather, and we have no concept of living without sin—either in ourselves or in those around us.

v2

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Opinions vary, of course, but there is much evidence to substantiate the position (held by Walvoord and MacArthur), that the “new Jerusalem” has not just been created along with the new earth and heavens, but has previously been in heaven, and now descends “out of heaven from God.” [Please turn to Hebrews 11.](#)

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Abraham went out in obedience, looking for something that did not exist on earth at the time. Verse 10 tells us that “he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” In the next chapter he writes with greater specificity, in vv22-23,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect

MacArthur goes so far as to say that “All of heaven is currently contained in the new Jerusalem,” but then a few paragraphs later states that “the new Jerusalem is not heaven, but heaven’s capital.” Giving Pastor MacArthur the benefit of the doubt, I think what he means by that first statement is that “all the *inhabitants* of heaven” are in the new Jerusalem. It does seem quite feasible that this “heavenly Jerusalem” descending from heaven to the new earth has indeed been the dwelling place for all those believers who have preceded us in death.

If this is true, it sheds fresh light on something Jesus told His disciples in John 14:

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”  
(John 14:2-3)

Heaven’s Jerusalem is the Father’s “house,” and in it are “many dwelling places” for those who are His. Every believer goes to heaven with a rental agreement in hand; passing through the Pearly Gates we hand it to the doorman and say, “Jesus made my reservation for me.”

**Sidebar:** For Americans, the KJV “mansions” is misleading. To us a mansion is a huge, expensive house for *one* family with many bedrooms and bathrooms. The British understand it to mean an apartment house, with many “dwelling places” within for different families—which is how the Greek *monai* is used here. Jesus is not preparing a huge manor house for every believer, but an “apartment” in the city of Jerusalem.

Later in this chapter we will have a more detailed description of this new Jerusalem.

### vv3-5

If Jesus’ pronouncement in vv3-4 does not stir your soul, then I recommend you check for your pulse. Here is without a doubt one of the grandest, most exhilarating statements any believer will ever hear.

## Read Revelation 21:3-4.

Literally, v3 reads, “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them”—the same word used as a noun and a verb. Here again is dual imagery: The tabernacle was the forerunner of the temple—the place where God was worshiped; but the word also means a tent, a dwelling place—here, the place where God lives. This is one of the most profound statements I can imagine: The Lord God of the universe, the first member of the Triunity of the Godhead, when this world and this universe reaches its final, eternal state, will deign to live with His people—“God Himself will be among them.” To me, that is breathtaking. What was true for thirty-three years in Immanuel, will now be true for eternity.

As if that were not enough, this new earth and new Jerusalem will be absent five miserable experiences that have been a part of humanity since Eve plucked the first fruit from the tree: no more tears, no more death, no mourning, no crying, no pain. All those things with which we have become accustomed will “have passed away.” Gone; never to return. Jesus declares, “I am making all things new.”

*David Guzik:* Our instinct is to romantically consider innocence as man’s perfect state, and wish Adam would have never done what he did. But we fail to realize that redeemed man is greater than innocent man; that we gain more in Jesus than we ever lost in Adam. God’s perfect state is one of redemption, not innocence.

Because John is so enthralled by all this (as I am sure any of us would be), it is necessary for Christ Jesus, sitting on the throne, to grab his attention, “Hey! John! *Write*, for these words are faithful and true.”

The next few verses, spoken by Christ, identifying Himself as He did at the beginning of the Revelation, sound as if He is stating something to happen in the future, but it is actually a recapitulation of that which has already taken place.

## Read Revelation 21:6-8.

We could easily spend an entire session in consideration of Jesus’ profound declaration, “It is done.” In lieu of that, I encourage you to do it on your own. Lean back in your prayer closet and contemplate all that Christ and His Father have done to accomplish this end—both in *your* life, and in the lives of all the redeemed.

All of these visions revealed to John are scenes from the far future—especially from the apostle’s viewpoint. We today may be closer to this future than John, but who can say that it won’t be *another* two thousand years before they are fulfilled.

One has the impression that these words from the Lord—perhaps more than any other uttered in the Revelation—are intended for us today. It is as if the lead character in this immense stage play suddenly turns toward the audience, breaks the imaginary fourth wall of the proscenium, and addresses the audience specifically, personally with a cautionary speech warning that for every man and woman on earth there will come in their lifetime a fork in the road.

Will he or she choose to follow Christ, to thirst for the water of life and thus accept Christ Jesus as God and to become His child, inheriting the kingdom of righteousness—or will they remain unbelieving cowards, embracing the immorality in which they were born, ending up in “the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.” dying twice—and the last, for all eternity.

