

# The End

New Heavens, and a New Earth

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I 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 the throne saying, “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.”*

(Revelation 21:1-3)

## Introduction

In our last lesson, we discussed the teaching of the rapture, and why it is a needless complication of a simple truth concerning the return of Jesus. Someday the Lord will return, not for the first of a few times, but to finalize His work and bring us home.

Today, we discuss what that work is and what the completion of that work will look like.

Process: we will do this by looking into the writings of John for connections to the descriptions of heaven, then outward into other New Testament witness, and finally, Old Testament witnesses to “The End”.

NOTE: we will not cover every single occurrence, there are many.

## John

The opening of Revelation 21 contains some phrases that take us back into John’s gospel for connection.

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (21:2)

The bridal language used here is something John the Baptist uses of Jesus in John 3 (for sake of “bride” we’ll include Paul’s writing in Ephesians 5:22-33 here as well).

We should also consider the passage of John 14:1-3 where Jesus speaks of going to “prepare a place” for the apostles.

NOTE: consider alongside this the “apostles” reference in Revelation 21:14

Culturally, Jewish husbands would become betrothed to be married, and then go to “prepare a place” in order to then be joined to his bride in marriage.

This phrase, and many others we’ll observe in this lesson, speak to the intimate connection of God and man in the end.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them...” (21:3)

The word “dwell” here is literally the word “tabernacle”.

This word is used in John 1:14 to describe the first coming of Christ:

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”*

This word speaks to the intimacy of the connection between God and His people (as does the rest of Revelation 21:3 "...and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.").

This word forms a bookend in John's first and last writings and serves as a word that helps to explain the nature of our relationship with God (think the Genesis concept of "walking with God").

For John, Revelation forms a closing within his own personal writings showing the first and second coming of Christ and desire for God to be with His people in the person of Jesus.

## **New Testament**

There are various New Testament references to heaven and what ultimately will be. Viewed together, we may find ourselves having more questions about the end, and the new creation of God. It is important in this discussion, and all biblical matters, to gather all the information we can, be diligent in study, and be gracious with one another.

### Peter

2 Peter 3 is one of the most thorough discussions on the "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1) in the New Testament. Peter centers this discussion of the "new heaven and new earth" around the word "promise" (3:4, 9, 13). Here is how the text 2 Peter 3 breaks down:

Peter writes to remind the reader of this promise by telling them to "remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the command of the Lord and Savior through your apostles" (3:1-2). In Peter's words here, this discussion is not unique to him, it's a discussion the prophets have had (Old Testament – Prophets below) and that other apostles have had (see 3:15-16).

Peter talks about "scoffers" in the "last days" that will mock specifically the "promise" of Jesus return saying (3:3-4):

*"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."*

This scoffing sets up the rest of Peter's teaching here, and as a result, reveals to us what the promise of the "new heaven and a new earth" is about: at God's return the corrupt creation will be redeemed. Peter confirms this by comparing the event to the Genesis account of the flood:

In both the flood and the new creation, sin will be punished, the ungodly will be destroyed, and something new will be created in its place.

The difference in these events is explained by water vs fire. Water washed away sin in the flood, and Noah's family came to a creation that had been cleansed, but would still face the potential of corruption. Fire will completely destroy the ungodliness and bring about a creation "in which righteousness dwells" (3:13).

Peter draws on an illustration Jesus used to convey the suddenness of His return being like a “thief” (Matthew 24:43) and very directly the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, “*for you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*”

Peter speaks to the when of all of this by telling us how the Lord views time differently than we do (3:8-9), and that if God is “delayed” in our thinking (the scoffers of 3:4) it is only because His interest is in the salvation of as many as possible (3:9), therefore, “what sort of people” ought we to be as we anticipate the coming of the Lord (3:11-12).

NOTE: the prophets also never really provide a “when” when speaking of what God is doing, but they, like Peter, affirm the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises and encourage steadfastness in our faithfulness to Him as a response.

Peter ends his letter, letting us know that Paul specifically has spoken about this promise in his own letters (3:15-16).

In his second letter, Peter provides a very logical layout of what is to come, connects it to prior events in Scripture, and encourages us to look into other writings on the matter.

## Paul

Paul speaks to heaven and our future “glory” in a number of places. For our purposes today, we will look at the passage of Romans 8:18-25.

Paul, following the prophets example, talks about the suffering that we are going through as the people of God. He likens the suffering to the things that Christ has gone through (8:16-17). It is from here that Paul moves from “suffering” to the “glory” that awaits us writing.

READ Romans 8:18-25

Notice the word “creation” used throughout this section. At first read, we may consider that the “creation” in discussion here is us (people), but we find out in 8:23 that this is not the case. We are included in this new thing, but we aren't the only ones.

Paul's language of a creation desiring to be set free from its bondage to corruption has roots in Genesis. For example,

Consider the cursing of the ground in Genesis 3:17

Consider the creation's rejection to Cain after he kills his brother Abel in Genesis 4:10-14.

Consider the phrasing of God in the flood narrative where God says that the “earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.” (Gen. 6:11). The “earth” here is not people, but rather the creation itself as shown in the next verse: “And God saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Gen. 6:12).

