

Text: Revelation 21:1-8

Title: All Things New

Truth: God and redeemed humanity will dwell together forever. God will be glorified, and His peoples' longing for eternal peace, life, and fellowship with God will be satisfied.

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This has been a great conference layout. We need to understand the kingdom, the people of God, and hermeneutics, in order to be able to properly understand passages like 1 Cor. 15:24-28 and this one in Revelation 21.

1. Read Revelation 21:1-8 (ESV)

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."

2. Theological Systems: Relation to Dispensationalism (D)

A. D has been characterized as a system of discontinuity...and rightly so at one level. But this characteristic is portrayed in a very negative light by those who don't embrace the dispensational, literal approach to Scripture.

Examples: two entirely separate peoples of God and two eternal destinies for these people; the tired accusation of two ways of salvation in the two Testaments; or two types of Christians—believers and followers. Or salvation and discipleship. Or a Jewish church and Gentile church.

D does not obligate us to adhere to those strange hyperdispensational distinctions. D is *not* a system of discontinuity at all. It teaches a wonderful consolidating truth.

B. God organizes His world program in a series of dispensations, or more simply, arrangements. Because God is sovereign, He can at will change the terms and conditions under which His people live. He has done that a number of times throughout history, with the Law, the church, and the kingdom being three distinct eras of history that receive much of the divine attention in Scripture. We believe it is very important for us to approach Scripture with these things in mind.

C. The divisions of history have historically gotten a lot of air time in our circles. Indeed it is helpful to recognize them. It can be revolutionary in a way because it can answer so many questions like the Christian's relationship to the Law of Moses. But the dispensations are not arranged in hermetically sealed compartments. Rather, as Dr. Rolland McCune taught us, they form a staircase arrangement, with the next dispensation

building upon the foundation of the former, carrying forward some principles and obsoleting others with the progress of divine revelation.

The staircase leads to a grand climax in the millennial and mediatorial kingdom of Christ. This is the administration of the fullness of times. Then, as the calendar fades into the eternal age, the eternal kingdom of the God of Heaven takes the front seat.

D. It is this kingdom that draws together all the loose ends and supposed “discontinuities” of God’s program and sums them up into one grand unity. Thus, DT is *not* ultimately a discontinuity system. It is a theological approach that offers diversity in unity forever.

The kingdom of Christ is the grand unifier that ties together all the loose ends of God’s revelation, of history, and of the peoples of God. It does so through the dispensational program that culminates in the co-dwelling of God and man.

E. **Dispensational theology** is not the same as a dispensation, or a list of dispensations. It is a much more thorough-going approach to theology and hermeneutics which holds that:

- God progressively works out His reign over creation,
- through a sequence of carefully interconnected administrations,
- climaxing in the mediatorial kingdom ruled by Christ.
- The kingdom is the end product of God’s redemptive work on the earth and it consists of Israel, the church, and the redeemed of all ages, under Christ’s rule.
- The kingdom extends into the eternal state, again with believing Israel and the church,
- and is designed to bring honor and glory to God forever.

It is this latter aspect—the God-glorifying extension of the kingdom program in the heavenly state—that is the subject matter of our message.

3. Introduction and Need for This Passage

Pastor Huffstutler asked me to explain and apply Revelation 21:1-8 this evening. Though the text is fairly straightforward, I admit a sense of inadequacy to this task. The realities that the text brings to our minds are beyond the earthly. Yet, we are drawn to the text because the believer’s mind is primed to think of our future hope. We are told to set our minds on “things above.” We are exhorted by our Lord to lay up treasures in heaven. We look forward to the blessed hope and all that entails. We

eagerly await the completed redemption of our bodies, and indeed of the created realm. Our hearts are pre-programmed with the *eternity* concept, and we want to experience it. We sense a thirst that represents a spiritual shortcoming cannot be satisfied this side of the glorious new creation. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

We come to the Biblical text with the rock-solid conviction that what it tells us is true. The reason John wrote was because, as God said, the words are true and faithful. This is why we read and study and preach this and all other texts of Scripture. We are commanded to know the true and faithful sayings of God, and to “keep” them as Jesus tells us in the Great Commission. As a result, we must resist the temptation to let our imagination take hold of what is written here and begin to speculate about what the future *could* be. Rather, we need to try to discipline ourselves to think specifically about what God has said *will be*.

