

A thick black L-shaped frame is positioned on the left and right sides of the page. The left side consists of a vertical line extending from the top to the bottom, and a horizontal line extending from the top of the vertical line to the right. The right side consists of a vertical line extending from the top to the bottom, and a horizontal line extending from the bottom of the vertical line to the left.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapter 21-22

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,
all our actions by your holy inspirations,
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,
that every prayer and work of ours
may begin always from you,
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

Summary of Chapters 19-20

- Chapters 19-20 culminated in the final battle and the definitive defeat, first of the Beast and the False Prophet, together with all the “inhabitants of the earth” who followed them
- Finally, the devil himself was defeated and cast into the lake of fire
- Evil in any form:
 - *whether it be the evil of these spiritual beings and their human puppets*
 - *The evil of greed and corruption, injustice, idolatry and licentiousness – represented by the harlot Babylon*
 - *Or the evil of sinfulness and the refusal to repent and believe in God, as seen in the “inhabitants of the earth”*
 - *All of it has been absolutely destroyed*
- Now that the adversaries of God and his people have been defeated, never to return, the fullness of God’s Kingdom is set to blossom into fullness

Preview of Chapter 21

- John will see two visions in the coming chapters
 - *One is the new heaven and the new earth, describing how God brings about the full inauguration of his Kingdom that began with the death and resurrection of Christ*
 - *The second image is that of the bridegroom and the bride, the new Jerusalem, and how God unites himself (weds) his redeemed people*
 - *The book will end with a brief and beautiful epilogue*
- Keep in mind that these are images used to describe these events and the life of heaven.
 - *They give us clues about what it will be like, but not quite a full picture*
 - *Our puny, finite, sinful minds cannot fully grasp the glory of heaven or the vision of God*
 - *But we will see some hints about the life to come that are most comforting, strengthening and encouraging.*

New heaven and new earth (21:1-4)

- Consistent with similar visions from the OT and NT:
 - *“The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. Instead, shout for joy and be glad forever in what I am creating.” (Is 65:17-18)*
 - *“The heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire,” and there will be, “a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Pt 3:10, 13)*
- In this culmination of the redemption of man, God will completely renew creation
 - *The entire earth and all of creation, including heaven, will be remade – the “former heaven and the former earth had passed away.”*
 - *This may refer to a completely new creation or a transformative renewal through the purging away of all evil.*
 - *In other words, it may be new or a renewal. Either way, it will be glorious and completely different from what we know now.*

New heaven and new earth (21:1-4)

- “The sea was no more”
 - *Recall from our study of Mark that the sea was understood in the ancient mind as the abode of chaos and evil*
 - *It was out of the chaos of the water (the sea) that God created and gave order to the world the first time (Gen 1), separating the waters and forming the earth to sit between them.*
 - *The sea was the dwelling place of the evil serpent of Isaiah 27, and was the place from which the Beast had come (Rev 13)*
 - *This is not a literal description – i.e., John is not saying that there will be no sea in the new heaven and earth – just that there will be no chaos or evil in it!*

New heaven and new earth (21:1-4)

■ “New Jerusalem”

- *The city of Jerusalem was understood as the city of God, his dwelling place on earth.*
- *As we’ve discussed, in a particular way, the Temple of Jerusalem, specifically the Holy of Holies, was the physical dwelling place of God’s presence*
- *The new Jerusalem is not in heaven but rather comes down out of heaven to earth*
- *The image suggests not that we go to heaven to live with God exactly, but that God’s dwelling place comes down to a transformed and re-created earth.*

New heaven and new earth (21:1-4)

- “A bride adorned for her husband”
 - *We return to the bridal imagery first seen in ch19, but a major image used throughout the Scriptures to describe the intimate relationship God desires with humanity*
 - *In Jewish wedding tradition at the time, a couple was married and then waited a year while the groom prepared his house before the bride moved in with him (this was the case with Mary and Joseph)*
 - *Similarly, humanity was first “wed” to Christ in holy baptism, and now with the “house” in order (evil destroyed, sin forgiven, creation renewed), the bride (the Church) now comes to live with him*
 - *This story is the basis for every fairy tale in which the prince rescues the damsel in distress, and they marry and live happily ever after!*
 - *Here, the prince (Christ) rescues the damsel (the Church) from her distress (sin, evil, persecution, pain, suffering, etc.) through his death and resurrection, and now “weds” her, uniting himself to her forever in his dwelling place (heaven)*

New heaven and new earth (21:1-4)

