

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 49 - Chapter 21 Continued 2

To resume our study of Revelation chapter 21 today I want to begin by quoting Paul in Romans because in some ways he sums up what we have discussed the last 2 weeks.

CJB Romans 8:19-24 ¹⁹ *The creation waits eagerly for the sons of God to be revealed;* ²⁰ *for the creation was made subject to frustration- not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it. But it was given a reliable hope* ²¹ *that it too would be set free from its bondage to decay and would enjoy the freedom accompanying the glory that God's children will have.* ²² *We know that until now, the whole creation has been groaning as with the pains of childbirth;* ²³ *and not only it, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we continue waiting eagerly to be made sons- that is, to have our whole bodies redeemed and set free.* ²⁴ *It was in this hope that we were saved.*

We've talked much about the Genesis Creation because Revelation 21 tells us about the Re-Creation and there are definite differences between it and the original Creation. We learn that just as the original Creation involved creating the entire Universe, including earth, so does the Re-Creation. One of our areas of discussion last week was how the Lord included a certain set of freedoms within the original Creation so that it, within limits, could itself create. Another topic was how (whether from Adam's sin or from divine plan) the whole Creation is under bondage to decay and thus its eventual death is a certainty. So Paul says that it is not only mankind that is in desperate need of redemption and renewal, but also everything of a physical nature that exists in the entire cosmos. Therefore the hope of our own personal salvation extends far beyond ourselves or even humanity.

What Paul explained would happen, John now sees in a powerful vision. What they both record for us is still far into our future, well over 1000 years from now, because the dissolution of the existing earth and Universe and its replacement with a new earth and Universe occurs at the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ that I have been referring to as the Millennial Kingdom. And when exactly that begins we do not know if one is of the Premillennial doctrinal belief. If one is Amillennial then you believe the 1000 year reign of Christ began 2000 years ago at the foot of the cross, and continues indefinitely and the new heavens and earth are mostly symbolism.

As concerns Revelation chapters 20, 21, and 22 we have to be a little bit cautious about how to envision the timing and sequence of these several monumental events that lay out the final moments of history and the entry into an entirely new reality. Is it after the conclusion of the 1000 years that Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire, or does it happen in the final moments of the Millennial Kingdom? Does the 2nd resurrection happen before or after Satan's demise, and in the same light, does the Great White Throne judgment mark the end of the Millennium or is it

something that happens later? Here's another question to ponder: when God melts the current earth and Universe back to its elements and reforms it, where will the people be? And, is this melting and reforming nearly instantaneous or does it occur similarly to the original Creation in that it was a process occurring over time (a rather short time if you adhere to a Young Earth Creation doctrine, or a very long time if you adhere to an Old Earth Creation doctrine)? None of this is addressed in Revelation and all we have available is speculation that I'd rather not spend much time with. So as we continue today, while some of your questions may be answered, many more probably won't be.

As but the briefest digest of the first 4 verses of Revelation 21, we find that the old (the current) earth and Universe have been done away with, and the creation of a new earth and new heaven have happened (let me remind you that in this case "heaven" is referring to the Universe, and not the spiritual place where God and the angels live). The new heavenly Jerusalem has descended upon the new earth, and it is described as being like a bride prepared for her husband. A booming voice from Heaven has announced that God will now live with His peoples (plural). This statement means that God, in all His essences, will literally exist alongside and with His worshippers; no barriers of any kind will extend to separate His worshippers from Him. By using the term "peoples" (*laoi* in Greek, a plural), it means that the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all the families of the earth....all races, ethnicities, and languages....not just Israelites, will be blessed through him, has happened.

And finally in verse 4 we're told that death and its accompanying fears and sorrows are a thing of the past; this is because the old order has passed away. What is the old order? First it represents all the characteristics of the original Creation, chief among them being that mankind is part of a Universe of opposites. Second is that the divine order of things was written down and summed up in the Torah and the Law of Moses. It is a specific order that includes how humans are to relate to God and to one another, and what to do when we fail. Both of these main attributes of the old order are now gone upon the Re-Creation. Thus the new heavens and earth will not endure both life **and** death..... only life. The new heavens and earth will not harbor both good **and** evil.... only good. And as we continue studying the final two chapters of Revelation we'll see other aspects of the Re-Creation spelled out that demonstrate that the governing dynamics of universal opposites will end and be replaced with something else.

