THE DENTON LECTURES DOCTRINAL DEFENSE SERIES

Studies in Difficult Passages in Revelation, No. 4

All Things New

The Heaven, the Holy City, and the Home

Revelation 21:1–22:5

FREE PREVIEW

THE SUNDAY SERMON

Dr. John W. Edmerson, DMin

EDMERSON MINISTRY PUBLICATIONS

FREE PREVIEW

The Sunday Sermon

from the Revelation Series

Dear fellow servant,

What follows is the complete Sunday sermon from All Things New, the fourth booklet in the Difficult Passages studies on Revelation, printed as it appears in the booklet.

The sermon takes up the new heaven, the holy city, and the home. Like every study in this series, it gathers the evidence, sets out the readings fairly, says plainly what is certain and what is open, and stops there. The full booklet adds the Wednesday companion Bible study, the Greek and Hebrew keyword chart, discussion questions, and the Teacher Answer Key.

I pray this sermon serves your pulpit. The complete booklet, and the rest of the Revelation series, are waiting in the store.

Dr. John W. Edmerson, DMin
Edmerson Ministry Publications

THE DENTON LECTURES
DOCTRINAL DEFENSE SERIES

Answering False Doctrines and Difficult Passages, Book by Book Through the New Testament

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All Things New

The Heaven, the Holy City, and the Home: What Is the New Heaven and the New Earth? (Revelation 21:1–2, 10)

Studies in Difficult Passages in Revelation, No. 4

Revelation 21:1–22:5 • with Genesis 3:22–24; Leviticus 26:11–12; Isaiah 25:8; 57:20; 65:17–19; 66:22; Ezekiel 37:27; 48:35; John 1:14; 14:2–3; Romans 8:18–23; 2 Corinthians 12:2; Galatians 4:26; Ephesians 5:25–27; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Revelation 3:12; 13:1; 19:7–8; 20:11; 22:14–17 (ASV, 1901)

DR. JOHN W. EDMERSON, DMin

Church of Christ at Kennedy Heights, Cincinnati, Ohio

Edmerson Ministry Publications

The Dr. John W. Edmerson Teaching Series

All Things New: The Heaven, the Holy City, and the Home: What Is the New Heaven and the New Earth? (Revelation 21:1–2, 10)

Studies in Difficult Passages in Revelation, No. 4

The Denton Lectures Doctrinal Defense Series • The Dr. John W. Edmerson Teaching Series

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Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version (1901), public domain, retaining “Jehovah.”

A NOTE TO TEACHERS. This is a Difficult Passages study of the most comforting chapter in the Bible. Careful brethren differ on some of its details, and those differences are set out fairly. The skill taught is holding the details with an open hand while holding the hope with a closed one.

This booklet was prepared with AI research and formatting assistance, working under the author’s direction, from his design, his doctrine, and his library, with every page reviewed and approved by him.

The author gratefully acknowledges the lectureship volumes, journals, and study resources consulted in the preparation of this

work, which are listed in the Sources and Acknowledgments page. Insights from these works are characterized in the author's own words with attribution rather than quoted at length, out of respect for the labors and the rights of their publishers. Any misrepresentation of a brother's teaching is unintentional, and correction is welcomed.

DEDICATION

To my wife, Dr. LaShelle Edmerson, with whom I hope to walk through the gates that are never shut;

to my sons and my grandson, who stand in pulpits of the churches of Christ;

and to every elder, preacher, and Bible teacher who will open this book after me:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them” (Revelation 21:3, ASV).

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come” (Revelation 22:17, ASV).

Boys, heaven is not the gold. Heaven is Him. Dad / Granddad

A Word to My Sons, and to Every Preacher Who Opens This Book

Of the four Revelation booklets I have written this season, this is the one I most wanted to write. The other three deal with numbers and beasts and a harlot, and they are necessary. This one deals with home.

Brother J. Noel Merideth handled these questions at Denton in 1984, and I have followed him closely. He gave us a key to the whole book: four times John was “in the Spirit,” and the fourth time he was shown the holy city. He drew a distinction in the Greek that every preacher should know, between what is new in time and what is new in kind. And he taught that the new heaven and new earth are heaven itself, described in the language of the two worlds man was made for. I lean with him.

But I want you to know that faithful men have read the new creation as a renewal of this one, from Romans 8, and I have stated their reading fairly. Do not let anybody tell you that reading is the same as the teaching of an earthly class of the saved. It is not, and that teaching will get its own fair answer in another booklet.

Here is what I most want you to take into the pulpit. The loudest voice in Revelation 21 does not describe the streets. It says, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.” The whole Bible has been moving toward that sentence since God pitched His tent in the wilderness. Preach that, and your people will want to go.

And read this chapter to the dying, and to the grieving, slowly. Do not argue about it at a funeral. Let God do the comforting. He said, “Write: for these words are faithful and true.” I believe them. I hope to see you there.

