

Everything's Brand New

Printed Text • Revelation 21:1–8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EVALUATE the “apocalypse” genre that characterizes the book of Revelation to discern how to understand its message; CONTEMPLATE the coming of “a new heaven and a new earth” for the hope that this vision brings; and EMBRACE the peace of God that begins in this life with Jesus.

In Focus

Grandma Lottie knew growing old was a blessing. She had accumulated plenty of wisdom and experience throughout the years. However, it had its share of challenges too. Bones began to ache. Strength and speed diminished. Wrinkles and gray hair became her prominent features. One of the main problems with growing old, Grandma Lottie thought, was suffering a lot of loss. At 95 years old, Grandma Lottie had seen her share. She had buried both of her parents and two of her four children. The majority of her closest friends had passed, and those who remained struggled to remember the great times they had together.

Most recently, she had lost her husband of 70 years. However, as God would allow it, she was eagerly preparing to celebrate the arrival of her first two great-great-grandsons. Twins! It was a tangible reminder that one day God would wipe away all tears and erase sorrows, replacing them both with all things new. These days, Grandma Lottie thought a lot about heaven. As grateful as she was for the life she lived, the experiences she had, and the family she had raised, she yearned for the day when all of the pain and heartache of this life would be left behind. She knew it was coming sooner rather than later. And she was ready. One day all things would become new.

In this lesson, we will learn about God's redemptive plan for heaven and earth. What is the thing you most look forward to in God's new heaven and new earth?

Keep in Mind

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. New (Revelation 21:1) *kainos* (Gk.) — Unused, unworn, fresh, not previously existing; beginning for the first time, or beginning again with improvements.

B. Dwell (v. 3) *skenoo* (Gk.) — To abide, live in a tent or tabernacle; to pitch a tent.

Say It Correctly

Apocalyptic. ah-pah-ka-LIP-tik

Whoremongers. HOR-mun-gers

Abominable. uh-BAH-mi-nuh-buhl

KJV

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

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

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

NLT

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone.

2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

5 And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true."

6 And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.

7 All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

8 "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The People, Places, and Times

John. John, whose name in Hebrew means “Jehovah is gracious,” was one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, and he is believed to be the author of the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. The son of Zebedee and brother of James, he was one of the three in Jesus’ inner circle (along with James and Peter) who witnessed the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and he was present with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His arrest (Mark 14:32–33). John is recorded as the only disciple present at the Crucifixion and was instructed by Jesus to care for His mother, Mary (John 19:25–27). Of the three, he was the only one not martyred (according to tradition). However, he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos for his faith. It was there that he wrote the book of Revelation.

Jerusalem. Jerusalem is recorded as being founded by Canaanites (see Ezekiel 16:3) and either named after one of their gods (Shalim) or adapted from the Hebrew word “shalom,” which means peace. It is purportedly one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, highly sought after—and fought over. Jerusalem has been besieged, attacked, and captured dozens of times, divided by Jews and Arabs (1948–1967), destroyed twice—and rebuilt. The city was captured by King David and became known as the “city of David” (2 Samuel 5:7). It is the place where Solomon’s Temple (and subsequent temples) was built, and the place where events leading up to the Crucifixion, the Day of Pentecost, and much of the history of Acts occurred. It is claimed as the rightful possession of both Israeli and Palestinian nationals. Jerusalem is known as the “holy city” for three major world religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Background

Although Revelation is the last book of the Bible, it is not necessarily the last book written. John’s original visions may have occurred shortly before the destruction of the Temple (AD 70), but some aspects of the book suggest that the Apocalypse as we know it could also represent visions that occurred after the destruction of the Temple. Similar to portions of Ezekiel and Daniel, the book is apocalyptic literature filled with symbolism, poetry, and prophecy, specifically about the end times. Because of the symbolic language, it can be difficult to understand, and there are many interpretations of how or when particular events will occur (or whether they have occurred already). However, John makes it clear that this is a revelation of Christ, affirming God’s sovereignty. This revelation serves as a warning to some, and it provides hope in the second coming of Christ and final victory over sin, Satan, and death for those who believe in Christ. With vivid imagery, he describes events that will occur, signs of end times, the awesome glory of God, and the beauty of a new heaven and new earth. Revelation 21 is one of the last two chapters of the book, and it grants a glimpse of eternity.