We've read through Revelation 21 a couple of times so let's just read it in sections as appropriate.

RE-READ REVELATION 21:5 - 8

Back in chapter 20 verse 11 we were told that "The One" sitting on the Great White Throne watched as earth and the heavens fled from His presence. We discussed at that time that most of Christianity says that this person on the throne is Jesus; however I told you that it is the Father, and I gave you various scriptural proofs for it. Here in chapter 21 verse 5 the term "The One" sitting on the throne again appears, and embedded within the actions taken are some attributes concerning who this person is. First it is important to notice that for the first time in this chapter, it is God Himself that is speaking because His words are given to us in the first person (I, me). And what He says sounds familiar because we read something similar in the

1st chapter of Revelation.

CJB Revelation 1:8 *"I am the 'A' and the 'Z,'" says ADONAI, God of heaven's armies, the One who is, who was and who is coming.*

So the God who is overseeing the new earth and heavens is the same God that oversaw "the beginning" as well as The One who inspired His faithful worshipper, the Apostle John. God says that He is making everything new. In fact, that He is re-creating **everything** new is emphasized by His intervening in John's vision, telling John to be sure to write this down because the words are true and trustworthy. Then, as if to underline it all, God says "It is done!". That is, since everything is new, the re-creation is complete and thus every aspect of redemption is complete. "The One" sitting on the throne goes on to say that He is the A and the Z, the beginning and the end as in 1:8. All of these named attributes and descriptions have been regularly used, Old and New Testaments, of the Father. We can also know that since the subject is the new earth and heavens, regardless of exact sequence or timing, prior to the re-creation of the Universe Christ gives back His own ruling authority to the Father.

CJB 1 Corinthians 15:23-26 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.* ²⁶ *The last enemy to be done away with will be death.....*

So the One sitting on the throne is doubtless the Father and we don't have to wonder which "person" of God is being referred to. When Christ is also involved, He will be mentioned separately. What else is important to understand is that God is reminding folks that while everything has been made new, He hasn't. He is the same God, of the same substance, the One who created the original Creation. He is the God who exists when nothing else does. So along with the new creation does not come a new, renewed, or different God. It will be we and everything else about the cosmos that are changed; but not Him.

The ending words of verse 6 ought to be familiar to many, especially to the Seed of Abraham local congregation, because I speak them at every Sukkot celebration. God says that to everyone who is thirsty, He will give water free of charge from the Fountain of Life. Listen to this excerpt from the Gospel of John. And since the same John wrote both the Apocalypse and the Gospel, then we should expect to encounter similar thoughts and wording in them.

CJB John 7:37-38 ³⁷ *Now on the last day of the festival, Hoshana Rabbah, Yeshua stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking!"* ³⁸ *Whoever puts his trust in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!"*

Essentially, in using those words about water from the Fountain of Life, God is rephrasing the Gospel. Since the new earth and heavens have already been created, then certainly its inhabitants are in no need of hearing it. Therefore we should take this sentence as a kind of

parenthesis that is aimed at the audience of John's Revelation, in John's time and on into the future. I love that the word "free" or "gift" is included in what God says. The Greek word is **dorean**, and while indeed it means "a gift, without cost", it also inherently includes the sense of the gift being undeserved and unmerited.

And yet not everyone, of course, will get such benefits as being eternally with God. Let me pause here to mention something. Notice **where** it is that God says He will be: with His peoples on the new earth. This is important in a couple of different ways. First is that His peoples will not be divided up into different realities depending on which people group they belong. That is, whether formerly Israelite or gentile, all will live with God. Second is that Believers will not be living forever "in Heaven" with God. A statement made rather routinely by Believers and given at the pulpit is that when we die we go to Heaven eternally; but that isn't scripturally accurate. So many Christians have visions of floating endlessly on Heavenly clouds, lounging at will, looking down at the hapless individuals still running on the treadmill of life.

