

# Revelation

## Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 21

Chapter 21

Heaven on earth!

1. Read verses 1-8.

This world—including its natural wonders—gives us foretastes and glimpses of the next world. These people—including ourselves—give us foretastes and glimpses of the new people to come. This life—including its culture—gives us foretastes and glimpses of the next life.

If we take literally the earthly depictions of life on the New Earth, it allows us to make a direct connection with our current lives. When I'm eating with people here, enjoying food and friendship, it's a bridge to when I'll be eating there, enjoying food and friendship. This isn't making a leap into the dark of a shadowy after life; it's just taking a few natural steps in the light Scripture gives us.

Every joy on earth—including the joy of reunion—is inkling, a whisper of greater joy. The Grand Canyon, the Alps, the Amazon rain forests, the Serengeti Plain—these are rough sketches of the New Earth. One day we may say, as a character in one of my novels said, “The best parts of the old world were sneak previews of this one. Like little foretastes, like licking the spoon from Mama's beef stew an hour before supper.”

All our lives we've been dreaming of the New Earth. Whenever we see beauty in water, wind, flower, deer, man, woman, or child, we catch a glimpse of Heaven. Just like the Garden of Eden, the New Earth will be a place of sensory delight, breathtaking beauty, satisfying relationships, and personal joy.

God himself prepared mankind's first home on Earth. “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Genesis 2:8-9). The phrase “planted a garden” shows God's personal touch, his intimate interest in the creative details of mankind's home. In the same way that God paid attention to the details of the home he prepared for Adam and Eve in Eden, Christ is paying attention to the details as he prepares for us an eternal home in Heaven (John 14:2-3). If he prepared Eden so carefully and lavishly for mankind in the six days of creation, what has fashioned in the place he's been preparing for us in the two thousand years since he left his world?

God poured himself, his creativity, and his love into making Eden for his creatures. But at that time, that's all we were: his creatures, his image-bearers. Now that we are both his children and his bride, chosen out of the human race to live with Him forever, would we expect more or less than Eden? More, of course. And that's exactly what the New Earth will be.<sup>87</sup>

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Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 233-234.

- (a) John sees a new vision in verses 1 and 2. What does he see?
- (b) Read II Peter 3:10-13. John writes, “For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” What do you think this phrase means?

Scripture says that the fire of God’s judgment will destroy “wood, hay, or straw,” yet it will purify “gold, silver, [and] costly stones,” which will all survive the fire and be carried over into the new universe (I Corinthians 3:12-15)...

A variety of theologians take this view of temporary, not final, destruction. Wayne Grudem, in his discussion of II Peter 3:10, which speaks of “everything” in the earth being “laid bare,” suggests that Peter “may not be speaking of the earth as a planet but rather the surface things on the earth (that is, much of the ground and the things on the ground.”

Anthony Hoekema says, “If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory....Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan’s evil machinations.

John Piper argues that God did not create matter to throw it away. He writes, “When Revelation 21:1 and II Peter 3:10 say that the present earth and heavens will ‘pass away,’ it does not have to mean that they go out of existence, but may mean that there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away. We might say, ‘The caterpillar passes away, and the butterfly emerges.’ There is a real passing away, and there is a real continuity, a real connection.”<sup>88</sup>

God has promised His people a new heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). The old creation must make way for the new creation if God is to be glorified. Jesus called this even “the regeneration” of the earth (Matt. 19:28), and Peter explained it as a cleansing and renewing by fire (II Peter 3:10-13). Bible students are not agreed as to whether the old elements will be renewed or whether the old will be destroyed and a whole new creation ushered in. The fact that the Greek word translated *new* means “new in character” (Rev. 21:1, 5) many lend credence to the former explanation.<sup>89</sup>

- (c) What does John see coming down out of heaven prepared for believers?

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<sup>88</sup> Alcorn, 146.

<sup>89</sup> Wiersbe, 622.

