

the **BIG** Story

RESTORATION

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The New Heavens & the New Earth

(Revelation 21.1-8)

Week of May 12th, 2019

This guide is designed to be used for community group discussions, but can easily be adapted for personal reflection.

Leader's Notes

The final two chapters of Revelation depict the consummation of the purposes of God in the gospel. Picking up the whole-Bible motif of marriage, the people of God (represented in the new Jerusalem; v. 2) are wedded to the Lamb (symbolizing our eternal reconciliation, union, and presence with Christ; vv. 2–3).

We also see here the fulfillment of God's creation agenda (vv. 1–4). The absence of sea (v. 1) reflects the absence of earthly disorder as was first accomplished by the Holy Spirit. It reminds us not only of the physical elements over which Christ had power but also of the peace he brought (Mark 4:39). The defeat of death is the good news realized in its fullness (Rev. 21:4), and those who conquer with Jesus are rewarded as Jesus himself has been rewarded in verse 7. Christ is now the eternal dwelling place of saved humanity, as the Old Testament tabernacle/temple promises reach their fulfillment (v. 3; cf. Ex. 29:44–46; Lev. 26:11–12; 2 Chron. 6:18).

In these final two chapters of the Bible, then, we see the final restoration and advancement of the creation introduced in the first two chapters of the Bible—only this time without any possibility of sin or its effects entering in, for Satan has been destroyed once and for all (Rev. 20:7–10).

Rev. 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The removal of the **first heaven and earth** eliminates the fatal infection of evil in the cosmic order and gives way to God's creation of a new cosmic order where sin and suffering and death are forever banished. The old order was in "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:21) and "groaning ... in pains of childbirth until now" (Rom. 8:22), awaiting the day when "the heavens ... will be dissolved" and "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell" will be established to forever replace the old (2 Pet. 3:12–13). This represents the specific fulfillment of the prophecy given to Isaiah: "Thus says the Lord God ... 'I create new heavens and a new earth ...'" (Isa. 65:13, 17; cf. 66:22). Scholars differ, however, as to the extent and way in which the "first heaven and the first earth" will pass **away** and be transformed into something new—especially as to whether this represents an entirely new creation, or whether (and to what extent) this represents a "renewed" creation that retains some degree of continuity with the old order. As seen in the example of 1 Cor. 15:35–44, it is clear, with respect to the believer's resurrection body, that although there is some kind of continuity between the old and the new order, the new reality will also be qualitatively different—for example, as different as a kernel or a seed is from a full-grown wheat plant (1 Cor. 15:35–39). Thus "new" (Gk. *kainos*) is best understood here in terms of something that has been qualitatively transformed in a fundamental way, rather than as an outright new creation *ex nihilo* (Latin, "out of nothing"), as in the case of God's original creation in Genesis 1. By comparison to the old order that is coming to an end, the new cosmic

order is radically different—a place where “righteousness will dwell” (2 Pet. 3:13), where God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 21:4; cf. Isa. 25:8 and Rev. 7:17), where “death shall be no more” (Rev. 21:4; cf. Isa. 25:8 and 1 Cor. 15:26), where “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:21), and where all that is “perishable” will be raised and transformed into a glorious new “imperishable” reality (1 Cor. 15:42–43), where the redeemed will rejoice in the eternal presence of “God and the Lamb” (Rev. 14:4; cf. 22:1–5). **The sea was no more** does not mean there will be no bodies of water in the new earth (cf. 21:6; 22:1–2) but refers to the source of earthly rebellion, chaos, and danger—the sea from which the beast emerged (13:1; Dan. 7:3). This symbolic (or literal) source of rebellion will no longer threaten creation’s perfection.

Rev. 21:2 The holy city, new Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22–24), the church redeemed by Jesus Christ, will no longer be trampled by nations (Rev. 11:2) but rather, will be **adorned as a bride**.

Rev. 21:3 He will dwell with them. The greatest blessing of heaven will be unhindered fellowship with God himself. The goal of God’s covenant, “God with us” (Isa. 7:14, esv footnote; Matt. 1:23), foreshadowed in the OT tabernacle and temple, will be achieved. **his people ... their God.** See Lev. 26:11–12; Ezek. 37:27.

Rev. 21:4 By wiping away **every tear** and eliminating **death, mourning, and pain** (Isa. 25:8; 65:19–20), God will reverse the curse that entered the world through human sin.

Rev. 21:6 It is done! The destruction of God’s enemies (16:17) and the salvation of his saints are both completed. **the Alpha and the Omega.** First and last letters of the Greek alphabet (cf. 1:8; 22:13). The Lord stands beyond the universe’s **beginning** and its **end** as Sovereign Creator and Consummator, the first and the last (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). The **spring of the water of life** is the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1), a throne of grace (Heb. 4:16) because here the thirsty drink **without payment**, by God’s free gift (Isa. 55:1).

