

Revelation 21

I. The New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1-8)

- a. This section describes the present and future glory of the Church, including the restoration of the entire created order.
- b. Although most of this section describes what is yet future for the Church, we should not interpret everything as wholly futuristic.
 - i. God is *already* dwelling with us by the Spirit, and He is *already* our God (v. 3), but God has *not yet* removed death and sorrow from creation (v. 4).
 - ii. God makes (present tense verb) all things new (v. 5). He has already started, but He is not finished! He will one day say, "It is done!" (v. 6)
 - iii. We are already sons of God (v. 7), but there is a greater fullness to come.
 - iv. David Chilton: "Yet this vision of the new heaven and earth is not to be interpreted as wholly future. As we shall see repeatedly throughout our study of this chapter, that which is to be absolutely and completely true in eternity is definitively and progressively true *now*."
 - v. Kenneth Gentry: "Orthodox Christians believe that at the end of history, we will literally enter the consummate new heavens and new earth in physical bodies renewed through the physical resurrection. John's picture of the new creation, however, represents a present reality which the consummate order eventually fulfills, perfects, and replaces."
- c. Similar language is used in Isaiah 65:17-25.
 - i. Isaiah 51:15-16
 - ii. Isaiah 65:17-25 cannot simply be a description of the eternal state.
 1. There is still death (65:20).
 2. There is still childbearing (65:23).
 - iii. The NT uses the language of new creation for spiritual realities that have already begun in the present.
 1. 2 Corinthians 5:17
 2. Galatians 6:15
- d. Romans 8:18-25 speaks of the future restoration of all creation.
 - i. 2 Peter 3:1-13 also speaks about a renewed earth.

- ii. William Hendriksen speaks of the glorious future of the created order:

“The very foundations of the earth have been subjected to the purifying fire. Every stain of sin, every scar of wrong, every trace of death, has been removed. Out of the great conflagration a new universe has been born. The word used in the original implies that it was a ‘new’ but not an ‘other’ world.¹ It is the same heaven and earth, but gloriously rejuvenated, with no weeds, thorns, or thistles, and so on. Nature comes into its own; all its potentialities, dormant so long, are now fully realized.”
- e. **Like the kingdom of God, then, the new creation is already here in seed form, but it has not yet come in its fullness.**
- f. All that said, the emphasis in this passage seems to be on the *future* consummation of all things.
- g. “...and the sea was no more” (v. 1).
 - i. Some interpret this phrase literally. They would say that the sea was burned up by the fiery judgment at the Second Coming (Revelation 20:9; 2 Peter 3:7), and there is now more space on the renewed earth for all the redeemed.
 - ii. However, in seeking to remain consistent with our interpretation of the book, it seems better to interpret this symbolically. Recall that the Beast came “out of the sea” (13:1), and that the woman who rode the Beast was “seated on many waters” (17:1), which were interpreted as the unbelieving peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages (17:15). The unrest and conflict of unbelieving nations fighting with one another, and persecuting God’s people, are no more. There is peace.
- h. The Church is described as the holy city, the new Jerusalem (v. 2).
 - i. This is not a literal city, but it refers to the people of God.
 1. Galatians 3:25-26
 2. Hebrews 12:22
 3. Philippians 3:21
 - ii. The Church is the bride (v. 2).

¹ The original has *kainos*, not *neos*.

1. Ephesians 5:25-32

- iii. William Hendriksen: "It is the ideal Church of the future foreshadowed by the ideal Church of the present."
- i. The Church is coming down and inheriting the renewed earth.
 - i. It is potentially misleading to say, "This world is not my home." Our hope is to live with God in a renewed world forever.
 - ii. Grace restores nature. Salvation is re-creation.
- j. The great covenant promise of the Bible finds its ultimate fulfillment (v. 3).
 - i. "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" (v. 3).
 - ii. Genesis 17:7; Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 36:26-28
 - iii. Matthew Henry: "The presence of God with His Church is the glory of the Church."
- k. God will comfort His people (v. 4).
 - i. A personal touch: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
 - ii. No more death.
 - iii. No more sadness or pain.
 - iv. We receive some of this comfort in this life (1 Thessalonians 4:13), but we will receive it fully in the life to come.
- l. "Behold, I am making all things new" (v. 5).
 - i. John is commanded to write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.
 - ii. He does not make all new things, but He makes all things new.
- m. There is a note of finality (v. 6).
 - i. This is the other side of Revelation 16:17.
- n. God satisfies spiritual thirst (v. 6).
 - i. Matthew Henry: "It would be inconsistent with the goodness of God, and His love to His people, to create in them holy desires, and then to deny them their proper satisfaction; and therefore they may be assured that He will give them of the fountain of the water of life freely."
- o. God gives an inheritance of eternal sonship (v. 7).

