

THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE STORY
OF HEAVEN

DATE

December 12 & 13

WEEK

2 of 3

OVERVIEW

Revelation 21

KEY VERSE

Revelation 21:2

SETTING THE STAGE

The last two chapters of Revelation are the end of the book but tell of a new beginning. Throughout Scripture, we have seen God change people's lives in such a way that they would become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Ezekiel, God talked about a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26). In Isaiah, God said He had a "new thing springing forth, making rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19). In Ephesians, Paul tells the church to "take off the old and put on the new" (Ephesians 4:22-24). God is all about making things new.

What began in Genesis is brought to completion in Revelation. ¹ Consider the chart below:

GENESIS

Heavens and earth created (1:1)
Sun created (1:16)
Night established (1:5)
Seas created (1:10)
Curse announced (3:14-17)
Death enters history (3:19)
Man is driven from paradise (3:24)
Sorrow and pain begin (3:17)

REVELATION

New heavens and earth (21:1)
No need of the sun (21:23)
No night there (21:25; 22:5)
No more seas (21:1)
No more curse (22:3)
No more death (21:4)
Man restored to paradise (22:14)
No more mourning, crying or pain (21:4)

The book of Revelation is the unveiling of the power, authority, majesty, and home of God. John has seen visions of dragons, wars, fires, beasts, horses, plagues, Satan banished to hell, and so much more. But now, John sees the new Heaven and the new earth. John sees the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. John realizes, at this stage of the unveiling, the grandeur of Heaven beyond that imagined, that it is more personal than expected and utterly new in all realms.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Out with the Old
2. In with the New
3. A Closer Look at New Jerusalem

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Greek word, "Kainon" means "new, recently made, unused, unprecedented, new." ²
- The Greek word, "Skenoo" means "dwell, tabernacle, abide." ³

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Introduction

John Lennon wrote a song in 1971 called “Imagine;” the opening line is perhaps one of the saddest lyrics in all of music, “Imagine there is no heaven.” Twenty-eight years later, Bart Millard of Mercy Me wrote another song about heaven, “I Can Only Imagine,” which is the opposite of John Lennon’s song. The one written in 1999 by Bart Millard focuses on imagining what it will feel like to be in heaven, the reality of seeing Jesus face to face.

There has always been a mystery and intrigue about heaven. Artists have tried to depict heaven on canvas, in books, songs, movies, and more. Heaven is no figment of the imagination, nor is it a feeling, a state of mind, or the invention of man. Heaven is a literal place prepared by Christ for a prepared people. ⁴ Though John Lennon imagined there was no heaven, the Apostle John got to see heaven unveiled.

While exiled on the island of Patmos in his 90’s, John recorded what he saw of heaven. He had heard Jesus talk about heaven numerous times during those three years of ministry. John even heard Jesus say the night before He was crucified, that He was going to “*prepare a place*” for those who believe (John 14:1-6). However, nothing could have prepared John for what he was able to see when Jesus unveiled heaven right before his eyes. What we can only imagine is documented by the inspired writings of John in Revelation 21 and 22.

1. OUT WITH THE OLD

REVELATION 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*

**The old creation
must make way for
the new creation
if God is to be
glorified. ⁵**

The phrase “*then I saw*” is always a clue that John sees a new vision in the progression of the revelation; this happens to be the last one in which he sees our eternal home. The new heaven and new earth come after the first heaven and the first earth passed away. Revelation 20:11b says, “*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.*”

Though we may not think about it often, the passing away of the old heaven and earth is not a surprise. The old creation must make way for the new creation if God is to be glorified. ⁵

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 1080.

² www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

³ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁴ David Jeremiah; *Answers to Your Question about Heaven*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2013; p. 3.

⁵ Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*, p. 1080.



It is something prophesied in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Isaiah mentions it specifically twice (Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22).

ISAIAH 65:17 *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.”*

ISAIAH 66:22 *“For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me,” declares the LORD, “So your offspring and your name will endure.”*

And Peter mentions it in his second letter, 2 Peter 3:10-13.

