

SESSION 13

REVELATION 21:1–22:5

*The New Creation and the New Jerusalem***I. THE NEW CREATION (21:1-8)****A. A New Creation or Renovated Earth?**

According to 21:1, John "saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away." For background, see Isa 65:17-25; 66:22-24; Ps 102:25-26; and 2 Pet 3:10-13.¹ While most commentators take the position that the previous creation was literally destroyed and replaced by an entirely new creation (*ex nihilo*), some have tried to argue that this is not a new creation but a renovation of the same creation.² The latter would argue from such passages as Rom 8:19-22; Acts 3:21; and Mt 19:28 which speak of a "regeneration" to include the elements of creation, as well as passages in the OT which speak of possessing the land "forever" (e.g., Gen 48:4; cf. Eccl. 1:4). The renovation passages, however, probably have reference to the Millennial period. Furthermore, a straight-forward reading of such passages as Ps 102:25-26; Isa 34:4; 51:6; Mt 24:35; and 2 Pet 3:7,10-13 argues in favor of a replacement of the present creation. Furthermore, Rev 21:1 must be seen along with Rev 20:11 — "earth and heaven fled away."

B. "there is no longer any sea" (21:1)

During the Millennium, the sea is still a feature (Ps 72:8; Isa 11:9,11; Ezek 47:8-20; 48:28; Zech 9:10; 14:8). Why should there be no sea in the eternal state? The answer is probably due to certain archetypal connotations that the sea has (note Rev 13:1; 20:13; cf. Isa 57:20; Ps 107:25-28; Ezek 28:8. The sea is the first of seven *evils* that will no longer exist in the new order (along with death, mourning, weeping, and pain mentioned in 21:4, note 22:3 concerning the curse and 21:25 & 22:5 concerning the night).

C. The New Jerusalem (21:2)

1. The idea of a heavenly city has been held out as a great hope elsewhere in the NT (note particularly Gal 3:20; 4:26-27; Heb 11:10,16; 12:22; and 13:14). This is the ultimate destiny of God's people, which stands in stark contrast to Babylon the harlot city.
2. Note that she is not simply a city, but a bride-wife for the Lamb (cf. 21:9-10). This should probably be understood as both the city and her people. Thomas remarks, "The bride is both the people of God and the seat of their abode, the new Jerusalem" (2:442).
3. The comment that "the tabernacle of God is among men" has obvious OT allusions. In the OT, the tabernacle in the wilderness allowed for God's presence to be among the people, as the Shekinah glory of God dwelt above the mercy seat in the Holy of

¹ Despite the mention of creating "new heavens and a new earth" in Isa 65:17, this does not necessarily mean that this passage is precisely identical to that in Rev 21:1ff. The mention of death in Isa 65:20 may suggest that Isaiah is blending the millennial and eternal scenes.

² For a recent example of a *renovation approach*, see Gale Z. Heide, "What is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *JETS* 40:1 (Mar 1997): 37-56.

Holies. This arrangement was not as direct and intimate as God would ultimately provide. In John 1:14, the incarnation of Jesus served as a better tabernacle, for "the Word became flesh and dwelt (*tabernacled*) among us." But even in this, the glory of God was shielded by the fleshly body of the Savior. Following His death, Christ appeared in the heavenly tabernacle to intercede for us (Heb 8:1-2,5; 9:11,23-24). In the New Jerusalem, we will have the most intimate experience yet of the presence of God.

4. "they shall be His people"

In the OT, the people of Israel were God's people. Through the New Covenant, however, both Jews and Gentiles have the privilege of being part of the one people of God. This is in fulfillment of God's original intention as first revealed in the Abrahamic Covenant to bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3; cf. Jn 10:16).

5. "the water of life without cost" (21:6)

The metaphor of "thirst" is drawn from Isa 55:1

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost."

The passage in Isaiah was an offer to sinners (note Isa 55:7) to receive the Lord's salvation from sin made available through the One who was a descendant of David (i.e., Messiah). In both passages, this salvation is a free gift—it is *without cost!* This offer is repeated again at the end of Revelation (22:17). The "water of life" cannot be bought, and therefore it is given freely. It is the sure remedy for those who are thirsty. Jesus offered the same gift to the woman at the well: "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). God's offer of salvation is always on the basis of a "free gift" — for only then is it in keeping with GRACE. Those who receive this "water" are those who first feel the "thirst" for it (the longing to know Jesus) and then who "take" it (which they do by faith—believing in Him alone as Savior).

