

A Brand New World

Heaven on Earth – Part I

Revelation 21:1

Introduction

We will continue our study through the book of Revelation today. So far we have covered all but the final theme of this great book – the theme of heaven.

We began some time ago with the opening pages of this revelation in which we studied “The Sovereignty of Christ in His Church”. This took us from chapter 1 through chapter 5.

In this study, letters from Christ were delivered to seven churches which, in my view, represent the condition of any church in any generation. These letters were powerful and included both challenges and affirmations.

We then followed the raptured church to heaven and listened in on what we called “The First Hymns of Heaven” as hundreds of millions of angels and the redeemed burst into song before the throne of God.

We moved on to chapters 6 through 15 and studied “The Severity of Christ in His Chastisement”. We watched as the terrible time of Tribulation began.

Four horsemen appear, one after another, and while the church is in heaven, the world below begins to experience a seven-year period of worldwide cataclysmic disasters as the wrath of God is poured out. We watched oceans turned to blood and demons unleashed as the world experiences the predicted judgment of God.

It is also a time of unprecedented conversions to faith in Christ. Millions of people refuse the mark of the beast and bravely go to their deaths at the hand of the antichrist and his government.

We then watched Babylon being rebuilt as the capital city of the antichrist who seizes the nations of the world by his satanically-induced powers. The world finally gets its wish as the antichrist institutes, for the first time in human history, a global, one-world government and a one-world religion.

We watched as the antichrist’s grip began to weaken under the unrelenting barrage of God’s judgment and the growing frustration of the other nations.

Then, as the world scene is about to turn on itself, we watched as Christ visibly returned with His beloved. We called this study “The Supremacy of Christ in His Coming”.

The antichrist and his global army are defeated by Christ, and Satan is thrown into the abyss for one thousand years (a millennium).

During this one thousand year timeframe, our imaginations were captured by the revelation of John the Apostle as we studied a literal, physical millennial kingdom with Christ on the throne of David. We learned that the millennial kingdom was a prelude – a foretaste – of the eternal kingdom as the earth is cleaned up and then developed amazingly over the course of one thousand years of Christ’s reign. Economy, education, industry, and the arts all flourished under Christ’s reign.

However, we then watched as the millennial kingdom ended and an attempt by rebellious mankind to overthrow Christ was underway yet again.

Millions marched against Christ’s capital city in Jerusalem. These millions were among the generations born and raised during the one thousand year reign,

- even though their parents and grandparents were believers who had survived the Tribulation and entered the kingdom phase; who had married and raised families during this golden age on the earth;
- even though these later generations had a godly heritage;
- even though they experienced the blessings of wonderful climate changes, marvelous health, long life, and just law;
- even though they could visibly see where Christ ruled from Jerusalem;
- even though they had glorified saints leading them and the enterprises of earth with sinless perfection, grace, and wisdom.

After all of this, when Satan is released from the abyss at the end of this thousand year reign, he is able to raise an army numbering as many as the sands of the seashore to march against Jesus Christ and us, the

immortals who reign with Him. However, we watched as one word of our Lord slaughters these enemy armies and the final judgment takes place at the great white throne.

In these past studies we have covered:

- The Sovereignty of Christ in His Church (chapters 1-5);
- The Severity of Christ in His Chastisement (chapters 6-15);
- The Supremacy of Christ in His Second Coming (chapters 16-20).

Now we begin our study of what we will call:

- The Satisfaction of Christ in His New Creation (chapters 21-22).

We have finally made it to these final chapters on heaven. We have finally made it! Some of you probably thought you would be there before we got here.

Let me say at the outset that we will have more questions about heaven when we are finished than when we began. I hope this study provokes your desire to study heaven further.

Be careful, however. Popular books on heaven often take passages that describe the millennial kingdom and attribute them to heaven.

The Old Testament prophets spent most of their time describing the millennial kingdom.

The majority of what we know about heaven comes from John the Apostle, and specifically the last two chapters of his revelation.

We might not have all our questions answered, but we will have a fresh and new perspective of heaven when we are finished.

We experienced the same thing as we studied the kingdom – Jesus Christ reigning on the earth and the coming golden age when we reign with Christ.

It was new to many of us to learn that we are not just going to live on the earth, die, and go to heaven. We actually have this amazing period of one thousand years ahead of us during which we will reign with Christ on the earth.

While we cannot figure out all the details, when we actually study what God *does* provide for us, our hearts and imaginations are livened with truths we probably never thought about before.

In fact, I had a lot of responses from people who admitted that they used to only think about going to heaven, but never considered the fact that there

would be this one thousand year reign on the earth with Christ or what it might look like.