2 PETER 3:10,13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up ...¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

In his vision, John sees this prophecy coming true; the old heavens and earth have passed away. This was not a renovation of the old, or even a transforming of the old. This was the destruction of the old to make way for the new. Notice in Revelation 21:1, the first thing that John notes will not be there, the sea.

In our present age, the sea is both essential, positive, and even enjoyable for us. To the people of the ancient world, the sea was a mysterious and dangerous place, characterized by frightening chaos and possessing the power to kill without warning.⁶ Also, remember John is exiled on the island of Patmos, 37 miles off the coast of Ephesus, when he receives this revelation. He is in his 90's and separated from people and civilization. So it could mean there is no “sea” in that there is no longer any “separation” of any kind.

The sea throughout Scripture is also a symbol of wickedness, chaos, and even destruction. So perhaps it could mean in the new heaven and new earth, there would not be any more wickedness, chaos, or destruction.⁷ The new heaven and new earth will be vastly different from what we are experiencing now, the critical factor to remember is that the old has passed away and the new has come.

2. IN WITH THE NEW

REVELATION 21:2 *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (ESV)*

John immediately sees the Holy City, new Jerusalem. This is not a restructuring of the historical Jerusalem or the present Jerusalem in Israel. This is a brand-new city. Think of it like this. In England, there are cities named York, London, and Hampshire. In the United States, we have New York, New London (CT), and New Hampshire. They are not restructured cities; they are brand-new, different cities altogether.

John sees the Holy City, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. This is a reminder that it is not a human-made city; instead, this is a God-created place prepared for this moment in eternity future.

⁶ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights, Revelation*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2014, p. 299.

⁷ Ibid.

When John sees this new Jerusalem, it is like a bride adorned for her husband. On a bride's wedding day, nothing is left to happenstance. The dress is ready, her hair is styled, her jewelry is chosen in advance, the invitations mailed, the reservations received, the plan was in place with purpose. So, it is with the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down the aisle from heaven.

The bride is adorned with purpose and intention. It is a reminder that God has adorned this new Jerusalem not only with purpose and intent but also with beauty and reverence.

The bride is adorned with purpose and intention. It is a reminder that God has adorned this new Jerusalem not only with purpose and intent but also with beauty and reverence. He is preparing not just for the wedding day, but for the eternal marriage in heaven itself. Throughout Scripture, God used the bride and groom to emphasize His intimate relationship with Israel in the Old Testament and then the church in the New Testament. By this chapter in Revelation, the bride concept expands to include not only the church but also all of the redeemed from all the ages who live forever in that eternal city.⁸

Then just as John was taking in this new Jerusalem, he hears a voice from the throne.

REVELATION 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,*

We often get so caught up with what heaven will look like, we forget about the greatest news of all, the fellowship with God. But here we see in heaven that God Himself will dwell among His people. If we are honest, there are times when God seems so far away. God, our heavenly Father, is never absent, but just sometimes feels distant. Jesus is absolutely God in the flesh, as the Son of God, and in the 21st Century; yet He is something we have not experienced in the flesh.

Up until this point of eternity future, no one has dwelt with God personally. Even Moses saw a burning bush and the glory and radiance of God, but not the face of God. So, this is something new for all the redeemed. What was foreshadowed in God's presence in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35), in the Temple, (1 Kings 8:10-11), and in the bodily presence of God Himself in Jesus, (John 1:14) will become a reality in the new Jerusalem.⁹

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It reminds us of the promise God made to the Israelites when freed from bondage in Egypt that God would never leave nor forsake them. He "tabernacled/ dwelt" with them in the form of pillars of clouds and fire by day and night. Later on, God would "dwell" in the Temple in the Holy of Holies, with the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing God's presence and dwelling. Only the High Priests could enter it, protected by a veil.

When Jesus was crucified the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom, a sign that each person, not just the High Priests, would have access to God through Jesus Christ. But we still needed a mediator, which is Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15).

