

# Revelation 21 – A New Heavens, a New Earth, and a New Jerusalem

## A. All Things Made New

### 1. (1) The new heaven and the new earth.

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.*

a. Now I saw: We can say that Revelation 21 begins a new section of the Book of Revelation:

- Jesus, the Lord of the Churches (**Revelation 1:1-3:22**)
- Jesus, the Lion over the nations (**Revelation 4:1-20:15**).
- Jesus, the Lamb among believers (**Revelation 21:1-22:21**).

The new perspective of this last section is glorious. “From the smoke and pain and heat it is a relief to pass into the clear, clean atmosphere of the eternal morning where the breath of heaven is sweet and the vast city of God sparkles like a diamond in the radiance of his presence.”

b. A new heaven and a new earth: The idea of a new earth, with a new atmosphere and sky is a familiar theme in the Scriptures. Many of the prophets, both Old and New Testaments, spoke of this new heaven and new earth.

i. For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create a Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. (**Isaiah 65:17-18**)

ii. Of old, You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes all of them will grow old like a garment, like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end. (**Psalms 102:25-27**)

iii. Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat... Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (**2 Peter 3:12-13**)

iv. It's worth remembering that the new heaven referred to doesn't mean the heaven where God is enthroned. The Bible uses the word heaven in three senses. The first heaven is the earth's atmosphere, the “blue sky.” The second heaven is outer space, the “night sky.” The third heaven is the place where God lives in glory. When the Scriptures speak of a new heaven, they mean a new “blue sky” and a new “night sky,” not a new heaven where God dwells.

c. New heaven...new earth: The ancient Greek word translated new here (kaine) means “new in character, ‘fresh’.” It doesn't mean “recent” or “new in time.” This isn't just the next heaven and the next earth; this is the better heaven and better earth replacing the old (the first earth had passed away).

i. “create out of nothing,” instead of re-fashioning existing material.

ii. Some take this “newness” as only a spiritual and moral change. But there seems to be a genuine physical transformation in mind: there was no more sea.

d. A new heaven and a new earth: Is this new heaven and new earth the Millennial earth shown in Revelation 20, or is it something beyond? It definitely seems to be past the Millennial earth. This is what we think of as “heaven” and “eternity.”

i. “In this chapter 21 we see that the history of time is finished; the history of eternity is about to begin.” (Barnhouse)

ii. “The eternal state is clearly indicated in the absence of sea, for frequent mention of bodies of water occur in millennial passages (cf. Psalm 72:8; Isaiah 11:9, 11; Ezekiel 47:10, 15, 17, 18, 20; 48:28; Zechariah 9:10; 14:8). The evidence of Revelation 21:1 is so specific that most commentators do not question that the eternal state is in view.” (Walvoord)

e. No more sea: To the Jewish mind, the sea was a place of separation and evil. Already in the Book of Revelation it is shown to be the source of the Satanic beast (Revelation 13:1) and the place of the dead (Revelation 20:13).

i. In other passages of Scripture, the sea is associated with the heathen (Isaiah 57:20) and in a more general sense, with the opponents of the Lord that must be conquered (Psalm 89:9).

## **2. (2-4) The New Jerusalem descends from heaven.**

***Then I, John, 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 heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”***

a. The holy city, New Jerusalem: This is the Jerusalem of hope (Hebrews 12:22), the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26), the place of our real citizenship (Philippians 3:20).

i. The terms holy and new distinguish the city. Because it is holy and new, it is different from any earthly city. The name Jerusalem gives it continuity with earth, especially with the place of our redemption.

ii. It is significant that this glorious dwelling place of God and His people is described as the holy city. Cities are places with many people, and people interacting with each other. This isn’t isolation, but a perfect community of the people of God.

iii. The Christian concept of heaven as a city – a place of life, activity, interest, and people – is very different from Hindu conception of a blank Nirvana. “The consummation of the Christian hope is supremely social. It is no ‘flight of the alone to the Alone’ but life in the redeemed community of heaven.” (Hunter)

iv. Man has never known a community unmarred by sin. Adam and Eve only knew a limited community, and community in a larger context only came long after the Fall. Here, in the New Jerusalem, we have something totally unique: a sinless, pure, community of righteousness, a holy city.

v. Problems arise when believers expect this kind of community now, or fail to realize that it only comes down out of heaven. This city is not and never can be the achievement of man, but only a gift from God.

b. Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband: John used the most striking, beautiful image he could think of. The most beautiful thing a man will ever see is his bride coming down the aisle, ready to meet him. John said that this is how beautiful the New Jerusalem will be.

c. The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them: Moses' tabernacle represented the dwelling place of God on earth. That was past the representation of the dwelling place of God; this tabernacle of God is the reality of His presence.

i. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people: This succinctly states essence of God's desire and man's purpose. Simply, God's desire is to live in close fellowship with man, and man's purpose is to be a people unto God.