For the truth of this passage to be fully appreciated, we have to recognize that the existence that we now experience, **no matter how peaceful or prosperous**, is but a dark shadow of what could and shall be in the eternal future of God’s everlasting kingdom. **If, on the other hand**, our present existence doesn’t seem so peaceful or prosperous, we must appreciate that for the redeemed, God will remedy each and every shortcoming of our present existence by taking up residence with His people in a glorious new creation. In other words, **if we are walking in relative light** now, notice the darkness of that light. **And if we are walking in darkness**, look at the coming light so as to be strengthened to carry on until that day.

Maybe we find ourselves captivated by the here and now. We too often forget our dependence on God for both future *and* present. We aim to please men, or ourselves. The reminder of Christian eschatology is that we are dwelling in a temporary, sinful earth that is full of the consequences of sin. It will be destroyed and a new order will take its place. God will judge all people around that time. This should shake us from our present satisfaction and re-focus our desires on an eternal dwelling place, not made with hands. Like Abraham, we are living in a foreign land, looking for a city whose builder is God (Hebrews 11:9–10). We are also looking to bring as many people with us as we can.

We speak in this message of the grand climax of history. After the delivering up of the kingdom to the Father (which Pastor Huffstutler explained this morning in 1 Cor. 15:20-28), we come to the capstone which is the

eternal kingdom. It will cause the thousands of years of earth's history of to fade into obscurity. It thus puts into proper perspective our present lives and helps us prioritize what we should be about as servants of our God.

4. Context of Revelation 21:1-8

- A. **Prior Context.** This follows on the heels of the end of the Tribulation and coming of Christ to rule for 1000 years with his saints. Satan is bound during that time and subsequently thrown into the lake of fire. The end of chapter 20 deals with the eternal state of the wicked, in the lake of fire, which is the second death.
- B. **Upcoming Context.** This is followed by the eternal state of the righteous in chapters 21-22. It appears to me that 21:1-8 are a good summary of the final two chapters of Revelation. The themes of 21-22 are almost all raised in these first eight verses. For instance, 21:2 is about New Jerusalem. That is the subject matter of 21:9-27. The perfect conditions of 21:4 are discussed again in 22:1-5. That the prophetic revelation is true and faithful is repeated (22:6, 8-10, 16). There are recurrent mentions of the residents of the city (21:7, 27; 22:11, 14). They are holy, and faithful to the writings of the book. Then there are the non-residents of the city (21:8, 27; 22:11, 15, 18-19) who are unholy and don't care about the prophecy. They are judged (as in 20:10-15, the lake of fire recurs in 21:8; the "outside" notion is one of judgment as well in 22:15). There are the themes of the co-dwelling of men with God and the Alpha and Omega, all introduced in the first eight verses and revisited throughout the chapters. Perhaps the only theme not introduced in these verses is that of "coming quickly" (22:7, 10, 12, 20).
- C. **Author's Setting.** In his vision, John is near the throne of God. He has been there since 4:1-2 when he was caught up in the Spirit and the first thing he described was a throne set in heaven, and the One who sat upon that throne. This is why "a loud voice from the throne" in verse 5 needs no introduction. The throne and its Occupant are the center of attention in Revelation, and particularly in chapters 4-7 and 19-22. John records what he sees ("I saw..." 3 dozen times) and hears ("I heard" 2 dozen times). Other voices that John heard were the Lord Jesus, or angels. In any case, whether the voice is God's or another herald, the message that he records is extremely important.

5. Interpretive Issues

- A. Our **overall interpretive scheme** for the book of Revelation—futurist. Of the Kingdom—premillennial. Of the Rapture—pre-tribulational. The school of hermeneutics I embrace—literalism, aka originalism. I'm not ashamed of that, as if it is simple-minded or an infantile approach to the text. I hope you are confident about the same.
- B. **Genre.** Revelation is commonly located in the apocalyptic genre of a highly symbolic nature. I think this is a bit overplayed and tends to scare people away from the book as a whole—even preachers. But note: the extensive symbolism in the book is not evenly distributed throughout the book. The opening chapters are essentially narrative and epistolary with minor symbolism that is clearly defined. Chapters 4-5 are more narration of what John sees in his vision of the heavenly court. Chapters 6-19 are highly symbolic and fit the apocalyptic-symbolic genre very well. The end of 19 and into 20 and the final chapters revert back to the more narrative “reporting” style with less symbolism. Recognizing this pattern of symbolism guides our interpretation of the final chapters so that we don't immediately throw up our hands and claim “allegorical” as the only feasible method of interpretation. In fact, a plain literal reading of the text is the easiest and makes the most sense.
- C. **Order of Events.** John saw and heard. This points to the ongoing vision that John was experiencing and recording for his later readers. Note for example 19:1, 19:6, 19:11, 19:17, 19:19, 20:1, 20:4, 20:11, and finally our verse at 21:1. It certainly appears that he is recording for us the events in the order that he saw them. The time words at some of these locations make this clear.