- “A bride adorned for her husband”
 - *Thus, the absolute and complete fulfillment of every marital image used in Scripture to describe the union of God and humanity in his Kingdom*
 - *“As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.” (Is 62:5)*
- “I will be your God and you will be my people”
 - *The language of the OT covenants between God and the people Israel. Like the bridal imagery, it conveys closeness and intimacy between God and humanity*
 - *Gen 17:8, Ex 6:7, Ex 29:45, Lev 26:12, Lev 26:45, Ezk 14:11, Ezk 36:28, Ezk 37:23, Ezk 37:27, Jer 7:23, Jer 11:4, Jer 30:22, Jer 32:38, Jer 31:33, Zech 8:8, 2 Cor 6:16, Heb 8:10, etc.*

New heaven and new earth (21:1-4)

- “Will wipe away every tear, no more death or mourning, wailing or pain”
 - *A staggering promise of hope in the life to come*
 - *It conveys both tenderness and comfort that God will give his people, not only who have endured much in life, but most importantly, to those who sacrifice and suffer so much because of their faith!*
 - *This verse speaks of absolute rest, the harsh memories of sufferings endured forgotten such that there is no reason to cry anymore – only rest and peace and happiness, amplified infinitely by the knowledge that it will never end or diminish*
 - *Not the slightest evil or pain or suffering will ever exist again*
 - *And our biggest enemy – death – is destroyed. Never again will fear of death trouble our souls. Death (part of the ‘old order’) simply no longer exists, only life without end.*
 - *We can imagine how this verse moved the first century audience (and every audience since) to continued perseverance in faith*

The Father Speaks (21:5-8)

- This is only the second time the Father speaks
 - *The first was back in 1:8, when he also called himself “the Alpha and the Omega,” the beginning and the end.*
- “Behold, I make all things new”
 - *A new heaven and a new earth, but especially a new creation of humanity, purified and redeemed through the death of Christ, made worthy of eternal life and union with God*
 - *The best line in the “Passion of the Christ”*
- “Alpha and Omega”
 - *The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, denoting his eternal nature as the source of all things that exist*
 - *He is also the last end or destiny of all creation.*
 - *Everything that begins with God and finds its fulfillment in God.*

The Father Speaks (21:5-8)

- The Father now speaks to the reader, naming the two paths before each person
- The path of eternal life with God
 - *Each person is invited to be a ‘victor,’ a term echoed many times back in ch2-3 in the messages to the seven churches by freely embracing God and remaining steadfast in faith*
 - *The prize of victory is to become a son or daughter by adoption of God himself, sharing in the relationship that Jesus enjoys by nature, and inheriting those gifts*
 - *Again, note the intimacy of the relationship – whether bridegroom/bride or son/daughter, God uses the closest human relationships as an analogy of what he offers*
 - *It will be far greater and more intimate than even those relationships, but these are the best analogies to use in our human experience so that we can begin to understand what God offers us.*

The Father Speaks (21:5-8)

- The path of the 'second death' without God
 - *As we've said, the first death refers to our earthly, bodily death, which all humanity suffers on account of sin. It loses its penal character for the baptized faithful, however, and leads to eternal life.*
 - *The second death is Revelation's term for hell, eternal separation for God, with the horrible image of the burning pool of fire and sulphur, reserved for the devil and his minions as well as for the ungodly.*
 - *"Cowards" – referring to the fear that leads to compromising our faith, being afraid to bear witness to one's faith*
 - *Also reserved for those who persist in sin and breaking the Commandments, a good description of the "inhabitants of the earth"*

The New Jerusalem (21:9-21)

- This next section describes exactly what this new Jerusalem will look like and what life will be like within it, using symbolic images
- Often in Scripture, “Jerusalem” refers to both the physical city as well as its inhabitants
 - *In a similar way, the “new Jerusalem” refers to the eternal dwelling place of God and the blessed people of God, the Church, collectively called the “bride of the Lamb”*
- Contrast of the two “women”
 - *Recall the description of the woman Babylon from ch17 as a harlot – seductive, greedy, corrupt and immoral, consorting with the Beast and the “inhabitants of the earth”*
 - *Contrast with the “bride Jerusalem,” depicting the redeemed people of God – radiant, pure, holy and beautiful, gleaming with the presence of God, symbolized by the sparkling and luminous precious stones that adorn her*

The New Jerusalem (21:9-21)

■ Description of the city

- *High walls – connoting complete security, safety and rest with God*
- *Gates on all four sides – pointing to all directions of the compass, incorporating the faithful from the four corners of the earth*
- *Twelve gates, twelve course of stones – symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles, the People of God from the Old and New Testaments*