The implication is that it already exists, a truth reinforced by Hebrews 12:22-23: “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 firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” All of heaven is currently contained in the new Jerusalem; it is separate from the present universe, which is tainted by sin. Believers who die go to the “heavenly Jerusalem,” where Jesus has gone before them to prepare a place for them (John 14:1-3). But when God creates the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem will descend into the midst of that holy new universe (21:10), and serve as the dwelling place of the redeemed for all eternity.<sup>90</sup>

- (d) What does John hear coming from the throne of God?
  
- (e) God created mankind to have fellowship with Him. According to Ephesians 2:1-3, and 12, what was the result of sin?
  
- (f) When a person places his or her trust in Jesus Christ a relationship with God develops. At that moment of trusting, that individual is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). He or she becomes a child of God (Romans 8:16). According to verse 3, what do Christians (those who have placed their trust in Jesus) have to look forward to in heaven? Are you looking forward to this with great anticipation?
  
- (g) Apparently John had a difficult time describing heaven in terms of what is there. So, he chose to tell us what will be no more. List the things that will be no more.
  
- (h) Read Romans 8:20 along with I Corinthians 7:31b. What will happen to the physical world around us one day? If that is the case, what should we focus on (Matthew 6:19-20; II Corinthians 4:18)?
  
- (i) Read Acts 3:21. According to verse 5, what is Jesus going to do one day? Can we trust this promise? If so, why (II Corinthians 1:20 and Hebrews 10:23)?

The majestic voice of the One sitting on heaven’s throne said to John, “It is done.” Those words are reminiscent of Jesus’ words on the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Jesus’ words marked the completion of the work of redemption; these words mark the end of redemptive history...

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The One who sits on the throne is qualified to declare the end of redemptive history, because He is the Alpha and the Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; cf. 1:8), the beginning and the end (cf. Isa. 44:6; 48:12). God started history, and He will end it, and all of it has unfolded according to His sovereign plan.<sup>91</sup>

- (j) According to verses 6 and 7, there are two characteristics of those who will enter the new Jerusalem one day. What are they?
  
- (k) Read John 7:37-38 and Revelation 22:17. What does it mean to thirst for God? Are you thirsty?
  
- (l) Read I John 5:4-5. What does it mean to be an overcomer? Are you an overcomer?
  
- (m) According to verse 8, who will not be allowed to enter the new Jerusalem and where will they find their place?
  
- (n) Read Ephesians 2:1-5 and Titus 3:3-7. According to these two passages, all of us at one time “followed the ways of this world” and “[gratified] the cravings of our sinful nature.” According to Titus 3:5, what happened to believers that separates them from those who will be banished to the lake of fire? Did any of us do anything to deserve God’s grace and mercy?

Because they lack saving faith and are unbelieving, their disloyalty excludes them from heaven...

The new heaven and the new earth await believers and the final hell awaits resurrected unbelievers. For believers, it will be a universe of eternal happiness as they dwell forever in the glorious presence of God. For unbelievers, it will be a terrifying place of unbearable torment and unrelieved misery away from God’s presence (II Thess. 1:9). The choices men and women make in this life determine in which of those realms they will live forever.<sup>92</sup>

2. Read verses 9-21. **The New Jerusalem!**

Scripture describes Heaven as both a country (Luke 19:12; Hebrews 11:14-16) and a city (Hebrews 12:22; 13:14; Revelation 21:2). Fifteen times in Revelation 21 and 22 the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 270-271.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 273.

place God and his people will live together is called a city. The repetition of the word and the detailed description of the architecture, walls, streets, and other features of the city suggest that the term city isn't merely a figure of speech but a literal geographical location. After all, where do we expect physically resurrected people to live if not in a physical environment?

Everyone knows that a city is—a place with buildings, streets, and residences occupied by people and subject to a common government. Cities have inhabitants, visitors, bustling activity, cultural events, and gatherings involving music, the arts, education, religion, entertainment, and athletics. If the capital city of the New Earth doesn't have these defining characteristics of a city, it would seem misleading for Scripture to repeatedly call it a city.