Evangelical Christians (especially) like to say that Heaven is our home and not earth. And yet Revelation teaches us that all during the 1000 year reign of Christ, most Believers will live on planet earth, and earth will exist more or less precisely as it is today. And now in chapter 21 we learn that when the old earth is done away with and replaced with a new one, we'll ALL live there eternally..... not in Heaven. Thus we need to view Heaven in a similar (although not precise) way as the ancient Hebrews viewed Abraham's Bosom; as a temporary place of safety and shelter until God completes His work of redemption. Upon Christ's first coming, He delivered the righteous souls held captive in Abraham's Bosom by allowing them to transfer to Heaven after Yeshua descended to proclaim Himself to the captives in validation of their trust for salvation in the God of Israel. Upon Messiah's second coming and the first resurrection, the souls temporarily residing in Heaven will be sent back to earth in glorified bodies to live out the Millennial Kingdom period with Him. I'm assuming that souls of the regular humans who live and then die during the Millennial Kingdom period will reside in Heaven until the second resurrection and then from that moment forward, Heaven will be forever empty of human souls.

Verse 7 of Revelation 21 explains just who will receive these wonderful rewards of faithful trusting in Christ during their lifetimes: it is "he (they) who wins the victory". Where have we heard that before? In the letters to the 7 Believing congregations of Asia.

CJB Revelation 2:7 ⁷ Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities. To him winning the victory I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life which is in God's Gan-'Eden."

CJB Revelation 2:26 ²⁶ To him who wins the victory and does what I want until the goal is reached, I will give him authority over the nations;

CJB Revelation 3:5 ⁵ He who wins the victory will, like them, be dressed in white clothing; and I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life; in fact, I will acknowledge him individually before my Father and before his angels.....

There are a number of promises of rewards made to the Believing victors, or over-comers, in the letters to the 7 "Churches". Some of them are:

- 1) the tree of life will be available to them
- 2) they will be part of the new order of Temple
- 3) they will be part of the New Jerusalem that comes down from Heaven
- 4) they will have God's name written on them
- 5) they will be excluded from the 2nd death

God also promises that every victor will be seen as a son to Him. However, for those who are not faithful to Him, there is another and different set of promises; ominous ones to be sure. An abbreviated list is supplied in the second part of verse 8 and in some ways it is terrifying..... even to Believers.... because perhaps we can be brave enough to look into a mirror and say to ourselves: 'but I have done these things'. Two quick points about that: 1) forgiveness through our trust in God and in His Son wipes out the penalty for those sins. 2) We must look at this list less as a list of behaviors and more as a list of freely chosen identities and lifestyles. That is, rather than our having committed one or more of these sins at some time, this list is about those who have turned themselves over to these sins and revel in them, making those sins part of them. It is not so much what someone has done, as who they are.

The list of those excluded from God's deliverance and therefore being barred from the new paradise begins with what the CJB says are the cowardly. While David Stern may be right to choose to use the English word "cowardly" that is not what the Greek lexicons say that the Greek word **deilos** means. Rather, more literally, it means timid and fearful. I'm not sure why someone who is timid and fearful would be excluded. However, when we find this word used in the New Testament in Matthew 8:26 and its parallel in Mark 4:40, it is directly connected with having little faith. And, interestingly, these passages were said in rebuke to Christ's Disciples! So the idea seems to be Believers allowing their fears to overcome their faith; the exact opposite of perseverance. With little else to go on or to otherwise rationally explain why being fearful or perhaps a coward would exclude one from eternal life with God, I must assume that this category of the excluded is directed towards Believers (or would-be Believers) who are so weak in their faith that they fall away in times of trial and tribulation. After all, the first list that was about rewards was promised to "those who win the victory" (as we find in the letters to the 7 "Churches"), and the second list that immediately follows it represents the other end of the stick; punishments promised to those who come up short and do NOT win the victory. So without further evidence I think that is what this first identity or characteristic on the excluded list is trying to get across to us.

