

# Revelation 21 (vv.1-8)

## General Notes on the Eternal State

- There are very few Scriptures that describe the “eternal state”, that is, the eternal conditions of redeemed humanity beyond the millennial reign of Christ in the “new heaven and new earth”. Perhaps the eternal state defies description.
- Three passages in the NT deal with the eternal state. There is one from the writings of Paul (1 Corinthians 15.24, 28), one from the writings of Peter (2 Peter 3.13) and another from the writings of John (Revelation 21). There is a different emphasis in each passage.
- Paul speaks of the consummation of divine **rule**. Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father, having subdued every enemy (including death). All will then be subject to God and exist for His glory. The new creation will remain undisturbed by any enemy or subversive element for eternity.
- Peter speaks of divine **righteousness**, “we... look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” During the millennium, righteousness will *reign* (Isaiah 32.1), suggesting that sin is present but suppressed. In eternity (the “Day of God”), righteousness *dwells* because there is nothing evil to suppress.
- John speaks of divine **residence**, “the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them,” (Revelation 21.3). God is at home in this new universe, where every part of it reflects His own nature, and sin has been entirely removed.
- Isaiah also speaks of “new heavens and a new earth” on two occasions (65.17; 66.22). However, the same passages also describe the passing of time and seasons (65.20-21; 66.23), the birth of children (65.23) and the presence of sin and death (65.20). It is therefore likely he is describing the great *spiritual regeneration* and *physical renewal* of the millennial earth – “the restitution of all things” (Acts 3.21). The millennium will be a new heaven and new earth in a partial and preliminary sense, having been freed from the bondage of corruption and decay (Romans 8.21).

## Eternal Creation [v.1]

**v.1.** Following the thousand-year reign of Christ (20.6), the fleeing away of the first earth and heaven (20.11) and the final judgment of the Great White Throne (20.11), John sees a **new** [*kainós*] **heaven** and a **new earth**. The word *kainós* refers to what is qualitatively new, as contrasted with *néos* (new in time). This is something new in form, nature, character, purpose and quality. The word also suggests that what is newly made is not impaired by time or use – so the new creation is abidingly new and fresh. The first earth and heavens “wax old as doth a garment,” (Hebrews 1.11) but the new heaven and earth shall never wax old, perish or be changed. The **first heaven and the first earth were passed away** [*parerchomai*] meaning, primarily, to ‘pass completely out of sight’ or to ‘discontinue as a condition or state’ (cf. v.4). This raises a controversial question about whether the first creation is annihilated or liquidated to its base materials and reformed (see discussion below). In the new heaven and new earth, **there was no more sea** (though there will be beautiful water courses, cf. 22.1). No doubt this refers to literal sea (cf. 20.13). The sea is a Biblical symbol of divine judgment (the flood), represents the instability of Gentile nations (Isaiah 57.20) and is a barrier of separation between countries. But in the eternal state there will be no trace of judgment or separation. The sea was last referenced in 20.13 as a tomb for dead bodies. Now the sea has given up its dead, it has no more purpose.

## Excursus: Annihilation or Reformation?

- Christians have long debated whether the first creation will be annihilated, and the new creation made from nothing, or whether the first creation will be dissolved and purged and then rebuilt into something completely new.
- Relevant Scriptures use very strong language. Peter says, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” (2 Peter 3.10). Again, “the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” (2 Peter 3.12). Hebrews 1 speaks of the first creation “perishing,” and being “folded up as a garment” (1.11-12). See also Hebrews 12.26-27; Revelation 20.11.
- I believe the heavens and earth will be liquidated to its base materials and reformed (reborn) for these reasons:
  - **First**, there is never any thought of annihilation taught anywhere in the word of God.
  - **Second**, note the obvious parallel between the ‘old earth’ (pre-flood) and the ‘new earth’ (Day of God). The language of Peter in relation to the *first* creation is very strong, “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished,” (2 Peter 3.6). The ‘old world’ perished in the cataclysm of the flood (with water), but the planet wasn’t annihilated! The present world is still the *same world*, though cleansed and renewed. Likewise this world will experience a cataclysm (with fire) before a new earth emerges – the same earth, though dissolved and renewed.
  - **Third**, everything will be put into a crucible of fervent heat and brought out changed. The very constituent, chemical elements that compose matter will be taken apart and reconstituted. In Peter’s language, the basic building blocks of the universe will be “dissolved” and “melt with fervent heat”. This is complete purification. God will melt down and liquidate the base materials of this creation and remodel a beautiful universe.

