

The New Heaven and New Earth

📖 Revelation 21:1-8

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Having seen the thousand years' kingdom when Christ rules and Satan is bound and the things which happen after the thousand years, including the release of Satan, the final battle of Gog and Magog and the dissolution of the present heavens and earth and the great white throne judgment upon all unbelievers, we now come to Rev 21 and the new heaven and new earth, our eternal destiny. This is the eternal dimension of the kingdom. That there are two dimensions is clear from a passage like 1 Cor 15:21-25. So let's look at this passage. This is the central chapter on resurrection and Paul is arguing for the resurrection, against certain believers at Corinth who had later rejected the resurrection. In verse 21 Paul argues from Scriptural reason, "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order:" so this is an order of resurrection. It's not concerned with all resurrections; it's simply proving resurrection to the believers at Corinth who were now rejecting resurrection. So here is the order. "Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming," which is the pre-trib Rapture, "then comes the end," and this is the part we are interested in, "then comes the end, when He [Christ] hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." So Christ must rule on earth, we find out in Rev 19 that it will be for a thousand years, then Satan must be released and finally defeated, then death and Hades will be defeated and cast in the lake of fire, then Christ will hand over the kingdom to the God and Father, in the sense that He will not be the sole ruler, but now God the Father and the Son will co-reign for all eternity in a new creation.

That's the subject of Revelation 21 which we now turn to. In verse 1, John says, **Then I saw a new heaven and new earth.** While this describes the sequence in John's vision, it really is the sequence. Rev 19 is a sequence leading into Revelation 20. So the thousand years first, then the release and defeat of Satan, then the destruction of the present heaven and earth, then the great white throne judgment in no place, because there's no creation present, and then the new heaven and new earth will be created. It becomes obvious that that there are two phases of the kingdom; a phase of temporal duration, a thousand years, and a phase is of eternal duration, called the new heaven and new earth.

You'll see in Rev 20:11 that the new heaven and new earth were already mentioned briefly when John saw "a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." So the millennial earth and heaven will be destroyed and **a new heaven and new earth** will be created. I'll talk more about whether this is a renovation or a new creation, but before we do, there are only three passages that discuss the **new heaven and new earth**; Isa 65:17ff, 2 Pet 3:10-13 and Rev 21-22. In Isaiah 65:17 we find the first mention of the new heavens and new earth. In the passage Isaiah seems to telescope both the millennium and the new heaven and earth into one picture. Telescoping is a feature common in both OT and NT prophecy (e.g. Isa 61:1-2; 1 Cor 15:23-24). It means that some events in the near term are mentioned and others in the far term, without any indication of how much time may elapse in between. We even saw this in 1 Cor 15:23-24 where Paul went from Christ's resurrection all the way to the Church's resurrection and then all the way to the end of the millennium. That's telescoping. Lots is skipped over, but the main ideas he wants to get across about the reality of resurrection are there. The same thing happens in Isa 65:17ff. It sounds like the new heaven and new earth include the millennium, but later we come to see more clearly that the two were telescoped together and are really different. For example, the millennial kingdom will have seas. Ps 72:8 says the Messiah will rule from "sea to sea." But in Rev 21:1 the main feature of the new earth is that there will be "no sea." So, the millennium cannot be the new heaven and new earth as John saw it. Therefore, what Isaiah saw was true, but the millennium and new heaven and new earth were telescoped into one picture. What John saw was a refinement of that picture where it is clear that Christ rules for a thousand years and then He and the Father co-reign in a new heaven and new earth. The other passage that contributes to our understanding of the new heaven and new earth is 2 Pet 3:10-13. This passage says "the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." While some say this aspect of the day of the Lord refers to the Tribulation, it better refers to the end of the day of the Lord after the millennium. Peter describes the present heavens and earth being destroyed by fire. Verse 12 says, "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!" The "day of God" is the rule of God in the new heaven and new earth, not the millennium. The next verse describes this clearly, "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." Righteousness will not dwell in the millennial kingdom. There will still be sin and death and suffering in the kingdom. But in the new heaven and new earth there will not be any sin, death and suffering. It will be only righteousness. So Peter says that the present heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire after the millennial kingdom. So the contribution of Isaiah 65 is that there will be a new heaven and new earth, and the contribution of 2 Peter 3 is that the millennial heavens and earth will be destroyed by fire and then a new heavens and new earth will be created where righteousness dwells.

