

**UNDERSTANDING END TIMES PROPHECY  
FOCUS #10—THE ETERNAL STATE  
REVELATION 21:1-22:5**

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Most of us probably wonder what heaven will be like. The Bible refers to heaven over 500 times. The book of Revelation alone mentions heaven around 50 times. There are three different heavens mentioned in the Scripture. There is the first heaven, which is the earth's atmosphere (Genesis 1:20; Ezekiel 38:20). The second heaven is that of the universe, interplanetary and interstellar space (Genesis 22:17; Deuteronomy 4:19; Psalm 83). The third heaven is the actual dwelling place of God (Deuteronomy 4:39; 1 Kings 8:30; Daniel 2:28; Acts 7:55; 1 Peter 3:22). It is this future dwelling place of God (heaven) that John receives a vision of in Revelation 21 & 22. He speaks of a New Heaven and New Earth in Revelation 21:1-8

**The New Heaven & The New Earth: (Revelation 21:1-8)**

*(1) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, (4) and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (5) And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He \*said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." (6) Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. (7) "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (8) "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

**The Appearance of the New Heaven and the New Earth: (Revelation 21:1)**

After the judgment on all unbelievers, that being sentenced to the lake of fire for all eternity (cf. Revelation 20:11-15), John witnesses the appearance of the new heaven and earth along with the new Jerusalem. He informs us that the old heaven and earth has passed away. This is not new teaching as it is often taught in the Scriptures that God will destroy the current heavens and earth (cf. Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:12-13).

The term new (KAINOS) indicates new in a qualitative sense and thus emphasizes that this will be something completely new. The Lord must destroy our present world due to

its pollution from sin (cf. Job 15:15; Isaiah 24:5). The Psalmist teaches of the passing of heaven and earth (Psalm 102:25-26). Jesus also declares in Luke 21:33, "Heaven and earth will pass away."

John provides the first hint of what the new heaven and earth will be like. He says that there is no longer any sea. Our present earth is a water-based environment. Three-fourths of the world is covered with water. All life on earth is dependent upon water to survive. Human blood is 90% water, while human flesh is 65% water. Life however in the new heaven and earth will not be based upon water. We will be in glorified bodies not in physical fleshly bodies and therefore will not need to depend upon water for our existence. The new heaven and earth will not have any sea.

*The Capital of the New Heaven and the New Earth:* (Revelation 21:2)

John's attention is now drawn to the capital city of the New Heaven and Earth, that being New Jerusalem. It is important to note that John saw the city descending out of heaven from God. This emphasizes that the holy city was already in existence. It is likely that this is the place that the Lord has gone to prepare for His redeemed (cf. John 14:1-3). This New Jerusalem is called the holy city. The words "holy city" emphasize the character of the city because it is "the city of God" (Revelation 3:12), which has not been tainted by sin.

John notes that the city is *made ready as a bride adorned for her husband*. In his commentary, John MacArthur provides a clear understanding as to the significance of this statement:

"The city is pictured as a bride because it contains the bride and takes on her character. The imagery is drawn from a Jewish wedding, which typically had three parts. First was the betrothal, which was like a modern engagement, but more legally binding. The betrothal of the Lord's bride took place in eternity past when God pledged to His Son a redeemed people. The next stage was the presentation, a time of celebration and feasting leading up to the actual wedding ceremony. The presentation of the bride took place following the Rapture of the church, when believers are taken to heaven.

The third stage was the ceremony, which for the Lord's bride began at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9) and stretched through the millennial kingdom. The final stage was the consummation, which corresponds to the eternal state. John saw the bride adorned for her husband because it was time for the consummation....By this point in Revelation, the bride concept expands to include not only the church (as it has since Acts 2), but also all the rest of the redeemed from all the ages who live forever in that eternal city. John goes into a detailed description of this holy city in Revelation 21:9ff.

*The Supreme Reality of the New Heaven and the New Earth:* (Revelation 21:3)

At this point John now hears a loud voice. This loud voice comes from the direction of the throne; however it is not God's voice. It is likely the voice of an angel. The fact that this voice is great connotes that the subsequent revelation is important and authoritative.

The announcement that is made is, "*Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.*" SKENE (tabernacle) also means "tent, dwelling place, or home. The word 'tabernacle' points to the tabernacle in the wilderness, where God dwelt with His people in the holy of holies.

Earlier in Revelation 13:6 and 15:5, John had seen the tabernacle in heaven. In eternity, God will "dwell" (i.e., tabernacle) on earth in the New Jerusalem, symbolizing His fellowship with and blessing of the redeemed, who will experience a new, intimate relationship and fellowship with the Lord. Such fellowship is unfathomable today, far beyond the scope of a believer's comprehension.

