

- Roman Empire, its persecutions and its downfall.
2. A call to worship God, not angels. Does this remind you of any other New Testament books?
 3. Another reminder that things are going to happen soon . Keep being holy!
 4. Yet another reminder that things are going to happen soon. God will reward those who are faithful. He will have the last word.
 5. A blessing on those who enter the city of God (see how in a sense it is already present.) A warning to those who don't that they will find themselves outside.
 6. A reminder that this is for the (seven) churches, and of two of Jesus' titles. He is the root and offspring of David, who fulfils the whole Bible story. He is the bright morning star, which may say that he also fulfils the claims of Roman emperors.
 7. The invitation, God's Spirit and God's church speak as one: Come. The water that flows from God is there for everyone.
 8. A warning: don't mess with this book.
 9. A final reminder: He is coming soon. Be ready! John gives us his agreement.
 10. The final blessing.

One final piece of advice: don't try to tie up all the loose ends. I doubt you will succeed. But let the story of the conquering Lamb, the new heaven and the new earth fill you. May God's grace be with you.

Revelation 20:7-22:21

Everything new

September 3rd 2023



It's time for Revelation's triumphant ending.

I wonder what you were expecting. Heaven and hell? Eternal judgement? Well, there is a new heaven and there certainly is judgement, but instead of 'going to heaven or hell' we have the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth. Judgement is severe. Those whose names are not written in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire, also called the second death.

But just when you might think this is 'heaven' and 'hell' we learn that the nations will walk by the city's light, that its gates will never be shut, the kings of the earth will bring their splendour in, and the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. A river will flow down the middle of the city with the tree of life standing on either side (try to work that one out!). The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. This is no copy of the Roman Empire.

So we have to put two things together: the total destruction of evil and total healing. God has become king. No more death or crying or mourning or pain.

The vision

As so often in Revelation, the vision attempts to describe the

indescribable. It's not easy to imagine a city that is 1400 miles long, wide and high, or walls that are 65 metres thick, though it may help if we remember that the holiest place in the Jerusalem temple was a perfect cube.*

It's more important to note the symbolism of 12,000 'stadia.' As usual, the number 12 symbolises the people of God, via the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus.

See how many 12s and multiples of 12 you can find in Revelation 21 and 22!

The second death

Revelation 20 describes the final judgement, after the dead are raised. There is a second death, which destroys the first death.

Those who are not named in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire, described as a fiery lake of burning sulphur. It sounds horrific, but this is the way that death is destroyed.

There are three options here:

1. This second death symbolises hell as eternal torture. This is what I learned as a teenager, but does it really fit Revelation 21:4.
2. It symbolises annihilation. (total wipeout—but who then are the kings and nations in chapter 21?)
3. It symbolises a final (painful?) refining.

The new Jerusalem

The mathematicians amongst us might note that 1,000 is a cube (10x10x10) as well as a large number. Remember the 144,000 in Revelation 14 etc.

Heaven and earth flee from God, to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. There is no longer any sea, meaning no source of evil.

A new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, so that God can live with people. This is the reality that the old temple and tabernacle stood for, and the Christian community trailblazed.

There is no temple because the whole city is a temple. The story of God living with his people has reached a triumphant conclusion.

The city brings life to the whole world; this may remind you of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14-16.) In one sense the new Jerusalem is now! It may also remind you of Isaiah 2. and the vision of the future temple in Ezekiel.

There we find the throne of God and the Lamb. The slaughtered one is finally victorious. The people who were once in the lake of fire are now outside the city, living in the light of God and the Lamb. Evil cannot get into the city, but this is not the end of the story.

Invitation, Blessing and warning

The final verse of the book may remind you of the letters of Paul, a reminder that this book points to the same Jesus and the same gospel.

The final section of the book (from 22:6) gives us:

1. A reminder that the events described in Revelation are to come soon. The main purpose of Revelation is to prepare the churches for what is about to come. (This points us back from the final triumph after the 'millennium' to the