6. "He who overcomes" (21:7)

The water of life is offered freely; it is "without cost." God's offer of salvation in Christ cannot be bought, earned or merited. It is free!! In contrast, however, becoming an "overcomer" is not free. It requires a faithful and persistent walk with Christ in total allegiance to Him. Notice how this *overcomer promise* is couched in the same terminology as that seen in chapters 2–3. In the earlier chapters, the promise held out to those who "overcome" was not based on simple faith in Christ but faithfulness to Him as a believer. In Rev 2:10, for example, the believers are exhorted, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Those who "overcome" are offered two promises:

a. "He . . . shall inherit these things (ταῦτα)"

This is probably a reference to verse 5: "I make all things (πάντα) new." In other words, the "overcomer" is first promised all the glories of the New Jerusalem. All believers may have this, but the "overcomer" is promised even more.

b. "and I will be his God and he will be My son"

At first glance, this may seem like a promise intended for all believers, regardless of the faithfulness of their lives. The key, however, is to recognize that this promise is cast in the form of the Davidic Covenant promise in 2 Sam 7:14 (cf. Ps 89:26-27). This pertains to *kingly reign*. What was once

promised to David's greater son is now being held out for others.

Thomas (2:450) explains,

Elsewhere in the NT this Davidic formula has Messianic overtones in conveying the intimate relationship between the Father and Jesus. Here John transfers the Messianic formula from Christ to Christ's bride, but in so doing changes the earlier part of the saying from "Father" to "God" to reserve a unique place for Jesus as the "one and only Son of God" (cf. John 1:17-18) (Beasley-Murray). This is the only reference to sonship in Revelation. John prefers the figure of priesthood to portray the believer's closeness to God.

Though this is the right to *reign with Christ*, it is not a right promised to all. As 2 Tim 2:12 declares, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." Brad McCoy points out:

While all believers will enter Christ's Kingdom (v 11, 'we shall live with Him'), only those who are consistently faithful in their Christian experience will also reign with Jesus. The verb *symbasileusomen*, rendered 'we shall also reign with Him,' means 'to rule as king with someone.' It refers to possessing a special place of authority in Christ's millennial administration. This exciting possibility is the same truth taught in the parable of the *minas* by Jesus Himself (Luke 19:11-27). The Lord used this story to illustrate the principle that faithful service for the Master will ultimately result in His conferring various levels of governmental authority upon reliable believers, consistent with the individual's level of faithfulness, when He returns to establish His Kingdom.³

Note the consistency of this promise with earlier promises in Rev 2–3. "And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father" (Rev 2:26-27). "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (3:21). Two things stand out from these earlier promises: (1) the one "who overcomes" cannot refer to any and every believer, for the expression is further qualified by the words "he who keeps My deeds until the end"; and (2) the Davidic throne promise that Jesus received is offered to those believers who overcome (which serves to link these passages with Rev 21:7).

7. Those whose part is in the lake of fire (21:8)

In contrast to the thirsty who come to take of the water of life without cost and those who overcome stand those who will spend eternity in the lake of fire. There can be no doubt that these are unbelievers who will spend eternity in hell. They are described in this verse in an eight-fold way: "the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars." That they represent one group and not eight different groups is attested by the one article *τοὺς* that governs all eight.

³ Brad McCoy, "Secure Yet Scrutinized—2 Timothy 2:11-13," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 1:1 (Autumn 1988): 26-27.

a. Professing Christians Who Have Not Been Genuinely Saved?

Unfortunately, Robert Thomas (in what is otherwise an outstanding commentary) has chosen to *read in* his "Lordship Salvation" views into this verse. For instance, regarding the "cowardly," Thomas (2:450) states,

It refers to those who repudiate their faith in Christ when faced with persecution and opposition. Without steadfast endurance on that faith, they are not true followers of the Lamb.