We will not have all our questions answered about heaven – Have I mentioned that yet? – but we are given enough to really provoke our thinking.

I am going to make a statement at the outset that might surprise you. In fact, after I say it, I will be tempted to duck! At first you might think I have come up with a strange new doctrine. I have not, but here it is: “Our future in the Father’s house – the glorious city of gold; heaven – is actually going to be *on the earth.*”

I have, in fact, actually entitled this series “Heaven on Earth”.

A New Heaven and A New Earth

The truth is that the average Christian thinks about heaven as a place up there somewhere where we should be happy because we are going to do a lot of singing.

Most believers never consider the implications of what it means when we are told in Revelation that there will be a new heaven and a new earth – that the new Jerusalem is going to descend out of heaven, literally taking heaven with it – and it will descend and rest on a new . . . what? God is going to create a new heaven and a new earth!

Listen to the first few verses of Revelation chapter 21 as if for the first time. Begin with verse 1a.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .

This is a reference to a new universe corresponding to our universe now, but new – and we will talk about what “new” means in a moment.

John writes in verses 1b-4,

. . . for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

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,

“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.”

Where is this taking place? On the earth!

To where does the new Jerusalem come? The earth!

We cannot discuss an eternal heaven without discussing an eternal earth. They are not the same thing, but they will be connected forever in the same place.

Even more surprising, we will not just be experiencing the glory of our Creator in the heavenly Jerusalem – the golden city of God’s throne – but will be experiencing the glory of His creation on a brand new earth and universe forever.

With anticipation for what we will learn together, let me invite your attention again to Revelation chapter 21, verse 1.

Then I saw . . .

Stop! Not so fast.

This particular phrase “I saw” is used throughout Revelation to indicate chronological progression.ⁱ

In other words, this indicates “from one event to the next”.

We find these words in:

- chapter 5, verse 1;
- chapter 6, verse 1:
- chapter 7, verse 2;
- chapter 8, verse 2;
- chapter 10, verse 1;
- the beginning of chapters 13, 15, and 18;
- chapter 19, verse 11,
- chapter 20, verses 1 and 11;
- chapter 21, verse 1.

I say all of this to underscore that there are not thousands or even millions of years between these events. They are consecutive events with one following another.

What does John see happening next? Look at chapter 21, verse 1.

. . . I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .

He is effectively saying, “I saw a new universe.”

In other words, there are not millions or billions of years elapsing in order for John to finally see a completed new universe.

Revelation 21 and Genesis 1 are similar in this way. There are no defenses or arguments regarding God’s ability, power, or creative work. It is just announced.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... (Revelation 21:1)

God did not need billions of years to allow things to evolve on earth to the point that they could sustain life the first time around, and He will not need billions of years to create a new heaven and a new earth the second time around.

If you have problems with Genesis 1:1, then you are going to have problems with Revelation 21:1.

However, if you believe that God created the first universe from nothing, you can certainly believe that God can take the elements of the former universe and create from them new heavens and a new earth.

Now, you might wonder why God did not keep the first universe. What has happened to the first earth – the one we are living on right now?

Turn back in your Bible ten pages or so to II Peter to discover that our current universe is going to be destroyed by fire.

Notice II Peter chapter 3, verse 3.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts.

By the way, the word translated “mocker” is a word that refers to someone who “makes fun of . . . mocks.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This word is used to describe a child playing with a toy.

In other words, the unbelievers will make fun of those who believe in the coming judgment of God. They will toy with people who believe such things. They will invite them on talk shows to interview them and toy with them – all the while patronizing the Christian as someone who really needs to be treated about as seriously as a child’s toy.

The world will say, “C’mon, you don’t really believe all that stuff about a creator God and the fact that He’ll judge us, do you? You can’t be serious! Just look around you – everything’s going along just the way it always has.”

This thinking happens to be the scientific theory of uniformitarianism. It is the naturalist’s theory that the same laws of nature have been in operation since the beginning of time; unchanged and unchangeable

and following a uniform pattern, having never been interrupted, supernaturally or otherwise.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, God has not been around for billions of years, and He is not about to show up anytime soon.

However, Peter points out one interesting fact of history – the flood. Look at verses 5-6 of II Peter chapter 3.

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,

through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

God *did* interrupt the systems of natural law and He did unleash the water stored under, around, and above the planet. He actually did literally drown mankind in judgment. The only ones who were saved were those in the ark (Genesis 7).