The city at the center of the future Heaven is called the New Jerusalem. The city is portrayed as a walled city; its security is beyond question. It is perched on the peak of a hill that no invading army could ascend. The city's walls are so thick that they couldn't be breached by any siege engine and so high that no human could hope to scale them. (Of course, the city won't ever be under attack, but its structure will remind us of God's might and commitment to protect his people).<sup>93</sup>

On the night before His death, the Lord Jesus Christ made a wonderful promise to all who believe in Him. He said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 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 14:1-3). The "Father's house" Jesus referred to is the New Jerusalem, where God will live with His people forever. It is the present heaven where God dwells with the holy angels, and where the redeemed go when they die...the place that the Lord has prepared for them will descend in the eternal state, where it will be the capital city of the new heaven and the new earth.

Just as a person preparing to travel to a foreign country desires information about that country, so believers long for a glimpse of that glorious place where they will live eternally. Knowing their eager sense of anticipation, God has provided believers with a description of heaven. Though only a select few details are given, they are staggering, mindboggling, and overwhelming.

As the vision of the New Jerusalem unfolds, history has ended, and time is no more. John and his readers are transported to the eternal state. Having described the fearful eternal destination of the damned, the lake of fire (v. 8; 20:14-15), the vision takes the beloved, exiled apostle to the blissful eternal resting place of the redeemed. Because it is the capital city of heaven and the link between the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem is central to the vision and is described in far more detail than the rest of the eternal state.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Alcorn, 241.

<sup>94</sup> MacArthur, 276-277.

(a) Read Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16.

1. To what was Abraham looking forward?
2. Abraham was a stranger in a foreign country. How does this passage characterize believers who “[live] by faith” and have not yet “[received] the things promised?”
3. For what should we as believers be looking?
4. What has God prepared for those of whom He is not ashamed to be called their God?

(b) What happens to John in verses 9 and 10?

(c) John is carried away in the spirit and given a view of this Holy City, Jerusalem. Read II Corinthians 12:1-4. Apparently, in this passage, Paul is speaking about himself (Acts 14:19), when he was caught up to heaven. What was Paul’s reaction in seeing what God has prepared for His children?

(d) From verses 11-13, describe this Holy City.

The eternal city is not only the home of the bride; it is the bride! A city is not building; it is people. The city John saw was holy and heavenly; in fact, it descended to earth from heaven, where it was prepared. John’s description staggers the imagination, even accepting the fact that a great deal of symbolism is involved. Heaven is a real place of glory and beauty, the perfect home for the Lamb’s bride.

We have already noted that “the glory of God” has appeared in different place throughout history. God’s glory dwelt in the tabernacle and then in the temple. Today, His glory dwells in believers and in His church. For all eternity, the glory of God will be seen in His holy city. It is the only light the city will need.

The city’s description follows the pattern of foundations, walls, and gates. The foundations speak of permanence, in contrast to the tents in which “pilgrims and stranger” lived (Heb. 11:8-10). The walls and gates speak of protection. God’s

people will never have to fear any enemies. Angels at the gates will act as sentries!

In this city, saints of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant will be united. The twelve gates are identified with the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve foundations with the 12 Apostles (see Eph. 2:20). Including the tribe of Levi, there were actually thirteen tribes; and, including Paul, there were thirteen Apostles. When John listed the tribes in Revelation 7, both Dan and Ephraim were omitted, perhaps indication that we should not press these matters too literally. John is simply assuring us that all of God's believing people will be included in the city (Heb. 11:39-40).<sup>95</sup>

(e) What is John told to do in verses 15-17?

1. How was the city laid out?
2. Give the city's measurements?

The city's exact dimensions are measured by an angel and reported to be 12,000 stadia, the equivalent of 1,400 miles or 2,200 kilometers, in length, width, and height. (Revelation 21:15-16). Even though these proportions may have symbolic importance, this doesn't mean they can't be literal. In fact Scripture emphasizes that the dimensions are given in "man's measurement" (Revelation 21:17). If the city really has these dimensions (and there's no reason it couldn't), what more could we expect God to say to convince us?

A metropolis of this size in the middle of the United States would stretch from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian Mountains to the California border. The New Jerusalem is all the square footage anyone could ask for...

