

Revelation Bible Study #49

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 21:1-8

1 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. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” **6** And 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 from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Introduction

After Judgment Day, believers will enjoy eternal blessedness in the New Heavens and New earth. Here the interpreter must have the same level of careful attention as is necessary in speaking on the matter of damnation, as St. John continues to employ symbolic language as he has for the entirety of Revelation. Nonetheless, despite the heavy use of symbolic language, he speaks in this way to *establish* the fact of the Resurrection and eternal life as a guaranteed future event. He is relating his vision in a fashion conducive to *encouraging* believers that their ultimate victory is assured.

Vs.1

1 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.

The Apostle does not mean here that the earth shall be annihilated completely. For that matter, neither shall the heavens, as though all of creation is to be undone. Remember, St. John expects us to be students of the entirety of Scripture at this point. We are reminded that God has made a covenant with Abraham so that his offspring (those who share his faith) shall ultimately retain possession of the Promised Land forever;¹ there is also a *cosmic* covenant which ensures that the cycle of day and night shall go on uninterrupted continually.² If God were to erase the current heavens and earth from existence entirely in some lovecraftian cosmic undoing, He would be going against His own Word on the matter.

But there *will* be a new heaven and a new earth in the sense of a new and enduring set of *conditions* for the universe. The same phrase was used in Isaiah's dual prophecy, told to the ancient children of Judah concerning both the immanent restoration of Jerusalem and the final judgment to come (Isaiah had a habit of weaving together prophecies that were close to being fulfilled and

1 Genesis 13:15, Romans 4:16

2 Jeremiah 33:19

prophecies that were to be fulfilled much later).³ To say there will be a new heavens and earth is to say that the old operations and circumstances are to be replaced; things change so radically that the old “world” becomes alien to the new man's understanding.

Similar discussion is found elsewhere in Scripture. St. Peter refers to the antediluvian period as its own world which was destroyed by the Great Flood.⁴ We cannot relate to the antediluvian “world,” let alone know much anything *about* it. Almost all writing from the era is either obliterated, fragmented or undecipherable to archaeologists. In terms of the artifacts discovered from the time, very little can be learned without a great deal of speculation; while a paleontologist might find an arrowhead somewhere in the South American jungle, there is nothing which tells us whether it was used for hunting or warfare. Cave art is determined to be religious in nature or just artistic based on the whims of opinion. To Noah and his descendants, they were truly living in a *new earth*. St. John relates that the same shall be the case for the New earth when we live in it.

Vs.2-4

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

The New Jerusalem is the seat of the Throne Room wherein St. John began to see his vision in Heaven. It shall be made to exist both physically and spiritually in simultaneous fashion. Though there is truly a place being prepared for all believers, and Christ is preparing it for us.⁵ Here though the Apostle begins to discuss what that place *means* for us in terms of spiritual benefit and the new reality in which we shall live.

Being Omnipresent, God has always been with man in the sense of having a presence. After all, as the Creed states the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life: He provides us with every breath we take. But here God declares that there will be a *change* in the means of His presence with men. Currently, the presence of God is mediated through several different means, because to see Him without any “filter” results in our death. Our Lord told Moses “man shall not see Me and live.”⁶ Under the Old Covenant, His Presence was mediated by the embodied Christ speaking to men as “the Angel of the Lord” and “the Word of the Lord,”⁷ or by a presence of fire and smoke.⁸ Now, our Lord's Presence is “filtered” chiefly by means of Word and Sacrament.⁹ Here, our Lord declares that after the Resurrection, He will be with us with an *unmediated* Presence, meaning that we will be able to see Him face to face without the risk of dying.

This unmediated or unfiltered Presence shall lack the risk of death precisely because death shall be abolished, both in the physical and spiritual senses. There shall be no more sin in the hearts and flesh of the regenerate, thus doing away with reasons for physical death being imposed in the first place.¹⁰ Mortality was inflicted on us precisely because being immortal would have necessitated damnation for sinners. The former things have passed away indeed!