ii. This is the greatest glory of heaven, and the ultimate restoration of what was lost in the Fall. "I do not think the glory of Eden lay in its grassy walks, or in the boughs bending with luscious fruit-but its glory lay in this, that the 'Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day.' Here was Adam's highest privilege, that he had companionship with the Most High." (Spurgeon)

d. The former things have passed away: The New Jerusalem is distinguished by what it does not have – no tears, no sorrow, no death or pain. Later it will be shown that the New Jerusalem has no temple, no sacrifice, no sun, no moon, no darkness, no sin, and no abomination.

i. "Man comes into the world with a cry; and goes out of it with a groan, and all between is more or less intoned with helpless wailing... But the Halleluias of the renewed world will drown out the voice of woe forever." (Seiss)

e. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes: "'Every tear,' for they be many; – tears of bereaved affection, such as Mary, and Martha, and the widow of Nain wept; – tears of sympathy and mercy, such as Jeremiah and Jesus wept over the sins and the calamities of Jerusalem; – tears of persecuted innocence, tears of contrition and penitence for faults and crimes against the goodness and majesty of heaven; – tears of disappointment and neglect; – tears of yearning for what cannot now be ours; – these, and whatever others ever course the cheeks of mortals, shall then be dried forever." (Seiss)

i. But the idea of tears in heaven should never be used as a tool of guilt-manipulation on this earth. "There is no just ground for imagining from this text that the saints will shed tears in heaven concerning the failures of their former life on earth. The emphasis here is on the comfort of God, not on the remorse of the saints." (Walvoord)

### **3. (5) All things new.**

***Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."***

a. He who sat on the throne said: This is an authoritative announcement, coming from the throne of God itself. This is one of the few times in Revelation where we clearly see God speaking directly from His throne.

b. Behold, I make all things new: This statement is in the present tense, "I am making everything new." This is the consummation of God's work of renewal and redemption, having begun here and now in our present time.

i. Paul saw this transformation at work on this side of eternity: Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 4:16, 5:17)

c. All things new: This is a brief glance at the thinking behind God's eternal plan – to allow sin and its destruction in order to do a greater work of making all things new. At this point in His plan of the ages, the plan is complete. All things are new.

i. 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.

ii. When God finally completes this work of making all things new, they will stay new. "Presumably this means not only that everything will be made new, but also that everything will stay then new. The entropy law will be 'repealed.' Nothing will wear out or decay, and no one will age or atrophy anymore." (H. Morris)

d. Write, for these words are true and faithful: John was probably so astounded by these words that he forgot to write – and must be told to do so.

#### **4. (6-8) The invitation and a warning.**

***And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."***

a. It is done! God's eternal purpose in Jesus is now accomplished. Ephesians 1:10 has been fulfilled: that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him. At this point, all things have been resolved or summed up in Jesus – it is done!

b. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts: Drinking and thirst are common pictures of God's supply and man's spiritual need. Drinking is an action, but an action of receiving – like faith, it is doing something, but it is not a merit-earning work in itself.

i. "What does a thirsty man do to get rid of his thirst? He drinks. Perhaps there is no better representation of faith in all the Word of God than that. To drink is to receive-to take in the refreshing draught-and that is all. A man's face may be unwashed, but yet he can drink; he may be a very unworthy character, but yet a draught of water will remove his thirst. Drinking is such a remarkably easy thing, it is even more simple than eating." (Spurgeon)

c. He who overcomes shall inherit all things: Those who overcome (by faith in Jesus, as in 1 John 5:5) enjoy a special relationship with God (I will be his God and he shall be My son).

d. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable... have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: Those who reject Jesus and make themselves apostate are specifically prohibited from entering the New Jerusalem.

i. Cowardly: Is cowardice enough to send a person to hell? “John is not speaking of natural timidity, but of that cowardice which in the last resort chooses self and safety before Christ.” (L. Morris) John Trapp spoke of these “Cowardly recreants, white-livered milk-sops, that pull in their horns for every pile of grass that toucheth them, that are afraid of every new step.”

## **B. The nature of the New Jerusalem.**

### **1. (9-10) An angel will show John the city in greater detail.**

***Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,***

a. I will show you the bride... showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem: Passages like this make some wonder if the New Jerusalem is a literal place at all. Some suggest that it is really just an exotic symbol of the Church, the Bride of Christ.

b. I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife: This heavenly city is literal, but it is called the bride, the Lamb’s wife because it is the place where all God’s people are gathered. In this sense the New Jerusalem is certainly like the bride; but this association doesn’t diminish the reality behind the image. The city is associated with the bride to awe us with a sense of its beauty.

