

The Hope of Heaven, Part 5

Study Guide

We're going to wrap up our study of John's vision of the new heavens and of the new earth and (primarily) of the new city this week. If you've been with us, then you know that one of the more important things that we've learned along the way is that the city that John sees and then describes to us in terms of foundations and walls and gates and streets and so forth, is not a literal, physical city that is 1,500 miles long, and 1,500 miles wide, and 1,500 miles tall, encompassing all of the created order and sitting upon 12 jeweled foundations that form a giant cosmic ziggurat. John, instead, uses the image of that city, together with each one of its various components, to describe you and me and all of the people of God throughout all of the generations and ages of man. That is to say, we are the new city! Moreover, John also uses these images to speak to us about what our lives will be like in the new heavens and earth as well.

Lastly, we've seen that the images that John uses are to be understood in light of what the bible teaches elsewhere. For example, at the beginning of his vision John tells us that there will be no "sea" in the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1). Well, we learned at that point, that John is not saying that there will be no literal seas in the new heavens and earth, but that there will be none of what the sea represents biblically (chaos, judgment, death, turbulence, etc) in the new heavens and new earth. We've also seen that John's imagery has been purposely constructed to cause us to think about other places and things in the bible. Two of those places are particularly relevant to today's study. The first is the Garden of Eden.

When you put all of the biblical teaching together regarding the garden you discover that the city that John is describing in Revelation is strikingly similar. The city is pictured as being 4-square, oriented to the east, characterized by gold and precious stones, located on a high place, containing a very significant river, as well as the tree of life. All of those things can also be said of the garden. Additionally, the city is the place where God and man dwell in perfect relationship. So also was the garden, until the fall of man.

Genesis 3:1–24 (ESV)

The Fall

3 *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"
² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "
⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a

delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

*"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.*

*¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."*

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

*"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."*

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

*"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;*

*¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face

*you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”*

²⁰ *The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.* ²¹ *And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

²² *Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”*

²³ *therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.* ²⁴ *He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

1) What happened immediately after the man and woman sinned against God? How did they try to cover their sin?

2) What are some of the ways that we try to cover our sins today? By the way, the word "atone" that we hear so often in the bible, means "to cover."

3) How does God cover over the nakedness of our first parents? What do you think that God is teaching mankind here about how sin is to be atoned for (i.e., covered over)?

Did you note that, once our first parents were cast out of the garden, God then placed angels with flaming swords at the gates or entrance to keep man out?

4) What was God guarding man from? What might the consequences have been had man been able to get back into the garden?

The second place that John calls us to remember from the bible that is particularly relevant to today's study is the Holy of Holies that was first found in the tabernacle and then, later, in the temple. It, too, was 4-square, oriented to the east, characterized by gold and precious stones, located on a high place (at least in the case of the temple. It was also guarded by a veil that was embroidered with cherubim (Ex. 26:31), who kept man out. It was the place where God dwelt in unapproachable holiness. It speaks of God's desire to be in the midst of his people, but it also speaks of the separation between God and man as a result of our sin.

5) Do you see any similarities between the Holy of Holies and the Garden of Eden? If so, what do you think the Holy of Holies was meant to represent?

With all of the above in mind, let's pick up our study of John's vision.

Revelation 21:22 (ESV)

²² *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

6) Why do you suppose that the new city (which again, represents the forgiven people of God and their/our eternal existence is the new heavens and earth) has no temple?

Matthew 27:51 (ESV)

⁵¹ *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.*

Matthew tells us that, upon the death of Jesus, the curtain in the temple bearing the cherubim which barred the way to the Holy of Holies was torn in two.

7) What does that tell you about what the death of Jesus has accomplished for his people (those who John, in revelation, is describing as the new city)?

Revelation 21:23 (ESV)

²³ *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

John says the lamp of the city is the Lamb. And he tells us also that the light from this lamp permeates all of the new heavens and earth. Light is that by which we see, find safety, are warmed, and live. Clearly, the Lamb is Jesus, who is the Lamb of God who sacrificed his life to redeem all of those who put their faith in him. That is to say, it is a redemptive light.

8) What does that imply about what our lives will be like in the new heavens and earth? What will we see everything in light of?

Revelation 21:24–27 (ESV)

²⁴ *By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

The new city (i.e., God's eternal people) are made up of the people from every nation. Those who are not of the people of God have no place in the new heavens and earth.

9) What affect should that reality have upon us today?

Revelation 22:1–2 (ESV)

The River of Life

22 *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

There are 2 phrases in the Greek language that appear in these verses that likewise appear in John 19:18. It's the phrases that are often translated "in the midst (or middle)" and "on either side" (i.e., a tree on either side).

John 19:16–19 (ESV)

¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

The Crucifixion

So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

It appears that John here is intentionally comparing his vision of the throne of God and of the Lamb in heaven with his depiction of Jesus who is crucified "in the midst" of the 2 thieves that were hung on the 2 trees "on either side" of Christ. (FYI - Jesus was later pierced in the side and blood and water flowed forth. Also, Jesus bore the sign "King of the Jews" above his head. Whenever God is pictured on his throne in the bible, as in "the throne of God and of the Lamb" in John's vision here, he is pictured as the king.)

10) What do you think that John is teaching us about heaven by making this comparison?

Revelation 22:3–5 (ESV)

³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

11) What do you imagine that the face of Jesus will look like? What do you think it will communicate to you when you first see him?

This concludes our series “The Hope of Heaven.” Sermon audio is available on our web site, through RSS feed, or from iTunes.

Next week we will have a Study Guide for our next sermon topic!