
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

Revelation 21:1-8: “The New Heaven and Earth!”

General idea: Total renovation! A voice announces that all things will be renewed! God is making all things new and John now sees hope beyond wonder as a new heaven and a new earth are formed. God is removing evil from humanity, separating out the good. The old earth and heaven have disappeared; even the sea is gone. Then, John sees a New Jerusalem coming directly from God in heaven like a bride being given away at a wedding. Everyone is celebrating, shouting that the throne and presence of God is now among us all, as God Himself now lives with us and within us for eternity. Then the greatest comfort is given; God wipes away all of our sorrows and fears so there is no more death, suffering, or pain as evil is wiped away for good. God is sitting on His throne and telling John to make sure he is writing all of this down correctly. God’s Word is true and trustworthy. Then, God reveals to John another one of His names, the *first and last*, the *Alpha and Omega*, the *Beginning and the End*. Then, He promises refreshment to quench the thirst of all who are victorious in Christ, who will inherit everlasting life. Christ gives us springs of water without charging us what is owed, and thus, His grace continues. But, God will also keep His promise of judgment; all those who are evil will be removed from those who are good, and all those evil people will be sent to hell for all eternity.

Vs. 1-8, Contexts: This passage is the about the Throne, power, and purpose of God being made known and extended to us. This is about God the Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator communing with us and making a total transformation and renovation of His creation! He brings all things to fruition. He brings peace and a future to those in Him! As magnificent as this is, it is only the backdrop of what is going on; the far more spectacular “center stage” is that God IS among us. He is our Lord, Protector, and Sustainer. He will remove evil; so those who are in Him will never hear, “depart from me.” Rather, we will hear “come to me and I will give you rest.” He has saved us, but here is how He *continues* to save us as His grace is continually at work, involved, and shepherding us now and for eternity. He promises us all things new, and for those who reject Him, all things of judgment. In the meantime, we have Christ in us now, empowering us—a preview, and a real, effectual presence and hope for us now. This is to inspire us for faith, reliability, and steadfastness in our Christian life (Ex. 33:14; Matt. 7:23; 11:28-30; 25:41; John 5:22).

Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *New*, in context, means “rejuvenated.” God is changing the “old order of things,” but that does not necessarily mean He is replacing it. As Paul states, we are being reconditioned in Christ by our “new” covenant of grace, as the “old” is passed away (Gen 3:17; Is. 51:15-16; 65:17; 66:22; Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Cor. 5:17).

- *New heaven and a new earth.* This theme comes from Isaiah 65, teaching that God will completely and thoroughly accomplish and achieve His purpose throughout the universe. Thus, as Christians, we will be “transfigured” so we will have no ties to the old nature of sin and evil. Some have seen this as an “extreme makeover” where the entire creation is restored to its original parameters—before sin corrupted everything—and we receive our new bodies. Perhaps so, or perhaps not, but new bodies are not the point of this passage. Many people in the last hundred years have seen this as our planet being destroyed and then rebuilt; such a concept would have been absurd to the original writer, John, his audience, and the Jewish culture to whom this book was written. Although the Greeks and some Jewish mystics had a philosophy that taught that a new heaven and earth would be formed, this was not a biblical concept. Such a view ignores the context and word meanings we get from the rest of Scripture (Gen. 1:1; Is. 42:9; 48:6; 51:15-16; 65:17-25; 66:22; 1 Cor. 15:35-57 and apocrypha 1 Enoch, Jubilees).
- *No longer any sea.* This is a contrast of the evil and oppressive things being replaced with what is good. *Sea* is a Jewish metaphor for what is frightful and terrible, and what is inexplicable and/or hostile as the sea was greatly feared by them. *Sea* is where the monsters lived; people did not live anywhere near it nor did they have a navy. This saved them from numerous deadly *tsunamis* over the centuries. Such imagery is used for invading armies and the occupation from the Romans. This does not necessarily mean the seas will evaporate or be removed, but the fear of it as “sea” meant evil. Here, God is saying He will neuter evil’s power or remove it all together. This can also refer to how God will (has already done) neuter Rome, its power, and its influence (Job 7:12; 41:1; Psalms 74:13; 89:9-10; Is. 27:1; 65:17; Rev. 13:1-10).
- *New Jerusalem means God comes to us.* Jerusalem refers to the city where God reigns and where He is among His people. It represents the holiness and eminence, as Jerusalem is a place of gathering, community, and worship in Jewish culture and faith. The contrast is, then, in the Old Jerusalem where they journeyed to meet Him. Now, the *New Jerusalem* is God who journeys to meet them. In ancient Judaism, this theme also meant “hope.” It is also a position and representation of the people of God, “His people,” as a bride to God. A re-established Jerusalem came after the exile under Ezra and Nehemiah and pointed to the Messianic kingdom. Here, it is metaphorical, pointing to Christ as messiah and hope. The point is that a greater Jerusalem is because of Christ, not the rebuilding of the actual city, thus Christ and His Kingdom are the *New Jerusalem*. Faithfulness is the key that opens to us the door to life in the New Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1-18; Psalm 87:5-6; Is. 48:2; 52:1; 54:11-12; 62:12; 65:17-18; John 1:14; 13:34; 16:33; Gal. 4:26; Phil. 1; Heb 11-10; 12:22; 1 John 4:20; 5:4-5; Rev. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5-13, 12, 21; 19:7; 21:1-22:5).
- *Coming down out of heaven from God* means that God dwells with His people! He is the God Who is now and *Who is to come*. It refers to perfection, holiness, and purity. This points to the Garden of Eden and that God is the One who restores, converts, and brings salvation and hope. This also means righteousness, rightfulness, and

