

# Living Word Fellowship Church

## An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 21

Pastor Paul Cannings, D.Phil.

### I. A Biblical Exposition of Revelation 21:1-2

#### A. The New Heaven and the New Earth:

1. Isaiah had already predicted the new heavens and new earth (Is 65:17; 66:22); the focus of attention in this new creation would be the new Jerusalem (Is 65:18). Many Jewish depictions of the age to come (e.g., in 1 Enoch, Jubilees and Pseudo-Philo) emphasized the new heavens and earth. <sup>[1]</sup>

a) God brings to His new Garden of Eden all His children who believed in Him that He has perfected; in other words Satan, despite all the noise and damage he thought he was creating, did nothing. <sup>[2]</sup>

2. “New” (*kainos*) is an eschatological catchword in Revelation that speaks of the kingdom of God and the coming age when all things become new (Rev. 21:5). Other “new” spiritual realities include a new name (2:17; 3:12) and the new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2). <sup>[3]</sup>

3. The opening verses of chapter 21 describe the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, which chronologically follows the thousand-year reign of Christ described in chapter 20. Chapter 21 begins with the familiar words **I saw**, an expression repeated in verse 2 (cf. v. 22, “I did not see”). This new creation is described as **a new heaven and a new earth.** That it is a totally new heaven and a new earth, and not the present heaven and earth renovated, is supported by the

additional statement, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (also see comments on 20:11). An amazingly small amount of information is given about the new heaven and the new earth. But one major fact is stated in this verse: **there was no longer any sea.**<sup>[4]</sup> There is no need to keep mankind separated anymore (Genesis 11:6).<sup>[5]</sup>

4. Isa. 66:22 affirms that one of the qualitative differences is that “the new heaven and new earth” will “remain” forever, in contrast to the old, which passed away.<sup>[6]</sup>

## B. The Holy City, New Jerusalem:

1. The new world that v 1 has portrayed as replacing the old is now called “the holy city, new Jerusalem.” Not surprisingly, the language comes from another Isaiah passage (Isa. 52:1b, “Jerusalem, the holy city”), again promising a time when God’s people will no longer suffer from captivity but will be restored forever to God’s presence (Isa. 52:1–10). The allusion anticipates the marital imagery in Rev. 21:2b because of the similar metaphors in Isa. 52:1: “clothe yourself in your strength, O Zion; clothe yourself in your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.”<sup>[7]</sup>

2. John’s addition of “new” to “holy city, Jerusalem” is also derived from Isaiah. Isa. 62:1–2 refers to “Jerusalem” as that which “will be called by a new name” at the time of its end-time glorification. This new name is then explained in Isa. 62:3–5 as signifying a new, intimate marriage relationship that Israel will have with God. Therefore, the marriage metaphor in Rev. 21:2 explaining the significance of “new Jerusalem” is not fortuitous. Already in 3:12 identification with Christ’s “new name” has been seen to be essentially the same as identification with “God’s name” and “the name of the new Jerusalem.” All three names refer to the intimate, latter-day presence of God and Christ with their people, as expressed in 22:3–4 and 14:1–4 (see the extensive discussion above of 2:17 and the comments on 3:12). 21:3 infers the same idea from “new Jerusalem” and the marriage picture: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among people, and he will tabernacle among them, and they themselves will be his people, and God himself will be among them.”<sup>[8]</sup>

3. Isaiah's prophecy of Israel's final redemption finds fulfillment in the church since Rev. 3:12 identifies both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church of Philadelphia with the "new Jerusalem." This is confirmed further by 21:10–14, which figuratively identifies the names of Israel's tribes and the names of the apostles as part of the structure of "the holy city Jerusalem descending from heaven from God," which itself is equated with "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). Therefore, "the saints" wearing wedding clothing in 19:7–8 also represent the multiethnic church.<sup>[9]</sup>