We don't need to worry that Heaven will be crowded. The ground level of the city will be nearly two million square miles. This is forty times bigger than England and fifteen thousand times bigger than London. It's ten times as big as France or Germany and far larger than India. But remember, that's just the ground level.

Given the dimensions of a 1,400-mile cube, if the city consisted of different levels (we don't know this), and if each story were a generous twelve feet high, the city could have over 600,000 stories. If they were on different levels, billions of people could occupy the New Jerusalem, with many square miles per person.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Wiersbe, 623.

<sup>96</sup> Alcorn, 242.

(f) Describe the wall, foundation and gates.

The city's construction cannot but fascinate us. The walls as jasper, with is a clear crystal; but the city itself will be made of pure gold, as clear as crystal. The light of God's glory will shine throughout the city, resembling a huge holy of holies.

Building foundations are usually underground, but these foundations will not only be visible but beautifully garnished with precious stones. Each separate foundation will have its own jewel, and the blending of the colors will be magnificent as God's light shines through.

No one can be dogmatic about the colors of these gems, and it really does not matter. Jasper...is a clear crystal. Sapphire is a blue stone, and chalcedony is probably greenish-blue. The emerald, of course, is green; and the sardonyx is like our onyx, a white stone streaked with brown, though some scholars describe it as red and white.

Sardius is a red stone (sometimes described as "blood red"), and chrysolite a yellow quartz like our modern topaz. Beryl is green and topaz a yellow-green. We are not sure about the chrysoprasus; some think it is a golden-tinted stone, others, an apple-green color. The jacinth is probably blue, though some claim it was yellow; and the amethyst is a rich purple, or blue-red.

Our God is a God of beauty, and He will lavish His beauty on the city He is preparing for His people. Perhaps Peter had the holy city in mind when he wrote about the "manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:10), for the word translated "manifold" means "many colored, variegated."<sup>97</sup>

(g) Read I Corinthians 2:9-10. John and Paul struggled to describe heaven. Why?

3. Read verses 22-27.

(a) Once inside the new city, what is the first thing that John noticed?

(b) Why does the city not need the light of the sun and moon?

That shining is not from any material combustion,—not from any consumption of fuel that needs to be replaced as one supply burns out; for it is the uncreated light of Him who is light, dispensed by and through the Lamb as the everlasting Lamp, to the home, and hearts, and understanding of his glorified saints. When Paul and Silas lay wounded and bound in the inner dungeon of the prison of Philippi, they still had sacred light which enabled them to beguile the night-watches with happy songs. When Paul was on his way to Damascus, a light brighter than the sun at noon shone round about him, irradiating his whole being with new sights and understanding, and making his soul and body ever afterwards light in the Lord. When Moses came down from the mount of his communion with God, his face was so luminous that his brethren could not endure to look upon it. He was in such close fellowship with light that he became informed with light, and came to the camp as a very lamp of God, glowing with the glory of God. On the Mount of Transfiguration that same light streamed forth from all the body and raiment of the blessed Jesus. And with reference to the very time when this city comes into being and place, Isaiah says, “the Moon shall be ashamed and the sun confounded,”—ashamed because of the out-beaming glory which then shall appear in the new Jerusalem, leaving no more need for them to shine in it, since the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.<sup>98</sup>

- (c) In this new Jerusalem where believers will reside, John writes in verse 25 that its gates will never be shut and that there will be no night. What does this tell you about this city?
- (d) According to verse 27, who will be able to enter this city? Is your name written in the Lamb’s book of life?

To be a part of a city is to be a citizen, which involves both responsibilities and privileges. The apostle Paul reminded the Philippians, who were proud of their Roman citizenship, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). Note the verb in the statement: Our citizenship “is,” not “will be,” in Heaven. Although our citizenship in Heaven is present, our residence there is future. People born far from their father’s native country are still citizens of that country, even though they have never lived there. One day as children and heirs of Heaven’s king, we will enter into full possession of our native land, which we will rule to our Father’s glory.<sup>99</sup>

- (e) Read Philippians 3:20 along with I Peter 2:11. Where is your citizenship?

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<sup>98</sup> J.A Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987), 499.  
<sup>99</sup> Alcorn, 244.