I understand that John sees the events in the order recorded here, and *that* order is the same as the order they will occur. There does not seem to be in this section of Revelation any recapitulation, rewinding, reviewing, or repeating of events.¹ It seems to be an orderly account, and the order in which the vision is relayed to us is a sensible order for the events to occur. I grant that prophetic literature does not always abide by a strictly chronological order. Yet in the main, prophecies often are foretold in the order they will occur (see Daniel, for example).

The order of events is: **1**) the Tribulation (6–19); **2**) the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth and judgments associated with it (Matthew

¹ There seems to be some rewinding in the middle of the book; but not in the last chapters.

25:31-46, Ezekiel 20:35-38, Rev. 19:11–21); **3**) the imprisonment of Satan (20:1-3); **4**) the millennial reign of Christ (20:4-6); **5**) the defeat of one last rebellion by Satan and sinners (20:7-10); **6**) the final judgment of unbelievers (20:11-15); **7**) and finally a two-fold eternal state, one for God’s people and one for the unbelieving (21-22). It is this last upon which our passage focuses.

D. **Extent of the new creation.** Are the new heaven and new earth **renovations or new creation**? New—replaced and re-created, not renovated. Why? The language “passed away” (21:1) and “fled away” (20:11). Also, 2 Peter 3:10’s “pass away” and “burned up” and “dissolved” and “destroyed” are most naturally taken to indicate a thorough destruction. Psalm 102:25-26 says of the earth and heavens, “They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed.” (See also Isaiah 51:6, Isaiah 34:4; Matt. 24:35, Hebrews 1:10-12). I understand most regenerative language in some texts to refer to the renewal of the old earth for the millennial kingdom (Matt. 19:28, Acts 3:19-21). The rejuvenation is before the kingdom; the re-creation is before the heavenly state.

Still, there’s no need to get into a scuffle with each other about this point—we should agree that a massive change is envisioned here—akin to the change of our natural to glorified bodies, which for those decomposed already amounts to the same thing as a recreation.

E. What does “**no more sea**” mean? The import of “sea” is not symbolic. It is neither a symbol of chaos; nor the origin of evil; nor of hostility toward mankind; nor a symbol of unbelieving nations; nor the place of the dead; nor a place of idolatrous trade; nor a danger prohibiting redemption as the Red Sea was for Israel; nor a backdoor allusion to the lake of fire; nor all or many of these things at one time.

The sea is not an evil in and of itself. We know that the gathering of waters was not an evil because God formed the earth with large bodies of water that He called seas (Gen. 1:10) and He thought it was all good. 71% of the surface area of the earth is presently covered in water, with over 96% of it in the oceans.

1. Presently, the oceans have a beneficial function in regulating climate and providing a food source for mankind. Those things will be unnecessary.

2. Seas serve to separate humanity by great distances, allowing some reduction of conflict and also encouraging us to fulfill the “fill the

earth” mandate in Genesis. Distance between populations is useful to reduce crime, war, and the transmission of disease. In heaven, none of those will be concerns!

But the presence of the oceans is not all good.

1. Those great distances between the human family reduce our connectivity and closeness with each other.
2. The sea may have become more prominent and dangerous as an after-effect of the Genesis flood when water was uncaged from its created boundaries and wreaked judgment upon the surface of the ground. Mountains were uplifted and sea-floors were depressed to contain the massive amounts of water that came from the fountains of the great deep. The large oceans are likely among the many leftovers and reminders of earth’s judgment by flood in Noah’s day. The removal of the oceans will serve to erase the mark that they left on human existence since that world-wide catastrophic event thousands of years ago.
3. The enjoyable aspect of sea-faring vessels and fishing may go away, but also absent will be its terrors with its dangerous creatures and tsunamis and hurricanes and the like.

We should adopt the simplest interpretation: Simply put, *sea* means *sea*. In the new earth, there are no vast oceans. Contrast a space-based picture of the earth today with what John sees in his vision. It is starkly different. Vast tracts of land will be recovered from the oceans, nearly quadrupling the habitable space of the new earth, assuming it is of similar dimensions to the old. Perhaps a water system comprising more lakes and rivers and streams will take their place.

