

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 48 - Chapter 21 Continued

In the previous lesson, which was meant as a preface to our study of Revelation chapter 21, we spent much of our time looking at the nature and characteristics of the original Creation as described in Genesis. This is the same Creation in which we currently live, and it is the same Creation that will exist throughout the Millennial Kingdom period of 1000 years. The reason for this revisit of the Creation is because chapter 21 introduces us to the **new** earth and heaven (heaven in this case indicating the physical Universe, not the spiritual Heaven where God lives). Thus this re-Creation is distinctly different from the original Creation and we're going to be looking at those several differences.

Let's first review some of the most significant characteristics of the original Creation of Genesis. First is that the Genesis Creation has the underlying governing dynamic of being created as a Universe of opposites. This reality is reflected in rather self-evident ways that we all experience every day but perhaps don't think about; but the universal Creation structure of opposites is also made clear in the words of the Genesis creation account. For instance: God created light to separate it from darkness, and to give us day and night. He created dry land to separate it from the watery oceans. Opposites. Through our life experience we learn the universal reality that where there is life, there is also death; and that evil and good exist side by side. Because there is up, there is also down. Where there is near, there is far. Because there is big, there is necessarily little. Even atoms are made up of positive and negative charged particles. Opposites.

Second is that the original Creation has been corrupted by sin. This corruption has infected not only humankind, but also everything that makes up the Universe. Thus God's ultimate plan of redemption is not aimed only at man, but rather at His entire Creation.

Third, and connected with the second, is that redemption inherently involves a new creation, or (perhaps better stated) a re-creation. There is no such thing as redemption without re-creation.

^{CJB} 2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation- the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!*

Fourth is that God created His Creation in such a way as to give it certain freedoms that even involved the Creation itself being able to create. This ability for Creation to create has definite boundaries, and must obey the limits God has set because He uses this creative ability of His Creation to bring about His will. Another freedom God has given some of His Creation is the freedom to choose. Humanity has the freedom to choose in both preference and in morality. Many (perhaps most) animals have a measure of freedom of preference; however the freedom of morality applies strictly to humans. By the freedom of morality I mean the freedom for humans to choose to love God or not. This is expressed by our willingness to trust Him and thereby agree to live by His laws and commandments.... or not.

Fifth, because of the fourth, then the Universe is constantly undergoing change; it is not static. Old stars use up their fuel, burn out, collapse and explode, and new stars are created from the vast cosmic dust clouds. Our Sun burns hotter and cooler in cycles. Oceans rise and fall changing coastline geography. Rivers change course, carve out canyons, and move soil around. Our earth's crust is split into giant plates that forever move upon a molten core. They collide with one another thus shoving up mountains, causing earthquakes and at times volcanoes to erupt that in turn create new land. Even plants are known to change to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

One other point and we'll move on. The Bible is frustratingly short on details about eternity; and eternity is something most Believers are quite interested in. We get a fair amount of information about the Millennial Kingdom period in the final 8 chapters of Ezekiel (especially as it concerns Temple operations), and from a couple of chapters in Revelation, and in a few statements by Christ in the Gospel accounts. But what happens at the end of history..... after the End Times, and then after the succeeding 1000 year reign of Christ.... is that time comes to an end and we enter into the realm of eternity. While it is not comprehensive, we do get quite a bit of information about eternity in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. So if eternity is of interest to you, you'd do well to pay close attention to the lessons on these final 2 chapters of the Holy Bible.

With that as our background, let's re-read Revelation chapter 21. We're going to go over a lot of Scripture today, especially ancient prophetic Scripture, so keep those Bibles handy.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 21

If there is an overriding theme to chapter 21 it is "newness". It is emphasized in the phrase "for the old heaven and earth had passed away". One of the important questions that, when answered, shapes one's theology concerning eternity is exactly what this newness amounts to and when, exactly, it happens. That is, to attain this "newness" will the dross of sin merely be burned off in order to expose the pure metal of righteousness underneath? Or will this be a complete destruction of the old and the reconstruction of something entirely new? At what point in history will this happen, or has it already happened? Interestingly the bulk of the Early Church Fathers did not believe that the current earth and heavens would be entirely obliterated and replaced, but that whatever it amounted to was in the future.

Oecumenius of the late 900's A.D. says this in his Commentary on the Apocalypse:

In his second letter Peter speaks in a similar way: "According to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth". They do not say this as though heaven and earth and sea are destroyed and pass into nonexistence and that other things come into being in their place. Rather they mean that the present realities have cast off their corruption and become new, as though it were an old and dirty garment".

