

Revelation 21:1-4

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God promises that He will come and dwell among his sanctified people in the new earth where there will be no more pain.

Chapter 21 of Revelation begins with the statement *Then I saw*. This continues the series of visions John observed beginning in Revelation 4:1, which begins with the phrase “After these things I looked.” “I looked” occurs eleven times in Revelation, and *then I saw* nine times.

What John sees this time is *a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea* (v 1).

The statement that *there is no longer any sea* doesn't mean that there's no water. We know this because of the river depicted at the beginning of the next chapter:

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”
(Revelation 22:1)

But there appears to be a marked difference between the topography of the current earth where 71% of its surface is covered in water compared to the new earth where *there is no longer any sea*.

In the book of Revelation, the *sea* might not reflect a body of water since it is the place from which the beast rises:

“Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his head *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names.”
(Revelation 13:1)

This was also prophesied about in Daniel:

“And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.”
(Daniel 7:3)

If *there is no longer any sea*, it means that there is no longer a place for the beast to come from, indicating that he has been forever defeated in the *new heaven and new earth*.

It could be that the phrase *there is no longer any sea* means that there is no longer a chaotic mass of humanity, that supported the rise of the beast, that provides the raw material for tyranny and mass violence. In the *new earth*, there will instead be order and harmony. Since the New Jerusalem will have a river, it seems likely that there will be bodies of water. The statement *there*

is no longer any sea would seem to indicate that any such bodies of water are friendly and tamed rather than unpredictable and deadly.

The next thing John sees is *the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband* (v 2).

The New Testament indicates that the body of believers is Jesus's bride. Instructing the Ephesian church on marriage, Paul wrote:

“So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”
(Ephesians 5:28-32)

This Ephesians passage teaches that just as a husband and wife are to become one flesh, so too will Christ and the church. Marriage is a symbol that points to the union between Christ and the church; the church being the entire body of those who have believed in Jesus. However, it seems that Jerusalem itself will also have a similar oneness with Jesus.

It is tempting to view this verse in Revelation as a metaphor. After all, it says that *new Jerusalem* is *made ready as a bride adorned for her husband*. The verse does not say that the city *is* a bride, but rather is *made ready as a bride*.

However, later in verse 9 we will see that “one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb’” (Revelation 21:9). Therefore, *new Jerusalem* is both made in the image of a bride and is a bride herself. It could be that these concepts overlap. *Jerusalem* is a city, but the city will be occupied with people. And it appears that the people who will occupy *Jerusalem* will consist only of those who have overcome, those who receive the great reward of sharing the reign with Christ (Revelation 3:21; 22:14-15). So it could be that those who dwell in the *new Jerusalem* are members of the body of Christ that have a special level of intimacy with Him (Matthew 25:21, 23).

The scene is building: first we have the *new heaven and the new earth* and the news that *there is no longer any sea*, so the beast's home in the chaos of fallen humanity is gone. Then, the *new Jerusalem* is prepared as a *bride*, all leading to the *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”* (v 3).

This is arguably the culmination of the restoration of God's creation. It is the reverse of the common narrative that we will “spend eternity in heaven.” Rather, heaven comes to earth and we spend eternity with God in the new earth. *God is among men, and He will dwell among them*. No longer is God in heaven, while humans dwell on the earth. Now God is with us, dwelling among

us on the earth: *God Himself will be among them.* God will dwell on the earth, *the tabernacle of God is among men.*

Tabernacle literally means “dwelling place.” The Old Testament *tabernacle* was the place where the Israelites stored the ark of the covenant. It was the seat of God’s presence with Israel (Exodus 33:14). After Moses sets up the tabernacle in Exodus 40, it says:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up.”
(Exodus 40:34-37)

The spirit of God inhabited the cloud as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, and the cloud would come and dwell over the *tabernacle* while the Israelites nomadically inhabited the wilderness, making camp for a time before packing up and moving on. The people could not enter the tent of meeting, as humans (on this earth) cannot face the glory of God and live (Exodus 33:20).

In Revelation 20, John “saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away” (Revelation 20:11). Jesus’ presence is too much to be withstood; the old earth and heaven melted from His presence. However, now the believers have been refined by His fire and are able to be in Jesus’ presence, so He can *dwell among them*. It is no longer the case that humans cannot see God’s face and live (Exodus 33:20). Those who believe have been changed and can now dwell in the unveiled presence of God.

The second part that comes with Jesus’ presence among His people is that *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* (v 4).

When God comes to *dwell* with His people, He will get rid of every pain and sorrow. That God will *wipe away every tear from their eyes* indicates that there will still have been some sorrow in heaven up until this point. Perhaps the sorrow was from the refining fire of Christ’s judgement seat (1 Corinthians 3:11-17). Perhaps the sorrow was from waiting for God to finally administer justice upon the earth (Revelation 6:9-10). Perhaps there was sorrow for loved ones who are not present; who were not redeemed. Whatever the case, the time for sorrow ends. And now *there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain*.

There is also *no longer any death*. *Death* was thrown into the lake of fire in the previous chapter (Revelation 21:14). Death is separation, in particular separation from God’s (good) creative design. This will be no more. In the *new earth*, and the *new Jerusalem*, all will be ordered according to God’s design and purpose.

It is interesting to note that in the next chapter we see the “tree of life” in the New Jerusalem. We also see that the “leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2). This is

fascinating, because it indicates that immortality in the *new earth* will depend upon people being faithful to ingest or apply a periodic dose of “leaves of the tree” of life. That suggests that although there is no *pain*, there is still dependence upon God’s ongoing provision. It appears that there will be full compliance in the new earth, since there is no *mourning, or crying, or pain*.

The preparation for receiving the greatest possible blessing comes through being a faithful witness and overcoming temptation (Revelation 3:21). James 1:2-4 instructs believers to

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

(James 1:2-4)

We are encouraged to welcome the trials in this life, knowing that they will refine us, and prepare us to receive God’s greatest blessings (James 1:12). However, James also makes the point that the primary thing we have to overcome is our own sinful nature (James 1:14). What has been made clear throughout Revelation is that when believers overcome our sinful nature and walk in faithfulness to God, His rewards surpass our ability to comprehend them (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Similarly, the book of Romans says,

“We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

(Romans 5:3-5)

Revelation brings us hope in the midst of trials because we know that there will one day be a day when *there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain*. All will be renewed.

Biblical Text

¹Then 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. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And 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, ⁴and 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.