



## Revelation - Chapter Twenty One

### Summary of Chapter Twenty One

The next revelation to John was a new heaven, a new earth, and a New Jerusalem. He heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them'.

Then an angel came to John and carried him away in the Spirit and showed him the great city, which came down from heaven. John saw no temple there because it was not necessary as the temple is the Lord and he was with the people of the great city. There was also no sun or moon because the glory of God gives the city its light and its lamp is the Lamb. John saw gates to the city which will never be shut by day and there will be no night. Only those written in the Lamb's book of life will ever enter the city.

### **IX Revelation 21:1-22:7 - All things new**

**The destruction of the last enemy, death and the last judgement will finally lead to the renewal of the entire created order, heaven and earth, to be the perfect home in which the Lamb will live forever with his bride, the people whom he has redeemed out of all the nations through his atoning death.**

#### **IX.a Revelation 21:1-8 - The New Heaven and the New Earth**

Having seen Christ's enemies destroyed, John finally sees a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal home of the Lamb with his bride. After the new cosmos is described, the bride herself is introduced (21:9-22:5). Scholars differ as to whether this new earth is entirely new, i.e. newly created, or is the old earth transformed in a way analogous to the transformation of believers' resurrection bodies. Refer to 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 and Philippians 3:21, as well as the comments made on 2 Peter 3:10.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The removal of the first heaven and earth eliminates the fatal infection of evil in the cosmic order and gives way to God's creation of a new cosmic order where sin and suffering and death are forever banished. The old order was in *<<bondage to decay>>* (Romans 8:21b), and *<<groaning in labour pains until now>>* (Romans 8:22), awaiting the day when: *<<the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home>>* will be established to forever replace the old (2 Peter 3:12b-13). This represents the specific fulfilment of the prophecy given to Isaiah: *<<For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind>>* (Isaiah 65:17).

Scholars differ, however, as to the extent and way in which the first heaven and the first earth will pass away and be transformed into something new, especially as to whether this represents an entirely new creation, or whether, and to what extent, this represents a renewed creation that retains some degree of continuity with the old order. As seen in the example of 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, it is clear, with respect to the believer's resurrection body, that although there is some kind of continuity between the old and the new order, the new reality will also be qualitatively different, for example, as different as a kernel or a seed is from a full-grown wheat plant (1 Corinthians 15:35-39). Thus new, Greek *kainos*, is best understood here in terms of something that has been qualitatively transformed in a fundamental way, rather than as an outright new creation, Latin *ex nihilo*, i.e. 'out of nothing', as in the case of God's original creation in Genesis Chapter One.

By comparison to the old order that is coming to an end, the new cosmic order is radically different, a place where *<<righteousness is at home>>* (2 Peter 3:13b), where God *<<will wipe every tear from their eyes>>* (v.4); refer also to Isaiah 25:8 and Revelation 7:17, where *<<death will be no more>>* (v.4), as well as Isaiah 25:8, and 1 Corinthians 15:26, where *<<the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay>>* (Romans 8:21a), and where all that is 'perishable' will be raised and transformed into a glorious new 'imperishable' reality (1 Corinthians 15:42-43), where the redeemed will rejoice in the eternal presence of 'God and the Lamb' (14:4 and 22:1-5).

The sea was no more does not mean there will be no bodies of water in the new earth, but refers to the source of earthly rebellion, chaos, and danger, the sea from which the beast emerged (13:1), *<<and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another>>* (Daniel 7:3). This symbolic or literal source of rebellion will no longer threaten creation's perfection.

<sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

## Revelation 21:2

The holy city, the new Jerusalem: *<<But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother>>* (Galatians 4:26), and: *<<But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the*

*mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel>> (Hebrews 12:22-24); the church redeemed by Jesus Christ, will no longer be trampled by nations (11:2) but rather, will be adorned as a bride.*

<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

<sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.’

#### Revelation 21:3-4

The home of God is among mortals. The tabernacle had been God’s temporary dwelling as he first moved among his people. This was later replaced by the magnificent temple built by Solomon, although even he acknowledged it was not a home for God: *<<But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!>>* (2 Chronicles 6:18). Now, however, God chooses to establish his home in the very midst of his people.

He will dwell with them. The greatest blessing of heaven will be unhindered fellowship with God himself: *<<Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord>>* (Zechariah 2:10). The goal of God’s covenant, ‘God with us’ *<<‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us’>>* (Matthew 1:23), foreshadowed in the OT tabernacle and temple, will be achieved.

They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them is a continuation of the promises that God had made to his people Israel: *<<I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people>>* (Leviticus 26:11-12), and: *<<My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people>>* (Ezekiel 37:27).