Augustine, writing 6 centuries earlier, was not quite as certain as Oecumenius about the extent of this newness with a new earth and heavens. In his ancient work "The City of God" he says:

Afterwards this world as we see it will pass away, burned away by terrestrial fires, just as the flood was caused by the overflowing of terrestrial waters. This conflagration will utterly burn away the corruptible characteristics proper to corruptible bodies, as such; whereupon our substance will possess only those qualities that are consistent with bodies immortalized in this marvelous transformation..... to this end, that the world, remade into something better, will become fit for people now remade, even in their bodies, into something better."

We discussed last week how the culture and the era in which a person lives greatly colors their worldview. Therefore it can and will greatly affect how one reads the Bible. In the times of these Church Fathers that I quoted, and in much earlier times, the discipline of "science" as we know it did not exist. They had no understanding of how the Universe operated, or of the nature of elements and atoms, or much of anything about the actual substance of what existed above their heads or under their feet. Neither microscopes nor telescopes had yet been invented. So the idea of the earth and the Universe being disassembled back to its smallest particles and then being reassembled into something else was not a thought they could have entertained. Thus they tended to liken Peter's claim of the current earth being melted and John's claim of a new heaven and earth being formed in its place, to the earth being purged of evil by the water in Noah's Flood. So Peter's statement in 2nd Peter 3 that ¹⁰ ***However, the Day of the Lord will come "like a thief." On that Day the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt and disintegrate, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up*** was not taken by the Early Church Fathers in a fully literal sense because they could not in their wildest imagination understand how such a thing could physically occur.

Interestingly in our day, with our increasing knowledge of how the Universe operates and the processes of its formation, Peter's claim can and should be taken literally not only because it is God's Word but also because it is entirely feasible from a scientific standpoint. But even Peter is essentially building upon what Isaiah said 7 centuries prior to him. So for us in the 21st century it's only an issue of whether we choose to believe it or not. History proves that most errors that prophecy teachers and students have made, whether in ancient or modern times, is by not taking the words of prophecies literally enough. And usually that is because in their era and in their culture they could not take seriously how the literal nature of what was being foretold could possibly occur. This inability to accept what is written as the literal truth leads to allegorizing and spiritualizing critical Scripture passages and thus the intended meaning becomes obscured and is replaced with incorrect manmade doctrines that can endure for centuries. So even when the disappearance of the present earth and heavens is plainly foretold as in Revelation chapter 20 verse 11, believing it was nearly incomprehensible to the ancients.

CJB Revelation 20:11 ¹¹ Next I saw a great white throne and the One sitting on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.

How can earth and the heavens "flee" from God's presence; and even more, how can no place be found for them? Only if they are destroyed and have essentially disappeared. Therefore with all the Scriptural evidence, and now even scientific evidence supporting Peter's startling claim that the way that the heavens and the earth will pass away is by intense heat

deconstructing everything back into their basic elements, then we must take what he and John are prophesying as factually true. The new heavens and earth will be new in its most complete sense. Fire and intense heat will be used to destroy the earth, as opposed to purifying it as did the waters of Noah's flood. So the Early Church Fathers got it wrong. But only because it was not yet time to understand the meaning of this prophesied re-creation event more fully as we can today.

Then to end chapter 21 verse 1, we read that the sea will no longer be there. What, exactly, does that mean? Are we to understand that the oceans will no longer exist and there will only be dry land? Will we become a green planet instead of a blue one? Why would that be necessary? As you can imagine there are many suggestions put forth by Bible commentators. Rather than go through them all, let's get right to the bottom line.

The term "sea" is used both literally and symbolically throughout the Bible. However the first thing for us to realize is that to a Jew writing in the 1st century, the literal "sea" would only have been the Mediterranean Sea. That is, when a Jew spoke about "the sea" it was understood that it was the enormous body of salt water that formed the western boundary of the holy land. When they were referring to other seas, such as the Red Sea, they would call them by name. However there were other uses for the word "sea" as well. For Jews in John's day (and for centuries earlier) the sea symbolized the restless, turbulent nature of the world. For the most part, the sea was seen as a powerful and dangerous force, fomenting evil and chaos. This belief came from the Torah where in the Creation account we read:

^{CJB} **Genesis 1:1 - 2** ¹ *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* ² *The earth was unformed and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.*

English masks the reason for why the Jews took this passage in the ominous way they did. The Hebrew word used for darkness in this instance is **choshek**, which means darkness in a spiritual sense. That is, something that is obscured, usually by deception. Thus we find God hovering over this chaotic "deep" that was spiritually dark. In the Bible and in other Jewish writings the sea also often represented the rebellious gentile nations that constantly oppressed God's chosen people. In Revelation the sea was the transportation highway for the world's greedy merchants and the idolaters who reveled in the Babylon the Great world system, and it was out of this symbolic sea that the demonic Sea Beast would arise. And yet in another setting "the sea" was a sort of nickname for the giant bronze water laver that sat just outside the door into the Temple, where priests would purify themselves before entering by washing with the living water that the laver held.