4. That the Holy City comes down out of heaven seems to imply that it is not identical with heaven.<sup>[10]</sup>

5. Such a reversal of images suggests that for John, the New Jerusalem is both a people and a place (cf. **John 14:2–4**). This picture of a renewed city fulfills numerous Old Testament prophecies where Zion is now the "City of the LORD" (Isa. 60:14) and the "City No Longer Deserted" (62:12). Much of its imagery is specifically drawn from Ezekiel's vision of the renewed temple, land, and city in Ezekiel 40–48. This vision is contrasted deliberately with the vision of Babylon, the mother of prostitutes. Both are introduced by one of the seven angels who holds the seven bowls (Rev. 17:1; 21:9) who then takes John up in the Spirit to see the visions (17:3; 21:10). The earthly city Babylon is a prostitute while the heavenly Jerusalem, also called the "holy city" (21:2, 10), is a bride and wife.<sup>[11]</sup>

### C. The Bride Adorned for her Husband:

1. The bridal imagery resumes from 19:7–9, where the wedding of the Lamb and his bride is announced. The use of this image suggests that the new Jerusalem is a people, the church. In 11:2, God's people are portrayed using the figure of a holy city that was trampled; here "Holy City" describes their heavenly destination where safety and security are assured (cf. 21:10; 22:19). The participation of the saints in this city fulfills the promise to be a part of the new Jerusalem (3:12). The coming of a new, second Jerusalem thus implies the passing away of an old, first Jerusalem. This newness suggests more than renewal or renovation, but, in fact, replacement.<sup>[12]</sup>

2. Rev. 19:7–8 has already alluded to the same Isaiah passage to make a similar point about God’s intimacy with his redeemed people. It thus clarifies further that the bride is a metaphor for the saints.<sup>[13]</sup>

3. In particular, the wedding garments in 19:7–8 connote not only righteous acts committed by saints but also their vindicated condition as a result of their faithful acts (or their vindication as a result of God’s acts of judgment against their oppressor, which is also a prophetic theme in the Isaiah context). Throughout the Apocalypse ἐτοιμάζω (“prepare”) has been used of an event occurring ultimately as a result of God’s decree and not human action (so 9:7, 15; 12:6; 16:12; cf. 8:6, where angels “prepared themselves to sound”). So also here in 21:2 the intimate union of God and his people, and possibly his vindication of them, is a prophetic decree depicted as fulfilled in the future. Preparation of the “bride adorned for her husband” conveys the thought of God’s preparation of his people for himself. Throughout history God is forming his people to be his bride, so that they will reflect his glory in the ages to come (so Eph. 5:25–27), an idea developed in what remains of Revelation 21 (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).<sup>[14]</sup>

4. But the woman of Revelation 12 represents that community in its suffering existence on earth, though spiritually protected because of its ultimate heavenly identity. The bride in Revelation 21:1ff., on the other hand, represents the end-time completion of the redeemed, believing community from throughout the ages, finally secured from any dangers and residing in the midst of God’s perfect, full presence. Therefore, the new Jerusalem of ch. 21 has its inaugurated existence throughout the ages in the true Israel of the OT age and the church of the NT age (the latter of which Gal. 4:21–31 and Heb. 12:22–23 testify to).<sup>[15]</sup>

---

[1] Keener, C. S. (1993). [\*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Re 21:1). InterVarsity Press.

[2] Keener, C. S. (1993). [\*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Re 21:1). InterVarsity Press.

[3] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [\*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation\*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 364). Zondervan.

[4] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [\*Revelation\*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 983). Victor Books.

[5] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [\*Revelation\*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 983). Victor Books.

[6] Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (p. 1041). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[7] Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (pp. 1043–1044). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[8] Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (p. 1044). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[9] Beale, G. K. (1999). [\*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text\*](#) (p. 1045). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[10] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [\*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Re 21:2). Moody Press.

[11] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, pp. 366–367). Zondervan.

[12] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 364). Zondervan.

[13] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 1045). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[14] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 1045). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[15] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 1045–1046). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.