At-A-Glance

1. All New (Revelation 21:1–2)
2. God Dwells (vv. 3–4)
3. All Done (vv. 5–8)

In Depth

1. All New (Revelation 21:1–2)

John begins this chapter by sharing his vision of a new heaven and earth, a fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17–18. This could be a restored and wholly cleansed version of God’s creation, or it could be an unused, fresh heaven and earth that replaces the one that was marred by sin and its effects—death, sorrow, and chaos. In the ancient Near East, the sea was a symbol of chaos (the Canaanites said the god Yam controlled the seas). John notes that the sea no longer exists, thus implying the establishment of complete order in the new creation.

Not only is there a new heaven and earth, but there’s a new “holy city”—a New Jerusalem—coming down from God Himself. Jerusalem has been at the center of Jewish and Christian tradition. While it is called the “holy city” because God’s presence is said to dwell there, historically it has been marred by division, fighting, death, and chaos from its founding even into the present. In this vision, God presents Jerusalem as a bride—a virgin, untouched, untainted, pure, and presentable to a perfect Christ. He does not “fix” the current Jerusalem by going to it, but He presents a new true Holy City through His presence.

2. God Dwells (vv. 3–4)

Now that a new, holy, and perfect heaven, earth, and Jerusalem have been created, God is free to live among His people. The tabernacle was known as the place where God’s glory resided temporarily (Exodus 25:8). When the cloud or pillar of fire (God’s presence) moved, it indicated when the Israelites should pack up their tents and the Tabernacle, and move along with Him. In Revelation, God, from His throne, says He will set up His tent and live with the people. Human kings do not reside among the people, but God, reminiscent of the incarnation of Christ who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14, NIV) chooses to do so. Because He is there, He wipes away every tear (Isaiah 25:8; 65:19; Revelation 7:17), removing death, sorrow, crying, and pain. The new earth will be as was the original one when God walked with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8), but this time without the influence or presence of Satan, who is now defeated (see Revelation 20). All things will be made new. It’s a fresh start!

3. All Done (vv. 5–8)

“It is done!” While the events recorded by John have not yet occurred, this is a promise of completion from the all-powerful, all-knowing One—the Creator who is the beginning (Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet) and the end (Omega, the final letter of the alphabet).

Throughout Scripture are references to living water (Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 14:8; John 7:38, Revelation 7:17), water that is not stagnant, like a pond, but free-flowing and fresh, as from a mountain stream. Stagnant water is often dirty, filled with harmful bacteria, and not recommended for drinking. Flowing streams and fountains, however, refresh and give life. No one can survive without physical water. Christ uses the “water of life” metaphor to demonstrate the need for us to quench our spiritual thirst through Him (John 4:10, 14). For those who thirst for Him, He offers this water—eternal life. Those who belong to Him will be children of God and inherit all the blessings already mentioned: new heaven and earth, eternal life free of pain, sorrow, and tears. In contrast, those who choose a sinful life apart from Him—fearful of a commitment to Him, rejecting Him, not believing, worshiping false gods, practicing sexual immorality—are destined for a place far worse, a place filled with pain and a second death.

Search the Scriptures

1. The location of the New Jerusalem is on earth (Revelation 21:3). How does this compare with popular perceptions of the afterlife?
2. In the New Heaven and New Earth everything will be made new (v. 5). If everything will be made new, is it okay to fail to take care of this present world?

Discuss the Meaning

Why is a new or restored heaven and earth necessary? Describe what it means to you when all things are made new and God dwells with us. How does this make you feel about those who do not yet know Jesus?

Liberating Lesson

We are drawn to things that are new: new homes, new clothes, new jobs, new babies, and new cars (even a new car smell). There is something appealing about starting over; it provides hope, anticipation, a clearer outlook, and excitement. We appreciate newness. If such excitement exists in receiving new temporal things, which are here today and gone, broken, stolen, or old tomorrow, how much more excited should we be about the forthcoming new heaven and new earth?