So which of these meanings of the term "sea" are we to assume is the proper interpretation of the statement that "the sea was no longer there" in this passage? I suggest that they are all correct because they all stem from the same root. That is, not only is the Mediterranean sea as a literal body of salt water gone in John's vision of the new earth (and probably all the world's oceans are gone as well), but so are all the evil, chaotic, and oppressive aspects of the world that the term "sea" has historically symbolized. Not only that, but because verse 22 explains that the new earth will have no Temple in Jerusalem, then it fits that there will be no more

water laver (nicknamed "the sea") for purification of priests, because there will no longer be a priesthood. Thus the sea will gone in every respect.

Verse 2 explains that John observes the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. This event was first foretold in another of Isaiah's prophecies. Notice that here the New Jerusalem is called "the holy city". But historically, Jerusalem has been anything but holy. Biblically, Jerusalem was constantly condemned by God's prophets for its idolatry, bloodshed, corruption, and sin, and was regularly punished for it. So the old Jerusalem was (is) in as much need of redemption as any other part of God's Creation.

Isaiah plays a key role in providing information and context throughout Revelation, but perhaps none greater than in the final 2 chapters. What he has to say is something we shouldn't bypass so we're going to read the entire 52nd chapter of Isaiah. You will immediately see that the subject is the eventual redemption of Jerusalem.

READ ISAIAH CHAPTER 52 all

Notice that in the first verse God calls Jerusalem "the holy city", and it is because "the uncircumcised and the unclean will enter you no more". Verse 9 says:

CJB Isaiah 52:9 ⁹ Break out into joy! Sing together, you ruins of Yerushalayim! For ADONAI has comforted his people, he has redeemed Yerushalayim!

And who brings about this redemption?

CJB Isaiah 52:13-15 ¹³ "See how my servant will succeed! He will be raised up, exalted, highly honored! ¹⁴ Just as many were appalled at him, because he was so disfigured that he didn't even seem human and simply no longer looked like a man, ¹⁵ so now he will startle many nations; because of him, kings will be speechless. For they will see what they had not been told, they will ponder things they had never heard."

In retrospect we now know that this servant of God is Yeshua, who is the agent of redemption for God's **entire** Creation. So far in Revelation God has redeemed (and thus, hand in hand, re-created) the earth and the heavens, and He has redeemed (and thus re-created) Jerusalem. Paul knew that the redemption of Jerusalem is less an event and more a process, something that has been in the works in Heaven for a long time, and he speaks about it in Galatians 4. But the anonymous writer of the Book of Hebrews also makes a poignant statement about this heavenly new Jerusalem that I'd like you to hear.

CJB Hebrews 12:18-24 ¹⁸ For you have not come to a tangible mountain, to an ignited fire, to darkness, to murk, to a whirlwind, ¹⁹ to the sound of a shofar, and to a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further message be given to them- ²⁰ for they couldn't bear what was being commanded them, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it is to be stoned to death"; ²¹ and so terrifying was the sight that Moshe said, "I am quaking with dread." ²² On the contrary, you have come to Mount Tziyon, that is, the city of the living God, heavenly Yerushalayim; to myriads of angels in festive

assembly; ²³ to a community of the firstborn whose names have been recorded in heaven; to a Judge who is God of everyone; to spirits of righteous people who have been brought to the goal; ²⁴ to the mediator of a new covenant, Yeshua; and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better things than that of Hevel (Abel).

What we learn in the final 2 chapters of Revelation is that in the new earth and the new Jerusalem, God will not be hidden away in a Temple, with a physical barrier between He and His people that is meant to keep them away from His supreme holiness. A physical barrier that if crossed in prior times meant death for the violator, like at Mt. Sinai and with the Temple in Jerusalem. As Hebrews 12 notes, at Mt. Sinai no human or animal could approach God and live except for one: Moses. In the Jerusalem Temple, no human or animal could approach God (in the Holy of Holies) and live except for one: the High Priest, and even then only 1 time per year. Yet because of Messiah Yeshua and the redemption He has enabled, all barriers, physical and spiritual, between God and mankind will be gone with the new earth. We will have no fear in approaching the God of the Universe because Yeshua's blood has more power to save and redeem than the sacrifices of Abel. God will truly and completely be God With Us, which was always His goal.

