



New Heaven, New Earth

(Rev 21:1-8 NIV) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (2) I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be with them. (4) He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (5) He who sits on the throne said, "I am making everything new." Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (6) I saw another angel standing on the sea and the land, saying, "Write the words of the prophecy of the book, for the words are true and trustworthy." (7) He said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of the book, for the time is near. (8) He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he who is holy, let him be holy still." (9) I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Then the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (10) The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death gave up the dead that were in it, and they were judged according to what they had done. (11) Then death and the sea gave up the dead that were in them, and they were judged according to what they had done. (12) This is the second death.

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(Artwork is William Blake's *Ancient of Days*)

Regeneration. The new heaven and new earth described here are just that: new. They are made by regeneration (the Greek clearly implies this), in the same sense that any man in Christ is a new creature. That this order of things is so different as to be beyond our comprehension is obvious, for we see that there is no sorrow, nor is there death. It is clear from the first -- the rules have changed.

God with men. One clear reason for that is that God is now with men. You will recall that in the Old Testament the *shekinah* of God dwelt in the Tabernacle, between the cherubim. This was a picture -- but a picture of God before the new heaven and earth. Indeed, the word for tabernacle in the Greek is related to the root for the word "dwell." It is the same root as is used in John 1:14 where Jesus "dwells" among us. The implication is a physical closeness -- whatever that might happen to mean under these new rules..

No more sea: much is made of this. The symbolic interpretation is clear (to the futurists, of all people). There will no longer be any distinct nations (sea = nations, in Revelation). This seems less than obvious in light of later passages, where the kings bring in their glory. It has been suggested that the ancients feared the sea, traveling as little as possible on it, and that there is no more sea to fear. Or, perhaps, that the sea represents separation from loved ones -- again, gone. Chuck Smith says that the function of the sea is to neutralize pollutants; since we won't have any pollutants then, we won't need a sea.

Wild ideas. One of the problems with this heavily symbolic language is that it calls forth wild ideas. McGee tells us (on the basis of verse 1) that the new earth will orbit the New Jerusalem, as will the rest of the universe. He also concludes (from the fact that there is no sea) that there will be no fish during the Millennium, and that therefore man will be a vegetarian during the Millennium. Smith holds that the entire planet will "go nuclear" and be converted into a giant fireball. Since, in the futurist view, the New Jerusalem descends at the *beginning* of the Millennium, it therefore follows that it must be gotten out of the way at the end of the Millennium -- like a yo-yo.

Beginning and End. The words here mean more than they say. In Greek, beginning = arche, meaning not only beginning but also source. End = telos means not only end but goal. So we have it that Christ is the source of all creation -- and the goal of all creation.



The symmetry of John's writing is apparent here; there are a dozen "12's" in this passage.

- In verse 12, gates, angels and tribes
- In verse 14, foundations and apostles
- In verse 16, length, breadth and height
- In verse 17, the wall is a multiple of 12
- In verses 19 and 20, the 12 foundations are described
- and in verse 21, the 12 gates and pearls.

The shape is most interesting to English readers; the Greek reader would have understood the play on words. The phrase translated (KJV) "foursquare" (from which Foursquare Gospel Church, for example) means both a cube and also is an adjective for one who is completely trustworthy (parallel to English, "square deal.").

The shape has symbolic significance:

- Altars in the Temple were cubes
- The Holy of Holies was a cube

The size is about 1500 miles to the side, a distance which in the original may be taken symbolically, but is now taken quite literally by futurists (since World War II). It is interesting to note what is not stated: the edges of this cube, added together, would total 144,000 stadia.

The stones have occasioned much comment. Most (but not all) commentators recognize that they are *not* identical to the 12 stones on the breastplate of the High Priest (Exodus 28:17-20). Some have woven such theology, however, that they have forced some of the less well identified stones (there are several) into being identical.

The explanation may be as simple as the idea that these stones illustrate the splendor of God. The gold is described as transparent; this is clearly (pun intended) not a characteristic of gold. In fact, the statement should probably be taken symbolically, representative of purity.

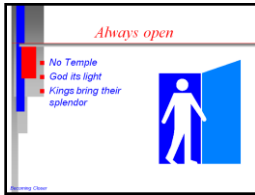
One interesting suggestion has been made about these stones. The Greeks identified these stones with the signs of the Zodiac. Indeed, the match is quite precise -- but John gives them in exactly the reverse order of the Zodiac. It may be a way of proclaiming God's truth triumphing over the forces of astrology and witchcraft.

As usual, we have a number of wild ideas stated as fact. McGee tells us that it must be surrounded by a crystal sphere (all heavenly bodies are spherical). Lindsey repeats an old suggestion (discarded by more serious students of the Greek) that the dimensions would apply equally well to a pyramid. Smith (contrary to McGee, who makes it the center of the universe) says it will orbit the earth -- just inside the orbit of the moon.

No Temple

(Rev 21:22-27 NIV) I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. (23) The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. (24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. (25) On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. (26) The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. (27) Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

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There is no temple here. Why? First, most scholars hold (largely from the shape of the city and Ezekiel's Millennial Temple parallel) that this is the heavenly equivalent of the earthly Holy of Holies. In other words, we then would have completely unhindered, direct access to God.

The statement that "God is its light" deserves some time. First, remember that John has already told us (1 John 1:5) that God *is* light. If we follow Aquinas on this, that God is his attributes, it would be impossible to be in the presence of God the Father and not be in the presence of light. But there is more. Christ is the Incarnation; what is physical about God, is in Christ (I phrase it poorly). So then does it not make sense that God (the Father) is the city's light -- as expressed through Jesus Christ, the Lamb, as its *lamp*?