Consider God's covenant at the end of the flood in Genesis 8:21 where He says "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth..."

The earth/ground has endured generations of sinfulness from the beginning to now. The creation has been distorted and twisted as a result, the greatest twisting occurring in the flood event itself as it was used to punish the evil on it. As a result, we are told, the creation waits to be free from the effects of sin.

God did not create only an uncorrupted people, but an uncorrupted creation for them to dwell on. Both Peter and Paul, and I would argue John too, point to a future reality of an uncorrupted and incorruptible people AND place for them to dwell.

While Paul does not use the phrase "new heaven and a new earth" it is clear that he has in mind a newly created person and place. The "glory" of God awaits us all the creation of God. Just like Peter, Paul encourages us to remain steadfast in our faithfulness, knowing the future hope that awaits not only us, but the whole of creation (8:23-24).

Of course, there are other New Testament references (like the gospels for instance), but these are some of the more interesting and enlightening passages with direct connection to what is being described in Revelation 21 and 22.

### **Old Testament - Prophets**

The list of Old Testament references is extensive, so we will highlight only a few sections here. For further study, read through the prophets, especially the "major" prophets, with eyes peeled for Revelation references. They are everywhere!

#### Isaiah

Earlier we saw that Peter gave reference to the promise of "a new heaven and a new earth" as being something the prophets spoke about. As it turns out, the very phrase Peter is using is a phrase picked up from the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 65 and 66.

READ Isaiah 65:17-25

Q: What similarities between this section and Revelation 21-22 exist?

READ Isaiah 66:15-24

Q: What similarities between this section and Revelation 21-22 exist?

It is important here to note that not everything is exactly one-to-one because Isaiah isn't talking about a heavenly idea (afterlife was not really a concept for them at this time). Isaiah is writing about a future that would make sense to the Jewish people (city, protection, glory, "like the good old days of King David"). Jesus, John and the other New Testament writers expand on these terms, phrases, and teachings and give them fuller meaning (we call prophecies like this "dual-fulfillment prophecies". They had an immediate meaning to their primary audience, but also a deeper meaning revealed by God and God's inspired writers).

### Zechariah

Briefly, we should make note of the idea of walls and cities. Walls were built for protection against enemies. While God supported efforts to do so (Nehemiah), His desire was for Jerusalem to understand that they did not need walls, but that God was their protector.

Zechariah speaks to this in Zechariah 2:4-5 saying "*Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it. And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst.*"

idea is communicated by John in Revelation 21 with the words "*and its gates will never be shut by day-and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it...*" (Revelation 21:25-27)

### Ezekiel

In his vision, John tells us about the "river of the water of life...flowing from the throne of God." Alongside the river ("on either side"; Revelation 22:2) is the "tree of life" which is seen yielding fruit and giving its leaves "for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:2).

The idea of both the water flowing from the temple of God as well as healing leaves are taken from Ezekiel 47:1-12.

In the next chapter, Ezekiel 48:30-35, we are given twelve gates, three on each side, corresponding to twelve tribes of Israel, something that John writes down for us in Revelation 21:12-13.

Again, John is building on previously used imagery and scenes given to other prophetic writers.

### Daniel

Daniel is pulled from a lot in John's writing of Revelation. This is true not only in regard to the persecution of God's people, but in relation to how things will end.

In Revelation 21:2, 10 and 22:19, John refers to the "new Jerusalem" as the "holy city". In Daniel 9, Gabriel brings an answer to David and when the suffering will all be over saying:

"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

## Daniel 9:24

Much of this language is shared among the various writers we've seen, particularly the idea of bringing an end to sin, and ushering in "everlasting righteousness". I have no doubt that Daniel believed in an eventual resurgence of the "holy city" of Jerusalem to its former glory. John uses the phrase to talk about the "new Jerusalem" that completely overtakes the glory of the previous city of God.

### **Old Testament - Genesis**

There are a great deal of connections between Genesis and the end of Revelation:

Consider the "tree of life" in existence in both places.

Consider that the tree of life is in "paradise" (Revelation 2:7)

NOTE: the LXX word for "garden" in Genesis 2:8 is the word for "paradise" that John uses in Revelation

Consider the themes of God and mankind dwelling together, and the emphasis on the water that flows from the dwelling place of God bringing about life all over.

Consider that after the fall, God's desire to is bring "all nations" back to Him (Genesis 12:1-4; Revelation 21:24-26)

### **Conclusion**

Throughout our study we have repeated the words "Revelation is a difficult because we do not know our Old Testament like we should" this is seen clearly in the closing chapters of Revelation. John draws from the Old Testament heavily in every part of his prophetic writing.

As a result, we are left with an ending that is not only satisfying to us as readers of Revelation, but satisfying to us as the people of God who are participants in the long-held tradition of living for our Lord while we anticipate the fulfillment of His promise to bring us into a place completely devoid of sin and its consequences because it is full of His glory and righteousness.

The book of Revelation, with all of its illustrations and connections, paints a clear biblical picture to its reader: the promise of God will "soon" be fulfilled. Anticipate it, long for it, and live for Him now so that we can "enter the city by the gates" (Revelation 22:14) and find our end in the place where it all began, holy people, unseparated from our holy God, in His perfect creation.