



# The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

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## SESSION 15. THE CITY OF GOD REVELATION 21:1–22:6

### I. Thoughts of Heaven

- A. “Set your minds on **things above** not on things on earth” (Col. 3:2) is a command. Yet when many today think of heaven, their minds are filled with notions that simply have no Biblical support. Describe contemporary notions of heaven:
1. Where is it?
  2. What is it like? Is it familiar or unfamiliar?
  3. Who is there?
  4. What are people doing?
  5. Is it solid and real or immaterial and disembodied? <sup>1</sup>
  6. How long will it last? Or is time irrelevant?
  7. Will people grow and change, learn and discover? Or is it static and unchanging?
  8. Is it boring or fascinating?
- B. Wrong notions about heaven can be found among many Christians.
1. *Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending **church service**.... the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks.... And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more “spiritual” (John Eldredge).*
  2. Peter Kreeft tells the story about the English vicar who was asked what he expected after death. He replied: “*Well, if it comes to that, I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn’t bring up such **depressing** subjects.*”
- C. Some wrong notions about life after death in the non-Christian world (that occasionally creep into the church).
1. **Annihilation.** When you die the lights go out and you cease to exist.
  2. **Reincarnation.** Some think that people return as other creatures (a person, an animal, etc.) and others think they return in a more impersonal form (the wind, the trees, the rain, etc.). (*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia).
  3. **Universalism.** Everyone (except maybe Hitler and Stalin) will go to a “better place.” After all, a loving God would never send anyone to hell! Right?

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<sup>1</sup> Pagan Greek philosophers preached “the immortality of the soul” while Christian evangelists announced “the resurrection of the body.” Most today are more Platonic than Christian in their notions of heaven.



4. **Purgatory.** In popular understanding this is a land of in-between which is neither quite heaven nor quite hell. Devout Catholics believe it is part of heaven (a sort of ante-chamber where one gets ready). But neither position has support in the Bible.

D. Thinking rightly about heaven.

To propagate wrong notions about heaven is **pastoral malpractice** of the worst kind! Such false teachings may make hurting people feel better but such sentiments are like drinking alcohol in a snowstorm. “While it makes a freezing person feel warm... it is false warmth. People have been known to freeze to death feeling warm.”<sup>2</sup> But where can we get accurate information about heaven? I know of only two reliable sources:

1. If only someone could go “over there” and then return to tell us about it. Well, I haven’t been there but I have a Friend who has!
2. The Bible. Revelation 21:1–22:6 is a great place to start.

II. The City of God (Revelation 21:1–22:6).

A. Survey the passage.

Jerusalem’s Arrival		Entrance Requirements		Jerusalem’s Description	
21:1	21:5	21:6	21:8	21:9	22:6
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her radiant beauty (21:9–11)</li> <li>• Her walls, gates and foundations (21:12–14)</li> <li>• Her shape and size (21:15–17)</li> <li>• Her construction materials (21:18–21)</li> <li>• Life in the city (21:22–27)</li> <li>• The River of Life (22:1–6)</li> </ul>	

B. Study the passage.

1. Jerusalem’s arrival (21:1–5).
  - a. The City of God **comes down** out of heaven from God (vv. 2, 10). We don’t “go to heaven” but rather heaven comes to us! No humans built this city! This is a city “whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). What a contrast this is to the city of man: Babylon (Gen. 11:1–9; Rev. 17–18).
  - b. Greek has two terms translated by the English word “new”. One term (NEOS) refers to what is recent or young; new in respect to time. This word is not used at all in Revelation. The other term (KAINOS) refers to new in respect to **quality**, not a new edition of the same thing but rather something having a different nature entirely. This is the word used to describe the place prepared for the redeemed. Heaven is not the end of the story but rather a **fresh beginning!**
    - A new heaven and earth (21:1).
    - A new Jerusalem (21:2; see 3:12).
    - Everything is new! (21:5). “I am making all things new” is in the present tense, meaning God will continually make everything fresh and new.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Price Janney, Who Goes There? (p. 13).

- A new name (2:17; 3:12).
- A new song (5:9).

*And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. (C. S. Lewis, The Last Battle, p. 210f.)*

- c. Note the things that are *not* in heaven:
  - No more **sea**<sup>3</sup> (21:1).
  - No more **death** (21:4). Imagine a world without funerals!
  - No more mourning or **crying** (21:4). God himself will wipe away every tear!
  - No more **pain** (21:4).
  - No **temple** (21:22).
  - No **sun** or moon (21:23)
  - Nothing **unclean** (21:27).
  - No more **curse** (22:3). This began in Genesis 3 with the arrival of sin.
  - No more **night** (22:5).
- d. Note especially that Jerusalem arrives as a **bride** (v. 2, 9). What a contrast to Babylon, the great prostitute! History began with a wedding (Gen. 1–2). Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding (John 2:1–11). Human history will culminate with a wedding. Here comes the bride!
2. Entrance requirements (21:6–8).
  - a. Those permitted into the city: those who are **thirsty** (v. 6), the ones who **conquer** (v. 7), and the ones whose names are written in the Lamb’s **book of life** (21:27).
  - b. Those excluded from the city (v. 8): the **cowardly**<sup>4</sup>, the faithless, the detestable, murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers (PHARMAKOS), idolaters, and all **liars**.
3. Jerusalem’s description (21:9–22:6).
  - a. Her radiant beauty (21:9–11). All brides are beautiful but this one is eye-popping, heart-pounding, mind-staggering drop-dead gorgeous! This city has the **glory of God**. Contrast Revelation 17:1 with 21:9.
  - b. Her walls, gates and foundations (21:12–14).
    - The wall was impressive for two reasons: 1) it was about 200 feet thick (or high), and 2) it was **transparent**, “clear as glass”! (v. 18). The