F. What is the referent of **the bride language** in 21:2? Here, the bride terminology is focused on the city, as confirmed by the detailed physical descriptions of 21:9-27. The appearance of the city is beautiful, as a bride on her wedding day is dressed and made up perfectly. There is no spot or blemish in this place of eternal residence for God, the Lamb, and their people.

I take the city to be a real future place, not merely a figurative portrayal of the people of God. The beauty of that place is fitting for the residents of the city, which include God, the Lamb, and God’s peoples of all ages (Hebrews 12:22–24).

Here, the city’s bride-like adorning is not specifically the bride of Christ = church. That issue is best taken up at 21:9 where the bride is specifically

called out as the Lamb's wife. Since the city is so closely associated with the bride of Christ, the city is called by the name of its very honored inhabitant. "The name of the material city stands for the community composed of the city's inhabitants."²

- G. **Peoples of God.** With respect to the issue of "peoples of God," in this passage we see a great city, holy Jerusalem, built for God's people to dwell eternally with him. Notice that the wall of the city is built upon 12 foundations, having the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb (21:14). And notice that there are twelve gates, named for the 12 tribes of the children of Israel.

This is different than you might expect. If Israel is the olive tree and the root of the program of God, you might expect Israel to be the foundation and the apostles to be built on top of them.

This is also different than many interpreters suggest where the church takes over all the blessings of Israel. In fact, Israel is represented prominently in the heavenly city. This glorious city shows the unity of the peoples of God in one city under one King in one Kingdom, yet the diversity of the population that remains somehow noticeably distinct for all eternity. Jews and there are church saints co-exist forever, with one not better than the other, all redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

There are not two separate dwelling places for God's people with a meeting place in between (contra Charles Feinberg³). Rather, the people of God will be perfectly united and share a common dwelling on the new earth and in the New Jerusalem. This is supported by the fact that the gates and foundations of the city point to the nation of Israel and the church, respectively. There is no Scriptural reason that I know of that would prohibit any of the saved of any age from enjoying all the blessings described in Revelation 21-22 and other eternal state passages.

- H. **Location and Nature of the New Jerusalem.** It is not suspended in mid-atmosphere above the new earth and millennial Jerusalem. Rather, it comes down onto the new earth (Rev. 3:12, 21:2, 10). There is one

² Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, Moody, 1995, p. 442.

³ Page 153, *A Commentary on Revelation: The Grand Finale*, Feinberg writes, "Apparently, the new heaven will be the home of believers of this age; the new earth will be the residence of redeemed ones apart from the church." On page 155, he adds of New Jerusalem that it will be "a midway house...the meeting place of all the redeemed, as the city is suspended, from all appearances, above the millennial Jerusalem." From the text of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21, it appears more realistic to say that the New Jerusalem *replaces* the millennial Jerusalem.

Jerusalem at a time. When John wrote, his Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Roman armies. He looked forward to a new one. Furthermore, **it is not “heaven” *per se***. In fact, the place and activities that are popularly thought of as “heaven” will actually occur upon the new earth, in and around the New Jerusalem.

6. Out with the Bad (v. 4, 8)

A. Removal of the Consequences of Sin.

1. The consequences that are removed, enumerated:

i. **Tears.** Every single tear (note the singular) will be wiped away. Is the emphasis that there are some tears initially in the heavenly state, or that there are none? As I read this, the emphasis is on God’s comfort and the removal of all cause for tears. This is not an indirect way of saying that there will be regret in heaven that God will then wipe away.

Tears are often shed over the loss of a loved one, or because of a deep relational hurt, or someone going astray, or physical injury. The deep loss experienced by a loved one’s departure in death is among the most pointed of such tearful experiences. The following things listed by John are the causes of many tears, and those causes will be removed. Sometimes, tears are shed for selfish reasons. That selfish nature will be removed, thus removing the cause of tears. Other times, tears are shed for joy. That kind of tears may also reflect the effect of our sin-cursed world upon us, as the tears of joy may do double-duty in expressing relief from some past hurtful situation. Whether joyful tears will be possible, deep joy will be the order of the day. There will be nothing bad, sad, wrong, shocking, tragic, or anything of the sort that would elicit tears.

ii. **Death.** The great leveler. The great time-limiter. It is the heavy consequence of being cut off from the life of God because of sin. It will be no more. All of the efforts to forestall death—or to cause it, say by murder or war—will be forever banished. Such efforts will be redirected toward good purposes. Since death will be removed, the sin which brought death must also be removed (Romans 5:12), since sin and death are conjoined in such a way that they cannot be separated. Both are vanquished by the cross-work of Christ. It was God’s good pleasure that sin and death should remain in this place for millennia subsequent to the

Son's self-sacrifice, thus delaying the full implementation of the benefits of the cross until the later time we are studying now.