John W. Edmerson

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DOCTRINAL DEFENSE SERIES

Answering False Doctrines and Difficult Passages, Book by Book Through the New Testament

VOLUME 27: REVELATION | STUDIES IN DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN REVELATION, NO. 4

All Things New: The Heaven, the Holy City, and the Home

Text: Revelation 21:1–22:5 (ASV, 1901) • with Genesis 3:22–24; Leviticus 26:11–12; Psalm 11:4; Isaiah 25:8; 57:20; 65:17–19; 66:22; Ezekiel 37:27; 48:35; Matthew 5:8; 25:34; John 1:14; 14:2–3; Romans 8:18–23; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 13:12; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; 5:1, 17; 12:2; Galatians 4:26; Ephesians 5:25–27; Philippians 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22, 26–28; 13:14; 1 Peter 1:4; 2 Peter 3:10–13; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 3:12; 4:6; 13:1; 19:7–8; 20:11; 22:14–17

Dr. John W. Edmerson, DMin • Church of Christ at Kennedy Heights, Cincinnati, Ohio

Prepared for the Wednesday evening Bible class and the Sunday pulpit • Foundations and Faith two-part format

The Difficulty

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:1–2). Is this heaven, or a renewed earth, or the church? Why does the city come down? Brother J. Noel Merideth took up these questions at Denton in 1984 and answered that John is showing us heaven itself, the eternal home of

the redeemed, in the language of a new world and a holy city. Tonight we will look at what the text says, hold open what careful brethren hold open, and fix our eyes on the home.

Part One: The Sermon Manuscript

INTRODUCTION

Brethren, any preacher who has stood at many gravesides knows this chapter by heart, because there is no other chapter in the Bible a grieving family wants to hear more. “He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more” (21:4). Nobody at a graveside asks the preacher whether the new earth is renovated or replaced. They ask whether their mother is with the Lord, and whether they will see her again.

But in a Bible class, the questions come. Is the new heaven and new earth the same as heaven? Will we live on this planet made over? Is the holy city the church, or the eternal home, or both? Why does it come down, if heaven is up? These are honest questions, and this is a study in a difficult passage. We are not answering anybody tonight. We will gather what the text says, lay out the readings fairly, say what is certain and what is open, and then stop, preferably in the same place John stopped, which is in front of the throne.

Brother Merideth gave the Denton audience a key to the whole book that I want you to keep. Four times John says he was “in the Spirit,” and each time a new vision begins: the Son of Man among the lampstands (1:10), the throne in heaven (4:2), the harlot (17:3), and the holy city (21:10). The book begins with Christ among His churches and ends with God among His people. We will take three things from the last vision: the new heaven and new

earth (21:1), the holy city coming down (21:2, 9–10), and the home itself, God with men (21:3–7; 22:1–5).

I. The Heaven: A New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1)

INTERPRETATION

The phrase did not begin with John. Isaiah heard God say, “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isa. 65:17; see 66:22). Peter picked it up: “But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). And John saw it: the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth in their place.

Brother Merideth reminds us that the Bible speaks of more than one heaven: the sky where the birds fly, the starry heaven, and what Paul called the “third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2), where God’s throne is (Ps. 11:4). The heavens that pass away with the earth are the first two, the heavens bound up with this created order. Peter says “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). And at the great white throne, “the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev. 20:11).

Then brother Merideth makes a point from the Greek that is worth a Wednesday night by itself. There are two words for “new” in the New Testament. One, neos, means new in time, young as opposed to old. The other, kainos, means new in kind, fresh as opposed to worn out. John uses kainos. The new heaven and new earth are not simply the next ones in line. They are a different kind of thing: unworn, unspoiled, where righteousness lives.

Now here is the open question, and I want to state it fairly. Brother Merideth, following A. T. Robertson, read 21:1 as the disappearance of this earth and sky, not their renovation. He reasoned that man is a creature of two worlds, the earth below and the heavens above, and so God describes man's eternal home in the language of both: a new heaven and a new earth, which is to say heaven itself, where the Lord is, and from which He will come to take us to be with Him (John 14:2–3; 1 Thess. 4:17). He considered the view that 21:1–22:5 describes the church today and set it aside, judging from the order of the visions that John is showing us the final glory.

Other careful students have read the passage as a renewal rather than a replacement. They point to Paul's words that "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21), and to the voice from the throne: "Behold, I make all things new" (21:5), which they note is not "I make all new things." Brother Merideth himself noted that the word for "pass away" has been read both ways. I want to be fair to this reading, and I want to be clear about what it is not. It is not the teaching that an "earthly class" of the saved will live forever on a planet while a small class goes to heaven. That teaching belongs to another booklet in this volume and will be answered there. The renewal reading, as careful students hold it, still sees one people of God, forever with the Lord.

