

Revelation Study Notes

Revelation 21 The New Heavens And Earth

What is the vision of the new heavens and earth?

Revelation 21:1-4...“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. 2And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. 4He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever. And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!”

The passing of the old creation to the new creation is the culmination of human history! This is the moment we are waiting for. Even the physical world is waiting for this. *“Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Romans 8:20-22* And it’s important to point out that the disappearing sea does not mean there will be no ocean or waves to surf in the new creation. The sea represents earthly rebellion, chaos and danger, so it means those things will pass away with the old creation. (ESV Study Bible)

The old heaven and earth must pass away for the new to come. Satan, the presence of sin and evil, death and the broken physical world will be no more! And God will create a new heaven and new earth, where He will dwell among His people forever. And as a result of His presence, there will be no more tears, death, sadness, crying or pain.

Revelation 21:5-8...“And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” 6And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. 7All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. 8“But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

The new heaven and earth is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises. The Bible Project says, “This vision is a kaleidoscope of Old Testament promises. It depicts a new Heaven and Earth (Isaiah 65:17), a restored creation that’s been healed of the pain and evil of human history. It’s also a new garden of Eden (Genesis 2) and paradise of eternal life with God. However, it’s not simply a return to the garden; it’s also a step forward into the new Jerusalem” This is what God meant when He said, “Look I am making everything new!” And “It is finished! All of the promises and longings for salvation, the garden of Eden where life is abundant, the Holy City Jerusalem where God rules and humanity flourishes, and the Temple of God where God dwells with His people, are fulfilled in the New Heaven and Earth!

God is the Beginning and End of History, “the Alpha and Omega”. God makes it clear that He is the source of life, and nothing happens outside of His sovereign rule. He also shows His incredible mercy and kindness, by offering “springs of living water without payment” to anyone who is thirsty. This represents the free gift of salvation that costs us nothing, but Jesus everything!

Those “who are victorious in Christ will inherit these blessings”. Anyone who is in Christ will get to enjoy the new creation with God the Father. He says, “I will be their God, and they will be my children. This shows the kind of relationship we will have with God the Father. Unfortunately, those who do not believe, will end up separated from God in Hell, “the lake of burning sulfur”.

Revelation 21:9-14... "Then one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come with me! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. 11It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone—like jasper as clear as crystal. 12The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. 13There were three gates on each side—east, north, south, and west. 14The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15The angel who talked to me held in his hand a gold measuring stick to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. 16When he measured it, he found it was a square, as wide as it was long. In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles. 17Then he measured the walls and found them to be 216 feet thick (according to the human standard used by the angel). 18The wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass. 19The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve precious stones: the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass.

The New Jerusalem comes down from Heaven to earth, which reveals that God's people will live on a new physical earth, instead of just floating around in heaven. This lines up with what the Apostle Paul said, *"We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. 3For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies."* 2Corinthians 5:2-3

Scholars are divided on whether the New Jerusalem is a literal city, or a symbol for human flourishing under the rule and reign of God in His fully established Kingdom. (ESV Study Bible) James Rochford says, *"If the New Jerusalem is literal, the measurements of a 1,500-mile cube imply a ground floor of 1,960,000 square miles. Thus, if it had 24-foot ceilings on each floor, it would contain 300,000 stories. This means that 588 billion people could each have a full square mile of real estate."* If the New Jerusalem is symbolic for human flourishing under God's rule, the detailed vision could simply be John's best attempt to describe the beauty he saw in heaven with a limited human vocabulary!

Revelation 21:22-27... "I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. 24The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. 25Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. 26And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. 27Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Regardless, whether the New Jerusalem is literal or symbolic, John makes it clear that God's glory is on display in the presence of His people. There is no need for a temple because God and Christ are its temple, the place where people meet and worship God. His Presence fills the city. There is no need for a sun or moon, because God's glory illuminates the entire city.

"The nations will walk in the light of God's glory, and they will bring their honor and glory into the city." This is a picture of human flourishing in God's fully established Kingdom. Life is organized and fruitful under the rule and reign of God. This is a sharp contrast to the evil and chaos of Babylon. This why God says, *"Nothing evil will be allowed to enter"*.

What can we learn from John's Vision of New Heaven & Earth?

John's vision shows us that one day – in God's presence in the new creation – all will be well.

There will be no more spiritual war between good and evil, no more sin, no more death, no more tears, no more sadness and no more pain. Can you imagine a world without these things?

Life with God in the new creation is going to be so good, infinitely better than the best experiences you can have on earth.

So what do we do today, while we wait in this broken world?

"Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. 25But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)" Romans 8:18-25

Wait patiently and confidently by remembering what's coming when life is hard. Remember, in your most difficult moments, "what you suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to you later."

Practice the presence of God in your daily life. In Christ, you have access to God's Presence through the Holy Spirit inside of you. Paul said the Holy Spirit is the "foretaste of future glory". This means when you experience the fruit of the Holy Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, self-control, you are experiencing a preview of what Heaven will be like. How do you practice His presence in your daily life? Throughout your day acknowledge His presence, thank Him for all the good things that happen, praise Him when you see something good, ask for His help when you need it.