

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 21

Speaker's Notes

The battle is over! Victory has been won over sin and Satan! Our God reigns supreme! Sin and sinful mankind have been judged by our righteous God and we are filled with praise for Yahweh! Hallelujah!

As we have been going through chapters 4 through 20, we have seen some frightening events that will happen during the Tribulation. One quarter of the population of the earth will be killed during the first four seal judgments alone. Then, following a massive earthquake, there will be a war in heaven in which the Archangel Michael and the good angels will defeat Satan and the bad angels and Satan and his entire army will then be cast out of heaven to the earth. This will be quickly followed by the destruction of the universal, world-wide church. As a result, the Beast will set himself up as the only god to be worshipped.

But - our God will not leave the earth without witnesses even in the midst of the coming trumpet and bowl judgments. He will call and seal 144,000 special witnesses who will go throughout the world proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom to all people of every land. And, perhaps to draw attention away from these 144,000 faithful ones, God will ordain two special witnesses who will publicly proclaim the ominous truth about the impending judgment on all who opposed Him.

Then, as all the witnesses are fanning out across the globe, God will send even more ominous warnings to the permanent earth dwellers in the form of the trumpet judgments: hail and fire mingled with blood pelting the earth, a great flaming mountain falling into the sea, and the heavenly body called Wormwood falling on many of the rivers, poisoning the waters and causing many people to die. Then, the sun, moon, and stars will lose their luster and only shine two-thirds as bright as they previously did. And these devastating acts are from only the first four trumpet judgments. These will be followed by an angel flying through the sky proclaiming "Woe! Woe! Woe!" to the permanent earth dwellers because of the three trumpet blasts yet to come.

Then - seemingly out of nowhere, a massive swarm of locusts with scorpion stings will be released from the bottomless pit and they will proceed to torment the permanent earth dwellers for five months. Following that, an army of 200 million horsemen will be released on mankind so that one-third of the remaining population of the earth will be killed. This means that in the space of just three or four years, more than one-half of the population of the earth will have been wiped out, but the earth dwellers will still refuse to recognize the God who is bringing all this judgment upon them.

Did you ever wonder why God didn't just prevent the fall of Adam and Eve in the first place? Why didn't He judge sin before it took control of His creation? Consider this: if mankind had never known sin, if we had no knowledge of the condemnation that we deserve as a result of our rebellion against God, then we would also have no knowledge of the extent of God's grace, mercy, and overwhelming love! We would not be able to sing our heartfelt praises to Him as we can now, because we would not know what kind of God He really is. The truth of the matter is that God, in His infinite wisdom, has allowed His perfect creation to be corrupted and stained, because it allows us to see how utterly sinful we are, and how utterly sinless He is. But - God is not yet finished with rebellious mankind.

As the Beast and his False Prophet finally get the upper hand against God's two special witnesses, the witnesses will be killed and left to rot in the streets of Jerusalem. But God will still be demonstrating His

power to the permanent earth dwellers by causing the two witnesses to come back to life and, in front of the eyes of the entire world, He will call them up to heaven.

Then - the most intense barrage of judgments from God will be brought down against the stubbornness of mankind. They will still refuse to admit that there is a higher power in the universe who deserves their praise. But all they will give Him is their rebellion. Without warning, blistering sores will break out on everyone refusing to submit to God. Even their animals will be affected with those painful sores. While the Beast and his cronies are trying to cope with the sores, the sea will suddenly be turned to blood. And, not just ordinary blood, either. The sea will become blood like that of a dead man, thick, dark, and putrid smelling. Even the rivers and glaciers of the world will be turned into blood. Then, while mankind is trying to figure out how to find fresh water to drink and to cleanse their blistering sores, the sun will suddenly become hotter than ever before in recorded history. In fact, it will be so hot, that neither man nor beast can stand to be outside. Then, as if the sun has suddenly burned itself out, there will be total darkness outside; so dark that even the stars will stop shining.

This eerie darkness will be as if God has finally thrown down the gauntlet before Satan and his man of lawlessness, the antichrist, challenging them to a final duel. Unwilling to walk away from an opportunity to face-off against the God of heaven, Satan will proceed to gather armies from throughout the world and head to the land of Israel with the intent of finally obliterating the Jews from the face of the earth. Although it is commonly referred to as the Battle of Armageddon, it will not really be a battle. With a single word, the Son of God will defeat Satan's entire army and He will usher-in the Messianic Kingdom.

With His enemies vanquished, God will take this lump of clay that we call earth and reshape it to be more like the garden that He created originally. So, for a thousand years, mankind will finally experience the earth as God intended it to be. It will be an earth at peace. Not only will mankind be at peace with itself, but with all the animals of the earth as well. Since Satan will be out of the picture, there will be no adversary to accuse or to tempt man to sin. However, good things seldom last forever. Once Satan is released from his prison at the end of the 1,000 years he will stoke the fire of man's sin nature, and it won't take long before the forces of evil are prepared to once again take on Almighty God. Some people just don't learn, do they! And, once again, without a battle, the forces of evil will be slaughtered. Then they will finally be banished to the Lake of Fire for eternity.