So what is certain? This present order will end, by fire and by the word of God (2 Pet. 3:10). What follows will be new in kind, a home "wherein dwelleth righteousness" (3:13). God will be there. And "the sea is no more" (21:1). What is open is the relationship between the old material and the new, and I am content to leave that where Paul left the resurrection body: "it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). The same, and not the same. I lean with brother Merideth that John is

showing us heaven itself in the language of a world, and I call that leaning. What I will not do is let the argument over the furniture keep anybody from wanting to go home.

And do not miss that last line: “and the sea is no more.” In Revelation the sea is where the beast came from (13:1). Isaiah said, “the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it cannot rest” (Isa. 57:20). And John wrote these words on Patmos, an island, with the sea between him and every church he loved (1:9). This is my own observation and I hold it lightly, but I believe “no more sea” means no more chaos, no more beasts rising, and no more separation from the people we love.

ILLUSTRATION

A note to the reader: this is a composite written to fill the slot, not the record of a particular family.

A family moved out of a house they had lived in for forty years. The grandchildren cried more than anybody, because every room had a memory in it. Then they drove to the new place, and Grandmother was already there, standing on the porch with the door open. One of the little ones ran up the steps and said, “Is this where we live now?” and she said, “This is where we live now.” Nobody asked about the square footage. The house was new because she was in it.

APPLICATION

First, hold this world loosely. Peter drew the application himself: “Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness” (2 Pet. 3:11). Do not build your life on what is passing away.

Second, do not be afraid of the end of the world. For the Christian the end of this order is not a catastrophe. It is a move.

Third, be patient with brethren who read the details differently. Where every faithful reading agrees that God will be with His people forever, the rest is furniture.

II. The Holy City: Coming Down Out of Heaven (Revelation 21:2, 9–10)

INTERPRETATION

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2). Later the angel says, "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb," and carries John "to a mountain great and high," and shows him "the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (21:9–10).

Why does it come down? Brother Merideth answers that the participle describes the city coming into John's view, so that he could see what could be seen in no other way, and he adds brother J. W. Roberts' explanation that the phrase describes the heavenly origin and the abiding nature of the city. The beast came up out of the earth, and that told you what he was (13:11). The city comes down out of heaven from God, and that tells you what she is. Nobody built her. She was given. Abraham "looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10), and God "hath prepared for them a city" (11:16).

And here is something brother Merideth saw that I want every class to see. The church is already, in a real sense, the heavenly Jerusalem. "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). "The Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (Gal. 4:26). "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). The Christians at Philadelphia were promised the name of "the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God" (Rev. 3:12). So the city John sees in chapter 21 is the church brought to

her glory: the bride Christ gave Himself for, presented to Himself at last "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:25–27).

That is why the city is described as a bride. Brother Merideth offers a caution here that is worth repeating. The New Testament uses marriage as a picture in several ways, and they must not be jumbled. The church is married to Christ now (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:22–32). In the parables the saved can be guests at the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1–14) or virgins waiting for the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1–13). In Revelation 19 and 21 the picture is the joy of the bride going home to the house prepared for her. Anyone who uses Revelation to say the church is not yet joined to Christ has mixed the figures and ignored Romans 7 and Ephesians 5.

Then look at the city itself. Her light is the glory of God (21:11, 23). She has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes and twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles (21:12, 14): the whole people of God, both covenants, built on the apostles' word. She is a perfect cube (21:16), like the most holy place in the temple, because the whole city is now the place where God dwells. And "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof" (21:22). You do not need a building to meet God in when you live in His presence.

ILLUSTRATION

A note to the reader: this is a composite, not the record of a particular wedding.

Every preacher who has performed weddings knows the moment. The music changes, the doors at the back open, and everybody stands and turns around. The groom has been standing at the front for ten minutes, and he has seen her before, many times. But not like this. She has been getting ready all day, and every person who loves her has had a hand in it. Revelation 21 is the church at

that moment. She has been betrothed for a long time. Now the doors are open.

APPLICATION

First, love the church. She is the bride of Christ and the city of God, and He gave Himself for her. A Christian who speaks carelessly of the church is speaking of someone's bride.

Second, get ready. The bride "made herself ready," and her fine linen is "the righteous acts of the saints" (19:7–8). What you do this week is part of her wedding dress.

Third, remember where the city comes from. The church is not a human organization trying to reach heaven. It is a heavenly people living on earth for a while.

III. The Home: God with Men (Revelation 21:3–7; 22:1–5)

INTERPRETATION

Now listen to the loudest voice in the chapter: "And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (21:3).