renewal. Christ is coming and all will consummate His will and purpose. Justice and His Kingdom will be fulfilled, and *every knee will bow* (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10; Rev. 21:1-22:5; Tobit; Jubilees; 4 Ezra)!

- *Bride*. This is an identification of His people and an image of our Redeemer's intimacy and the community between God and His children (Eph. 5:31-32; Rev. 19:7).
- *Throne... dwelling of God*, meaning, "God is among us!" refers to the Tabernacle—how God resides among His people, and the theme of "Immanuel." *Tabernacle* and *Sanctuary* are images of the Old Testament Tabernacle tent that was God's heavenly dwelling. As a throne, this refers to the inner sanctum of God's most holy of holies where the Ark, with the two tablets of the Testimony Moses brought from Mount Sinai dwelt. This represented God's home on earth as a "copy" of God's Throne Room, made for His presence in the inner chamber of Jewish Temples and the Tabernacle, a tent used before the Temple was built by Solomon. Now, John sees the *real* heavenly version being brought down to us. This is very significant in Christian redemption (Ex. 24:9-11; 25:8-9, 40; 29:45; 32:15; 37: 24-28; 43:7-10; Lev. 26:11-12; Deut 10:5; 1 Kings 6:12-13; 22:19; Is. 8:8-10; 51:16; Ezek. 37: 24-28; Zech. 2:11; Dan. 7:9-10; Matt. 1:22-23; 13:38; John 8:42-45; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:1-6; 9:1-14; Rev. 3:12; 4:1; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-16:1, 16:17; 21:22).
- *His people*. God seeks us; He wants to be with us, He is our refuge; He is the One to whom we look for leadership (Psalm 23; 80:1; 121:5-6; Isa. 4:5-6; 49:10; Micah 7:14; John 10:11-18; Heb. 3:1; 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 4:6-7).
- *Wipe every tear....* means we have victory in Christ and that God is true to his promises! This is also a contrast of those who made oaths to the beast and/or are disloyal to God (Psalm 23:6; 49:14; Is. 25:8; 35:10; 51:11; 1 Cor. 15:54; 2 Cor. 1:20; Rev. 3:14; 7:17).
- *No more death/swallow up death* meaning we receive the promised, eternal inheritance (John 11:25; 1 Thess. 4:13; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb 9:13-17).
- *Everything new* means God is the Creator; He will complete His purpose—He will work it out. God intervenes in history and in our lives. He will judge, as He demonstrated with the Flood (Gen 6-8; Isa. 4:5; 43:18-19; 57:19; Rom. 8:18-23; Heb. 8:13; 2 Pet 3:7-13).
- *Alpha and the Omega* means God is eternal and rules over all places and time. This refers to the majestic, messianic journey and work of Christ. He is *omnipotent*, or "all-powerful." *Alpha* and *Omega* refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and embodies His Sovereignty. Christ is all in all; He is LORD of all that is past, present, and that which is to come. His will and purpose will come true, and ours will not; so, to grow, we must surrender to Him (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; John 19:20; Rom. 8:18-25; Gal. 2:20-21; Col. 1:17; Rev. 1:8; 22:12-16).

- *Give to drink...water of life* gives us an image and a promise of comfort, and provides the remedy to the greatest fear of loss to a desert dweller (Psalm 36:9; Is. 35:1-2; 55:1; Ezek. 47:1-12; John 4:10-14; 7:37).
- *He who overcomes* means our perseverance of faith in Christ and the promises of our Lord. We are a part of His Covenant and thus, He will give us not only a hope, but also a future. Our Christian lives, even in persecution and trials, are of great worth and meaning. Those who are His are called to be faithful and loyal to Him, and Him alone. We overcome the ways of the world when we look to Christ and not to our desires or situations (Zech. 8:12; Mark 13:13; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; Jubilees).
- *Be my son* refers to our inheritance, the blessings we have in Christ, and His love and pursuit of us, for He does seek us (Rom. 8:15-17)!
- *The cowardly* means that God preserves and protects the righteous from those who are evil and does not place those who are evil with the good, as good and evil do not mix. This is about pride and faithlessness versus humility and those who have been faithful even unto death. Pride, in God's eyes, is actually weakness. This is not referring to those who are fainthearted or struggle with faith, or who doubt or question; rather, it is about those who refuse Christ and refuse to deploy their faith, turning their backs on Him. They are the ones in trouble—as in doomed (Isa. 66:24; 1 John 2:15-17)!
- *The unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral.* The wicked will also receive an inheritance, but one not so good!
- *Magic arts/sorceries.* This refers to any kind of witchcraft or sorcery being brought together, and the trusting in other things rather than trusting in God. The word denoting “magic arts” also means, “mix in” (*pharmakon*), and is where we get our English word *pharmacy*. In Acts, we read of some repentance of this, but not usually (Acts 19:19; Rev. 9:21; 19:19-20).
- *All liars / Lying.* This refers to being an apostate—one who says he or she is of Christ but his or her bad character shows that to be a lie, rather saying that one is not of God. This also denotes disloyalty, even idolatry, as it is saying a god or an idea is true when it is not, and/or to adultery with God as with a spouse—besides the obvious omission of truth (Is. 44:20; Jer. 10:3; 1 John 2:22).
- *Lake of fire/Lake of burning sulfur* means the final place of residence for Satan and evil. (See Revelation 19:20 study.)
- *Second death* means the permanent separation from God! The first death means when we physically die; this second death means evil people will be resurrected,