Thomas would have us believe that these are *professing Christians* who have not been genuinely saved. He carries this idea through the other descriptives, despite lack of evidence in doing so. Regarding the "unbelieving," he opts to translate the word as "unfaithful," and concludes: "in this situation it applies to professing Christians who by act or word deny their faith in Christ" (2:451). Of the "idolaters," he concludes (2:452), "Already many parading themselves as Christians are 'idolaters' . . . (1 John 5:21; cf. 1 Cor. 5:10-11; Eph. 5:5). Of the "liars," he states, "These are primarily those who lie in their denial of Christ, but include untruthful Christians who cheat (Acts 5:3) and lie to one another (Col. 3:9; contra Rev. 14:5)" (2:452).

b. Theological Reflections

There is really nothing in the meaning of these words or in the context that would support the above interpretation. If one's theology says that people who habitually do certain major sins show themselves to be unregenerate, then they may very well *read that theology* into this passage, but there is nothing here to support it. A more sensible conclusion is that this verse reflects the *eternal sinfulness of the lost*. People who never believe in the Lord Jesus Christ remain in their sin (John 8:24). When they die, they die in an unregenerate state and are permanently sealed as those who are unjustified. Thus, they remain sinners in God's sight forever. On the other hand, people who accept the gospel offer and put their faith in Christ for their salvation do not remain in a state of sinfulness. Rather, their sin is not imputed to them, they are justified, and they are forgiven (Rom 4:6-8).

The point of this verse is not to show that someone who professed to know Christ but continued doing "major sin" will certainly go to hell as proof that they never were regenerated.⁴ This verse is simply making the point that sin (and unredeemed sinners) will not be present in the New Jerusalem (note 21:27 and 22:15). This should not be taken to mean that a true believer could never do one of these sins. After all, David was guilty of the murder of Uriah, and Peter shamefully lied three times about knowing Jesus in order to avoid being arrested himself. Both these men did these things as believers, too! Rev 21:8 is meant to be a joyous assurance that we will not have to endure sin any longer in the New Creation. Everyone in the eternal kingdom will be holy and sinless (recall 1 Jn 3:2 – we will be like Him when we see Him).

c. A Contextual Interpretation in Light of the Tribulation

Most of these descriptives probably are mentioned in light of the Tribulation experience that occupied so much of the book.

⁴ For a helpful analysis of this issue in regard to Rev 21:8, see Robert Wilkin, "Does Major Sin Prove a Person Is Unsaved," *Grace Evangelical Society News* (Sep-Oct 1993): 2.

- (1) "cowardly"
This word is only used three times in the NT (cf. Mt 8:26; Mk 4:40). Elsewhere, it is used to describe the apostles of our Lord whose faith was "timid." But there was nothing in that context having to do with a believer who repudiated his faith. There is no reason to think that this word has anything to do with people who recanted of their profession to know Christ. The real cowards in this book are those who went along with the Beast, accepted his mark, and turned to worshipping him. Many of them probably knew in their hearts that this was not the truth, but they did not have the courage (because of fear of persecution) to stand up to him. But there is no reason to think they ever made a profession for Christ.
- (2) "unbelieving" (ἄπιστος)
Although both the *NASB* and the *NIV* translate this as "unbelieving," Thomas wants to make it mean "unfaithful" or "untrustworthy." Although this is the only use of this term in Revelation, it does occur 23 times in the NT. But there is not one single case where ἄπιστος means "unfaithful." The counterpart, πιστος, can mean "believing" or "faithful" (for the latter, see Rev 1:5; 2:10,13; 19:11). ἄπιστος consistently means "unbelievers" (e.g., 1 Cor 6:6; 7:12-15; and 14:24).⁵ Even if it could be demonstrated that this word *can* mean "unfaithful," the issue is whether or not the context warrants such a deviation from the standard meaning of the word. Hence, we cannot say that they are "unfaithful," and that by being so they have demonstrated that they are really unregenerate. The point is that they never believed in the first place. Despite opportunities to repent and turn to Christ, they refused to believe. This was a major theme in Revelation (e.g., 9:20-21), and the use of several of the descriptives in these very verses supports this suggestion of linking the "unbelieving" to those who refused to repent.
- (3) Five of these descriptives are specifically linked to the activity of the harlot and/or Beast, or they are mentioned in the unrepentant stanzas