### A HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

Suddenly, in v9, the scene changes, and one of the seven angels who had had one of the bowls of wrath speaks to John: “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” From v10 to the end of the chapter we are granted a detailed picture of the new Jerusalem. Note that in v2 the city was described with a simile: “made ready *as* a bride adorned for her husband.” Here in this reprise, the city is described without the simile; now the city *is* the bride, the wife of the Lamb, which I take to be a reference to its inhabitants: the redeemed.

Before we proceed into the description, let’s pause and get our bearings. Some expositors say that this scene flips back to the Millennium—that this is the Millennium temple—but we will interpret it in a sensible, literal manner, that this scene follows chronologically after the creation of the new heaven and new earth (v1). So let’s set the scene:

- the second resurrection of the wicked has occurred;
- once they were emptied of the dead, death and Hades are sent to the lake of fire;
- in a fiery flash, the earth and the heavens—that is the *first* and *second* heavens, the immediate atmosphere and the universe (space)—are destroyed (“uncreated”), leaving only the Great White Throne of Christ Jesus, surrounded by the billions of the unregenerate, suspended in nothingness (“...from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them” [20:11]);
- all are judged, and consigned to the lake of fire;
- the earth is no more, the universe is no more;
- then John is shown the *new* universe and the *new* earth (21:1).

We are not told, but we can safely assume that some time just before or during all this—before the destruction of the earth—all of the redeemed who have been co-ruling on earth during the Millennium have been transferred to heaven, specifically heaven’s Jerusalem. For as heaven’s Jerusalem comes “down out of heaven from God” (v2, v10) it is called in v9 “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

We need to remind ourselves that throughout all these dramatic universal changes, the Lord God remains constant, unchanging—*He is not new*—which is what the psalmist expresses in Psalm 102.

### **Read Psalm 102:25-27.**

As we look at what John passes along to us we should keep in mind that mortal man, with his feet stuck in the clay of this present earth, cannot possibly imagine, much less appreciate, what this eternal city will actually be like. It will be impressive, it will be huge, it will be utterly magnificent—but beyond that, we cannot possibly know what it will be like to see it, much less live in it, for we have nothing with which to compare it. Can you describe “transparent gold”? Can you imagine pearls the size of city gates? a city fifteen hundred miles long and wide—and high? Can you describe what your apartment in it will look like? Let us not try too hard to imagine any of it, for surely all of our imaginings will fall short.

I believe some interpreters, even with righteous intentions, nonetheless read the description of this new Jerusalem through fleshly eyes. For example, Morris writes, concerning the jewel-encrusted city, “John’s use of material riches to describe the city is his way of bringing out the very great value of what God has for His people.” No, Mr. Morris, that’s not it at all. It has nothing to do with us. Alan F. Johnson gets it right: “The symbolism is not meant to give the impression of wealth and luxury, but to point to the glory and holiness of God.” Everything about this city—*everything*—is meant to illustrate the majesty and holiness and righteousness *of God*. It is *His presence in it* with us that expresses the love of God for His people—*that* is what demonstrates His regard for us. But let’s look at the details given to us, beginning in v11.

- There is a wall around the city with twelve gates, each a single pearl (v21), three on a side, each bearing the name of a tribe of Israel (vv12-13). Each gate has an angelic gatekeeper (v12). The wall is seventy-two yards (216 feet) high (or thick?) (v17) and made of jasper stone (v18)—not our modern jasper, which is opaque, but almost certainly a reference to a perfectly clear, flawless diamond. John writes that the city entire appears as brilliant as if it were one huge diamond (v11).

- The foundation of this wall consists, apparently, of twelve layers of stone, each layer bearing the name of one of Jesus' twelve apostles (v14). These stones are adorned with all sorts of precious jewels—one type of jewel per layer (vv19-20).
- The construction of the city is often imagined to be a cube, but could also be a form of a pyramid (with God enthroned at the top), or a more irregular shape. We are told that the city is approximately fifteen hundred miles square, as well as fifteen hundred miles high (v16). Verse 18 seems to suggest that the building material of the city is something like gold, yet clear like glass—a translucent material with a tinge of gold perhaps (v18).
- The street(s?) in this city are made of the same translucent, golden material as its walls (v21).
- It is revealed to John that the city does not include a temple—a dramatic omission especially for someone living in the first century. *Every* city at that time—except Jerusalem, of course—would have *multiple* temples to at least several gods. To have a city without at least one temple, as in Jerusalem, would be like saying there is a city today without a gas station. The word *naon* refers not to the temple building, but to the innermost shrine—that is, the sanctuary, the holy of holies. Thus the better version of this verse is found in *Young's Literal Translation*: “And a sanctuary I did not see in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, is its sanctuary, and the Lamb” (v22). And here again, we could spend an entire session discussing this remarkable aspect of the new Jerusalem. Put succinctly, however, *Why* have a shrine when you already have the literal, “bodily” God in residence—not just visiting, but permanently in residence? They *are* the temple!
- Similarly, What need have we for the sun or moon when we have the manifest glory of God and the Lamb in permanent residence, sharing their brilliant illumination (v23).