As we said in the opening:

The battle is over! The victories over sin and Satan have been won! Our God reigns supreme! Sin and sinful mankind have been judged by our righteous God and we are filled with praise for Yahweh!

But now God has a problem. The problem is that the pristine earth that God created has been stained with the sinful deeds of mankind. The only way to make things right is to start over, throw away the rough draft, and create the masterpiece that He wanted in the first place. Now, God will make everything new, and it **will** be perfect! Let's see how John described that perfection.

Revelation 21:1

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.

The first thing we need to do is look at the word translated **new**. It is the Greek word *kainos* which refers to something qualitatively new (fresh). We could translate this as, "a new type of heaven and earth" or "a renewed heaven and earth." Because of this, some commentators claim that God will simply renovate the existing heaven and earth. However, there are several arguments against that idea.

The first thing we have to recognize is that in the previous chapter, John saw the complete destruction of the current heaven and earth. They were not just destroyed; they were removed from existence!

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (Revelation 20:11)

If there was no place for them, then they completely disappeared, vanished, forever! Also, keep in mind that more than 2700 years ago, the prophet Isaiah foretold of this creation of a new heavens and earth.

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

The Hebrew word translated here as “create” is *bara*, which means “to create from nothing.” This is the same word translated “created” in Genesis 1:1.

Therefore, according to Isaiah 65:17, this is not a renovation of the current heaven and earth, but a new creation of them. And, since the present heaven and earth will be destroyed at the Great White Throne, this will be a brand new creation, not a re-creation.

Finally, the word *kainos* also means something created new as an improvement over the old. For instance, the word “New” in “New Testament” is *kainos*, meaning, not a recreation of the Old Testament, but something entirely different that is also an improvement.

No more sea!

The first thing that John notices about the new earth is the fact that there is no sea. Without the hydrologic cycle of evaporation and rain, created from the vast oceans of our planet, life as we know it cannot exist. Currently our life depends on water. In the new heaven and earth, things will be different.

Perhaps, the new earth will be watered like the Garden of Eden was, by a mist which rises up from the earth:

... for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground (Genesis 2:5-6)

Now that John has briefly described the new earth, his attention is drawn heavenward.

Revelation 21:2

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

John now sees the New Jerusalem coming down toward the earth. This New Jerusalem is the dwelling place of God. It is perhaps what we currently refer to as the third heaven, or the throne room of God.

According to John MacArthur:

All of heaven is currently contained in the New Jerusalem; it is separate from the present universe, which is tainted by sin. ... But when God creates the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem will descend into the midst of that holy new universe (Revelation 21:10), and serve as the dwelling place of the redeemed for all eternity. Since the throne of God will be in the New Jerusalem, which will come down to the new earth, that city will be the bond between the new earth and the new heaven. (MacArthur, 2005)

Notice that the city is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The word translated, “adorned” is from the Greek word *kosmeō*, meaning “to put in order” or “to adorn.” This is the word from which we get our English word “cosmetics.”

New Jerusalem is pictured as a bride, perhaps because it contains the bride. In the traditional Jewish wedding, there are three phases. The first phase is the betrothal, when the bride is selected by the father of the groom, this occurred when God, the Father chose us ([Ephesians 1:3, 4](#)). The second phase is the presentation. This is where the groom goes to the house of the bride and brings her to the father's house where he has prepared a place for her. This will occur at the Rapture ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). The third phase is the ceremony phase. This is pictured in the first 8 verses of Revelation chapter 19, where all of heaven is celebrating the marriage of the Lamb. This third phase is concluded with the consummation, when the husband and wife are finally joined together. This coming of the New Jerusalem out of heaven to the earth, uniting the two of them for eternity represents the consummation of the marriage between the Lamb and His chosen bride.

Revelation 21:3

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."

No longer will God be far off in heaven separated from His people. In the new heaven and new earth God will make his dwelling place in the midst of them. This is the fulfillment of Christ's prayer in the upper room after the last supper:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ([John 17:24](#))

Revelation 21:4

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.

Some have supposed that since God will "wipe away every tear" there will be tears in heaven, perhaps from sorrow over the sins that were committed in this life, and that God will personally wipe them away. The context, however, indicates that tears simply will not exist, since there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. This heavenly existence will be so different from our earthly existence, and so indescribable, that John can only talk about what won't be there.

Revelation 21:5

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."

From His seat on the throne God reminds John that He is making all things new. Nothing that we will know in heaven will be the same as it is here on the earth. Apparently, John is so in awe from the thoughts of the new heaven and earth that he stops writing and God has to command him once again to write.