By wiping every tear from their eyes, and eliminating death, mourning, crying and pain: *<<And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken>>* (Isaiah 25:8), and: *<<I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred*

*years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed*>> (Isaiah 65:19-20), God will reverse the curse that entered the world through human sin.

The first things have passed away restates the reason why the human condition has improved. Initially, this occurs when someone places their hope in Christ: <<*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*>> (2 Corinthians 5:17), but now comes to completion. This clause refers back to v.1, which indicated that a new heaven and earth had come; those aspects of the creation that produced hardship and suffering for mankind have been removed. This is not restoration, but re-creation.

<sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’

### Revelation 21:5

The one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new’. This is only the second time in Revelation that God speaks directly to John as he did in 1:8. He indicates that everything will be renewed or replaced; nothing will be left as was before, for all of creation had become tainted by sin. This is not something God does only at the end of time, but something going on already in the present age, whether in the seven congregations to which John wrote or in today’s troubled world. It is a trustworthy and true pronouncement, so crucial to the message of the book that John is immediately commanded: write this down to ensure that it is not omitted from the record.

<sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

### Revelation 21:6

It is done! The destruction of God’s enemies (16:17) and the salvation of his saints are both completed.

The Alpha and the Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and is a phrase used by Jesus elsewhere in 1:8 and 22:13. The Lord stands beyond the universe’s beginning and its end as sovereign creator and consummator, the first and the last: <<*Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last*>> (Isaiah 41:4), <<*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god*>> (Isaiah 44:6), and: <<*Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: I am He; I am the first, and I am the last*>> (Isaiah 48:12).

To the thirsty I will give water as a gift was something that Jesus had promised as he stood in the earthly Jerusalem: <<*On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water”*>> (John 7:37-38).

The spring of the water of life is the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1), a throne of grace: <<*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*>> (Hebrews 4:16), because here the thirsty drink without payment, by God's free gift: <<*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price*>> (Isaiah 55:1).

<sup>7</sup> Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

### Revelation 21:7

Those who conquer will inherit these things. The promises to conquerors in Chapter Two are summed up in this assurance that the new heaven and earth are their inheritance as God's children.

I will be their God and they will be my children. This promise to David's descendants: <<*I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings*>> (2 Samuel 7:14), fulfilled pre-eminently in Jesus: <<*For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'?*>> (Hebrews 1:5), also includes those who belong to him: <<*for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith*>> (Galatians 3:26).

In this quote from Galatians Paul identifies a crucial difference between old covenant and new covenant believers: life under the law was slavery; life in Christ is marked by the freedom that comes from being God's children, literally sons. Paul characterises both men and women as having the rights of sons, because with sonship comes the right of inheritance.

<sup>8</sup> But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.'

### Revelation 21:8

Sorcerers is a term also used of Egyptian and Babylonian magicians in the OT: <<*Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts*>> (Exodus 7:11), and: <<*So the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams*>> (Daniel 2:2a).

Magic in antiquity was practiced by both pagan and Jewish people, with the goals of healing diseases, bringing physical blessings, cursing or otherwise harming others, and guarding against both curses and demons. Magicians also claimed to foretell the future. Ancient literature, e.g. Pliny, Natural History, and discovered magical books, refer to Acts 19:19, indicate that magic often involved special incantations, frequently invoking magical names of deities and demons, potions, and the use of magical objects such as amulets, incantation bowls, or figurines.

The conqueror's blessedness contrasts with the second death or final judgement awaiting those who renounced the faith because of cowardice or compromise with idolatry and sensuality.

#### IX.b Revelation 21:9-17 - Vision of the New Jerusalem

An angel takes John away in the spirit onto a high mountain so that he can witness the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. He describes its magnificence, with its foundations in both Judaism and Christianity, before being instructed by the angel to measure the city and its walls.

<sup>9</sup> Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'

#### Revelation 21:9

Then one of the seven angels said to me implies that the final details of the book are about to be added. This is not an advancement of the chronology of the book. That ended at v.8.

Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. At the marriage supper of the Lamb in Chapter 19 the bride was clearly the church of Jesus Christ. Here, John is shown the new holy city Jerusalem as the wife.

<sup>10</sup> And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

#### Revelation 21:10

A great, high mountain. After Gog and Magog's destruction (Ezekiel Chapters 38-39), Ezekiel was transported to 'a very high mountain' to view God's future temple (Ezekiel 40:2-3). Although believers are exposed to suffering on earth (11:2), their true life in the holy city has been secured in heaven, from which it will suddenly be revealed: <<*When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory*>> (Colossians 3:4).

<sup>11</sup> It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.

#### Revelation 21:11

The glory of God or *Shekhinah*, resembling jasper (4:3), radiates from the transparent city, which is as clear as crystal and glass (v.18).