The second characteristic or identity concerns the untrustworthy. The Greek word being translated here is **apistos**. It means unbelieving or without faith. It refers to blatant Unbelievers; those who have never accepted the redemption of God's Lamb. And, in my opinion, it backs up my contention that the first on the list (the fearful) speaks about Believers,

although marginal or wanna-be Believers, who had such small faith and trust that they didn't persevere. Thus that kind of so-called Believer as well as openly non-believing individuals are excluded from God's presence and eternal grace.

The third characteristic or identity is the vile. The Greek word is **bdelusso** and it means exceptionally hateful, abominable or abhorrent. It refers to a broad category of the worst of the worst sins and sinners. Since this one can maybe cause heart palpitations among Believers, let me remind you: this is not saying that an abominable sin is an unforgivable sin. In our passage this is referring to a lifestyle or a chosen mindset that is loathsome to God and so that person's life reflects the opposite of holiness and righteousness.

The fourth excluded category is murderers. This is pretty straightforward except to say that these are unrepentant murderers who enjoy preying on others.

The fifth is the sexually immoral. The Greek word being translated is **pornos** from where we derive the English word pornography. Interestingly, **pornos** is a term applied only to males. Most often it is referring to a male prostitute (always meaning it in the homosexual sense). However in its most generic sense, it means having sexual relations of any kind that are immoral. And what is immoral is, of course, defined by the Law of Moses. Thus often in English Bibles **pornos** is translated as fornicator. However that is actually a nicer, milder way of sort of avoiding the intent, which is to call out gay males.

The sixth exclusion is what the CJB says is "those who misuse drugs in connection with the occult". Most English Bibles say it means sorcerers. In Greek the word is **pharmakeia**; it means one who prepares magical remedies. So David Stern has it right; it involves drugs and the occult. Because of books like the Harry Potter series we sort of laugh off the idea of sorcery and wizardry, thinking it fun and harmless. However it is a very serious matter before the Lord and I wish parents who either encourage or at least accept their children reading those sorts of books would consider this before making that decision. It's not that the child is going to necessarily become an excluded sorcerer. But anyone who doesn't believe in slippery slopes simply hasn't lived long enough to know that they're a fact of life and often unavoidable when some indulgences are entertained.

The seventh is called idolatry and the Greek word is **eidololatrias**; it indeed means the worship of false gods. Interestingly that same word is used in the Bible to describe a man who craves money and the decadent things of the world. So as we've seen throughout God's Word, one cannot devote their lives to acquiring all the extravagant things of the world and at the same time seek God. We are fooling ourselves when we try. This doesn't mean that should God decide to bless us with plenty that somehow we are displeasing Him. It's an issue of priorities.

CJB Matthew 6:31-33 ³¹ **"So don't be anxious, asking, 'What will we eat?,' 'What will we drink?' or 'How will we be clothed?'** ³² **For it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all.** ³³ **But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

The Eighth and final excluded category or identity is being a liar. The Greek is **pseudes** and it

means to be deceitful. So perhaps a better English translation is Deceiver, the chief attribute of Satan. Deceitfulness and darkness go hand in hand in the Bible as their sources are spiritual. While especially the first category of excluded people in this verse is likely speaking about those who profess Christianity, this eighth one may be aiming at that as well. False doctrine is deceit; and to John, Traditions of the Elders that were the heart of the synagogue system that dominated Jewish religion in the 1st century pointed people away from Yeshua as the Messiah and therefore he considered it deceit. During my years of study and research I've found that much false doctrine is probably intentional or maybe comes from willful ignorance in that it serves a man-defined purpose. Some doctrinal error is just that: error. It is likely just poor understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

There were many false Messiahs and false Apostles that proclaimed false doctrines running around in John's time as Christ warned there were, and would be. Just as today there are many false teachers and preachers of false doctrines who claim to be doing God's work but in fact are primarily seeking an opportunity to acquire personal wealth and power. The fate of the people from all eight categories of sinful identities was that they would be thrown into the Lake of Fire and suffer the second death. This would be an eternal condition for them, of which they would remain entirely conscious. Let's read a little more of chapter 21.