only to *die again* as in sentenced to the “lake of fire.” (Ezek. 18:4; Matt. 10:28 See Revelation 20:7-15 study.)

Thoughts and Applications:

God will achieve His purpose; we will inherit His wonders and blessings! This flows into the great *axiom*, that Christ will “wipe away every tear.” This must resound in us not just for our personal hope and comfort but also to enable us to trust in Christ for all things and situations. Those in Christ are His and His for all time; there is no fear or dread when we are with our Lord King. He is the *Alpha* and *Omega*. He will bring all things new to those who know and love Him, and judgment to those who fight Him. Thus we can be encouraged, as we have hope, reason, and purpose, to be faithful because of our confidence in Him, producing active faith that glorifies Christ and builds His kingdom (Eph 1:14; Heb. 12: 18-29)!

The goal in our Christian life is to be apart from sin—not to allow ourselves to be influenced to compromise our faith and life in Christ. When we choose to mix or add in evil, then rationalize it away, we become the evil people Revelation talks about and the fools that the Proverbs talk about. We must be above reproach and open to inspection when we claim Christ as Lord. Our faith matters, because what we do and say does indeed echo into and throughout eternity. Our spiritual growth affects our moral success and failures (2 Cor. 5:10). We will give an account and He will wipe away our tears!

The Two Prevailing Views: Chapters twenty-one and twenty-two deal with the literal versus the non-literal interpretation of Scripture.

In this passage, the debate is whether it is literal or figurative. The “phraseology” in the language and word usage from Jeremiah and other places and the *genre* (literature type) tell us it is most likely *metaphorical*. Just because Jesus says He is the “bread of life,” it does not make Him a bakery product. This does not water down or neuter the meaning, but gives us more wonder, hope, and insight into His mighty work. Nor, is this subject worth a debate as it is not essential. When we argue on this, we miss the point of the passage!

The Literalist View: They see this passage as very literal, as in God will destroy the earth and all He had created, and remake it in some new form. This takes place at the close of the millennium. The New Jerusalem is Heaven, the eternal home for Christians. There are many versions of and theories on this, many of them nonsensical and humorous. Of course, God can do this; no problem. But, the passage comes from Isaiah and that is not what it meant then, thus probably is not literal for us either. But, if you are going to error in biblical interpretation, it is always best to error toward the literal.

The Non-Literalist View: They see this passage as symbolic, that John is using words the ordinary human language that cannot convey the wonders that God is expressing. How do you explain heaven, our eternal state of grace with Christ? Thus, this *New*

Heaven is our eternity and the *New Jerusalem* is the Church on earth, as God dwells among us. They are many versions of this, too.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What is in your life that you would like to have totally renovated? Home, church, work, car, spouse, pet...?
2. What do you think this new heaven and new earth will be like? Do you like the literal or the non-literal view? Why?
3. What does it mean to your daily life that God's Word is true and trustworthy? What causes Christians to trust in other things rather than in God?
4. How does this name of *Jesus*, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, give you hope? What does it mean that He is the First and Last?
5. Jesus promises to give us refreshment to quench all the thirst and tribulations we have been through. What does this mean to your faith? What does it mean to you and your church that we are victorious in Christ and will inherit everlasting life?
6. The center stage of this passage is, God IS among us. He is our Lord, Protector, and Sustainer! How is this so in the passage? How can it be so in your life?
7. God's grace is continually at work, He is involved and shepherding you now and for eternity. What will you do with this information?
8. God will achieve His purpose! How does this give you hope and assurance for your faith? Are you aware of His continual grace at work in you? If not, what gets in the way?

9. If you were facing extreme suffering and/or persecution, how would this passage comfort you? What does comfort you in dire times?
10. How can you be more thankful for God's work in you, even when you do not see or feel it? What needs to take place in you so you can have more confidence in Christ as Lord over your daily life? How does this give you hope? What will you do?
11. What does God want renewed in you? Be honest. What are you going to do about it? What does it take for you to apply His hope and comfort so you can more fully trust in Christ for all things and situations?
12. How can you overcome the ways of the world? What happens when you look to Christ and not to your desires or situation? How can you be better at looking to Christ in firm hope and trust?

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