

## A Theology of the Book of Revelation

### *Session #10 – The New Heavens, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem*

#### Review

What is God portrayed as doing in the book of Revelation?

He is establishing His kingdom on earth through Christ and His church. The story of this triumph is being told by means of three images: A Messianic War led by the Davidic King that leads His people out of oppression in an Eschatological Exodus by being the Faithful and True Witness unto Death. As such, the theology of the book of Revelation is intended to encourage us and challenge us to remain steadfast in trial and tribulation with a holy anticipation for the day when Christ returns.

Last week, we consider some of the details of Christ's return and reign in Revelation 19 & 20. Tonight, we conclude our study of a theology of the book of Revelation by looking at the visions of Revelation 21 & 22, which should serve to stir our hearts in anticipation and wonder for the future.

#### The New Creation

After all the conflict that we have encountered in the book of Revelation, the last two chapters of the book gives a vision of peace and salvation. Salvation, as we will see, is not simply about individuals. Salvation is about the restoration of all things. As the One "seated on the throne" tells us in Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I am making all things new." This should not surprise the conscientious Bible reader. We have already been told by the apostle Paul in Romans 8 that all of creation is "groaning for the day of redemption" when "creation itself will be set free from its bondage and decay" to "obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." If the point of the book of Revelation is to tell the story of God "establishing His kingdom on earth through Christ and His church," then chapters 21-22 reveals to us that God does, in fact, win in the end. After all the speculation and wonder, God revealed to be victorious, restoring all things unto Himself.

As we read Revelation 21, the attention turns from a focus on the new earth to a focus on the new Jerusalem, the city of peace, the city of God. This is the city that the people of God must align themselves with; not the cities of Rome and their respective values. Christians are citizens of a heavenly city before they are citizens of an earthly city. And when the values of the heavenly city are at odds with the values of our earthly city, we must align ourselves with the values of the heavenly city. We must set our minds above. We must recognize, as the audience in the book of Hebrews had to recognize, that "here we have no lasting city." So, it should not surprise us to encounter a vision of this holy city in a book written to seven churches that were being tempted to abandon Christ and embrace the values of their earthly communities. The book of Revelation serves to reorient the Christian's attention on the things that truly matter in this life. We are not to succumb to the temptation of the "great whore of Babylon" by abandoning the values of Christ in order to make our lives easier in the present. We must live for our future home, where God is, where the dwelling place of God is with man and woman for all eternity on a renewed earth with renewed heaven in the new Jerusalem.

So, what do we know about this New Jerusalem?

Revelation 21 describes the New Jerusalem as a place and as a people. Think about the way that our high schools are described in sports. For instance, Camden defeated Harmony Grove in football. We know what that means, right? The Camden football team defeated Harmony Grove's football team, but we do not necessarily have to say, "Camden football team," we can just say, "Camden." This is similar to how the term "Jerusalem" is used in Revelation 21-22. The New Jerusalem can refer to a people and a place. Or more specifically, a particular people from a particular place. Hence, the city is described as "the bride, the wife of the lamb," while also being described in construction terms with specific building materials. This place, the New Jerusalem, is a place of holiness and perfection. This is expressed in the description of its shape – a square, 12,000 stadia on each side (21:16). When compared to the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek. 40:1-4, 43:1-5, 47:1-12), John's vision of the holy city is "a thousand times greater," which, as one writer notes, showing that "God will both keep and surpass the promises that were made through the prophets."

Not only is the New Jerusalem a holy city it must also be understood as a holy sanctuary. This comes from the parallel of the cubed holy city to the cubed "inner chambers of the tables and temple in the Old Testament (1 Kings 6:20). This also makes sense of the statement that we find in Revelation 21:22. There is no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem, because the Temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. This, of course, helps us to understand how it is that New Jerusalem is not simply a geographical place but also the corporate body of the redeemed. For have we not been told at different places in the New Testament that the church itself is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16, Eph. 2:21-22)? There will be no need for a physical temple. The old gives way to the new so that "all the redeemed might live in the presence of God." Furthermore, there will be no need for a sun, because the glory of God in the midst of mankind will provide a "light for the nations" (21:24).

Finally, the New Jerusalem is revealed to be a return to the bliss of the Garden of Eden. Notice the imagery of the "tree of life" in Revelation 22:2. Like the Garden of Eden, men and women will enjoy fellowship with God unhindered by sin and rebellion. Unlike the Garden of Eden, however, "nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). There will be no more death, darkness, or tears. What a glorious place the New Jerusalem will be on the New Earth with the New Heavens!

So, who will enter this New Jerusalem? The one who has been cleansed (Rev. 22:14). The one who perseveres in holiness and righteousness (Rev. 22:11). The one who remains true and faithful as a witness in the face of trial and tribulation (Rev. 22:4). The one who believes and worships the One, True God (Rev. 22:9).

And who will not be allowed into the New Jerusalem? Everyone who loves and practices sin (Rev. 22:15). As I have said before, the New Jerusalem is not a place for people who simply fear hell. The New Jerusalem is a place for people who love the King of Righteousness and Truth! Who are willing to die for that Righteousness and Truth if necessary.