So the supreme reality in the new heaven and new earth is the fact that God will dwell with us. In fact this seems to be rather emphatic in verse 3 as this reality is stated in a number of different ways:

- 1-*Behold the tabernacle of God is among men,*
- 2-*and He will dwell among them,*
- 3-*and they shall be His people,*
- 4-*and God Himself will be among them.*

For the first time the idea of Immanuel (God with us) will be realized to its fullest. This may be the idea emphasized in the last phrase by the Greek phrase, THEOS META AUTON, literally rendered "God with us." Indeed in this new heaven and new earth, God very God will dwell with the redeemed. God will be ever present with us.

In his commentary, John MacArthur answers the question, "What will it be like to live in God's glorious presence in heaven?" He lists five truths about our living in the presence of God:

**"First,** believers will enjoy ***fellowship*** with Him. The imperfect, sin-hindered fellowship that believers have with God in this life (1 John 1:3) will become full, complete, and unlimited.

**Second;** believers will **see** God as He is. In 1 John 3:2 the apostle John writes, "*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*" Such an unveiled view of God is impossible for mortal men.

No living person has ever seen God in the fullness of His glory (John 1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12); He is invisible (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17) and "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16; cf. Psalm 104:2), exposure to which would mean instant death for any living person (Exodus 33:20).

But in heaven, "the pure in heart...shall see God" (Matthew 5:8), since they will be perfectly holy. They will be given an eternal and expanded vision of God manifest in His shining glory (21:11, 23; 22:5).

**Third**, believers will **worship** God. Every glimpse of heaven in the book of Revelation reveals that the redeemed and the angels worship (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:1, 16; 19:4). In heaven, the glorified, perfected saints will offer perfect worship to God.

**Fourth**, believers will **serve** God (Revelation 22:3).

**Finally**, and most astounding of all, the Lord will serve believers. Jesus told a parable reflecting that truth in Luke 12:35-40...Jesus pictures Himself as a wealthy nobleman, who returns to His estate after a long trip. Finding that his servants ministered faithfully in His absence. He rewards them by taking the role of a servant and preparing a feast for them. So will it be for believers in heaven, forever to be served a heavenly feast of joy by their Lord.

*The Changes in the New Heaven and the New Earth:* (Revelation 21:4)

There will be a number of differences in this new heaven and new earth in addition to the permanent presence of God with His own:

**First** we are told that God will *wipe away every tear from their eyes*. This does not mean that the redeemed will be crying in heaven or sorrowing over the past. It highlights a contrast between our present state in the old earth and our future state in the new heaven and new earth. What it declares is the absence of anything to be sorry about—no sadness, no disappointment, no pain. There will be no tears of misfortune, tears over lost love, tears of remorse, tears of regret, tears over the death of loved ones, or tears for any other reason.

**Second**, John also notes that there will no longer be any death. The greatest curse of human existence will be no more. "Death," as Paul promised, "is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Both Satan, who had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14) and death itself will have been cast into the lake of fire (20:10, 14).

**Lastly**, there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain. The inward sorrow of mourning and its outward expression in crying will be no more in the new heaven and the new earth.

In addition, due to the absence of sin and the fact that we will be in perfect holiness, there will also be no more pain. We will be in glorified sin free bodies, which will not be subject to pain of any kind. The phrase, "*the first things have passed away*," simply summarizes all these differences. Old human experience related to the original, fallen creation is gone forever, and along with all the mourning, suffering, sorrow, disease, pain, and death that has characterized it since the Fall.

*The Lord in the New Heaven and the New Earth:* (Revelation 21:5-6a)

In verse 5 John hears another voice. This time it is coming from the one who sits on the throne. This is a reference to the voice of God. Once again the term IDOU (behold) is used to grab the attention of the readers. It marks out an important statement. This time it is a statement made by God in regards to the changes just mentioned in verse 4.

The Lord says, "*Behold, I am making all things new.*" This is simply a summary statement of the preceding verse. God will make all things new. He will create a new heaven and a new earth. This is not stating that He will simply renew the old heaven and old earth. No, the new heaven and new earth will be an entirely new creation.

It will be a creation where there will be no sea, (Revelation 20:11). It will be a creation where there will be a new capital city of Jerusalem, likely prepared by the Lord Himself (20:12). It will be a creation, where the Lord Himself will dwell in the presence of the redeemed (20:13). It will be a creation, where there will be no death, mourning, crying, or pain (20:14). God will indeed make all things new (20:15).