Having said that, the new heaven and new earth will be an entirely new creation, not a renovation. This is mainly because 2 Peter 3:10 and 12 describe the incineration of the present heavens and earth and Isa 65:17 says God

will create a new heaven and new earth. A destruction followed by a creation. And the reason God will destroy this present heavens and earth and create an entirely new one, is because this creation has become so corrupted by sin that it will have to be destroyed and a new one created. And the only things that will move over from this creation to that creation will be things that in this creation were holy. So, for example, Christ in His resurrection body, us in our resurrection body, our rewards, all things that are perfectly righteous and holy will be transferred over to the new creation. But with respect to the material and physical universe, it will be totally destroyed and in Isaiah 65 God says, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth....Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create." 1

Now you'll notice from Rev 21:1 that we are not destined for heaven, but for a new heaven and a new earth, and specifically the earth. Almost everything that follows is a depiction of a new earth. Man was made from the earth, for the dust is *Adamah* and refers to the dust of the earth, and he is destined for the earth. This is one reason for the bodily, physical resurrection. We will need a physical resurrection body to fit us for habitation in a new physical earth. So you should never think of material as intrinsically evil and that we are somehow trying to escape these bodies. That is eastern mysticism, and it is a very different story. There you are destined to simply be absorbed into the unconscious universe. In Christianity you are destined to be resurrected to inhabit a new earth. You should also never say that where Christians will ultimately go is heaven. We will only go to heaven for about seven years after the rapture. That's why the word Jesus uses in John 14:2 where He says, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places," is a word that refers to a temporary dwelling. You'll go there after the rapture but you'll return with Christ to the earth at the Second Coming and remain on earth during the thousand years reigning with Christ and then we'll be taken to the new heaven and new earth. So our destiny is not heaven, our destiny is the new earth. George Eldon Ladd said something important, though I don't agree with all his theology, I agree with him here. "Throughout the entire Bible, the ultimate destiny of God's people is an earthly destiny. In typical dualistic Greek thought, the universe was divided into two realms: the earthly or transitory, and the eternal spiritual world. Salvation consisted of the flight of the soul from the sphere of the transitory and ephemeral to the realm of eternal reality. However, biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence."¹ And anyone who reads the Bible will come to this conclusion, but anyone who just listens to whatever the preacher says probably will not! All most Christians do is talk about heaven and they don't even know what it is. All they are talking about is a concept of Greek philosophy. They may never have even read Socrates, Aristotle or Plato, but they have certainly gotten that idea from them. But it's a wrong idea, ultimately believing man's destiny is a new earth.

Also in verse 1, John explains why what he was seeing was **a new heaven and new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth passed away.** Now it's interesting that he refers to the present heaven and earth as the **first heaven and the first earth.** In other words, there was no creation prior to the one that now is. There was no creation before Genesis 1:1-2:4, which is a complete book giving the account of the first creation as proven by what is known as the *toledot* formula in Genesis 2:4, which says, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth

when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven." No previous creation. And yet, many in the last 200 years have insisted that there was a prior creation in Gen 1:1 or even before 1:1 that fell into chaos and judgment as described in Gen 1:2 and was renovated in Gen 1:3ff. But there simply is no description of a prior creation anywhere in the Bible. The only description of a creation is Genesis 1. It's the beginning of **the first heaven and first earth**, which John says will at this future time **pass away**. And Peter tells us it will be destroyed by fire. In its place there will be **a new heaven and new earth**.

We know little about the **new heaven**, except verse 23 indicates there will be no **sun** or **moon**, because it will not need them, they would have no purpose, and so they are not present, because their function of illumination will be provided by **the glory of God** and **the Lamb**. And by implication there will be no stars either. For they too will have no purpose, and so are not present. Their purpose is for telling times and seasons and for navigation at night. But verse 25 says **there will be no night there**. So the **new heaven** will be very different from the present heaven.

As for the **new earth**, it too will be radically different from the **first earth**. This was the most striking thing to John, as he pointed out immediately, in 21:1 **there is no longer any sea**. That is a radical difference when you observe that 75% of the present **earth** is covered by seas. The absence of **any sea** will have a dramatic effect on weather, the atmosphere, climate, travel, and other aspects of our life.

