We Will Dwell with God Forever

Revelation 21:1-8

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 21:1-4 John saw the new heaven and new earth which replaces the old earth—the new Jerusalem, where God will dwell with men and where there will be no death or mourning or crying or pain. * Revelation 21:5-8 God makes everything new in His new creation, and God’s people will enjoy abundant spiritual life and fellowship with God in the new creation, but unbelievers suffer the second death—the lake of burning sulfur. * Revelation 21:9-21 John describes the appearance of the Holy City, Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God, and which is the place where God will dwell with His people. |
| **Summary Sentence** | God’s plan of redemption is complete, and God’s people will live forever in intimate fellowship with God in the new Jerusalem. |
| **Central Idea** | In the new Jerusalem we will dwell with God forever. |

When I was a little girl, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. She taught me to read when I was four; she taught me the multiplication tables when I was seven, and she taught me hundreds of Bible verses. Another thing that she did was that she did a lot of needlework. She embroidered every mundane piece of fabric that came into her house. Her dish towels were plain, white cotton dish towels, but every one was made special by her needlework; she embroidered every dish towel she owned. I have some of her pillowcases here, and you can see how she transformed a plain white pillowcase into a work of art.

She also did a lot of counted cross-stitch. When I was very little, I would watch what she was doing, and it was all very perplexing to me, because I couldn’t perceive the pattern. She would take the fabric and put it in an embroidery hoop, and the she’d take a particular color of embroidery thread, and she’d make a few little X’s at the top, and then a cluster of X’s on one side, and then a whole bunch of X’s in the center, and then she’d get another color of thread, and there would soon be more little puddles of X’s on that portion of the fabric. I understood the specifics, the details of what she was doing at any particular moment, but I had no idea what the finished product was going to look like.

We have a tendency in our study of the book of Revelation to be focused on the details and to miss the beauty of what God is accomplishing overall. We look at the threads and the colors and the particular placement of the stitches, and we miss the glorious beauty of the tapestry God has woven.

As you consider the book of Revelation, I would urge you that you not let yourself be distracted by the details of the process and miss the beauty of the finished product. Don’t let yourself be distracted by speculation about timelines and concerns about who the beast might be, or what specific current events might correspond to the events described in Revelation. Rather than focus on details, let yourself be overwhelmed by the glory of the completed masterpiece that Revelation presents to us.

Think about the purpose of the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a book of comfort for believers who are facing suffering, and ultimately it’s a book about Christ. It’s a revelation of our Lord. In the gospels we see Jesus in His humility; in Revelation we see Him in His majesty. In the gospels we see His sacrificial love; in Revelation we see His purifying judgment. In the gospels we see His suffering on our behalf; in Revelation we see His victory over evil. In the gospels we see Him die for us; in Revelation we see Him exalted as our King.

But in addition to the expanded picture we see of our Lord Christ, we also see in the book of Revelation the certainty of *our* eternal destiny. We see in Revelation what God has provided for *our* future. In the eternal kingdom of God **we will dwell with God** in a place of sinless perfection. In the final Kingdom of God we will enjoy intimate fellowship with God forever.

Open your Bibles this morning to Revelation chapter 21.

In these last two chapters of Revelation, we see the resolution of all things. It is not until Revelation 21 that we see the ultimate fulfillment of all of God’s promises. God has redeemed and glorified His people. God has removed all evil, and God has provided a new creation, a new earth, a new Jerusalem. Our eternal destiny is a state of glory and perfection. **In the new Jerusalem, we will dwell with God forever**.

Look at verse 1. *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”*

Let me emphasize again that heaven—the concept of heaven we have today—is *not* our eternal destiny. We don’t go to heaven to live there forever. We live there for a while, but our eternal destiny is the new creation—the new earth.

Our final destiny is *not* the Millennial kingdom; our final destiny is not a thousand-year kingdom on a fallen earth; our final destiny is an *eternal* kingdom on a *new* earth. This earth is destined for destruction, but we are destined to live forever. We will live with God forever in the New Jerusalem. We do go to heaven when we die, but that’s only an interim situation. Our ultimate destination is to **dwell with God forever** on the new, recreated earth.

Look at verse 1 again: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”*

Verse 1 says that there will be no sea. The sea will be no more. Why is this? Doesn’t God like the beach? I grew up in Jacksonville, and the ocean was just a few miles from my house. I love the ocean; I love the beach. How are we to understand this? Why is the sea a bad thing?

Throughout the Bible, we find that there are terms that have a figurative meaning; there are terms that mean more than their literal sense would convey. For instance, we learn in the 23rd Psalm that the Lord is our Shepherd. We understand that term as a metaphor. We don’t mean by the term *Shepherd* that the Lord serves us in caring for our flocks of white wooly sheep; we mean that God is our compassionate leader. He’s our Provider; He’s our Protector.

When Jesus said that He is the vine and we are the branches, He didn’t mean that He and we are literal botanical entities. He meant that we are connected to one another, and it is as we stay close to Him that we produce fruit. And of course, when we talk about producing fruit, we’re not talking about grapes. I like grapes, but we’re not talking about that. In the parable of the vine and the branches, we’re talking about godly character being developed in us.