We now come, at the end of this chapter, to a challenging passage, one so troublesome that it has caused many expositors and commentators to claim this is describing not the eternal state, but the Millennium.

### **Read Revelation 21:24-27.**

It is tempting to conclude that this passage represents a mystery that will not be explained until the day this new city is in place, and all believers are in their glorified state. But let's see if we can't do better than that—admitting up front that there may remain at least certain aspects or details of this situation that may not be answered until that day.

I'll be honest and admit that none of the explanations I have read are without problems; not one is completely satisfying as a sensible interpretation.

V24: The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

First, the KJVs add a phrase that is absent in all the rest. In the NKJV this verse begins, “And the nations *of those who are saved* shall walk in its light...” (emphasis added). Everyone I have read—even older commentaries—quickly dismiss the inclusion of this phrase (M. R. Vincent [1886] has just one, succinct word: “Omit.”) This bears all the marks of a marginal “gloss” has become an interpolation—which is when a subsequent copyist of a manuscript errantly inserts into the *actual* text a marginal note left behind by an earlier copyist.

On its face, these four verses seem to paint a picture of “nations” and kings of those nations (the word is *ethne*, better translated peoples, or better yet, Gentiles) dwelling outside the walls of the new Jerusalem, going in and out through its gates, being stopped and denied entrance if not redeemed (by the angelic gatekeepers?), as v27 implies: “and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Permit me to recommend a suitable and, I hope, satisfying approach to this passage.

Look back at vv7-8. These two verses, as well, seem out of place at first glance, but I suggested that they represented Christ momentarily stepping out of the narrative to speak directly to its readers. I contend that something similar—but not identical—is going on here. First some bullet points:

- The eternal state on the new earth will not include unbelievers or those not glorified—that is, still flesh.
- The different ecology of the new earth and the absence of water and weather will preclude human beings surviving outside the city.
- The eternal state on the new earth will not include sin.
- The population of the eternal state will not grow, since there is no evidence whatsoever that it will include sexual congress or babies ([Matthew 22:30](#)).
- There is every reason to believe that all those who begin in the new Jerusalem will *want* to remain there, close to the light of the Lord.

All these being true, we need to find a different explanation for this passage. Happily one presents itself if we use vv7-8 as a template of sorts—if we disengage it from the narrative timeline.



We have already seen elsewhere in Scripture—for example, Hebrews, where to the saints this city was a very real, tangible, yet future reality. [Please turn to Hebrews 11 again and follow along with me as I read some excerpts.](#)

for [\[Abraham\]](#) was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:13–16a)

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; (Hebrews 11:35)

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind... (Hebrews 12:18)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22–24)

Note the time-shifting that takes place in some of these passages; the saints' hope was—and is today—so real, so tangible, it is as if it has already occurred: “But you *have come* to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...” (12:22, emphasis added).

I contend that the passage at the end of Revelation 21 employs a similar time-shifting in a *backward* direction. To wit, let me offer a paraphrase of vv24-27:

*The nations and kings of this present earth will walk by the light of this future city on a new earth, freely offering whatever glory they possess gladly to their Lord God and the Lamb. This is a city that will never shut its gates, for night has been banished, and besides, there is no threat from outside. All glory and honor in the nations that has ever existed down through the history of man will be gladly placed at the feet of our resident Lord and the Lamb. For this city—this glorious city—will contain nothing defiled, no detestable abomination (as before on the old earth), no deceit. Everything in the city and all its citizens will be utterly pure, for only those whose names are found in the Lamb's book of life will be permitted inside. So make sure that you are one of them!*

*Alan F. Johnson:* No idolatrous person may enter. Only those whose names are in “the Lamb’s book of life” and thus belong to Him through redemption. This should not be taken as implying that [on the new earth] there will still be unsaved roaming around outside the [New Jerusalem] who may now and then enter it by repenting. Instead, the exhortation warns present readers that the only way to participate in the future city is to turn one’s loyalties to the Lamb now.