- **Fourth**, there is a partial parallel between our own experience of salvation and that of creation. Believers are *regenerated* at conversion. This is a radical change, though sin remains in our nature. In the future we will be *resurrected*, and sin will be completely eradicated. The earth has a similar experience. It will be *regenerated* in the millennium, but sin will remain. At the end of the millennium, the earth will be *reconstituted*, and evil will be removed.
- **Fifth**, some say the word *kainós* does not allow for reformation. The opposite is true. Greek scholar GK Beale says, “καίνος refers predominantly to a change in quality or essence rather than something new that has never previously been in existence.” Indeed, the same word is used of the regenerated believer who becomes a new creation (2 Corinthians 5.17) – this is not annihilation, but transformation.
- **Sixth**, the word “were passed away” in v.1 [*parérchomai*], is used by James to describe a rich person passing away in death (1.10) – clearly there is no thought of annihilation, but the passing from one state to another.
- **Seventh**, if God had to throw away the first creation as a lost cause, then the devil was successful in thwarting the original purpose of God. Greater glory is due to God if He can take the original creation stained by sin and make it (through fire) a place fit for Himself to dwell with men on earth eternally.

### Eternal City [v.2]

**v.2.** The last time **John** referred to himself by name was in the first chapter (1.1, 4, 9). The vision he sees is so remarkable that he gives it his personal affirmation. Note. Most translations (including NET, JND, RV) omit “John” as it is not found in the earliest manuscripts. John sees the **holy city, new Jerusalem**. The city is “holy” because it is characterised by purity as the dwelling place of God. Old (earthly) Jerusalem was God’s chosen city to be the centre of divine administration on the earth – a place of purity, peace and spiritual blessing. Sadly, it degenerated into a spiritual Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified (Revelation 11.8). Divine purpose will therefore be fulfilled in the new (heavenly) Jerusalem.

- In Revelation, this city is first mentioned in the promises to the overcomers at Philadelphia (3.12). Believers have the “name of the city” inscribed upon them indicating they belong to the city as their place of eternal habitation.
- This city was promised by God and anticipated by the patriarchs (Hebrews 11.10, 16). It is an eternal city and forms the dwelling place of the redeemed forever (John 14.2-3; Galatians 4.26; Hebrews 12.22-23; 13.14).
- There is clearly a parallel between new Babylon and new Jerusalem. Babylon is a false religious system, symbolised as a *harlot* and centred in a *real city* (17.18). The church is the true people of God, symbolised as a *pure bride* centred in the *new Jerusalem* (21.9-10). As a bride, she symbolises a people precious to Christ. Dwelling in a city, she is at the centre of divine administration – what she is for Christ.
- Some believe this city is merely symbolic of the church (21.9-10), but it seems much more likely it is a physical and real place – note the specific human dimensions and measurements which are given (21.12-21). Furthermore, since our resurrected bodies will be *physical* bodies, real and tangible, they will need a real place and an actual home.
- The saints will “inherit” the city, so they cannot be the city (21.7). The saints go *into* (22.14) and *dwell* in the city (22.3-5). Right of entry is granted by having one’s name written in the Lamb’s register of life (21.27) – this is wider than the church. The city cannot therefore *be* the church.
- Almost every reference to a city in Revelation refers to a literal city, whether Jerusalem (11.2, 8, 13; 14.20; 16.19; 20.9), Babylon (14.8; 17.18; 18.10) or cities of the nations (16.19).
- Just as the *old* Jerusalem is a real earthly city which represents a people in covenant relationship with God (Isaiah 62.1-5), so the *new* Jerusalem is a real heavenly city representing the saints in eternal relationship with God.
- The most we can say is that the city represents the inhabitants (saints) of the city, and their dwelling place. The city as a real place does not deny that some of the tangible aspects of the city’s architecture have symbolic meaning.