That sentence is the whole Bible in one line. God promised it at Sinai: "I will set my tabernacle among you … and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:11–12). He promised it through Ezekiel: "My tabernacle also shall be with them" (Ezek. 37:27), and Ezekiel's city was named "Jehovah is there" (48:35). He began to keep it in Bethlehem: "the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us" (John 1:14). And here He keeps it forever. Heaven is not first a place with gold streets. Heaven is God with His people and nothing between them.

And because God is there, some things are not. "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be

no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away" (21:4). Isaiah had promised that God would swallow up death and wipe away tears from off all faces (Isa. 25:8). John saw it done. And the voice from the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new," and "Write: for these words are faithful and true" (21:5).

Then the last picture: "a river of water of life … proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," and "the tree of life" on either side of it, and "there shall be no curse any more" (22:1–3). Do you remember where we last saw the tree of life? In Eden, with a flaming sword to keep the way to it after man sinned (Gen. 3:22–24). The Bible begins with the way to the tree of life closed and ends with it open. What Adam lost, the Lamb restored. "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads" (22:4). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

A FENCE, BECAUSE THIS CHAPTER CAN BE MISUSED. One misreading makes heaven a reward everybody gets, as though Revelation 21 were read over every grave without condition. The same chapter says, "He that overcometh shall inherit these things" (21:7), and names those whose part is "in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone" (21:8), and says that nothing unclean will enter, "but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27). The other misreading makes the chapter so literal that people argue over the measurements and forget the Lord who is the light of the place (21:23). The text holds both: the home is real and glorious, and it is for those who wash their robes (22:14).

ILLUSTRATION

A note to the reader: this is a composite drawn from years of hospital and hospice visits, not the record of a particular patient.

Chaplains learn to listen to what the dying ask for. It is almost never gold or crowns or mansions. An old saint in a hospice bed, too weak to lift her head, asked for the twenty-first chapter to be read to her one more time. When the reading got to "God himself shall be with them," she lifted one finger off the blanket, the way people do in church when they want to say amen and cannot find the breath. That was the verse she wanted. Not the jasper or the pearls. Him.

APPLICATION

First, want God more than you want heaven. A heaven without Him is not the heaven of the Bible, and a Christian who wants the gold more than the Lord has missed the chapter.

Second, carry this chapter to the grieving. Read it slowly. Do not argue about it at a funeral. Let the voice from the throne do the comforting.

Third, make sure you are written in the book. The gates of the city are never shut (21:25), and the invitation is still open. But only the washed go in (22:14).

Conclusion and Invitation

The Heaven. The Holy City. The Home.

The first heaven and the first earth will pass away, and God will make a new heaven and a new earth, new in kind, where righteousness dwells and the sea is no more. The holy city will come down from God, the bride made ready, the church brought to her glory. And the great voice from the throne will say what God has been promising since Sinai: the tabernacle of God is with men. No tears. No death. No curse. The tree of life open. His face.

And then the Bible ends the way it has been speaking all along, with an invitation. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And

he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (22:17).

If you are not yet in Christ, the Spirit and the bride are saying come. Hear the gospel and believe it (Rom. 10:17). Turn from your sins (Acts 17:30). Confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Rom. 10:9–10). Be baptized into Him for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27), and wash your robe in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14; 22:14). And if you have been away from the Lord, come home tonight. The gates are not shut. Come while we stand and sing.

About the Author

Dr. John W. Edmerson (DMin) is a minister, educator, and Bible expositor with more than fifty years of ministry in the conservative churches of Christ, currently serving at the Church of Christ at Kennedy Heights in Cincinnati, Ohio. A Doctor of Ministry graduate of United Theological Seminary in Trotwood, Ohio, he has served as an elder, evangelist, Bible class teacher, professor, and board-certified chaplain, and is a retired high school teacher and assistant principal.

Since his retirement in 2023 he has devoted himself to writing, curriculum development, and Bible class instruction under the Edmerson Ministry Publications imprint, producing expository and doctrinal teaching material for preachers, teachers, and Bible classes, including the Greek Words That Preach series, the Foundations and Faith teaching series, and the Denton Lectures Doctrinal Defense Series. His work reflects the doctrinal seriousness of the conservative churches of Christ, the warmth of experienced ministry, and the practical spirit of a lifelong teacher.

Dr. Edmerson and his wife, Dr. LaShelle Edmerson, have shared more than fifty years of marriage and ministry together.

Learn more about this ministry and find the full Denton Lectures Doctrinal Defense Series, in print and eBook, at the ministry website, edmersonministry.netlify.app, and the Edmerson Ministry Publications store, edmersonministry.netlify.app/store (payhip.com/EdmersonMinistry).

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The Difficult Passages studies in Revelation take up the questions careful readers ask in that book, such as who speaks in 1:8, what the Lord’s day is, and who the angels of the seven churches are. Each booklet pairs a complete Sunday sermon with a Wednesday companion study, a keyword chart, discussion questions, and a Teacher Answer Key.

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