God now warns, through the apostle Peter's letter, "Just as I disrupted the systems of the planet I created so that the world was flooded, there is another judgment coming."

In fact, the next verse reveals what it is. Continue to verse 7.

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Skip to verse 10b.

. . . the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed [literally, loosed] with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Peter's words in verse 7 could be translated:

. . . the present heavens and earth are being stored with fire, kept for the day of judgment...

In the same way God allowed the canopy of water above to collapse, and the reserves of water beneath to erupt, drowning the earth's inhabitants, He has already built into planet Earth the fire which He will simply allow to erupt.

Think about this. The earth we live on is about 25,000 miles in circumference and 8,000 miles in diameter. I read this, I did not measure it.

The earth is formed like a hollow ball with an outer shell or crust and a liquid core that is seething and boiling in the center of the heart. Temperatures are estimated to be as high as 10,000 degrees

Fahrenheit, which is about the same temperature as the surface of the sun.

In some places on the earth's crust the molten, superheated elements are near the surface and the pressure becomes so great that suddenly a piece of the crust blows apart. This usually occurs at a mountain whose roots reach into the caldron of fire, which we refer to as a volcano. Suddenly millions of tons of burning rock and earth are blown into the sky, shooting flames hundreds of feet into the air and emitting a stream of glowing, burning lava as well as sending ash into the sky for miles around.^{iv}

On May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens in the Pacific Northwest erupted, leaving an area three times the size of the District of Columbia a wasteland. The volcanic eruption, which lasted for nine hours, spewed up to 13,000 metric tons of hot gases and rock every second.

Perhaps you have seen the news about a volcano in Iceland that has been erupting since this past Wednesday, sending an ash plume more than five miles into the air. One article I read talked about the fact that the eruption has shut down air travel across Europe, stranding thousands of travelers and forcing world leaders to govern by phone from airport lounges.

Even world militaries have been forced to alter their flight patterns due to this volcanic eruption. The wider fear is that the invisible microscopic particles could clog airplane engines. Flight cancelations are so numerous that this has become the world's biggest flight disruption since 9/11.^v

Just one volcanic eruption has interrupted the business of world governments.

By the way, in the same *Science News* magazine article that reviewed the results of the eruption of Mt. Saint Helens, I noticed another article across the page that announced astronomers are reconsidering how extraterrestrials can make contact with us.^{vi}

I thought this ironic. Mankind is ignoring the warning signs of a rumbling creation while at the same time, taking seriously contact with aliens.

Are things reversed or what? Are we not captivated by the wrong things?

My friend, every hot springs is a warning, every spouting geyser of steam is a sermon, and every volcanic eruption is a reminder that inside this old earth is a sea of fire. These tell us that God knew exactly what He was talking about when He promised Noah it would flood one day, and He knows what He is talking about when He promises

that planet Earth will disappear in a fiery explosion one day.

Earth is a ticking time bomb. Mankind ignores the warning signs of a planet given to earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions.

Think about the fact that mankind walks around on an outer crust of a planet on which he is working, building his home, conducting his business, taking his vacations, and making his plans, while living on a boiling, seething planet which God has actually designed to one day literally explode and burn away.^{vii}

Paul wrote in Romans 8:19,

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

Creation is even groaning to be redeemed (Romans 8:22).

The volcano in Iceland is just another groan and a warning from God. This old earth has not been designed to last!

Peter says it will one day burn away in a great big roar.

There is friendly debate among Bible scholars as to whether or not God will destroy the earth completely or just burn the surface. There are verses that can be lined up on both sides.

The determining text of II Peter chapter 3 settles the issue for me. It uses clear and decisive language to indicate that while God may reuse the matter and elements of this destroyed planet and universe, He will completely destroy it and refashion a new heaven and a new earth.

One author wrote that by the principle of mass/energy conservation, nothing of the former universe has been lost; God will take the matter which by fire had been reduced to a vapor state and once again exercise His mighty powers of creation and integration, and the new heavens and the new earth will appear, so to speak, out of the ashes of the old.^{viii}

John writes in Revelation 21, verse 1,

. . . the first heaven and the first earth passed away.

Peter explains this in II Peter chapter 3.

Some have suggested that this would be admitting defeat; that it would be unfortunate for God to lose this earth and need to create a new one.

However, our creator God, who evidently happens to be rather excited with His plan of a new creation for us, says through His prophet Isaiah,

Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth and [it is so wonderful that] no one will even think about the old ones anymore.

Be glad; rejoice forever in My creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in My people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more.