Application for Activation

Life is full of suffering and difficulty, but this passage provides hope for a new, perfect world. We are often so focused on the present that we ignore that there is an eternity. When things are going well, we are content with the present. When we struggle, we strive to find a solution for the present. What challenges do you face now that viewing eternity helps you to put it into perspective? What decisions do you believe you need to make now in light of what is to come? Are you free from the sinful lifestyle described in these verses? Have you accepted Christ? If you have, are there people in your life that you need to tell about Jesus? Pray for courage to share your faith with others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Revelation 21:1–8

In the closing chapters of Isaiah, God promised that He would create a new heaven and a new earth that would endure before Him forever (Isaiah 66:22). The unfolding of the fulfillment of this prophecy is presented in John's vision of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to take its place upon a renewed earth in Revelation 21:1–22:5. Chapter 21 begins with John's vision

of the transformation of the new order. In verses 1–8, the first heaven and earth are replaced by a new heaven and earth. The vision shows an entirely new order of existence. It is new in that it is the redeemed order; it has taken place of the old. It is a creation that is renewed and brought to the glorious consummation for which it is intended. In verse 5, God speaks from His throne: “Behold, I make all things new.

1 And I saw new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven had passed away; and there was no more sea

John received a divine revelation from God concerning what He had purposed for the final stage of His created order, the final result of His creating activities. The adjectives “new” and “first” seem to describe a previous and latter cosmos standing in opposition to each other. The previous had “passed away” (Gk. *aperchomai*, ap-AIR-kho-my), which means to depart from a location. The sense is that the old heaven and earth have vanished and disappeared. The latter had come to take its place, and God intends that it stay forever without ever reversing into a negative direction again (Isaiah 65:17).

John also recognized that there was no more sea. The ancient mind feared the sea as a place of terror and chaos, and it was to be avoided. Evil beasts, such as Leviathan, who represented the enemies of God lurked in the sea. The fact that the sea was gone points toward a new creation that is orderly and absent of conflict and evil.

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

The Apostle John saw the New Jerusalem, God’s Holy City, descending from His presence from heaven. The city is God’s place for renewing and refreshing His people after both their turbulence and success. It has no tears, sorrow, or pain; it is a place where we never die and wickedness is totally shut out. God Himself specially prepared it for His people.

John uses a metaphor of a good and promising marriage to describe the power and reality of what the new order brings to God’s people. The city is personified as a bride adorned for a husband. The word “adorned” (Gk. *kosmeo*, KAHS-meh-oh) is appropriate and fitting for the city. It is also connected with the word for world in Greek, from which English gets the word *cosmos* (Gk. *kosmos*, KOS-mos; decoration; order; universe). The careful preparation and arrangement of a bride embodies the gift that God is giving to His people. This is no ordinary city; the new home for God’s people is excellent beyond all our human imaginations or dreams. It has already been prepared for us and is waiting for us. It is the new and permanent place that Christ refers to (John 14:2–3).

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

God’s physical presence will be with His people in our new home. God has declared that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). This is a reiteration of the covenant promise God

gave to His people, which now at the consummation of the age is being fulfilled (Leviticus 26:11–12). In fact, the Tabernacle was a symbol of God’s dwelling among His people (Exodus 25:8–9). However, in our new home, the content and context of God’s abiding presence is totally different. The word “tabernacle” (Gk. skene, ske-NAY) used in this text does not literally mean the physical temple or sanctuary described in the Old Testament (Exodus 29:44; 1 Kings 6:12–13). Rather, it figuratively referred to a dwelling place of God. It includes the idea of God’s kingdom, glory, and power tangibly filling up this “renewed” world that He created for His people.

The consequences and impact of a fallen human nature and society will be no more. God’s presence in the new world becomes the light that dispels all forces of evil and destruction. The concept of “Emmanuel” (God with us) will once again become an everlasting reality in this new world.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

The fall in Eden brought with it death, sickness, and poverty. The Bible teaches about three types of death: spiritual death is the result of the broken relationship between God and humankind (Ephesians 2:1 ff.); physical death occurs when our spirit is separated from the body (James 2:26); and eternal death occurs when sinners depart forever into condemnation by spending eternity in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14–15, 21:8). But in our new home, the Scriptures reveal that all of these kinds of death shall be no more (Revelation 21:4).

Sickness is often the evidence of disease. Humankind is broken spiritually, psychologically, and physically. Poverty has stricken society on many levels, expressed spiritually as a lack of the knowledge of God; physically as poor health and malfunctioning of the body; materially as a lack of resources and money; and socially as political vulnerability and oppression. Poverty has produced misery and mourning in families and society. However, God has promised us that “neither shall there be any more pain” in the new world (Revelation 21:4).