### **2. (11-14) The city’s brilliance, wall, gates and foundation.**

***Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.***

a. Her light was like a most precious stone: John was first impressed by the glory of this city. She shared in the glory of God, and it was expressed in the radiant light shining from her.

b. She had a great and high wall: The wall was not needed for defense, because there were no more enemies. But the great and high wall gave the city definition (this is no cosmic nirvana) and shows that some will be excluded from the city (only the righteous can enter).

c. Twelve gates... and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: The names of the tribes on the gates communicate the unity and heritage that the people of God have with Israel. God will never forget the tribes of Israel, even unto eternity.

i. Three gates on the east, three gates on the north: Some have thought the arrangement of gates looks back to the camp layout used during the Exodus (Numbers 2).

d. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb: The foundations are an eternal testimony to the apostles, and their permanent place in God’s plan. If it isn’t built on the foundation of the apostles, it’s isn’t the right place for God’s people.

i. The New Jerusalem and the church are founded upon the apostles (Ephesians 2:20).

### **3. (15-17) The dimensions of the city.**

***And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.***

a. The city is laid out as a square: The New Jerusalem's length, height and width are equal. This means that it is either a cube or a pyramid. A cube is reminiscent of the Holy Place of the tabernacle, suggesting that the entire city is the Holy Place.

b. He measured the city with the reed: The size of the New Jerusalem is enormous; twelve thousand furlongs equals 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers). This is the same distance from Maine to Florida; the square footage would approximate the size of the moon.

i. "A city of this size is too large for the imagination to take in. John is certainly conveying the idea of splendour. And, more importantly, that of room for all." (L. Morris)

ii. Henry Morris, guessing that there will have been 100 billion people in the human race through history, and that 20% of them will be saved, calculated that each person would have a "block" with about 75 acres on each face to call their own. This is highly speculative, but illustrates the point that there is plenty of room in the New Jerusalem.

c. According to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel: In this case, the cubit measure of a man is the same as an angel's measure of a cubit.

### **4. (18-21) The beauty of its structure.**

***The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.***

a. The construction of its wall was of jasper: When we read of jasper and pure gold and all kinds of precious stones, we should take these as literal representations; yet they express realities of another world. We can gain a brief glimpse of what John saw, but we can't even begin to see it in fullness until we see it with our own eyes.

i. John's use of riches in his description "is his way of bringing out the very great value of what God has for His people." (L. Morris)

b. Jasper... sapphire... chalcedony: The precise identification of these gemstones in modern terms is difficult, but the impression is of unending, staggering beauty.

i. "The symbolism is not meant to give the impression of wealth and luxury, but to point to the glory and holiness of God." (Johnson)

ii. If there is any Biblical reference point for this assortment of gemstones, it is probably the High Priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:15-21).

c. Like clear glass... like transparent glass: "The constant mention of transparency indicates that the city is designed to transmit the glory of God in the form of light without hindrance."

i. If the dimensions and descriptions seem confusing or impossible, there are two main principles to keep in mind. First, we must understand the ideas communicated in the details (glory, beauty, splendor, and so forth). Second, we must understand that this is the city whose architect and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). We should expect it to be beyond our comprehension.

## **C. The temple of the New Jerusalem.**

### **1. (22-23) God is all in the New Jerusalem.**

***But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.***

a. But I saw no temple in it: In the ancient world, it was unthinkable to have a great city without many different temples. It's like saying today, "I saw a great city but I saw no bank in it" or "I saw a great city but I saw no shopping mall in it." Nevertheless, in this city there was no temple in it.

b. For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple: Here, the temple was not removed, but expanded. Everything and every place is holy and the dwelling place of God.

i. Before Jesus the temple was a prophecy. In the Christian era God's people are His temple. In the Millennium the temple will be a memorial. Here the temple is everywhere.

ii. "The inhabitants need no place of worship or sacrifice, the object of all worship being present, and the great sacrifice Himself being there." (Alford)

c. No temple... no need of the sun or of the moon: This reminds us that heaven will be a place of pure worship. The things we use to help us worship, but often end up distracting us in worship (such as buildings, music systems, customs, and so forth) will no longer be an issue. Our focus will be totally on the Person we worship, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

i. In heaven, none of our joy, beauty, or knowledge will be based on created things, but only on the Creator. By faith, you can have it that way now. You can decide to trust in God so completely that your joy, what you consider beauty, and your foundation of knowledge are all based on Jesus, and not on anything created.

d. The Lamb is its light: Light speaks of joy, for in the Scriptures light and joy go together. Light speaks of beauty, because without light there is no beauty. Light speaks of knowledge and in heaven we will all know Him as He knows us.

### **2. (24-27) Access into the city.**

***And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.***



a. The kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it: What about these kings of the earth? Who are they? This is difficult to understand, and different commentators have different suggestions.

i. "How encouraging to note that not all were destroyed when the nations came to do battle against Jerusalem and the Lord Himself. There will also be 'kings of the earth' who will be a part of the eternal state." (Hocking)

ii. "Among the mysteries of this new heaven and earth this is set forth to us: that, besides the glorified church, there shall still be dwelling on the renewed earth nations, organized by kings, and [xxii. 2] saved by means of the influences of the heavenly city." (Alford)

b. There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles: Does this mean that such people will threaten the city? It isn't necessary to say that this is the idea, because all sinners and death have been cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). 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." (Johnson)