In 21:2 John says **And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband**. Because the **new Jerusalem** is not said to be created at this point, but only that John saw it **coming down out of heaven from God**, some have assumed that the **new Jerusalem** was already in existence. This view usually claims that when Jesus said in John 14:2, "I go to prepare a place for you," that He was referring to going to prepare the new Jerusalem after His ascension. They further argue that this city will be a satellite hovering over the earth during the millennium and that Church saints will traverse back and forth between this city and the earth for the thousand years. However, this is never stated in the Bible, it is only an implication some have drawn. There are several reasons this implication seems incorrect. First, because when Jesus said "I go to prepare a place for you," He was referring to the preparation of His death and resurrection. That is what prepared a place for us. He was not speaking of making rooms or decorating the Father's house. Second, because there is no more implication that the new Jerusalem was not created at this time than there is implication in 21:1 that the new heaven and new earth was not created at this time. John doesn't say either was created at this time. That does not mean they weren't. Every indication, in fact, is that they were. So my position is that the new heaven and new earth and new Jerusalem will all be created at this time, after the destruction of the first heaven, first earth and millennial Jerusalem.

The city is described as **made ready as a bride adorned for her husband**. This really does describe the city and not the people in the city. Some say, "This is the Church!" because the Church is the bride of Christ. But in the Revelation the story is between two cities and which city will prevail. The city of Babylon is called a harlot and

the new Jerusalem is called **a bride**. It is evident that the new Jerusalem will prevail. In contrast to a harlot it is described **as a bride**, not that it is **a bride**. Its adornment is being described as the adornment of **a bride for her husband**. In other words, the city is beautiful. Before John describes its beauty in vv 10ff, he hears a voice that draws his attention.

Verse 3, **And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."** This is the consummation of what Stanley Toussaint considered to be the major theme of the Bible, the seamless thread that holds the whole Bible together; God's desire to **dwell** with men. This dwelling began in the garden with Adam and Eve. It was broken by sin, but the lamb of sacrifice made it possible for God to have contact with sinful man. The sacrificial system of Israel in the tabernacle and temple allowed God to dwell among them in the Most Holy Place above the ark of the covenant. This system remained until God sent His Own Lamb who took away the sin of the world. Now He dwells with believers by means of His Spirit. But we have never had the fullness of God dwelling with us. Even in the thousand-year kingdom with Christ reigning there is still something lacking in the dwelling of God with man. But that will all be remedied in the new heaven and new earth. The **voice from the throne** is probably the voice of the Lamb. He says, **"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."** This is the chief characteristic of the new heaven and new earth. We will be with God Himself and God will be with us. This is what we were created for and this is what we will enjoy forever. There will not be anything like it. It will be the most awesome reality because He is the most awesome person. Imagine being with the greatest person on earth and magnify that to infinity. No human relationship can transcend a personal relationship with the divine.

In 21:4 we see six additional characteristics of the new heaven and new earth. Not only will it have no sea, but **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.** Just as the **first heaven and first earth** passed away, so the **first things** accompanying that creation also passed away. The first thing He **will** do, which is an awesome thing, is to **wipe away every tear from** our eyes. This is a removal of the mental pain that is associated with our pain and suffering and loss in this world. All of that will be cleansed. You won't think about the losses, the pain, the suffering. You won't think about the loss of a child or a spouse, you won't think about a mother who died unsaved or a friend. That is the meaning of wiping **away every tear**. It is different from **no crying** which is mentioned later in the verse. But before we get to that, the second thing stated is **there will no longer be any death**. The reference is to any kind of **death**, both physical and spiritual. The cause of spiritual **death** is sin, so in the new heaven and new earth there will be no sin. This means it will be impossible to sin. People think that for man to be man he must have free will. And they think that if man does not have free will then man is a robot. Here man will not be able to sin and he will be freer than he has ever been. They misunderstand what it is to be free and they misunderstand what it is to be man. They misunderstand what it is

to be a free man. To be a free man is to be a man who never sins, because sin enslaves. The freedom to sin is no freedom at all. In any case, since there will be no sin there will be no spiritual death, and because there is no spiritual death there can be no physical death. This means there will not be the opportunity to fall as Adam fell. That event can never be repeated in the new heaven and new earth. It is a permanent state wherein righteousness dwells. The third thing states is **there will no longer be any mourning**. This is intense pain caused by sin being in the world. Also no **crying**, no tears in the eternal state due to events that happen in the eternal state. And no **pain**. All these things are listed because they are effects of the fall of Adam, but they will all be undone in the new heaven and new earth.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 21:1.