Revelation 21:6a

and he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

"It is done!" - This sounds similar to what Christ proclaimed on the cross (It is finished!), however this is a different statement. Christ's proclamation on the cross means that what He started out to accomplish had been completed (He fully satisfied the Law of Moses and completed the offering of Himself as payment for our sins). What God is proclaiming here is that He has done all things. Not just that He has completed what He started, but that He is the source of all things and He is the end of all things.

Revelation 21:6b, 7

To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

“To the thirsty” – This is not a physical thirst, but a spiritual thirst. Those who thirst are those who desire a close fellowship with God. They are the chosen and called. The resulting thirst which necessarily exists in the mind and heart of believers is described in the following:

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalms 42:1, 2)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matthew 5:6)

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13, 14)

“The one who conquers” - Each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters two and three was ended with a promise to the overcomers (conquerors). And, according to John in his first general epistle,

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4, 5)

In the new heaven and new earth God promises us that we will finally fully realize the promises regarding our inheritance. He will be our God and we will be His children.

Revelation 21:8

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."

Once again, by way of describing how incredible the new heaven and new earth will be, John tells us what (or who) won't be there. Instead of enjoying God's eternal presence with us, these souls will all be suffering from the lack of God's eternal presence in the Lake of Fire. One of the great blessings of the eternal state will be the total absence of sinners as well as the total presence of God.

Revelation 21:9

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

Though John has been seeing visions of the Great White Throne and the new heavens and new earth, in spirit he is still standing in God's throne room from where he watched the tribulation events played out. Now, one of the seven angels who previously had one of the seven bowls of God's wrath approaches John and offers to show him the bride of the Lamb (the little Lambkin).

Revelation 21:10

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

John is now transported in spirit out of the throne room of God to a great high mountain where he sees the holy Jerusalem (called New Jerusalem in verse two) coming down out of heaven. Some texts actually say that John saw “the great holy city Jerusalem.”

Revelation 21:11

having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

“glory of God” - God’s shekinah glory, unmasked and undiminished will shine out from the city. Consider the following verses regarding the glory of God:

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and **the glory of the Lord shone around them**, and they were filled with fear. (Luke 2:8, 9)

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.** (1 John 1:5)

As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about **noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me** ... And since I could not see because of the **brightness of that light**, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. (Acts 22:6, 11)

“jasper” - This is most likely a diamond, for it is described as being clear as crystal.

“crystal” - From the Greek verb *krustallidzō*, a form of *krustallos*, meaning ice (water which has been frozen). The verb literally means to be acting like an ice crystal. Therefore, it probably refers to the brilliance and dazzling, sparkling effect of a huge diamond. God is present in the New Jerusalem in His entire magnificent, glorious, splendor, and His glory will shine throughout the city in the most dazzling display of radiance imaginable!

Revelation 21:12-14

It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed-- on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

“at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names ... were inscribed ...” - Literally, this is “and over (or above) the gates twelve angels and names having been written ...” This is a literal city with a literal wall and twelve gates, three on each of the four sides. The twelve gates have angels over them and the twelve names of the twelve tribes of Israel written over the gates. This is reminiscent of the twelve tribes encamped around the tabernacle during the exodus, where the twelve tribes were encamped three to the north, three to the west, three to the south, and three to the east of the tabernacle. Additionally, the walls had twelve foundations upon which are written the names of the twelve apostles

Revelation 21:15, 16

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.

The New Jerusalem is measured to be 12,000 stadia, from the Greek word *stadion* which is somewhere between 600 and 625 feet in length. Therefore, the city measures approximately 1,400 miles in length, width, and height. Some assume that the city is in the shape of a pyramid but a cubic shape is a more

reasonable interpretation of the words. As a point of reference, the moon is about 2,150 miles in diameter and the earth is about 8,000 miles in diameter. The New Jerusalem will be about 2/3 the size of our current moon.

“foursquare” – Literally, this reads “lays four cornered.” This expression refers to four square corners. This expression would not likely be used if it were square on the base and pyramid shaped. It is also unlikely that the New Jerusalem is a spherical shape. The implication is that it will be the shape of a cube which is not possible under the current laws of physics. However, God is not bound by the current laws of physics.

Revelation 21:17, 18

He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.

The wall is measured to be 216 feet (height or thickness?) and is made of diamond, whereas the city is pure gold, like clear glass. Consider this: gold, like other metals, is made up of a lattice of atoms. If all the impurities of gold are taken out, leaving only pure gold, this lattice of atoms will line-up in such a way as to allow light to pass through it. Thus, it would be, “pure gold, clear as glass.”