(Smith, with his orbiting city, interprets verse 24 as making this city the main source of light on the earth during the Millennium, and beyond).

Finally, we note that kings will bring their splendor into this city. Indeed, it is a proper act of worship to bring your best to Jesus Christ, and that is what this is. Note the inclusiveness: "the nations." The only exclusion is: the sinner.

They will see his face

(Rev 22:1-5 NIV) Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) Along the middle of the great street of the city, on each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (3) No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. (4) They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (5) There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

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Matters now indeed pass our ability to comprehend. Even the futurists begin to use the word “Maybe.”

The River is seen by some as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Note that the Spirit has not been mentioned here yet. There are parallels in Isaiah 44:3 and John 7:38-39.

The picture is a common one in the Old Testament: Joel 3:18, Ezekiel 47:1-9 and Zechariah 14:8 are examples.

The Tree of Life is first seen as being in the Garden of Eden. Recall how God drove Adam and Eve out, and posted cherubim “with a flaming sword” to keep them out -- lest they eat from this tree and gain eternal, sinful life. Now, all the believers have access to it.

It is said that its leaves are for healing of the nations. Futurists (some) hold that this is during the Millennium; others see a gradual renewal of the universe.

Also, see again the use of 12; the number implies completeness. We may conclude that this may mean “complete healing.”

No more curse also refers to the Garden of Eden story, the curse being placed on Adam and Eve. Its remedy was made available at Calvary; its destruction is now a fact.

The most puzzling part of the passage is that we will **serve him** and yet also **reign with him**. One explanation comes from the word used for “serve” -- it’s the same one we might today use for “worship service.” Recall that the High Priest wore a gold band around his forehead with the name of God on it. The picture from the Old Testament -- the only one with access directly to God had God’s name on his forehead -- is repeated here.

But reign? Over whom? Or what? Speculation abounds; each of us gets his own galaxy; or maybe it’s the mortals on earth during the Millennium. Who can say?

Epilogue

(Rev 22:6-9 NIV) The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." (7) "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." (8) "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. (9) But he said to me, "Do not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

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There is much or little to say about this passage.

I choose to look at this as a form of testimony. How do I convince you that these things are true?

There is the testimony of Christ himself. He tells you, "I am coming soon." What does "soon" mean? He alone knows.

But he also tells you that if you want to be blessed, "keep" the words of this prophecy. It reminds us that all prophecy has two functions: not just foretelling the future, but also reminding of us of how we should live (more on that in the next section).

There is John's testimony, the human eyewitness. You're getting it from the horse's mouth, the last living Apostle, and the best friend on earth of Jesus Christ -- the disciple whom Jesus loved. What's particularly revealing here is John's reaction: he is so overwhelmed, he begins to worship the angel who shows him all this.

Which gives opportunity for the angel's testimony, too. His honesty compels him to point John to worship God -- and God alone.

In the mouths of three witnesses -- you will find the truth. Keep it.

My reward is with me

(Rev 22:10-15 NIV) Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (11) Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong, let him who is vile continue to be vile, let him who does right continue to do right, and let him who is holy continue to be holy." (12) "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (13) Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

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It is interesting to me that John is told NOT to seal up the vision (compare the instructions given at the end of Daniel). This, I believe, is because God's message to man is now complete -- complete in Christ Jesus. See Hebrews 1:1-2.

The section which tells the wicked to "continue" is most disturbing. It appears in the English to say, "I don't care, go ahead, keep on sinning." This is an unfortunate appearance, for the original Greek carries with it the idea that the good will continue to be the good, and the evil will continue to be the evil. But we may observe the following:

- Man, ultimately, makes the choice (Ezekiel 3:27, and many others)
- The choice made is the one which separates the wise from the foolish. In fact, you can tell wisdom, if you will, the other way around. Do you understand? Then you are wise!

(Dan 12:10 NIV) Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

- Ultimately, the choice is made. Ultimately, it cannot be unmade. Dives is still in torment.

Finally, there is the concept of **reward**. God understands us all too well; we must be rewarded if we are to work. And we will be, too! It is a consistent principle in the Scripture:

- Proclaimed early in the Old Testament -- God rewards the good (see, for example, Leviticus 25:18-19)
- Proclaimed to be specifically associated with the Lord's coming in power (i.e., his return) in Isaiah 40:10
- But proclaimed to be at a cost:

(Mat 16:24-27 NIV) Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. {25} For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. {26} What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? {27} For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

I am coming soon

(Rev 22:16-21 NIV) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David and the bright Morning Star." [17] The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. [18] I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. [19] And if anyone takes away from the words of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. [20] He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. [21] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

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The names of Jesus are not just labels: they are descriptive. We may learn from them:

- The root and offspring of David. As root, he is before David for all time (thus, he is divine). As offspring, he is human.
- The bright and morning star. Just before daybreak it appears. Jesus is the harbinger of the dawn of the new world.

The warnings are specific and severe.

- We are warned not to add to this book (which should settle Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.)
- We are warned not to take away from it (which means that those who "spiritualize" it are likewise warned).

It is interesting that God often (see Deuteronomy 4:2, for example) commands that nothing be added to or taken away from his commands, but this is the only *book* of the Bible about which such a command is given. Perhaps this is because it is the book of ultimate things.

Three witnesses (there's God's number again) say, "Come!" The Spirit, the bride (i.e., the church) and "him who hears." That makes the invitation very open. The real question is, "why?" Why do we want Him to come? (Discussion point).

Finally, there is this: it is fitting that the last verse of the Bible should proclaim the very heart of God:

(Rev 22:21 NIV) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.
Amen.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come!