Now in the new Jerusalem, in our new home in heaven, we are citizens of heaven, unlike when we were on earth. And as such, there is no need for pillars of fire, no need for Holy of Holies, no need for a veil, even a torn veil, and no need for a mediator. There is no need for a temple or building of any kind, as Revelation 21:22 states, *And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.* Every single person will have direct, continual access to God and Jesus for all eternity.

⁸ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 2000, p. 265.

⁹ *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2011; p. 1268.

God Himself will be among us. For the very first time in the history of creation and new creation, we will see God face to face in all His Glory, and we will be touched by the hands of God.

REVELATION 21:4 *and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.*”

Notice how personal and compassionate God is to His people. The tears do not cease to exist at the beginning, instead, God wipes them away. The same hands of God that formed man out of dust in Genesis 2:7, will wipe away every tear in Revelation 21:4. The hands of God that let go of His Son to dwell among us is the One who will embrace us in heaven. The hands of God are protective and comforting, as we can see with the list of “no more’s.”

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In fact, throughout the last two chapters of Revelation, there are twelve “no more’s” in the new heaven and new earth.

- No More:**
- Sea (21:1)
 - Tears (21:4)
 - Death (21:4)
 - Mourning (21:4)
 - Crying (21:4)
 - Pain (21:4)
 - Thirst (21:6)
 - Wickedness (21:8,27)
 - Temple (21:22)
 - Closed Gates (21:25)
 - Night (22:5)
 - Curse (22:3)

All those things were part of the old, which will have passed away. This is a beautiful reminder that everything we experience is temporary. All that we can see, taste, touch, and hear is limited to this earth. In heaven, life will be different in every way, thanks be to God.

In verse 5, we see why things will be so different.

REVELATION 21:5 *And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”*

The first things have passed away, and all things are being made new. This promise is already a reality in eternity future. The Bible began with God as creator and ends with God as Creator. These words and visions were to be recorded. John obeyed the command of the One who sits on the throne; we have proof today with the book of The Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

REVELATION 21:6 *Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.*

That phrase, “*It is done,*” is different from when Jesus said on the cross, “*It is Finished.*”

There are two completely different Greek words and meanings. This is what Chuck Swindoll says about these two phrases.

For Jesus when he said, “*It is Finished*” it was a word that emphasized something in the past that has come to its intended end in the case of Jesus the suffering and sacrifice for our sins by His death on the cross.

But when God says, “*It is Done*” God is pointing forward to a permanent condition that has fully arrived. This perfect tense usage affirms God’s promises are so secure that although they are in our future they are already completed events.¹⁰

¹⁰ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights, Revelation*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2014, p. 301.

And then God reminds John and us He is the Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end. This open invitation continues even today for anyone who thirsts. Come to Him, and He will give a drink from the spring of the water of life without cost. Salvation has always been free to us; Jesus paid the cost, the ultimate price on the cross.

3. A CLOSER LOOK AT NEW JERUSALEM

REVELATION 21:9-14 *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.¹² It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.¹³ There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

John had seen the new Jerusalem come down out of heaven, but now he is taken to this high mountain to see it from a different perspective as it is still coming down out of heaven.

Here are some details of this holy city.

- 12 Gates, three on each of the four sides. These gates have the 12 tribes of Israel, representing the Old Testament.
- 12 Foundation stones, which have the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb, representing the New Testament.

In Heaven we will be seeing the fulfillment of God's plan everywhere we look in each direction.

In heaven we will be seeing the fulfillment of God's plan everywhere we look in each direction. What God did in the Old Testament was not only looking forward to Jesus in the New Testament but ultimately, to heaven itself. The New Testament was not an end in itself, but as the Old Testament was looking forward ultimately to heaven as well.

The details continue in verses 15-21.

REVELATION 21:15-21 *The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.¹⁷ And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.¹⁸ The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.¹⁹ The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;²⁰ the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

The size is astonishing; the beauty is unparalleled; the purpose is our eternal home with God. John gives great detail in these verses.