When we go to our new home, “there shall there be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4). The “former things are passed away” because the fallen world system will be transformed into a new created order where God’s entire creation is launched into an era of shalom. This is sealed by God’s promising declaration: “Behold, I make all things new.”

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

The descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven and its attendant blessings is now considered accomplished as God tells John, “It is done.” God further says, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” This claim was previously made by the risen Christ in 1:8. Again John hears the same voice that the great prophets had heard: “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6, KJV). This figure of speech, called a merism, states the

opposite poles of something in order to emphasize the totality of all that lies between. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and omega is the last. God is the beginning and the end. The word for beginning is arche (ar-KHAY). It does not simply mean first in point of time, but it means the source of all things. The word for end is telos (TEH-loce). It does not simply mean the end as a point of time, but it means the end as the completed goal. John is saying that all life begins in God and ends in God. Paul expresses the same thing in Romans 11:36 and Ephesians 4:6.

To the announcement is added the promise of the living water or “the water of life,” which may refer both to spiritual life now and eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. In the same manner as in the Gospel of John, this is an invitation to the spiritually thirsty to come and drink of the “water of life,” but here and in 22:17 John adds “freely” (Gk. *dorean*, do-reh-AN); this word comes from the noun *doron* (doh-RAHN), which means gift. The water of life is a gift that can be taken freely. This may also reflect Isaiah 55:1, which adds to the invitation “come to the waters” and the further promise, “And you who have no money come, buy and eat” (NASB).

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

The section concludes with a challenge to the readers to recognize the difference between those who are faithful and those who are not; that is, to decide whether to be an overcomer (v. 7) or a “coward” (v. 8, NLT). The opening, “he that overcometh,” is drawn from the conclusion of each of the seven letters in Revelation 2–3, where it is followed by the promises given to all those who were victorious over the world with its temptations and suffering. The exalted Christ promises that the overcomers, who remain faithful in the face of opposition, will eat from the tree of life (2:7), escape the second death (2:11), receive a new name (2:17), receive authority over the nations (2:26), remain in the book of life (3:5), be eternally united with God in the heavenly city (3:12), and share the rule of Christ (3:21). The overcomers shall inherit these blessings of the eternal state. The language of overcoming or triumph in the messages to the seven churches seems to be echoed closely in the scene here. To these blessings of eternity is added the gift of life-giving water from a sovereign God (v. 6). The last part of the verse sums up both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. In Genesis, God established a covenant with Abraham “to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (from Genesis 17:7, NIV), and to David he made a promise concerning Solomon: “I will be his father, and he will be my son” (2 Samuel 7:14, NIV). The covenant is fulfilled for all who are Abraham’s heirs by faith (Galatians 3:29). God now declares that the overcomers will be His children, and He will be their God. This expresses the intimate relationship between the saints and God.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

In contrast to the overcomers in verse 7 are all those who cowered in the face of persecution and joined the company of sinners. Here we see the character of those who follow sin instead of the Lamb, and wish to exclude themselves from the presence of God in the New Jerusalem. The fact that the list begins with the fearful and ends with “all liars” suggests that the list is not a

general statement about cowardice and falsehood, but instead it defines those who compromise with truth and righteousness.

The verse concludes with the eternal destiny of those who exclude themselves from the life of the new covenant. Those who only appeared to profess Christ but were not truly saved will go to “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” This is not a statement of the destiny of the wicked, who have already been cast into the lake of fire (20:15). It is a warning to those who continually, deliberately, habitually practice sin (1 John 3:9). True salvation is evidenced by a transformed lifestyle, and with it, the promise of eternal security. True salvation is more than just words. It is how we live day to day. To believe and not obey is not yet to believe. The Bible warns, “Be not deceived” (1 Corinthians 6:9).

The water images of this passage form a stark contrast. In the end, believers will drink from the water of life. Unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire (21:6).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Psalm 90:1-12

TUESDAY

1 John 2:12-17

WEDNESDAY

1 John 5:1-5

THURSDAY

Isaiah 43:14-21

FRIDAY

Isaiah 55:1-5

SATURDAY

Romans 8:31-39

SUNDAY

Revelation 21:1-8