- i. We are already God's children now, but there is a greater enjoyment of this sonship to come.
 - ii. 1 John 3:2
 - iii. Romans 8:14-17 (present), 23 (future)
- p. There is a brief word about a consummate place of judgment (v. 8).
 - i. The saints will inherit the renewed earth, but the wicked will be removed.
 - ii. Matthew 5:5
 - iii. Matthew 13:41-43 (Note well: You want to be "left behind"!)

2. The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-27)

- a. It is important to keep in mind that this is not a description of a literal city. It is a description of God's people as verse 9 makes clear.
- b. God's city comes down from heaven (v. 10).
- c. God's city is radiant (v. 11).
- d. God's city is well fortified (v. 12).
- e. God's city includes the old and the new people of God (v. 12-14).
 - i. The names of the twelve tribes
 - ii. The names of the twelve apostles
- f. God's city has a stable foundation (v. 14).
 - i. Ephesians 2:20
- g. God's city is cared for and protected by God (v. 15).
 - i. Compare this with what we said about the earthly Jerusalem in Revelation 11:1-3!
- h. God's city is beautiful (v. 15-21).
 - i. Perfect symmetry
 - 1. The city is a perfect cube, the same shape as the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 6:20).
 - ii. Precious stones
 - 1. These stones are reminiscent of the stones of Aaron's breastplate (Exodus 28:15-21).
 - 2. Malachi 3:16-17
 - 3. Isaiah 54:11-12
 - 4. Isaiah 60:18

- i. God's city is without a temple (v. 22).
 - i. Recall that the earlier part of the book described the destruction of the physical temple in Jerusalem. There is no more physical temple, but the people are the temple! The whole earth has really become the temple!
- j. God's city is full of eternal light (v. 23).
- k. God's city is international (v. 24, 26).
 - i. Isaiah 60:3-12
 - ii. Haggai 2:7-9
 - iii. Matthew Henry: "Whatever is excellent and valuable in this world shall be there enjoyed in a more refined kind, and to a far greater degree."
- l. God's city is safe (v. 25).
- m. God's city is pure (v. 27). The Church invisible has become the Church visible. There are no longer any false sons or daughters in the pale of the Church.

Quote for Reflection:

Philip Schaff: "To the Lord and His kingdom belongs the whole world, with all that lives and moves in it. All is yours, says the apostle (1 Cor. 3:22). Religion is not a single, separate sphere of human life, but the divine principle by which the entire man is to be pervaded, refined, and made complete. It takes hold of him in his undivided totality, in the center of his personal being; to carry light into his understanding, holiness into his will, and heaven into his heart; and to shed thus the sacred consecration of the new birth, and the glorious liberty of the children of God, over his whole inward and outward life. No form of existence can withstand the renovating power of God's Spirit. There is no rational element that may not be sanctified; no sphere of natural life that may not be glorified. The creature, in the widest extent of the word, is earnestly waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, and sighing after the same glorious deliverance. The whole creation aims toward redemption; and Christ is the second Adam, the new universal man, not simply in a religious but also in an absolute sense. The view entertained by Roman monasticism and Protestant pietism, by which Christianity is made to consist in abstract opposition to the natural life, or in *flight from the world*, is quite contrary to the spirit and power of the Gospel, as well as false to its design. Christianity is the redemption and renovation of the world. It must make all things new." *The Principle of Protestantism*, pg. 173