Rev. 21:7 The one who conquers. The promises to conquerors (2:7, 11, 17; etc.) are summed up in this assurance that the new heaven and earth are their **heritage** as God’s children. **he will be my son.** This promise to David’s descendants (2 Sam. 7:14), fulfilled preeminently in Jesus (Heb. 1:5), also includes those who belong to him (Gal. 3:26). On “son,” see note on Gal. 3:26.

Rev. 21:8 The conqueror’s blessedness contrasts with the **second death** awaiting those who renounced faith because of cowardice or compromise with idolatry and sensuality. **Sorcerers** is also used of Egyptian and Babylonian magicians in the OT (e.g., Ex. 7:11; Dan. 2:2); on ancient magic, see note on Acts 13:6.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Share the following things coming up in the life of the church:

Summer Studies: [Discuss your group's plans for winding down for the year] As our community groups wrap for 2018-2019 let's not give up meeting together but rather take this opportunity to switch it up and try one of our various *Summer Studies!* There are men's Proverbs groups, women's Bible studies, a group for mom's and daughters and *more!* Check them out online: <https://newcitycincy.churchcenter.com/groups/summer-studies> - **A great way to stay in the loop about what's happening around New City, and an easy way to see and sign up for groups, is to download the *Church Center App* on iPhone and Android. Give it a try!**

Intro to New City | Saturday, June 1st 8a- Noon: Our next Intro to New City class is coming up in June! Intro to New City is a seminar designed to help you get to know the church a little better: hear the story of the church's origins, our Vision, Values, Beliefs, and Philosophy of ministry, some things that are distinctive about New City, etc. It also provides a basic framework for understanding the gospel, and the church's role in God's plan of redemption.

Intro to New City is a pre-requisite to membership at New City, however, attending the seminar does not commit you to membership. If you need childcare for the class we will be glad to provide it. ****The REGISTRATION DEADLINE for adults and children is May 27th.** (Download the Church Center App and sign up!)

Missional Motherhood Event | Saturday June 8th 9 – 1130a: Join moms with children of all ages including expecting mothers, for breakfast and connections. This topic is focused on renewing our minds in Christ and touching on some common emotional struggles of motherhood; including Abby Morwood's story with Perinatal distress. Come learn, engage with others, and be encouraged! There is nothing to prepare or read prior. Childcare IS Provided if needed, please RSVP May 31. (Questions? Contact nancyrosemusser@gmail.com) (You can sign up via the Church Center app!)

ENGAGE (15-20 minutes)

Real Biblical community involves people living life together. As much as we can, we want to create an atmosphere where people get to know one another, and feel comfortable sharing the ups, downs, and in-betweens of life. So take some time for people to get acquainted. A possible icebreaker question:

- Rate your week 1-10, (can't be a 5), and why.
- What is one place, or a piece of art, or a piece of music that you have only seen or heard once, but would like to go back to revisit over and over again.

REFLECTION AND STUDY (30-35 MINUTES)

Read Revelation 21.1-8

- 1) Have you always thought about heaven in terms of "going to heaven?" What reading, sermons, pop culture imageries influenced your view of heaven?
- 2) If someone says "Christians are so heavenly minded, they are no earthly good," how will you respond?
- 3) What particular descriptions in Revelation 21:1-8 contradicts the idea of "going to heaven?" What do you think "heaven" means in Revelation 21?
- 4) John borrows heavily from the imageries of the Old Testament in writing Revelation, please read Isaiah 65, what are some of the details that Isaiah gives us about the new heavens and new earth? What are some of the new details that John included in his description?
- 5) Looking at Jesus being the "first fruit" of the new heavens and the new earth, what are some of the things we can know about the new creation? How does the scars of Jesus after his resurrection comfort you?
- 6) If the new heavens and new earth belongs to the "thirsty" and "the ones who conquer" (vv.6-7), what are some of the things that stand in your way of being thirsty and conquerors? How can the church family help us remove each other's obstacles?

Spiritual Formation:

On Sunday, Ryan asks us to imagine if one plant, or flower, or shrub in our neighborhood that will still be there in the new heavens and new earth. How would that affect the way you care for it? C.S. Lewis famous said in a sermon, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal—they are immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." Consider this spiritual practice over the next few weeks, before you go to each appointment, each date, each dinner invitation, each meeting, you take a minute to remind yourself that you are meeting with an immortal being. You imagine that they will be there with you as friends, family, colleagues in the new heavens and new earth (even for non-believers because you never know what God will do in their lives). You now have the opportunity to live into the new creation by treating them a little differently than you have before. How would that change your behaviors around them? What will you do differently?

PRAYER (15 minutes)

Break into men and women for prayer. Share prayer requests and pray for one another. Pray especially areas where you long for God to make things right in your life, or the lives of neighbors, co-workers, family, or friends.