Revelation 21:19, 20

The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

First of all, notice that “the foundations were adorned with,” not “the foundations were made of.” We have to assume that the foundations were also made of Jasper, clear as glass. These jewels will sparkle with glorious colors from the glory of God. Nobody knows for sure what all twelve of these stones will look like, but they may be:

- jasper (diamond – crystal clear)
- sapphire (blue)
- chalcedony (lavender-blue)
- emerald (bright green)
- sardonyx (red-orange)
- carnelian (blood-red)
- chrysolite (golden-yellow to green)
- beryl (blue-green or yellow)
- topaz (topaz, blue, green, yellow, purple, or orange)
- chrysoprase (apple green)
- jacinth (reddish-blue)
- amethyst (deep purple)

Revelation 21:21

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

The twelve gates are each made of a single pearl. John Phillips writes:

How appropriate! All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster – the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. The pearl, we might say, is the answer of the oyster to that which injured it. The glory land is God’s answer, in Christ, to wicked men who crucified heaven’s beloved and put Him to open shame. How like God it is to make the gates of the new Jerusalem of pearl. The saints as they come and go will be forever reminded as they pass the gates of glory that access to God’s home is only because of Calvary. Think of the size of those gates! Think of the supernatural pearls from which they are made! What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl! Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ. Those pearls, hung eternally at the access routes to glory, will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree and whose answer to those who injured Him was to invite them to share His home. (Phillips, Exploring Revelation, 2001)

“street” – From the Greek word *plateia*, meaning “a broad street, one that is spread-out wide.” The word literally means “Broadway.” It is not so much a linear street as it is a wide-open plaza. The street (notice it is singular), like the remainder of the city, is of pure gold, transparent as glass.

Revelation 21:22

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

The temple (the holy of holies) in the Old Testament was the place where the high priest could go to meet with God and offer the sacrifice for the people once a year. In the eternal New Jerusalem, there will no longer be a need to make a blood offering since Christ, as our high priest, offered up His blood once for all of us (**Hebrews 7:26, 27**). And, since God will no longer be veiled from us, there will no longer be a need for a temple. We will not need to go to a temple to access God’s full presence, for He will be there, and we will behold His glory!

Revelation 21:23

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Since the city is translucent gold and crystal-clear diamond, the glory of God will shine everywhere.

Revelation 21:24-26

By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Though we will all be redeemed and will exist with new perfect bodies, it appears from this verse that there will still be national distinctions and that the people of the new earth will walk around in the light of the city. There also will be kings of the earth. God does not create anything without purpose. Therefore, the new earth will have a purpose and the kings of the earth will have a presence on it.

“By its light will the nations walk” - Literally this says “and the nations will walk in her light.” Since God is never referred to in the feminine, this is a reference to the city. Therefore, the nations will walk in the light of the city. This presents a dilemma (based on current laws of physics). Since a city situated on the earth cannot shed light throughout the earth, the city must be above the earth, circling about it. Verse 25 says that there shall be no night there, but that is referring to the city, not the earth. On the other hand, it

is possible that the atmosphere will reflect the light of the city all around the earth in a way that is impossible today. We simply don't know, and won't know 'till we get there.

Revelation 21:27

But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Only the redeemed will be there. All others will be in the Lake of Fire.

So What?

In the next chapter, chapter 22, we will learn more about our eternal heavenly home and the river that runs through it. So, what will it be like? When someone sees or experiences something exceptionally good they say, "It was heavenly!" However, without a thorough understanding of our future in heaven, this expression really has no meaning. The reason is, in spite of John's attempt here to describe heaven, we are told:

... eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9) [NKJV]

We can't even imagine how glorious and "heavenly" it will be. A city made out of gold! And not just any ol' gold, it will be made out of pure, translucent gold. God's brilliance will be shining through it! But before we get carried away, let's come back to earth for a few seconds.

Some of us are going through struggles right now. In fact, I think it's safe to say that we are all going through one kind of struggle or another. But whether it has come about because of our own sinfulness (or foolishness), or it has come about because God believes that it is best for us to go through it right now, we can all rest in the fact that it will be over soon. Look, we're all going to die someday. How's that for an uplifting thought? We'll either die or we'll be caught up in the rapture before we die. Either way, the trials and troubles of this present age will all be behind us. And – once the rapture happens, we will be in the presence of our God for all eternity.

In the new heavens and new earth, we will reside in New Jerusalem. We will be married to the Son of God! We will have a most intimate relationship with the creator! Think about that for a second. Now consider this, we don't have to wait until heaven to have a most intimate relationship with Jesus. He invites us to submit to His lordship right now. And in return, He promises us that He loves us more than anyone has ever loved us. He invites us to walk by His side as we travel through this earthly life. And – if we do, He promises us a peace that passes all understanding even in the midst of our daily trials. So, by surrendering to God, not only can we experience peace right now, but some day we will experience the magnificence of glory, and it will be heavenly!

Hallelujah!

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.