RE-READ CHAPTER 21:9 - 14

Although it's been a while since we've talked about Babylon, we shouldn't lose track that, like with many other sections of the Book of Revelation, strong contrasts are set up between that which is Godly, and that which is of the Adversary. The New Jerusalem is the Godly contrast to the wicked Babylon. Listen to the first 3 verses of chapter 17 concerning Babylon and notice the similarity to chapter 21 verses 9 and 10 concerning the New Jerusalem.

^{CJB} **Revelation 17:1 - 3** ***¹Then came one of the angels with the seven bowls; and he said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is sitting by many waters. ²The kings of the earth went whoring with her, and the people living on earth have become drunk from the wine of her whoring." ³He carried me off in the Spirit to a desert, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast filled with blasphemous names and having seven heads and ten horns.***

More precisely, the opening of chapter 17 speaks about the **whore** of Babylon, while chapter 21 verses 9 and 10 speak about the **bride** of the Lamb. The descriptions of each are personified by women. In the 1st case it speaks of a woman who desires everything this world and Satan has to offer; while the woman in the 2nd case speaks of a woman (the bride) that is pure and godly and seeks only after God and the Lamb.

It is from the same group of angels (who carry out the Bowl judgments) that one reveals the future to John about both the whore of Babylon and the bride of the Lamb. It is the same group of angels that carry John off in the spirit to see the evil nature of the whore of Babylon, that also carry John off to witness the descending of the new holy Jerusalem.

Biblically, and often practically, the origin of a thing defines the nature and sometimes the fate

of that thing. The origin of Babylon the Great is wicked humanity. The origin of the New Jerusalem is Heaven and so it bears Heaven's nature; but it is NOT Heaven. What it is, is the ideal Jerusalem; the ideal abode of God's ideal people. It is NOT the old Jerusalem that ascended to Heaven to get cleaned up, a new paint job, and sent back down. It is a Jerusalem that has been created by God in the spiritual realm. Since it is descending from Heaven, then its physical nature could be (and most often is) taken mostly symbolically; although some room has to be allowed that what "physical" amounts to in the new earth and Universe could be entirely unlike anything we would deem as "physical" today. So rather than being symbolic, perhaps this New Jerusalem and the way it is described to John uses the best words available at his time in history to describe this new reality that has just descended to earth.

While the New Jerusalem is primarily about the redeemed people who live in it, nonetheless the vivid descriptions of the city itself tell us that the infrastructure is important as well. And we're told that it shines with God's glory. So if we take the Hebrew word ***Sh'khinah*** to be the divine personification of the glory or splendor of God, then we won't be too far off the mark to understand its brilliance and radiance. John compared it to a giant perfect diamond. The city had gates; 12 of them. Each gate was named for one of the tribes of Israel. The city was clearly a square and on each side were 3 gates. The walls were held up by underlying foundation stones; 12 of them. And they were named for the 12 Disciples. As Believers we need to face that the New Jerusalem is awfully Jewish! But, I confess, that sadly most Christian commentaries I've researched simply dismiss this fact and appropriate the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Jewish disciples to the gentile Church. So for them, the gates and the foundation stones have nothing to do with Israel, but instead represent the Christian Church.

The other mistaken Church doctrine that is regularly put forward about the New Jerusalem of chapter 21 is that it is what we read about in the final chapters of Ezekiel. It is also commonly said that what Ezekiel writes about in that regard is entirely symbolic and so is spiritualized and has no basis in reality. A couple of things; first the Jerusalem that Ezekiel writes about beginning in Ezekiel 40 is mostly about the Temple and that is where most of his attention is focused. Yet Revelation 21:22 says that the New Jerusalem that John sees has NO Temple! And it is not because John chooses not to address the Temple of the new earth, but rather the existence of a Temple is of the old order and not the new order so there isn't one. Second, the Temple that Ezekiel writes about in his book can only be one thing: the Temple of the Millennial Kingdom when the old order still reigns, sacrifices continue to occur, and a Priesthood still exists, because after the Millennium the earth will never again have a Temple.

We'll continue with Revelation 21 next time.