- iii. **Sorrow.** All grief, sadness, mourning, depression, and the like will be eliminated. All those sorts of depression that have cause will be eliminated—whether caused by spiritual, emotional, or physical factors. Even the “causeless depressions” like what Charles Spurgeon suffered will be eliminated. The God of all comfort will bring all comfort with Him, and bring all sorrow to an end. By the way, in our current state, we must recognize that trials are indeed from the hand of God, and are designed and limited by His hand, with the purpose of growth in faith and sanctification, and increasing our utility as instruments in His service. Sorrow-causing trials will be unnecessary in the new earth because the world will be changed, the flesh will be transformed, and the devil will be banished to the lake of fire. There will be no more need of sanctification, no lack of ability to serve Christ, etc. In short, there will be no utility to sorrow, nor any necessity.
- iv. **Crying.** The near synonyms are beginning to pile up. Death and sorrow and pain cause crying, and crying causes tears, and the whole complex of this sort of thing will disappear. What relief. What emotional release. What rejoicing. What happiness.
- v. **Pain.** The Greek “*po'nos*” does not refer specifically to the nervous system sense of discomfort. It indicates a work or experience that makes for trouble or exertion, hard labor, toil, distress, and affliction. Such a quality obviously does not belong in utopia. This does not mean there will be no work or service in heaven; but that service will not be toilsome. But since the categories of emotional pain have been given attention already—in crying and tears—I think this may focus a bit on the physical side of pain. In our world, pain is almost always viewed as a negative. But it actually serves important purposes. Ask the parents of children affected with CIPA, a disorder where the child cannot feel pain. If the food is too hot, they can swallow it anyway; if they fall, they don't feel the scraped knee; if the body's temperature is too hot, they don't sweat. They cannot feel appendicitis. They can feel texture or the pressure of a hug, but not pain. I don't say all this to extol the value of pain, as if I hope we keep it forever. God certainly has all this figured out so that we won't be in any danger when there is no more pain. Pain indicates a problem and may well point to a solution, like pain in the appendix. It can protect from dangers like burning from hot

surfaces. It may be indicative of a new injury that if left untreated could be deadly, like a foot wound and infection. But this may be missed by the diabetic with neuropathy, or someone whose extremities are desensitized by Hansen's disease. Pain is something that, paradoxically, we can thank God for, but we will thank Him also when He removes it from us because the need of it will disappear.

All of the physical and emotional burdens of our curse-bound lives will be permanently lifted off. The negative descriptions are helpful for us because we only know by experience one kind of life. It is the kind that is plagued by death and disease; natural and man-made evil; accidents; sorrow and suffering; tears and trials; crying and pain; rust and thieves; moths and loss. It is easier to describe a new thing by comparison to what it is like or not like in terms of the old.

2. How they are removed. Isaiah 53:4 tells us that Christ bore our griefs and sorrows. What Christ came to do was to take the penalty for us and to remove the curse of sin and all its consequences—eventually—and that includes burdens of mind and body. The sacrificial work of Christ was comprehensive in that it addressed every aspect of sin and its consequences—and not just the individual human stuff, but the cosmic and creation stuff as well.

The presence of God drives away such things as death and sorrow. Since He will dwell with His people, it is necessary that unholy things and their consequences from the former epoch be removed from His—and their—presence.

The fact that these things *can be removed* is cause for great thanksgiving. The work of Christ subdues all enemies, even death itself, and all consequences of the fall into sin.

3. Application: Appreciation of these promises may well be lessened in your mind in the measure that you have not experienced such trials in your life. But the more you have experienced these, or the more recently, I think the more you can deeply appreciate what God is saying here through John. Your excruciating pain will be no more. Whether it is a consequence of personal sin or part of the general curse on humanity, or a messenger of Satan, it will be forever banished.

For a pastor, this means that the weighty burden of the care of the church will pass off your shoulders; death will not be a personal concern; nor will death be a corporate concern with all the funerals

and care ministry that presently consumes a portion of your life. The intercessory prayer that is requested of you in these matters will be gone. Sorrow at souls lost, tears due to souls astray, the toil of never-ending deadlines, Sundays coming, etc. will all go away. The work of evangelism will be a distant memory. Guarding the flock from false teaching both from within and without will be obsolete. Counseling due to these sorrowful things will be gone as well.