<sup>12</sup> It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; <sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

## Revelation 21:12-14

The city's high wall and twelve gates are guarded by angels, as was Eden: <<*He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life*>> (Genesis 3:24) signify invulnerability to attack. The gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites, and the Lamb's twelve apostles are named on the wall's foundations: <<*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone*>> (Ephesians 2:19-20), signifying the unity of OT and NT believers.

There is some debate as to the identities of the twelve apostles. Popular acceptance is that it is eleven of the twelve original apostles (Luke 6:12-16), with Judas Iscariot excluded and Matthias added as described in Acts 1:15-26. Some writers believe that the twelfth is Paul and not Matthias, while some believe that Judas will have been forgiven and reinstated.

<sup>15</sup> The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using.

## Revelation 21:15-17

The measuring rod of gold is more glorious than the reed in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 40:3). The city's length and width and height are equal, having a cubic shape like the Most Holy Place in the OT sanctuary: <<*The interior of the inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high; he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid the altar with cedar*>> (1 Kings 6:20), and: <<*He measured the depth of the room, twenty cubits, and its width, twenty cubits, beyond the nave. And he said to me, This is the most holy place*>> (Ezekiel 41:4).

Since the entire city is the Most Holy Place, i.e. the place of God's presence, John saw no temple in it (v.22). The length, width, and height of the city fifteen hundred miles, and the width of the city wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits, are multiples of twelve. This may indicate the literal dimensions of the city or may symbolise the perfect life of the people of God (7:4-8).

<sup>18</sup> The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass.

## Revelation 21:18

Pure gold may be literal gold that is appropriate to the bride's priceless value and transparent purity, or the expression may simply be symbolic of those things.

As with v.10, which stated it was as clear as crystal, the city is shown to be as clear as glass, indicating both purity and the transparency of all that God is and does. Nothing will ever be hidden again: <<*Truly, you are a God who hides*

*himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour>> (Isaiah 45:15), and: <<For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light>> (Mark 4:22).*

<sup>19</sup> The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth cornelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

### Revelation 21:19-21

The twelve jewels adorning the city's apostolic foundations correspond to those engraved with the names of Israelite tribes on the high priest's breastplate: <<*You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald shall be the first row; and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a moonstone; and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree*>> (Exodus 28:17-20). They also resemble stones associated with Eden: <<*You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, chrysolite, and moonstone, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald; and worked in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. With an anointed cherub as guardian I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the stones of fire*>> (Ezekiel 28:13-14). The pure beauty of the bride in paradise restored puts to shame the prostitute's cheap ornaments (17:4 and 18:12).

The twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl is probably symbolic of their magnificence but it is not beyond the abilities of God to create pearls of such size and splendour.

The street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. This is in keeping with the structure of the whole city and its walls.

<sup>22</sup> I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

### Revelation 21:22

Its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. Jesus himself is the tent and temple in which God lives among his people: <<*Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body*>> (John 2:19-21). Because the Lamb is in her midst, the church is 'a dwelling place for God by the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:22).

<sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

## Revelation 21:23

The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it. Language echoing: <<*The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended*>> (Isaiah 60:19-20), identifies the glory of God the Father as the source, and Christ the Lamb as the mediator, of the bride's radiant light, her truth and purity.

<sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## Revelation 21:24-27

The nations will walk by its light. It is the light of Christ that is the truth that finally everyone will walk in: <<*I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father*>> (2 John 4), and: <<*I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely, how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth*>> (3 John 3-4).

When the Lamb, who is King of kings (17:14 and 19:16), has destroyed rebellious kings and nations, then the kings of the earth and their nations, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, will enter his city-sanctuary, bringing their glory: <<*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you*>> (Isaiah 60:3-5). The city's gates will never be shut because there will be neither foe nor night to assist hostile invaders.

There will be no night there because God's glory will make it perpetually bright. Also, God is outside of the constraints of time. Additionally, night and its darkness have always been symbolic of the evil deeds that were perpetuated in the darkness of the human heart alienated from God: <<*And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God*>> (John 3:19-21).

People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. This glory and honour is that which has been bestowed on them by God when they came to

accept his gracious gift of Jesus, for no other people will come into the city: <<*what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour*>> (Psalm 8:4-5).

Nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood. This is a natural outcome given the nature of the New Jerusalem. However, if the New Jerusalem comes down at the beginning of the eternal future, what about the unrepentant? For the judgment of the damned occurs at the end of the millennium. After the creation of the new heaven and earth, there will be no more wickedness on the earth. Perhaps the unrepentant are the ones who can only stand outside the city (22:15), staring in at those who have been graciously permitted access into the very presence of God forever.