And so, in Revelation 21:1, when we read that there will be no sea, we should carefully consider what that might mean, and whether it might be a metaphor.

Many times in the Bible, the sea is used in a figurative sense as representing the source of evil and the realm of godlessness. In Revelation 12:18, the dragon—the devil—stood on the shore of the sea. In Revelation 13:1, Satan calls to himself the beast from the sea—the beast that represents governments and authorities that will oppose God and persecute God’s people. In Daniel chapter 7, Daniel is given a vision of four powerful beasts rising from the sea, and these beasts represent four evil and godless world kingdoms. Daniel was terrified by this vision.

In Mark chapter 5, when Jesus cast evil spirits out of the demon-possessed man of the Gerasenes, Jesus sent the evil spirits into a herd of pigs, and then sent the pigs into the sea.

In Isaiah 57:20, God says this: *“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.”* The sea is a place of unrest. In Isaiah, the *sea* pictures the activity and the character of the wicked.

But when Jesus came, Jesus demonstrated His authority over evil by calming the sea. Jesus walked on the sea, illustrating that evil cannot touch Him; chaos cannot disturb Him.

When Jesus chose His first disciples, He went to the shore of the sea and He called Simon and Andrew. They were fishermen; their lives were spent casting nets to draw fish from the physical sea. Jesus told them that if they followed Him, He would make them fishers of men. They would be casting nets into the sea in a spiritual sense—they would be casting their nets into realm of the lost; the territory of godlessness—and they would rescue men and women from that place of chaos and they would draw them to Jesus.

In the new creation, there will no longer be any sea; there will no longer be any source of evil. There will no longer be any realm of godless unrest. There will no longer be any death or mourning or crying or pain.

The centerpiece of the new earth is the new Jerusalem. Look at verses 2-3. *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now* ***the dwelling of God is with men****, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”*

The new Jerusalem is the eternal dwelling place of God’s people. It’s not a city that man builds; it’s a city that God gives. It’s a city that comes down from heaven—a city built by God. The new Jerusalem is prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. The image of a bride pictures purity, holiness, and beauty. This city, the new Jerusalem, is the ultimate kingdom of God. **The new Jerusalem is the eternal Kingdom where God will dwell with His people**.

Now look again at verse 3. This is magnificent, breathtaking, central idea of the entire chapter. *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*

There is one single concept in this verse, and that single concept is repeated—it’s restated—five time. Anytime you see something in Scripture repeated five times, you know it’s important.

Look at what we see in verse 3:

1. the dwelling of God is with men
2. He will live with them
3. They will be His people
4. God Himself with be with them
5. (God) will be their God

**In the new Jerusalem God will dwell with us forever**. This is a big deal. This is a new thing. All that has ever separated man from God will be eliminated, and God will be with us. This is a return to the condition that existed originally in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis chapter 2, before the fall of man, Adam would walk with God in the Garden of Eden. In the new Jerusalem there will be a return to that blessed situation, but actually it’s going to be better than the Garden of Eden, because in the eternal state, there will be no possibility of sin.

In the new Jerusalem, we will have eternal, unbroken fellowship with God. **In the new Jerusalem, we will dwell with God, and we will be His people forever**.

We can’t comprehend such a thing, because we’ve never experienced it. We’ve never experienced this kind of closeness with God, but this is what we were created for. This intimate fellowship with our Creator is what we were designed for.

I remember that before I had children, I really couldn’t comprehend how it was that parents loved their kids so much. As I observed other people’s kids, I saw that young children were demanding, complaining, noisy, selfish, and they were always sticky. No matter how much you wipe a kid’s hands, his hands are still sticky. Why would you want to clutter up your life with a child?

I remember a wise pastor saying to me that God calls children a gift from the Lord. Children are a *good* gift. And he said to my husband and to me, *“right now you’re enjoying your life unencumbered by children. But you believe the Bible is true, and if God says that children are precious gift, you know it’s true! So take that on faith; it is a true statement. Children are a good thing.”*

It was a couple of years later that my first son was born. I remember, even in the hospital, right after giving birth, that I was overwhelmed with love for my son. And I realized—and I said to my husband—*“this is what I was made for. I’ve never in my life felt so satisfied and so fulfilled as I feel today holding my baby boy.”* And so it was. I couldn’t understand it before I experienced it, but once I held that newborn baby, I knew that this was the greatest gift I had ever received apart from my salvation.

In the same way, we have no way of appreciating the joy of intimate fellowship with God. We have no way of understanding what that kind of closeness with God will be like. But that is what we were created for, and **in the new Jerusalem, God will dwell with us**. That will be a glorious day.

Now look at verse 5. *“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold! I make all things new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”*

God says, *“Behold, I make all things new!”* In the provision of the new Jerusalem, God’s power is revealed, and His purpose in redemption is fulfilled. The heavens and the earth have been made new. The people of God have been made new. Our life with God is new. Behold! God makes all things new! It is *God* who makes it happen. It is *God* who makes us fit to serve Him. It is *God* who removes the curse of the fall.