For every Christian, this all is a part of our HOPE. When Scripture speaks of the believer's future hope, obviously this hope centers upon Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 1:1), but it is attached to the *eternal life* that Christ offers His people (Titus 1:2). That eternal life is not only good because of its infinite longevity; it is good because of its perfect quality. This is a hope reserved in heaven, the hope of the gospel, the hope of glory, the hope of salvation, the blessed hope, the living hope, and the better hope. It is rest from the bitter battle against sin in your flesh. It is cessation of the temptations of the world and the devil. These painful situations will be gone. Thanks be to God!

B. Removal of Unbelieving Sinners. Sometimes, especially as we age, we can get a little wobbly on "harder" truths revealed by God. The lost condition of the unevangelized is one of those truths. Another is the eternal punishment of the unsaved. Another is the fate of apostates who once professed faith but later deny the faith. The Scriptures make clear in verse 8 that people who practice ungodliness—including the disobedience of unbelief—will be excluded from the eternal blessedness of the new heaven and earth. Their inheritance will be much different. And lest we should doubt, the surrounding text reiterates it four more times:

1. 20:11-15 explains the final judgment. Chapters 21-22 reflect that this judgment will occur prior to the opening of the eternal state.
2. 21:27: nothing bad will enter the heavenly Jerusalem but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.
3. 22:15: "outside" are dogs and sorcerers, those who practice deceit and so forth. Outside is not a suburb of heaven with slightly lower standard of living. It is far outside, in outer darkness. There is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Such conditions are not at all heavenly conditions, or kingdom conditions, or blessed conditions. There is a place of pain, torment, and that because it is a place of judgment.

4. 22:18-19 is the curse pronounced on those who would change the prophecy. They will not be allowed to partake of the tree of life or the eternal city.

And then, there are other strong reminders in Scripture:

5. Gal. 5:19-21 – works of the flesh are obvious, which will result in no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

6. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 – Paul commands us not to be deceived about this matter. People who live like unbelievers are in fact such, and will not inherit the kingdom of God, neither in its millennial stage, nor in its eternal stage.

7. Ephesians 5:5-6 teaches the exact same thing. The repeated warning against being deceived indicates to this reader that such is a very real possibility.

C. “Out with the bad” is not *bad* for God’s people. In fact, this cleansing/separation/removal of evil is absolutely necessary for the holiness and blessedness of God’s people forever into the future. Judgment on the wicked *is* mercy on the righteous, for we do not desire to experience the evil that is present in our world forever.

D. Furthermore, this cleansing demonstrates the *justice* of God—because unrepentant sinners have earned their wages of sin. Judgment accords with God’s *sovereignty* in showing mercy to whom He wills (Romans 9:15) and judgment to others (Romans 9:21-23). Removal of evil is a part of the God-glorifying nature of the eternal age. All this—yes, even this—accrues to the glory of God forever.

Transition: So, it is “out with the bad.” But it also “in with the new.” The believer will have access to the tree of life, a crown of life, hidden manna, participation in the new temple, life in the new Jerusalem; identification with the name of God; his name in the book of life; shining garments, a bright white stone, co-reigning with Christ, a perfect priesthood, and a place of eternal service to God. But there is something more important than all that.

7. Emphasis on Co-Dwelling of God with Mankind (v. 3, 6-7)

The eternal state of the blessed is arranged as a kingdom, but it is not a kingdom where the king is on high and the subjects have no access to him. It is rather a kingdom with a real relational connection between king and subject, where the divine and the human meet and fellowship together in perfect harmony forever.

A. The main message of Revelation 21 is that the dwelling of God will be forever with humanity. Don't allow the splendid city and personal blessings obscure this fact from your view: God will dwell with mankind. "The considerable beauty of the new Jerusalem is outlined at some length. However, these beauties pale before the relational promises and the magnificence of the vision of God himself."⁴

21:3 The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

21:7 I will be his God and he shall be My son.

B. Co-dwelling is not an absolutely new thing. It has happened other times in human history:

1. In the Garden of Eden – Gen. 3:8. the LORD God walking in the garden...

2. During the theocratic kingdom of Israel – God was with Israel in the pillar of cloud (Exodus 13:21); the camp (Deut. 23:14); the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 40:34), at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1), and Kiriath-Jearim (1 Samuel 1:7-2); the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11); and when in battle (Deut. 20:1). This blessing was usually quickly lost each time it was experienced—for example, after the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 33:3).