For the sake of clarity: when Jerusalem (or new Jerusalem) is spoken of, it is not representative of the city infrastructure per se; rather it is representative of the people who reside there. Thus just as it was not the infrastructure of the old Jerusalem that was condemned as sinful and idolatrous, but rather it was the people, so it will be that the new Jerusalem is representative of the holy, pure and redeemed people who will live within it.

Verse 3 says that from God's throne in Heaven, a loud voice is heard that announces God's living presence with His people. Who is making the loud voice? Not God, because the message is not in the first person. It might be the 4 Living Beings who surround and guard His throne; but we aren't told. The CJB makes an error, I think, in saying that God's **Sh'kinah** will be with mankind. Rather the Greek word is **skene** and it means tabernacle. So this statement is merely saying that God will be living on earth with mankind. In what form He will exist on the new earth we are not told.

An interesting point about this verse that is worth exploring is where we read "they will be His peoples". Most translations have it as "they will be his people" (singular). However the Greek word used is **laoi**, a plural, that means peoples. Other parts of the Old and New Testaments speak of God's people, singular, that in Greek is **laos**. So why the change here in Revelation 21? I think the reason may be that while in other parts of the Bible the term "God's people" is specifically referring to Israelites in the historical sense (one distinct people group), here the point is that many peoples (plural) will be represented on the new earth and all will be considered as God's people. Or, as we find it earlier in **Revelation chapter 5, ⁹ and they sang a new song, "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals; because you were slaughtered; at the cost of blood you ransomed for God persons from every tribe, language, people and nation.** Racial, cultural, and ethnic boundaries have been obliterated because through trust in Christ all have access to redemption..... not just ethnic Israelites. This was a promise that was famously made to Abraham in Genesis 12, around 2000 years before the Apostle John lived.

CJB Genesis 12:1 - 3 ¹ *Now ADONAI said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

So upon the advent of the new earth, the diversity of blessed people that God promised to Abraham will finally come about.

Next is verse 4; a verse spoken at nearly every funeral I've ever attended. It explains that the tears and pain and mourning from death will be gone, because the old order of things has passed away. With the new earth there will be no more death. Nothing and no one will die; ever. Yet again Isaiah speaks about the coming of this day:

CJB Isaiah 25:8-9 ⁸ *He will swallow up death forever. Adonai ELOHIM will wipe away the tears from every face, and he will remove from all the earth the disgrace his people suffer. For ADONAI has spoken. ⁹ On that day they will say, "See! This is our God! We waited for him to save us. This is ADONAI; we put our hope in him. We are full of joy, so glad he saved us!"*

So we read that the old order has been replaced with the new order. The old order seems to have two aspects to it. First is that aspect of order that God established at Creation; an order that produced our Universe of opposites and all that comes with it. Second is that aspect of order that lays down how mankind and all living creatures are to relate to God. That second aspect of the old order began at the Garden of Eden with the fall of Adam and Eve, and later it was made into a law code and put to writing on Mt. Sinai with Moses. Both aspects of the old order will continue on until the new earth and heavens are established. It is popular in the Church to say that Christ abolished the old order (the order given to Moses). But even Christ Himself told us exactly when that old order would be abolished. He said in Matthew 5:18 that not the tiniest bit of the Torah would pass away (part of the old order) until heaven and earth passes away (the beginning point of the new order). So please notice: the old order did not pass away at the foot of the cross. Not Christ's first coming nor even His return to inaugurate His 1000 year reign abolishes the old order and replaces it with a new order. It only happens here in Revelation 21; it occurs after the end of the Millennial Kingdom, upon the destruction of the old earth and heavens, and the re-creation of the new earth and heavens. And, significantly, it only happens after Christ has handed the Kingdom back over to God the Father.

CJB 1 Corinthians 15:21-25 ²¹ *For since death came through a man, also the resurrection of the dead has come through a man. ²² For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming; ²⁴ then the culmination, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father, after having put an end to every rulership, yes, to every authority and power. ²⁵ For he has to rule until he puts all his enemies under his feet.*

When this old order is replaced is a huge doctrinal issue in the Church. So huge that many

good Bible commentators have concluded that the final chapters of Revelation must have been given to us out of order, and so they rearrange sections of these chapters so as to change the point in time at which this new order of things that we read about in Revelation 21 occurs. And this is done so that it upholds their personal, and no doubt denominational, doctrinal beliefs. I suggest that we accept what has been handed down to us as inspired writings just as they are, and not attempt to modify them unless we should find earlier original manuscripts that show something different.

We'll continue in Revelation 21 next week.