Overwhelmed by all that he had seen, John seems to have lost his concentration. Thus, God Himself, the glorious, majestic One on the throne said to him, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." God had to get John's attention and command him to write. In fact this statement by God is indeed faithful and true. These truths are as faithful and true as the One, who is revealing them.

This statement and the following words of verse 6 seem to indicate that this is the Lord Jesus speaking from the throne. Jesus is called faithful and true (Revelation 3:14; 19:11). In verse 6 the speaker is referred to as *the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end*. This is a title assigned to the Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:8, and 22:13. Jesus is also referred to as the first and the last in Revelation 1:17; 2:8; and 22:13.

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, while Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. This expression stands for totality. It expresses eternity and infinitude. Christ is eternal, which means that He is infinite in relation to time. He is without beginning or end. He is not bound by time, but is the cause of time. Christ is infinite. He is without measure. He is not bound by or limited to space.

What a marvelous truth about our Lord and a fitting truth as He exclaims, "*It is done!*" This is reminiscent of Christ's words on the cross as recorded in John 19:30, where He says, "*It is finished!*" Jesus' words marked the completion of the work of redemption; these words mark the end of redemptive history.

Who better qualified to declare the end of redemptive history than the eternal, infinite Creator. God both started and will end redemptive history. It has all unfolded according to His marvelous sovereign plan. This offers a great amount of assurance for believers.

God indeed will accomplish all that He has planned for mankind and faithfully guide the destiny of His creation to its designated conclusion.

*The Residents of the New Heaven and the New Earth:* (Revelation 21:6b-7)

In these two verses occur three marvelous promises to the redeemed, who are indeed the residents of the new heaven and new earth. As these three promises are made, three aspects of these residents of the new heaven and new earth are noted.

1) The first promise is in verse 6. The Lord Jesus says, "*I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.*" Thirst is often used throughout the Bible to express a spiritual need (Isaiah 55:1; John 4:13-14; 7:31-39). These are likely the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

The Psalmist expressed this strong desire in Psalm 42:1-2: "*As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?*" The promise is that this thirst will be given from the spring of the water of life without cost.

This is similar to the promise that Jesus gave the Samaritan woman at the well. He said, "*Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.*" (John 4:13-14)

The water in these passages symbolizes eternal life. Those who thirst for and passionately seek salvation are the ones who will receive it and enjoy the eternal bliss of heaven.

2) The second promise is given in verse 7. *He who overcomes will inherit these things.* An overcomer is identified by the apostle John in 1 John 5:4-5, as one who is a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. An overcomer is one who has exercised saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the same person who in faith drinks the water of salvation freely offered by God. John also mentions promises to the overcomers in the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (cf. Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). It says that these overcomers will inherit all these things.

This is likely a general reference to eternal life and in particular the blessings of the new heaven and the new earth. It is beyond our comprehension what all this might include. It is hard to imagine all the blessing that is wrapped up in this promise. What a thrill to think on the glories of heaven promised to believers.

3) The third and final promise exceeds the previous two. The Lord says, "*I will be his God and he will be My son.*" "Here John transferred the Messianic formula of intimate relationship, which God the Father has with Christ, to the glorified saints.

Even in this life it is the believer's privilege to be the adopted son of the God of the universe (John 1:12; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5; Hebrews 12:5-9; 1 John 3:1). But only in heaven, when believers come into their inheritance (1 Peter 1:4), will that adoption be fully realized (Romans 8:23).

*The Outcasts from the New Heaven and the New Earth: (Revelation 21:8)*

This verse mentions all those who will not be allowed to enter into the New Heaven and the New Earth. These are individuals who by their actions have demonstrated that they are not saved. There are 8 categories of people mentioned here that will not inherit eternal life and the blessings of the new heaven and new earth: cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, immoral persons, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars.

These unbelievers, whose lives are characterized by such things, give evidence that they are not saved and will never enter the heavenly city. On the contrary, *their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*

In contrast to the eternal bliss of the righteous in heaven, the wicked will suffer eternal torment in hell. Eternity should motivate all believers to become serious about our commitment to the Lord during our relatively short time on earth.

Dr. J. I. Packer, as quoted by Ron Rhodes, said it well: "Lack of long, strong thinking about our promised hope of glory is a major cause of our plodding, lackluster lifestyle." Setting our affections on the glories that await us in eternity will renew and motivate us to greater service for our Lord in this present age."

For the believer in Christ, we have the blessed hope of a glorious future in heaven. As Jeremy Camp sings, "there will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, no more fears, There will be a day when the burdens of this place will be no more and we'll see Jesus face to face!

Let us look forward to this future time with great anticipation! Let us long for this future time of blessing! Let us live our lives in the here in now in light of what is to come!