3. During the ministry of Jesus Christ, God dwelt with mankind in the person of Jesus – John 1:14, Matt. 1:23. But this too was temporary.

4. Spirit indwelling in individuals and the 1 Cor. 3 and 6 temple ideas. God makes enemies friends (Rom. 5:10) and adopts them as sons (Rom 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5, Eph. 1:5). His indwelling *is* permanent, but it is only a down payment of the greater things to come.

C. The nature of the future heavenly dwelling of God *is* brand new.

1. It is different than all of the above mentioned dwelling places of God, and in some sense it is better even than Spirit indwelling. Revelation 21's mode of "tabernacling" is way better than the occasional visit of the preincarnate Christ in early OT history (Genesis 18, for example).

2. After Eden, these temporary dwelling places for God were limited by either a priestly interface or to certain times like once a year on the

⁴ Paige Patterson (2012). [Revelation](#). In NAC (E. R. Clendenen, Ed.) (Vol. 39, p. 361). Nashville, TN: B&H. Accessed from Logos Bible Software.

Day of Atonement. This is not so with the New Jerusalem. The immediate presence of God is there forever, always accessible to all the saints.

3. The limited condition of fellowship was brought about by the entrance of sin into the world, and consequent upon sin, death. Isaiah 59:2: “your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.” The life-giving presence of God was cut off by the rebellion of sin against the Creator. His holiness could not endure too close contact with the unredeemed sinner. This led to what was nearly a complete breakdown of fellowship between God and the human race.
4. Only by progressive movements of God toward humanity has this awful estrangement been reduced, until the point here where again full and unfettered fellowship is possible. We must be individually reconciled to God to solve this estrangement and partake of heaven. Therefore we must turn from sin and believe in Christ. In heaven, there are *no* people who refuse to repent of sin. There are *no* people who delight to live in sin. There are *no* people who refuse to acknowledge that Christ is the risen Lord of all.

D. There are at least 39 texts in Scripture, given over thousands of years, that express this same theme of co-dwelling. In them, God promises a renewed co-dwelling with humanity which we know will be fulfilled in the future millennium and heaven. This is why we suggest **the grand theme of Scripture to be that God’s goal is to establish a relationship of loving sovereignty over creatures made in his image, in which He will dwell with them and be their God, and they will be His people.** This He will do in His eternal kingdom and by this means He will glorify Himself.

By way of contrast, a most terrifying pronouncement is this: “You are *not* my people!” It is akin to “Depart from me, you workers of iniquity...” But here, the saints *will be* God’s people, and with no termination point. “You *are* my people!” is what God is saying here to believers of all ages. The implicit promise of the name of Jesus, “Immanuel” will be fulfilled when once again and for all time “God is with us.”

E. The presence of God naturally brings blessing.

1. We are talking about the ultimate effects of redemption here, not just the immediate effects upon initial salvation. There are new places for saved mankind to dwell—a new earth. There is a new place for God to dwell. There is complete physical healing, etc. There is the tree of life. There is no night.

2. There is the fountain of the water of life (v. 6). This fount is not free because the water is cheap. Nay, it is infinitely expensive. But it is free to us because its access price has already been paid by Another.

“...as a part of God’s being with us, he provides water from the fountain of the water of life; and no payment is sought—not because the water of life is of little value. Indeed, it is the only remedy to slake human spiritual thirst. But the price for this purchase has already been paid with the death of the Lamb, and consequently the water of life is now free to those who thirst for it.”⁵

How about you—do you recognize your thirst? Think about hydration for a minute. When you feel thirsty, it is already after the point when you should have had water. But tragically, people go through life and do not recognize that they lack a “spiritual mineral” that is essential to life and health. Even after you are saved, don’t you notice your spiritual need (thirst) even more keenly?

3. There is the inheritance of all things (v. 7). Why squabble over a few measly possessions down here when the believer is heir of all there?
 4. But most importantly, there is the inter-personal relationship that will be shared between God and each individual (v. 7). We will be like sons to our Father. We are sons by adoption, but sons nonetheless.
- F. God is the Alpha and Omega. Our well-being, our eternal blessing, our bliss—these things are *not* the Alpha and Omega. They exist as a side-effect, a consequence of God’s work in us, so that there is nothing of which to boast.
1. Alpha and Omega, beginning and end – indicates God’s sovereignty over all things.⁶ From Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. He planned, decreed, created, sustains, and guides all things to His intended end. He is the answer to the philosophical problem of the one and the many.
 2. The important thing about heaven is not the “where” or the “how.” It is the WHO. Who is there, with a capital W? It is God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. We must focus on God and his glory, the regal majesty

⁵ Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC. Accessed in Logos.