The word "abominable" only occurs elsewhere in Rom 2:22, but a related noun form (βδέλυγμα) is used in Rev 17:4-5. The "harlot" had the cup full of "abominations." Hence, the "abominable" are those who partook of her cup (i.e., participated in her ungodly activities). The reference to "murderers" is probably not to the general sin of murder, but to those who carried out the martyrdom of the saints (17:6; 18:24). Rev 9:21 speaks of those in the Tribulation who refused to repent of their murders. "Immoral persons" is a translation of πόρνοις (this word-group is used 16x in Rev). Rev 9:21 (see above) also mentions those in the Tribulation who refused to repent of their immoralities. In 17:2, we are told of those who dwell on the earth and were made to drink with the wine of the harlot's immorality. Once again, the word "sorcerers" is also used in Rev 9:21—those who refused to repent of their sorceries (cf. 18:23 regarding the nations who were deceived by Babylon's sorceries). Finally, the word "idolaters" is also used in Rev 9:20 of those who refused to repent. Of course, their primary idolatrous activity involved worshipping the image of the Beast (13:14-15).

⁵ The only exception to this is Jn 20:27, which had to do with the unbelief in Thomas's life in regard to the resurrection. But even there, the point was not that he was "unfaithful," but that he did not believe the wonderful truth about Jesus' resurrection.

(4) "all liars"

This could refer to liars in general, but in light of the way the preceding terms are used in connection to the Tribulation, more likely this has the unbelievers of the Tribulation era in view (rather than "those who lie in their denial of Christ" as Thomas has suggested [2:452]). In contrast to "the liars" are the 144,000 of the Lamb—"no lie was found in their mouth" (14:5). Those who took the mark of the Beast bought into the lie of worshiping the Beast (in the spirit of Rom 1:25, they "exchanged the truth of God for a lie"). There is no reason to think that this descriptive has in mind those who lie in regard to their stance for Christ.

d. Conclusion

There is no reason to think that the list of sins in Rev 21:8 applies to *false professors* of Christianity. A study within the context of Revelation suggests that these sins were listed because they had been particularly true of the Christ-rejecting world that blasphemed God and worshiped the Beast. They refused to repent of these sins, and willfully partook of the immoralities of the harlot. As a consoling thought to those who would be martyred at the hands of such ones, we are told that they will not be in the New Jerusalem but in hell. They had the opportunity to repent, but refused it. Thus, they went to the fate they had chosen for themselves. While the same fate will be true of other unbelievers from other ages who died in their sins, John probably is focusing in Rev 21:8 on those from the Tribulation period. Note how he used a similar tactic in Rev 20:4 to speak of the Tribulation martyrs who came to life and reigned with Christ (though other believers will reign with Christ, too).

II. THE NEW JERUSALEM DESCRIBED (REV 21:9–22:5)

A. What does the New Jerusalem represent?

Suggestions:

1. A symbol of the church
Mounce takes the position that (although this could be an actual city) this is a symbol of the church in its perfected and eternal state.
2. The Millennium is in view
Some older dispensationalists held the idea that this depicted the millennium (note the reference to kings, nations, and healing of nations). So Darby, William Kelly, A.C. Gaebelein, and H. A. Ironside.
3. The Habitation for the resurrected saints during the Millennium
Pentecost (*Things to Come*, 572-580) held the view that the New Jerusalem was the eternal habitation of the resurrected saints during the millennium. Supposedly, it would be suspended above the earth.⁶

⁶ Walvoord (commentary, 312) expresses openness to this view, though he would see it in the eternal state as well. He states, "If the New Jerusalem is in existence throughout the millennial reign of Christ, it is possible that it is a satellite city suspended over the earth during the thousand-year reign of Christ as the dwelling place of resurrected and translated saints who also have access to the earthly scene." Cf. *Bible Knowledge Comm.*, 984.

4. The eternal state in view
This view has the best support.
 - a. From ch 19 on, there does seem to be chronological order. To revert back would violate the structure.
 - b. Rev 21:9 and 21:2 look at the same thing, and 21:2 is part of the eternal state.
 - c. The "reign" is forever, not just a 1000 years (note 22:5).