Completely equal on all sides, its length, width, and height each 1500 miles; the walls are 72 yards thick. John even makes sure we know that human measurements and angelic measurements are the same (v. 17). With an area that large, if we placed New Jerusalem in the middle of the United

States, its borders would stretch from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian Mountains to California.¹¹

Verses 18-20 show how the foundational stones, the ones with the names of the 12 Apostles, are adorned with a precious stone like jasper, sapphire, topaz, etc. The beauty is extraordinary in every direction, looking upward to the top, the sides, and even the foundation.

Next, we find out the streets of the city are pure gold. But focus a moment on the 12 gates:

REVELATION 21:21 *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

We are told very specifically, that the 12 gates were 12 pearls not adorned with multiple pearls, but actually 12 **single pearls**. And just in case we did not understand fully, we get a more specific explanation; “each one of the gates was a single pearl.”

Everything else in heaven that has been adorned with anything precious, valuable, and significant has been either precious metals or stones, except for the gates. Each gate is made of a single pearl. Among the ancients, pearls were ranked highest among precious stones, because their beauty derives entirely from nature, improvement by human artistry being an impossibility.¹² The size of the individual pearl was enormous, considering the measurements of the city.

Now we have all heard jokes about St. Peter standing at the pearly gates. Which, by the way, is not stated in Scripture. As a result of those jokes and stories, many have missed the purpose and significance of the gates made from a single pearl. John Phillips writes:

All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster—the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. The pearl, we might say, is the answer of the oyster to that which injured it. The glory land is God’s answer, in Christ, to wicked men who crucified heaven’s beloved and put Him to open shame. How like God it is to make the gates of the new Jerusalem of pearl. The saints as they come and go will be forever reminded, as they pass the gates of glory, that access to God’s home is only because of Calvary.¹³

“The pearl quite literally represents pain resulting in beauty, suffering crowned with glory.”¹⁴

Chuck Swindoll puts it like this, “The pearl quite literally represents pain resulting in beauty, suffering crowned with glory.”¹⁴

These 12 gates, each made of a single pearl that can only be described as supernatural in size, and beauty are a reminder of the cross. A reminder of the sacrifice, the pain, the suffering, the wounds, the penetration of the spear. A reminder of Jesus, giving His life for our sins and then the beauty and miracle of the resurrection. The Victory over death and hell itself.

The eternal reminder that entering the gates of heaven is only possible for those who believe and accept Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross as payment for their sins.

So often we think of Revelation as the end, but it truly is the beginning of new life, in the new heaven, new earth, and the new city of Jerusalem.

¹¹ Dr. Robert Jeffress, *A Place Called Heaven*; Baker Books; Grand Rapids, MI; 2017, p. 51.

¹² www.soniclight.com/revelation

¹³ MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; p. 283.

¹⁴ Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights, Revelation*; p. 301.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Heaven is a reminder of God's perfect plan. In the past, present, and future, you can see reminders of how He worked and continues to work in the lives of His people. His faithfulness never runs short. His grace never withheld. His mercies are new every morning. Heaven is proof that God had a plan from the beginning.

And the good news of His plan is that it included us! God wanted to dwell with us from the very beginning of time, yet when sin entered the world, everything changed. The holiness of God could not embrace the sinfulness of man. But God had a plan when He sent Jesus to dwell with man in the form of a baby born in a manger.

This time of year, we are reminded of His birth. We celebrate the fact that God had a plan to dwell for a brief amount of time on this earth in the flesh of Jesus. This was not by accident or a surprise; it was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.

ISAIAH 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*

MATTHEW 1:23 *"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."*

This season we sing the Christmas hymn "O Come, O Come, Immanuel." God had a plan to be with us even when Jesus ascended to heaven; the Holy Spirit dwelt in those who believed. But can you imagine what it will be like when we are in heaven dwelling with God every day in that magnificent city?

God's plan was not without purpose. He wants to dwell with us this season like no other. May His presence be felt in your heart, mind, and spirit to long for that time of walking through the gates made of a single pearl, telling your Heavenly Father, "I'm home."