New Jerusalem is seen **coming down from [apo] God out [ek] of heaven**. The city is coming ‘away’ from God as to its *source* (divine in origin), and ‘out from’ heaven as to its *sphere*. “Heaven” is *singular* because this city is not coming out of the created atmospheric heavens, but God’s uncreated and eternal dwelling place. This great city will be permanently located on the new earth in the eternal state. Quite literally, heaven will be on earth. The city is **prepared** or ‘caused to be ready’. The same word is used by the Lord Jesus in John 14.2-3, “I go to prepare a place for you,” and again in Hebrews 11.16 of God having “prepared for them (OT saints) a city.” The city is prepared **as a bride adorned for her husband**. This statement does not equate the city with the bride (cf. vv.9-10) but describes the city as “having the freshness and beauty of a bride adorned for marriage to her husband,” (Walvoord). This is a simile to illustrate the preparation of the city and its resulting freshness and radiance.

### Eternal Community [v.3]

**v.3.** John hears a **great voice** out of **heaven**, the loudness emphasising the importance of the announcement. As God is spoken of in the third person in this verse, it is likely this is the voice of an angel speaking with divine authority. The **tabernacle [skēnē] of God** is new Jerusalem itself, thus the immediate and intimate presence of God is dwelling among men in the new creation. This is the fulfilment of Leviticus 26.11-12, “*And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul*

*shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.*" It has always been God's desire to dwell among His people, but the full enjoyment of that presence has always been restricted by sin. No longer! Now sin has been eradicated, and God is dwelling permanently and intimately among them. Indeed, the church today is "builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit," (Ephesians 2.22). The mention of the **tabernacle** does not suggest a temporary dwelling. In Revelation 15.4, "tabernacle" signifies God's intimate and permanent dwelling place in heaven. Now that dwelling place comes down to **men** on earth. Dwelling with "men" may imply national distinctions have gone, although the word **people** is plural. This suggests distinctions between people groups in the eternal state. These "men" will be distinct from Israel and the church and may comprise the redeemed from the millennium.

Three things are mentioned:

- **God will dwell with** [*meta*, in the midst of] **them** – divine presence. The word "dwell" [*skēnoō*] is the same as that used of the Lord Jesus in John 1.14 – the Word became flesh and "took up residence among us" [NET]. The presence of Christ among men was then temporary, now the presence of God among men is permanent. God is not now *visiting* men as with Adam in Eden, and Christ in His incarnation. Now he *dwells* implying being at home in rest and love.
- **they shall be his people** – divine possession. Unfaithfulness on the part of Israel once caused God to say, "*not my people, and I will not be your God,*" (Hosea 1.9). But now there is eternal security. The terms of the new covenant are enjoyed by all men eternally (Jeremiah 31.31-34).
- **God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God** – divine power. Jim Allen notes, "*The words 'and be' of the AV are not in the text and their omission allows the presence of God to be seen in the manifestation of His power in their interests.*" This appears to be the full realisation of God "all in all," (1 Corinthians 15.28). God will be 'all' as an object to fill and satisfy the heart. He will be 'in all' that we may enjoy perfect, eternal fellowship with Him.