Now look at verse 6. *“He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.’”*

God proclaims, *“It is done!”* The Kingdom of God has come in its fullness. It is done!

God goes on to say, *“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the fountain of the water of life.”* In the New Jerusalem, God’s people have access freely to the living water, the water of life, spiritual refreshment from the eternal presence of God. This is the life of eternal fellowship with God. You and I will have the privilege of drinking freely from the spring—the neverending source—of the water of life.

Now look at verse 7. God says: *“He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”* Who is the one who overcomes? What does it take to be an overcomer? The apostle John explains the concept in 1 John 5:4-5. John says, *“Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”*

In verses 7 and 8, God explicitly contrasts the destinies of those who are people of faith versus those whose names are not written in the book of life. People of faith inherit all of the beauty and the glory of the New Jerusalem. People who have rejected Christ will instead be sent to the place of condemnation, which is called the second death.

Next we have a description of the New Jerusalem. This Holy City, the New Jerusalem is above and beyond our concept of a city. Consider some of the images God uses to describe the New Jerusalem, the new dwelling place of God and His people.

This New Jerusalem is called the bride of Christ, the wife of the Lamb. In chapter 19, the bride was the body of believers—Christians from all ages. Here the bride is the City, the eternal dwelling place of Christians from all ages. The bride of Christ is the people of faith; the bride of Christ is the new Jerusalem.

This bride appears adorned with dazzling light—the glory of God. God is with her; God is joined with her. In a Hebrew wedding in the Ancient Near East, the groom goes to His bride and accompanies her back to the place where the wedding ceremony takes place. As the bride of Christ comes down from heaven, the glory of God is manifest with her, in her, around her. The city shines with the brilliant light of the presence of God, and just as man and woman are joined in a marriage covenant forever; even so, God in Christ joins Himself to the people of faith forever.

The city is surrounded by a wall, with twelve gates, and the gates into the city have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The gates into the city bear the names of twelve tribes of Israel. Entrance into this city has been provided by God through His covenant relationship with Israel, and through God’s provision of the promised Seed of Abraham, the true Israel, our Lord Jesus.

This city, this new Jerusalem, houses the New Covenant people of God—those redeemed by the Lamb from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. This New Covenant people of God—Christians—serve God forever as a Kingdom of priests. Back in Revelation 5:9-10, the four living creatures before the throne of God sang to the Lamb, and this is what they sang: *“...by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”*

The walls of this city have twelve foundations, and on these foundations are engraved the names of the twelve apostles. In the book of Ephesians, Paul identifies the apostles and prophets of the early church as the foundation of this eternal city. This is a temple of which Jesus is the chief cornerstone. In Ephesians chapter 2, Paul speaks to the Christians in Ephesus and says this: *“You are fellow citizens with God’s people; you are members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building* (the household of God) *is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”*

In our passage, in verse 15, John reports that the angel from God takes a measuring rod of gold to measure the city. There’s much more meaning to this measuring process that merely obtaining physical dimensions. We saw back in Revelation chapter 11, that when God directs that something be measured, there is an implication that God is committing to protect that thing from defilement. Back in Revelation chapter 11, John was told to measure the heavenly part of God’s temple, but not the earthly part—the earthly part would be overrun by the ungodly.

In our passage today, the angel takes a measuring rod of gold—symbolizing absolute purity and eternal value, and the angel measures the new Jerusalem. This act of measuring the holy city signifies that the new Jerusalem is fully protected by God from any impurity, and corruption. The protection extends from east to west; from north to south. The city of God is pure; the entire city of God is protected

The measurements of the city are 12,000 by 12,000 by 12,000. The city is a perfect cube: 12,000 cubed. 12 cubed times 1000 cubed. The city of God is perfect.

The size of this city is breathtakingly immense. The nation of Israel on this earth is about 150 miles from Dan to Beersheba. This city, this new Jerusalem, is almost ten times this length. The city of God is immense. The city of God is pure. The city of God is protected and secure. The city of God is perfect.

Why, though, is this new Jerusalem a perfect cube in its dimensions? I get that it’s 12,000 stadia in length by 12,000 stadia in width—but why is it 12,000 stadia high? That’s like 1400 miles high! You can’t fly an airplane without supplemental oxygen above two miles high. This city is 1400 miles high. Scientists consider that the boundary between our atmosphere and outer space to be 62 miles high. This city is 1400 miles high. What is the purpose of that?

In Solomon’s temple, in the Old Testament, the Holy of Holies—the place where God dwelled—was a perfect cube. The portion of the temple where God’s presence was manifest was a perfect cube—it was 20 cubits by 20 cubits by 20 cubits. It is my view that the key concept here is that this new Jerusalem is now the eternal Holy of Holies. The new Jerusalem is a perfect cube because God dwells there. There is no separate, identifiable temple in the new Jerusalem because God fills the new Jerusalem. It is the glory of God—it is the presence of God—that gives the city its brilliance.

The city of God is immense. The city of God is pure. The city of God is protected and secure. The city of God is perfect, and **we will dwell there with God** forever. When the new Jerusalem descends from heaven, the fullness of the Kingdom of God has come. What a glorious destiny we have!

Let’s close in prayer.