■ Measuring the city

- *Note the dimensions: a perfect cube*
- *The only other structure in the Bible described as a perfect cube was the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the physical dwelling place of God.*
- *Thus, the entire “city” of the new Jerusalem, heaven come down to earth, is God’s dwelling – and the dwelling of the blessed as well*
- *The bride now moves into her bridegroom’s house to consummate the marriage*

The New Jerusalem (21:9-21)

■ Measuring the city

- *As before, modern translations and units of measurement (1500 miles) obscure the symbolic meaning of the dimensions*
- *This is literally “12,000 stadia” in length, width and height*
 - 12 – the number of the people of God
 - 1000 (10x10x10) – symbolic of a “large” number
 - Thus, an enormously large dwelling place, plenty large enough to accommodate the immense number of the faithful
- *The walls, signifying its permanence, strength and security, are 144 “cubits” in height*
 - A cubit was a common unit of measurement in ancient times, equal to the typical length of a man’s forearm, about 18 inches. Thus, the wall was about 216 feet high
 - The real significance of 144 cubits is likely a reference to the 144,000 blessed ones marked with God’s sign

The New Jerusalem (21:9-21)

■ Measuring the city

- *The twelve different precious stones mentioned recall the breastplate of the high priest of ancient Israel (Ex 28), which was made of the same stones*
- *Mention of the breastplate as well as the continual mention of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles demonstrate the continuity between the faithful Israel of the past and the faithful of the Church*
- *The Church is seen as “spiritual Israel,” the people of God now redeemed through the death of Christ, as prophesied throughout the OT*

Details of the New Jerusalem (21:22-27)

■ No Temple

- *A huge detail!*
- *Recall that the Temple in the 'old' Jerusalem was everything – the epicenter of the Jewish faith and the dwelling place of God*
- *The new Jerusalem has no Temple – because God is immediately present everywhere.*
- *There is no central locus of encounter with God or special place to be with him – as in the Temple (or as in our modern churches) - the faithful will essentially live within the Holy of Holies, with God directly present to them. (Perhaps like living in a big tabernacle!)*

■ No sun or moon

- *The radiance of God's presence provides light, and there will be no shadows and no more darkness, which in every time and culture is a symbol of absence, evil and loneliness. Those things will never be experienced again.*
- *Note that in Rev1, the Church began as a lampstand with Christ beside it. Now the Church exists within the light which is Christ.*

Details of the New Jerusalem (21:22-27)

- “The Kings of the earth bring treasure”
 - *A classic OT reference of earthly kings paying monetary tribute to Jerusalem and going there to visit and see its earthly glory*
 - *Here leaders and pastors of souls, through their preaching of the Gospel, win converts to Christ and stream in huge numbers to the heavenly Jerusalem. The people themselves are their treasure.*
- “Gates will never be shut”
 - *An image connoting the absolute security and worry-free, joyous existence of heaven*
 - *Since evil does not exist in any form, there is no need to protect against it by “shutting the gates”*
- “Wealth of the nations”
 - *Not physical gold or money, which will be worthless and unnecessary*
 - *Rather an image perhaps of the best of our world, culture, art, beauty, all absolutely purified*

Details of the New Jerusalem (22:1-5)

- “River of life-giving water”
 - *A common biblical image of a sharing in very life of God*
 - *Just as a tree draws its life from the water of a river, so will the blessed in the new Jerusalem partake of life itself in God*
- “Tree of life”
 - *A reference to Gen 2:15, the tree of life present at the center of the Garden of Eden*
 - *It is fitting that redeemed and restored humanity, remade like unto Adam and Eve in their original innocence through the death and resurrection of Christ, should once again “return” to Eden*
- “Medicine for the nations”
 - *There will be no need of medicine in heaven as there will be no injury or pain*
 - *This is perhaps a reference to the healing that has already occurred*
 - *body, soul and spirit – in every one of the blessed*
 - *There will simply be not the slightest shadow of any pain, loss, sorrow, disappointment or fear in the new Jerusalem*

Details of the New Jerusalem (22:1-5)

- “They will look on his face”
 - *The Beatific Vision, the beholding of God face to face in all his glory*
 - *What countless prophets and saints have longed for from the beginning.*
 - *The absolute purity, holiness, beauty and love of God experienced in its fullness before our eyes, unshielded and completely uncovered*
 - *The utterly complete satisfaction of every possible longing and desire, perfect happiness, total rest and peace, the fullness of love*
 - *And the joy of knowing it can never be lost.*
 - *It is impossible to adequately describe what the Beatific Vision will be like!*