#### Eternal Conditions [v.4]

**v.4.** This verse describes the eternal conditions of the new heaven and new earth – heaven on earth for eternity. There are *seven* negatives in total – there will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying, pain (v.4), curse (22.3) or night (22.5). All but one of these are imposters in the world because of the entrance of sin (Genesis 3). But in the eternal state, no trace of sin and its associated curse remains. It is sobering to think that Christ experienced and endured every one of the seven negatives that we might be found eternally in a state where none of them will ever be found! **God shall wipe away** (blot out) **all tears from their eyes**, is a phrase also used of millennial conditions (cf. 7.17). The RV says, "he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." Every *single* tear, and every *kind* of tear will be forever lost in the presence of a tender-hearted God. **There shall be no more death**, for it will no longer be required. The last enemy has been vanquished; death having been cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20.14). The new earth and its capital city (new Jerusalem) will have no obituary notices, no funeral parlours and no cemeteries! Neither will there be any more **sorrow** – grief, sadness and mourning. We *entered* this world through sorrow (Genesis 3.16); loved ones *leave* this world amidst scenes of sorrow (1 Thessalonians 4.13), and in between it is sorrowing all the way, "*Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful,*" (Proverbs 14.13). But not in eternity! There, sorrow will be forever removed all because the soul of the Saviour was once wrapped about in sorrow, even unto death (Mark 14.34). There will be no more **crying**, a word which does not describe tears so much as the vocal response to sorrow, an outcry or shout of anxiety and grief (cf. Hebrews 5.7). Finally, there will be no more **pain**, the Greek indicating physical distress and affliction which is a natural consequence of physical bodies which are part of a groaning creation. But, in the eternal state, the **former** (first) **things are passed away**. Everything that accompanied and belonged to the old creation ravaged by sin has gone.

#### Eternal Comfort [vv.5-7]

**v.5.** So incredible is the eternal scene of vv.1-4, it is almost as if God must speak to give John (and us) some additional assurance of the certainty of His promises. He that **sat upon the throne** is God the Father (1.4; 4.2; 7.10; 19.4). This is the seat of supreme, sovereign authority and rule. Such a throne guarantees order, blessing, security and control throughout the universe. The word **behold** draws specific and special attention to something remarkable (cf. 19.11; 21.3). For the first time we are informed that it is God who is the source of the new creation, **I make** (to form or construct) **all things new**. Likely, **And he said unto me** is a new speaker, probably the angel-guide who last spoke to John in 19.9-10. Perhaps John was so transfixed by the scene he needed to be reminded to **write** for the words he has heard, though incredible, are **true** and **faithful** (reliable) and thus worthy of eternal record.

**v.6.** As is clear from the rest of the verse, the speaker is no longer angelic but reverts to God Himself. "**It is done**" (or 'has happened') is a statement of magnificent power and assurance akin to "it is finished!" (John 19.30). In fact, in some manuscripts the word is a plural meaning 'they are done'. Jim Allen says, "*A comprehensive plural is used to summarise all that has now been completed to bring the purposes of God to fruition. The word is wider than the triumphant 'It is finished'. The cross was the foundation; the new creation is the fulfilment.*" God's ultimate and eternal purpose is realised. Two titles of God (1.8), also used of Christ (cf. 22.13) re-emphasise God's ability to perform what He promises. First, He is

the *omniscient Alpha and Omega*, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (including all the letters in between). Thus, God holds all things under His complete and sovereign control (cf. 21.5-6) and is the sum total (A-Z) of divine revelation and truth. This guarantees the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the words He has spoken. Second, He is the *omnipotent beginning [archē] and end [telos]*. As such He is the source and origin of the universe, as well as the one who guides the entire course of history, bringing it to its ultimate consummation (goal). History and eternity are in His hand.

