

Revelation as Trilogy
The Return of the King
Chapters 21 – 22:5: The New Creation

Introduction: The final two chapters of Revelation close not only the book itself but the entire Biblical narrative. They bring the reader full circle from God's creation of a perfect world to God's recreation of the same. They fulfill the promise to Abraham that through his family all the nations of the world would be blessed; meaning in and through the work of Jesus on the cross, to defeat the power of sin, and Jesus's work as the rider on the white horse in which the final vestiges of evil are vanquished and the blessings of God are made complete. This portion of the book also brings together themes from virtually every other section; contains a myriad of OT references and archetypal images; and uses numbers, dimensions and colors to complete the mix. Finally, we see the completion of God's work of redemption as we return to a state of Eden where God is with God's people and all is right with the world.

The Story: this chapter opens with a new heaven and a new earth. The Greek word used in this case for new, is not new, as in a new car. New here is in the sense of an old car being renewed. So, the image is that God has recreated the heavens and the earth in such a way that all that is old has been renewed. The idea that the sea is gone is code language for there is no more chaos as there was at the beginning of creation where the earth was covered with oceans of chaos. This is possible because the Unholy Trinity and their deception is gone.

A renewed creation needs a new city/empire and Revelation does not disappoint. This new city, the new Jerusalem (the holy city in which once stood the Temple of God) comes down from heaven, again as a bride adorned for her husband...meaning she is ready to take on her role in the renewed creation. And once again, just as God's home was in the Jerusalem Temple, God's home is now in the new Jerusalem without the need of a Temple. God will dwell with the saints and there will be no more tears, death, mourning or crying because this is the renewed creation as it was intended to be; one of joy, love, life and peace.

The theme of renewal is now taken up from the throne itself. The pronouncement is made that all things are being made new. This is followed by a description of rewards for those who are faithful which are that they will drink from the spring of the water of life and will inherit the new creation. There is also a warning for those who choose not to follow God but choose the way of chaos; to be thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. This warning once again seems to suggest that somehow, even after the initial judgment, people can choose the way of life rather than the way of death.

John, then can see the new Jerusalem in all its splendor. It is perfect. It is a cube, with twelve gates made of twelve pearls, each inscribed with a name of one of the twelve apostles, whose foundations are twelve jewels, meaning it is all perfect. Inside the perfect city there is no need for light because God and the Lamb provide all the light it needs. There is also the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God. The city also contains the tree of life which can heal the nations. Only those who worship God and are marked by the Lamb will be found there. These images come directly from Genesis and the original garden of Eden, meaning that Eden has been restored.

Reflection: As was mentioned in the introduction, Chapters 21 and 22 complete the Biblical narrative. This narrative is that 1) God creates a wonderful creation in which love of God and neighbor are at its heart; 2) human beings rebel and warp this good creation; 3) God covenants with a family through which creation will be restored; 4) God sends God's Son Jesus to make restoration possible; and 5) the restoration occurs and God returns in all God's fullness to restore creation to its original condition. This restoration includes a place in which God and human beings can live in intimate communion.

Questions:

1. What does your image of Eden look like?
2. Where do you see God at work renewing the world?
3. What do you make of the gates of the New Jerusalem never closing?