⁶ “First and last” is a *merism*, using two opposites to refer to the entirety of all things between and inclusive of those endpoints. So it is with similar phrases “Alpha and Omega,” “beginning and end.”

of our God and King, not just on how great heaven will be for ourselves.

Conclusion: Thinking About Heaven

God desires and plans, for His good pleasure, to make some human beings His people and to dwell with them and be their God. What a wonder this is! It pleases God to create a new heavens and earth. It is his pleasure to bless the righteous forever with an inheritance of all things. It is also his determination to punish the wicked eternally.

The point is that **God and redeemed humanity will dwell together forever. God will be glorified, and His peoples' longing for eternal freedom from sin, eternal life, and eternal and perfect fellowship with God will be satisfied.**

- A. Since these things will be, how holy ought we to be in our conduct (Lev. 19:2; Rev 20:6, 22:11)?
- B. We are servants of God now (Romans 6:18-19). But we will be in greater measure at that time what we are already (Rev 22:3)!
- C. We should not think of heaven as an ethereal place. It will be a physical, real, material place centered on the new earth. It is real, we are soon to move there, and we long for it with great anticipation—at least, I hope we do. It represents for us vindication before the world, relief from the curse, and regathering with loved ones, and most important of all, the direct presence of God and Christ.
- D. Heaven is a great hope for the believer in Christ. It is a great **comfort** and encouragement. That we think of it and our God often is a mark of belief and thus **assurance**, since those who have no relationship with Christ don't do that. It is a motivation for **sanctification** since there will be no sin there. It is a place where God will be honored, and where we will serve God. The reality of the new heaven moves us to **honor God** now, and to **serve Him** now, and to carry on the work of the **Great Commission** now.
- E. This text calls us to be faithful to preach the true words of God. They are trustworthy words, faithful words. We cannot form or fashion them to make more sense than they do in their plain meaning. We cannot adjust them to make them more inclusive than they already are, or more to the point, less exclusive than they are.

F. Revelation 1:3 tells us that those who read, hear, and obey the words of this book of Revelation will be blessed. We must then share these words with the people of God in our churches.

Close with Ps 145:10-13.

MAP

Questions and Answers

Q. How do you think about the kingdom and its relation to heaven?

A. I think of the kingdom of God as happening in two stages. Neither one is present. Both are future to the church age. The stages are 1) the millennium, and 2) the eternal state. Today is not the kingdom age; it is the church age. The kingdom is called by its full name, "The Kingdom of the God of Heaven," which is drawn from Daniel. It will invade the earth after the Tribulation

Q. What is the kingdom's relationship to the church?

A. We are called ones—ones called into God's kingdom and glory. We are not in that kingdom and glory yet, but we are citizens of the coming kingdom. Therefore, we ought to live like such, as ambassadors of the king, proclaiming that the king is coming, and how to be properly related to the king. We must tell others how to do homage to the Son, lest He be angry with them.

Q. What about eternity in relation to the millennial kingdom?

A. The first is an eternal and perfect extension of the second. I do not see Revelation 21-22 (eternal state) as a collapsed explanation of Ezekiel 40-48 (the millennial state).

Q. Do you have an outline of the passage?

A. Very briefly:

1. The Newness of All Things, v. 1-5. New heaven, earth, Jerusalem. New dwelling place for redeemed. New conditions for redeemed.
2. The Completion of Redemption, v. 6-8. God's sovereignty on display forever. God's people spiritually and physically satisfied forever. God's enemies punished forever.

Q. Where does the Bible talk about the eternal state?

A. References in Scripture to the eternal state are not many. Besides Revelation 21-22, here are the main ones: Isaiah 25:8, 65:17, 66:22; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 3:21; and 2 Peter 3:13.

Q. It is possible to be too heavenly minded to be any earthly good?

A. No. The Bible's concern is that we are too worldly minded to be either any earthly good or any heavenly good.

Q. How do you think about the "people of God?"

A. I understand there to be "peoples" of God: particularly Israel and the church, but also the saints prior to Israel and the millennial saints. The arrangement of the heavenly state is like the first century idea of a household—with a husband (leader), wife, children, servants, etc. It is not a flat arrangement. And in a sinless place, it doesn't have to be a "flat" society to be a perfect one.