(Isaiah 65:17-19 NLT)

When John writes in Revelation 21:1 that he “saw a new heaven and a new earth,” he is referring to the universe in general and earth in particular.

This will be a new earth. The word used by John refers to a new kind of heaven and new kind of earth. It is a word that means this new creation will have continuity with the old creation as we know it, but it will be uniquely new.

God will do with the earth what He will do with our glorified bodies. He will bring from the dust of coffins long inhabited a reconstituted body, but there will be continuity with our past. We will be us, only perfect.

We will not have three arms, four legs, and one big eye in the middle of our foreheads; those are the aliens astronomers are hoping to make contact with. This is not us, as modeled by the glorified body of Jesus Christ. He still had two arms, two legs, spoke in the same language as before, and even enjoyed grilled fish for supper.

However, Jesus could walk through a closed door, disappear and reappear at will, and ascend through the skies.

Like Him, we will be recognizable. We will still be us, only perfected. We will have no physical limitations. We will no longer be restricted by the law of gravity that makes our backs hurt and our bodies shrink.

Like our glorified bodies, the earth will also be recognizable, but different. It will be perfected and unique in many ways.

This will be God’s gift to us, and for all eternity it will be ours to explore, enjoy, uniquely cultivate, travel in, and discover.

It is a real place – a magnificently beautiful, refashioned earth.

There are several words in the Greek language that are translated “earth” or “world”. One of them is the word “cosmos” (κοσμος), which refers to our world system – our world of politics; our world of business. In the Bible this word is often used of the world that excludes God.^{ix}

John used this word when he wrote,

The world [cosmos] is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (I John 2:17)

Another Greek word that is translated “earth” or “world” is “aiwnos” (αιωνος), which refers to “an era, an epoch of time, a dispensation or period of time”. This is the word used by our Lord when He told His disciples,

. . . I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

The third Greek word that is translated “earth” or “world” is “ge” (γη), which we have transliterated to sound like “gee”. It is a word that refers to the physical earth upon which we live – the dirt, the rocks, and the mountains. The English words “geography” and “geology” borrow from this Greek idea.

This is the word the Spirit of God inspires through John the Apostle. John writes that we are going to have a new physical planet, with new rocks, new trees, new rivers, new mountains, and new everything.

In case you missed it, this is a real location with a physical address; a real place.

Jesus did not promise His disciples in John 14, “I am going to prepare a state of mind for you”; He promised them, and us,

. . . I go to prepare a place for you.

. . . that where I am, there you may be also.

(John 14:2-3)

We have often only thought of our heavenly future as a heavenly city somewhere out there – the golden city of God. However, in Revelation 21 we discover that Christ is also going to prepare for us a brand new earth. In fact, according to what John sees, the heavenly city is going to descend and rest on this brand new earth, surrounded by a brand new universe.

Heaven will literally come down to earth.

God will exhibit His glory from His eternal city which rests upon a now recreated, eternal planet which He has redeemed.

Nature will no longer groan for redemption. It will be redeemed and set in motion with perfection, beauty, and glory for God’s redeemed people to enjoy.

Heaven includes earth.

This is the first of our surprises as we study what John the Apostle revealed.

The typical idea of heaven is that it is one long song service and all we will ever do is stand around the throne of God singing one hymn after another. If the truth were told, the average Christian secretly feels guilty for not being spiritual enough to look forward to this.

Frankly, the average Christian wonders what they are going to do after the first million or so years. What do we do after we have sung through the hymnal a few dozen times?

Gary Larson, the cartoonist of *Far Side* humor, drew the typical understanding of heaven by people too afraid to admit it: in the picture is a man with angel wings and a halo who is sitting on a cloud with the expression of someone marooned on an island with absolutely nothing to do for eternity but play his harp, which he has grown tired of. The caption underneath has him saying, “I wish I had brought a magazine.”^x

The truth is that this is a new world we cannot even begin to imagine. John will try to create images and provide some snapshots for us using words that still defy our imagination.

The Triune God will be there, and we cannot imagine our connection and communion with Him, or how this is going to work out.

Millions of fellow believers will also be there, even though we are not sure how our eternal fellowship with them is going to play out. Will it be with all of them, a few of them, or will we rotate through friendships with the redeemed over the course of eternity?

There are a lot of things we are told about heaven, and I am looking forward to studying them with you. However, everything is not provided. I think the reason we are not given every fact about heaven – or even close to as much information as we would like – is because it is so far beyond our time and space perception and even our wildest imaginations.

Describing heaven to humans is like describing the thrill of driving a car for the first time to a giraffe. He is just not going to get it!

