

Revelation Chapters 21 and 22

“Behold, I am making all things new...”

The new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21 v 1 to 8)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (verse 1) – the idea of a new earth, with a new atmosphere and sky, is a familiar theme in both the Old and New Testaments: see Isaiah 65 v 17, 2 Peter 3 v 11 to 13. The ‘new heaven’ does not mean the heaven where God is enthroned. The Bible uses the word ‘heaven’ in three senses: (i) the first heaven is the earth’s atmosphere, or ‘blue sky’; (ii) the second heaven is outer space, or ‘night sky’; (iii) the third heaven is the place where God lives in glory. Here the ‘new heaven’ means a new ‘blue sky’ and a new ‘night sky’.

- How does John describe the ‘new Jerusalem’ (verse 2)?
- What will characterise the ‘holy city’ (verse 3), and what ‘former things’ will have passed away (verse 4)?
- How will God reward the “one who conquers” (verse 7)? Who is the ‘overcomer’? 1 John 5 v 4, 5.

This is truly a ‘new’ heaven and a new earth, not merely a ‘remade’ heaven and earth: in Isaiah 65 v 17 the Hebrew word for ‘create’ (אֵרָא, *bara*) means to ‘create out of nothing’.

“The sea was no more” (verse 1) – to the Jewish mind, the sea was evil: it was associated with ‘the wicked’ (Isaiah 57 v 20); in the Book of Revelation it is the source of the Satanic beast (Revelation 13 v 1) and the place of the dead (Revelation 20 v 13).

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (verse 4) – what tears? Tears of bereavement, tears of sympathy, tears of penitence, tears of disappointment, tears of lost opportunities, tears of yearning...
“Behold, I am making all things new” (verse 5) – Paul saw this transformation at work on this side of eternity: see 2 Corinthians 5 v 17.

The new Jerusalem and the river of life (Revelation 21 v 9 to Revelation 22 v 5)

- In these verses John is given a much more detailed vision of the “holy city Jerusalem”. The various features (radiance, high wall, twelve gates, foundations, city dimensions, “river of the water of life”) are probably both literal and symbolic. What do you think these features symbolise?

“Its radiance like a most rare jewel” (verse 11) – John is first struck by the glory of God in this city, expressed in the radiance shining from it.

“It had a great, high wall” (verse 12) – the wall is not for defence, because there are no enemies, but it gives the city boundaries, showing that some will be excluded, as “only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life” (verse 27) can enter. “On the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed” (verse 12) – these names demonstrate the heritage that God’s people have with Israel: God will never forget the tribes of Israel.

“The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (verse 14) – the foundations are an eternal testimony to the apostles, and their permanent place in God’s plan (see Ephesians 2 v 19, 20).

“Jasper... sapphire... agate...” (verse 19) – precise identification of these gemstones is difficult, but they give the impression of unparalleled beauty; there is a possible connection to the gemstones of the high priest’s breastplate (Exodus 28 v 15 to 21), but the correlation is not exact. “For its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (verse 22) – the temple is not removed, but expanded: *everything* is holy and the dwelling place of God.

“The river of the water of life” (verse 1) – throughout the Old Testament, writers used the picture of a river as an expression of God’s richness, provision, and peace (Psalm 46 v 4, Isaiah 48 v 18, Zechariah 14 v 8). Why do the nations need healing (v 2)? The Greek word for ‘healing’ (θεραπεία, *therapeia*) can also mean ‘health-giving’.

“They shall see his face” (verse 4) – Moses was denied the privilege of seeing God face to face (Exodus 33 v 20 to 23), but everyone in heaven will see his face. Through Jesus we know something of the face of God *now* (2 Corinthians 4 v 6), but Paul also anticipated the greater fulfilment of seeing the face of God *in eternity* (1 Corinthians 13 v 12)!

Jesus is coming (Revelation 22 v 6 to 21)

- These final verses include promises (verses 7, 12, 20), titles of Jesus (verses 13, 16), warnings (verses 18, 19) and an invitation (verse 17).
- What is Jesus’ overriding promise (see Matthew 24 v 44)? Why are the warnings given? What invitation is given in verse 17, and to whom? Why is this verse so exciting and encouraging?

“Behold, I am coming soon” (verse 12) – the Greek word for ‘soon’ is *ταχύ* (*tachy*), which is better translated ‘quickly’ or ‘suddenly’.

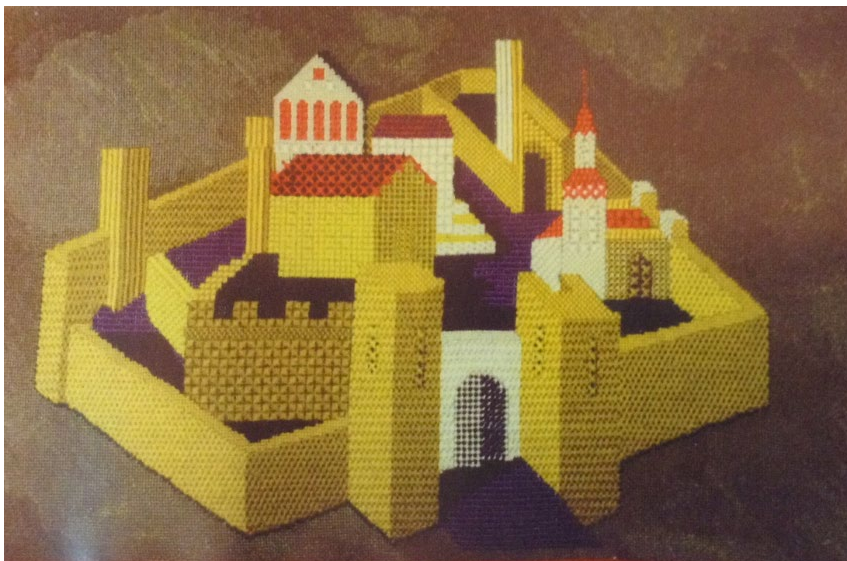
“I am... the first and the last” (verse 13) – this proves that Jesus is Jehovah God (Isaiah 41 v 4).

“The root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (verse 16) are also Messianic titles (Isaiah 11 v 1, Numbers 24 v 17).

Prayer – thank you Lord, that in these closing chapters we see the curse of sin lifted, our share in the tree of life restored, and the joy of Heaven regained. Help us to be encouraged by this Revelation. Come, Lord Jesus!

Personal note

I would like to end this incredible series of Studies in the Book of Revelation on a personal note... During the 1960s we lived in Highgate, North London, and our ‘local church’ at this time was St Michael’s Anglican Church, Highgate. It was there that my mother, Mary Hall, joined the prestigious ‘Sylvia Green’s Embroidery Group’, where she embroidered the amazing Celestial City (New Jerusalem), to a design by Sylvia Green, for a ‘*sedilia*’ (choir stall) cushion. My mother passed into God’s eternity in December 2010, aged nearly 90.



Celestial City (New Jerusalem) – embroidered by my mother, Mary Hall

From Sylvia Green’s Embroidery Group