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<sup>3</sup> But why? Perhaps because the beast (antichrist) came out of the sea (13:1) and thus the sea is considered as the source of evil and all things unstable and without foundation.

<sup>4</sup> Mentioned first! To run in fear before the enemies of God is to deny Christ (like Peter did).

wall was not for protection but probably to designate the boundaries of heaven... marking those who are in and those who are not.

- 12 gates named after the **12 tribes** of Israel. Each gate was made of a single pearl (v. 21).
  - 12 foundations named after the **12 apostles**. Each foundation is made from a precious stone: jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, etc. (vv. 19–20).<sup>5</sup>
- c. Her shape and size (21:15–17). Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the City of God is that it is shaped like a **cube** (1,400 miles long, wide and tall, about 3,225,000 cubic miles!). Only the Holy of Holies had this shape (I Kings 6:20).
- d. Her construction materials (21:18–21). The city is made of jasper and gold, the foundations of precious stones, and the gates of pearl.
- e. Life in the city (21:22–27). The gates of the city are never shut so that the **nations** can enter and will walk in the light. .
- f. The river of life (22:1–6). This city is also a **garden**. Two characteristics of this new Eden are mentioned:
- The **river of life**. The old Jerusalem had no river but not so this new city (Psalm 46:4; Zech. 14:8; Ezekiel 47). Issuing from the throne it flows through the city, giving life.
  - The **tree of life**. We first met this tree in Genesis 3:22 when humans were prohibited from eating its fruit. No longer! The fruit now is for everyone and the leaves bring **healing** to the nations.

The redeemed will see the **face of God!** (Ex. 33:20, 23).

*I stood a mendicant of God before His royal throne  
And begged Him for one priceless gift, which I could call my own.  
I took the gift from out His hand, but as I would depart  
I cried, "But Lord this is a thorn and it has pierced by heart.  
This is strange, a hurtful gift, which Thou hast given me."  
He said, "My child, I give good gifts and gave My best to thee."  
I took it home and though at first the cruel thorn hurt sore,  
As long years passed I learned at last to love it more and more.  
I learned He never gives a thorn without this added grace,  
He takes the thorn to pin aside the veil which hides His face.  
(Martha Snell Nicholson, "The Thorn").*

*"These words are trustworthy and true!"* (Rev. 22:6).

### III. Will You Be Happy in Heaven?

It may sound like a strange question but pause and consider. Jesus went away to prepare a place for us (John 14:1–3). But **are we prepared** for what He has prepared for us?

- A. Nothing **unclean** will be there (21:8, 27). Everything is holy and pure. All jokes are clean, all movies are rated G, etc. Only the pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8).

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<sup>5</sup> These stones are basically the same stones used in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:17-20).

- B. A place of **light** and utter **transparency** (21:18, 21–25; 22:5). Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, people have been trying to hide from God. In heaven, there will be no place to hide. There will be no secrets because all the walls are made of glass. Learning to **love the light** is one of the best ways to prepare for heaven (John 3:19–21).
- C. Unceasing **worship**. Though there will be lots of corporate singing and praise, heaven’s worship will be much more than “sitting in church forever and ever.” We will “serve” God and “reign” with him. This means we will finally be able to fully accomplish what we were designed **to be** and **to do**. Everything will be done before the face of God (22:3–5).
- D. People from all **nations** and ethnicities will live there (21:24–26; 22:2). Heaven is a place of reconciling love. All relational ruptures will be healed. Heaven will be a miserable place for those who have prejudice and hatred of any kind.
- E. Where doing **the will of God** is everyone’s highest joy (Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50).  
For those who are unprepared, even if they got to heaven it would seem **like hell** to them!

### TABLE TALK

1. Describe some experiences you have had with people who had false notions of life after death. What could be done to correct their thinking?
2. What did this lesson teach you about heaven that you didn’t know before?
3. Our grandparents sang about heaven constantly. Why don’t we sing about heaven any more when we gather for worship?
4. How does thinking about the future change the way you live today?
5. Describe someone you know (no names, please) who loves the light. Describe someone else who loves the darkness.
6. Imagine what it will be like to be face to face with God! But do we have to wait until heaven for this to be true?

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has imagined  
what God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Cor. 2:9).*

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## Joy to the World

by Isaac Watts

Joy to the World , the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And Heaven and nature sing,  
And Heaven and nature sing,  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders, of His love