The angel's final words (22:6-11)

- Echoing the dialogue that we heard in the first verses of ch1, John begins his epilogue to the Book of Revelation
 - *There are variously divine, angelic and human voices being heard here*
- The entirety of what John has seen is “trustworthy and true” because it comes from God
 - *The events described will come to pass “soon”*
- Jesus himself responds, “behold, I am coming soon”
 - *This is obviously from the perspective of Christ, not ours*
 - *As we've discussed, the biblical “soon” can be understood as “already here, but not quite yet fully present”*
 - *The Kingdom has already come through the foundation of the Church and the gift of the Holy Spirit upon believers, but it is not yet fully inaugurated*
 - *The certainty of God's victory is so utterly assured that it is spoken of in the “prophetic past tense” as having already happened.*

The angel's final words (22:6-11)

- As John did in ch17 with the destruction of the harlot Babylon, he falls down as if to worship the angel messenger.
 - *So overwhelming is the grandeur and power of these visions that it invokes worship*
 - *As before the angel corrects him immediately and clearly*
 - *Both angels and humans are but humble servants, in this sense on the same level, but it also elevates the dignity of man to share in the service of such glorious creatures as this angel obviously was*
- “Let the wicked still act wickedly...”
 - *It is not that God wishes them to do so*
 - *In his wisdom and respecting human freedom, he allows people to make their choice, though the visions in this book are clear as to the consequences of each choice*
 - *But those who are holy, he calls for steadfastness in faith, as those same visions encourage.*

Jesus speaks (22:12-17)

- Jesus himself speaks, proclaiming his own Gospel and the promises he makes to those who come to him in faith
- “Recompense” – as just judge he will repay every person as his deeds deserve
- Blessed are those who wash their robes”
 - *A call to conversion and repentance*
 - *As we saw in ch7, the blessed ones had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb – in other words, they had accepted Christ and his Gospel, were baptized for the forgiveness of sins and lived lives of faith.*
 - *Their recompense will be eternal life. They will enter into the new Jerusalem “through the gates” and be with God for eternity, where they will have access to the ‘tree of life.’*

Jesus speaks (22:12-17)

- Evildoers of all sorts remain 'outside' the gates, the common Gospel image for hell (Mt 8:12, Mt 13:32, Mt 22:13, Mt 25:30, Lk 13:38, etc.)
- The Spirit and the bride say 'come'
 - *Animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church cries out to the Lord Jesus to come and bring about the full inauguration of the Kingdom ('thy Kingdom come')*
 - *The Church wants the Lord to return and bring about the restoration and renewal of creation to its full, and to receive her reward of eternal life as described in the previous visions*
- Let the hearer say 'come'
 - *All who read this book and hear these visions of heavenly rest and glory should echo the same longing as the Church*

Jesus speaks (22:12-17)

- No one is excluded from this offer
 - *Everyone can receive it, for it is a free gift. Christ has already paid the price, and eternal salvation is offered to all who repent and believe in the Gospel.*
 - *All are invited to satisfy their thirst through Christ, the source of the spring of life-giving water*
 - *Jesus, in his final plea to the nations, invites everyone on earth to “come forward” to receive his promises.*

Final words (22:18-21)

- A warning
 - *Those who read the book are reminded not to add or subtract from its words*
 - *The tendency or temptation is always to ‘conveniently’ change the Gospel, adding or subtracting such that it is more palatable or not as demanding.*
 - *Jesus wants his Gospel transmitted as he proclaimed it!*
- Jesus’ final words
 - *“Yes, I am coming soon”*
 - *Words of great encouragement and reassurance to the faithful, so many of whom are suffering for their faith in him*
- The Church’s response
 - *“Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”*
- The last line from John to his readers – “the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.”

The Seven Beatitudes of Revelation

- Blessed is the one who reads aloud and blessed are those who listen to this prophetic message and heed what is written in it, for the appointed time is near (1:3)
- Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. They will find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them. (14:3)
- Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who watches and keep his clothes ready (16:15)
- Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb (19:9)
- Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection, who will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (20:6)
- Blessed is the one who keeps the prophetic message of this book (22:7)
- Blessed are they who wash their robes so as to have the right to the tree of life and enter the city through its gates. (22:14)

Thank you!

- More Bible study coming “soon!”
- If you have suggestions for particular courses or biblical texts, let me know!

- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.