The section (vv.1-9) closes with a divine appeal to receive and enjoy the eternal blessing that is freely available in Christ. There is a word for the *thirsty* (v.6), for the *triumphant* (v.7) and, for the Christ rejecter, a word for the *tormented* (v.8). **I will give to him that is athirst**, the metaphor of thirst is a symbol of unsatisfied desire, and here describes a person that has an earnest sense of spiritual need (cf. Isaiah 55.1). Satisfaction cannot be found in anything or anyone else other than the Lord Jesus (cf. Jeremiah 2.13). Christ is *“the source from which all the spiritual longings in the hearts of men are satisfied,”* (Jim Allen). Perhaps the specific appeal is to one who hears this description of eternity and longs to be part of the scene. God is graciously offering every individual to drink of **the fountain of the water of life** freely! Jehovah is the *“fountain of living waters,”* graphically expressing the insatiable spring of eternal life that finds its source in Him. In the arid climate of Palestine, a spring of cool water would be a vivid symbol of refreshment and satisfaction. Note that before speaking again of the *lake of fire*, which is the second death (v.8), God freely offers, by contrast, a *fountain of water* which is life giving and life sustaining. The word **freely** is elsewhere translated ‘without a cause’ (John 15.25) or ‘for nought’ (2 Thessalonians 3.8). This is a gift to all who will receive it, though we know it cost the Giver an enormous price.

**v.7. He that overcometh** refers to the true believer in the Lord Jesus, the one who has drunk of the water of life. This is the eighth promise to the overcomer, following those made to the seven churches. In John’s language, overcoming is synonymous with believing (1 John 5.4-5). *Every* believer is an overcomer, having prevailed over the current of unbelief and falsehood abounding in the world. The believer **shall inherit** (possess or partake of) **all things**, or ‘these things’ [NET] – referring to the promises of vv.1-4. In an echo of v.3, one of the distinctive blessings received by the overcomer is the enjoyment of a special, intimate relationship with God – **I will be his God, and he shall be my son** (cf. 2 Samuel 7.14). Believers are described as ‘sons’ [*huios*], a word John uniquely (apart from here) reserves for the Son of God (John 1.18). He normally speaks of believers as children [*teknon*] in the family of God (1 John 2.1). Sonship indicates a status of dignity, liberty and inheritance. We are joint heirs with Christ! Jim Allen notes, *“Christ is the appointed heir of all things and deigns to share His inheritance with His saints and as the new creation comes into view, this wealth unfolds.”* Thus, God Himself is describing the dignity of our position before Him in eternal glory. We share a standing with Christ.

### Eternal Condemnation [v.8]

**v.8.** This verse must be linked with v.7. I am *either* an overcomer, **or** I am fearful and unbelieving. Eternally, there is but two classes of individual. *Eight* vices are listed. The words describe the character of those who find their eternal destiny in the lake of fire. The list is not referring to isolated acts of sin, but the direction and pattern of one’s life. Any acts of sin can be forgiven, but when sin becomes habitual, character is formed, and a destiny is reaped.

- **fearful** – standing solemnly at the head of the list are the *cowardly* or *timid*. This word describes those who through fear of human disapproval and persecution refused to be identified with Christ and His cause. They deemed it too costly to trust Him. This appeal will be particularly relevant to those living under the reign of the Beast. To whom will they give allegiance?
- **unbelieving** [*apistos*] – those who are *faithless*. They deliberately refuse the message of the gospel and God’s testimony concerning His Son.
- **abominable** – to ‘stink’ or ‘pollute’. Those who are morally corrupt, possibly because of idolatry (cf. Leviticus 18.26).
- **murderers** – the unjustified taking of human life is an affront to God as those who are made in His image. The Beast will place very little value on human life, especially the lives of the saints (Revelation 9.21).
- **whoremongers** – those who practice sexual immorality and depraved lusts of all kinds.
- **sorcerers** [*pharmakos*] – those who mix, make and use drugs, and embrace the unseen world of spirits and demons.
- **idolaters** – refers particularly to those who have been defiled by idolatry, whether emperor worship or the worship of the Beast (cf. 13.12; 17.4-5; 21.27). This, in turn, leads to immoral behaviour.
- **all liars** – Satan was the first liar (John 8.44). Primarily those who lie by their denial of Christ and divine truth.

As there is a glorious inheritance for the redeemed (v.7), so the lost will also have **their part** (share) in eternal damnation – the **lake** which **burneth** (perpetually) with **fire and brimstone**. This is the **second death** – the separation of a resurrected individual (body and soul) from the presence of God for eternity.