Describing the glory of the new earth is like trying to describe a five-star hotel to a June bug!

It is like trying to describe humility to a cat!

It is nearly impossible.

What we *do know* about the new heaven and new earth is:

- This is the place where we are citizens; this is our home (Philippians 3:20);
- This is the place where our names have been recorded (Revelation 20:12);
- This is the place where our treasure is located (Matthew 19:21);^{xi}
- This is the place where serving Christ on assignments we cannot even imagine will take place and never end (Hebrews 12:28).

Now you may have noticed one very unique attribute of the new earth that shows up in Revelation 21:1.

John writes at the end of verse 1 these words,

... and there is no longer any sea.

Literally, there is no longer a sea. This word is equivalent to our word or idea for ocean.

Why would this be? We are not told, but let me offer a couple of suggestions.

From what I have read, the planet we now inhabit is covered by oceans. In fact, 70% of our planet's surface is covered by salt water. The average depth of the ocean is just over two miles.^{xii}

The earth is now bathed in what could be called God's great antiseptic solution, composed of about 96% water, 3.5% salt, and about .5% of a combination of chlorine, magnesium, and calcium.

God literally designed the oceans of our world to purge, cleanse, and preserve, making it fit to live.

One author wrote, "Many of the pollutants and waste we produce get washed out of the soil and into our streams and rivers; others are deliberately dumped into the rivers. The rivers wash these materials into the ocean where it absorbs, scrubs and breaks down these pollutants. The sun heats the ocean, causing only pure, clean water vapor to float up into the sky, forming clouds which bring refreshing rain back to the land – a continuous cycle of cleansing and renewal. But in the new earth and

heavens there will be no more pollution, no more decay, no more need for cleansing."^{xiii}

Add to this the fact that the ocean has been used by God to divide nations, making war and invasion more difficult.

Donald Grey Barnhouse also brought out the point that the ocean is God's metaphor throughout scripture for evil, and for Gentile nations that are not in covenant with God.^{xiv}

In the new earth, God effectively creates an earth without the ocean; He removes barriers from continents as the topography of the earth is changed and He removes that which represented division and rebellion.

However, keep in mind, as Warren Wiersbe pointed out in his commentary on this text, "No more sea does not mean no more water . . . or bodies of water."^{xv}

The throne of God sits upon a glassy sea (Revelation 4:6). From His throne flows a river (Revelation 22:1) and this river will flow somewhere as it cascades in waterfall after waterfall down from the throne of God, through the golden city, and out of the city into the earth.

We have every reason to anticipate a planet – as it is today – populated with bodies of water. Lakes may be so large that we will not be able to see across them.

One author postulated that huge lakes could, in effect, act as freshwater oceans, teeming with recreated life – saltwater animals recreated and adapted to live and flourish in fresh water.^{xvi}

However, the symbol of evil and separation is gone, as well as the cleansing system of the salty oceans of our world, as they will no longer be needed in God's brand new earth.

This is a brand new and unique universe!

We often talk about heaven being our blessed hope (Titus 2:13). We are looking for our blessed hope – eternal life with Jesus Christ.

We so quickly focus on the word "hope" that we overlook the word "blessed," which could translated "happy, jubilant, glorious".

The new heaven and the new earth happen to be our glorious prospect, and the reality of this eternal place causes us great jubilation and joy!

We have no idea how amazing this place that we will inhabit and explore for all of eternity will be – our brand new world!

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- ⁱ John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 262.
- ⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 780.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, Prophecy (Insight for Living, 1983), p. 34.
- ^{iv} M. R. De Haan, Revelation (Zondervan, 1946), p. 285.
- ^v <http://www.aolnews.com/world/article/europe-flights-grounded-for-3rd-day-as-volcanic-ash-worsens/19443783>.
- ^{vi} Sid Perkins, "A Fresh Look at Mount St. Helens," Science News, vol. 177 #9, (Apr. 24, 2010), p. 18.
- ^{vii} De Haan, p. 285.
- ^{viii} Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record (Tyndale House, 1986), p. 436.
- ^{ix} Stephen J. Lawson, Heaven Help Us! (Navpress, 1995), p. 105.
- ^x Randy Alcorn, Heaven (Tyndale, 2004), p. 6.
- ^{xi} MacArthur, p. 260.
- ^{xii} Ray C. Stedman, God's Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 336.
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Donald Grey Barnhouse, Revelation (Zondervan, 1971), p. 400.
- ^{xv} Warren W. Wiersbe, Revelation: Be Victorious (Victor Books, 1987), p. 146.
- ^{xvi} Alcorn, p. 266.