3 Isaiah 65:17-25

4 2 Peter 3:1-7, esp.vs.6

5 John 14:1-3

6 Exodus 33:20

7 Genesis 15:1, 1 Samuel 3:21, Judges 2:1-2. There are countless other examples, as discussed earlier.

8 Exodus 19:18-20

9 Romans 6:1-5, Matthew 26:26-28

10 Genesis 3:17-24

When God promises to make all things new, He means it. The same way we cannot relate to the Antediluvian world, we are unable to fully comprehend what life under the new Heavens and new earth shall be like. Revelation has given us some *hints*, certainly, but without the problems of mortality, conflict, or moral transgression the settled rhythm of human life shall be vastly disrupted by this change. Today men must eat, drink, sleep and breathe lest they die; in the Resurrection, there may be cases of men living thousands of years without doing any of that. Christians receive the Sacraments today for the forgiveness of their sins, being central to our religious life; with God quite literally being *visible* to us and no sin to mitigate, what shall characterize our worship? While the post-Flood era marked great changes, nothing shall compare to the change in the human experience that shall occur when Christ Returns. However, here God encourages us by saying that it shall be unspeakably *good*.

Vs.6-8

6 And 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 from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

From the Throne, God pronounces Himself to be Alpha and Omega, which Christ will later say of Himself. Thus the doctrine of Christ's Divinity is stated in strong terms, and the unity between the Father and the Son is emphasized. After all, here the Father is re-stating the promises given to the “one who conquers” in the seven letters.¹¹ Note here that salvation by Grace Alone is also emphasized, as eternal life from the “spring of the water of life” is without payment – that is, it is not purchased by the believer in *any* sense, whether by works or by money. Thus we come to a different understanding of what it means to *conquer* in the seventh verse. To conquer is not necessarily about what one *does* so much as it is about remaining in the faith despite pressure to depart it.

This promise of eternal life being without cost is especially comforting for believers given the list of those who shall be damned in the eighth verse. It ought not be seen as a list of sins that, if one commits them, renders one damned forever – otherwise, we find ourselves all damned. God is not contradicting what He has said through the likes of Isaiah who said that man's righteous deed are like a “polluted garment,”¹² or St. Paul who describes even Christians as unable to fully extinguish sin.¹³ If St. John is discussing sins committed in general or particular inclinations of the heart, we would all be damned. After all, the Apostle relates God saying that all liars are damned, but according to Jeremiah we are *all* liars in our hearts.¹⁴

Thankfully the list does not damn everyone; to the contrary, it is relegated to those who have either never believed in the Gospel or have abandoned the Christian faith.

- The cowardly are those who abandon Christ in the face of persecution.
- The faithless are all who refuse to believe in the first place.
- The detestable (that is, ἐβδελυγμένοις,¹⁵¹⁶ with a connotation of inner idolatry) harbor a *secret* faithlessness as they worship *secret* idols.
- The murderers are those who according to Hebrews “trample underfoot the Son of God” by their

11 Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21

12 Isaiah 64:6

13 Romans 7:14-20

14 Jeremiah 17:9

15 Transliterated “ebdelygmenois,” Strong's #948

16 <https://biblehub.com/greek/948.htm>

apostasy.¹⁷

-The sexually immoral are those who abandon God or refuse the faith for pleasure's sake. Scripture ties this particular sin with *rebellion*.¹⁸

-Sorcerers and idolaters choose to openly worship other gods in rebellion against the true God.

-St. John has defined liars previously as whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ.¹⁹

In other words, the list condemns all circumstances and motivations for leaving, refusing, or avoiding the Gospel altogether. God condemns those who *do not believe* as all being *without excuse*. An apostate cannot claim that he should be saved on account of his reason for abandoning God being fear. A sorcerer cannot claim that he believed in Christ while he mixed his “potions” and appealed to demons to brew them. No man has any escape clause by which he may declare his innocence: all who refuse Christ for any reason shall be damned, and all who embrace Christ with faith in Him Alone shall be saved.

17 Hebrews 10:29

18 2 Peter 2:9-10

19 1 John 2:22