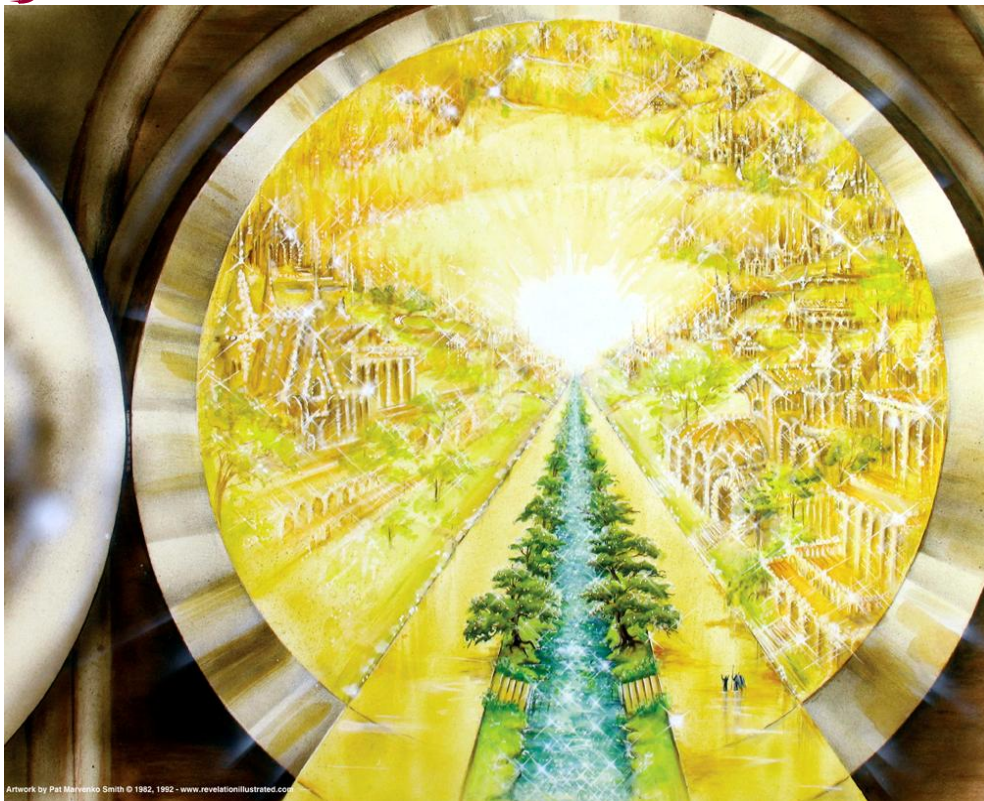


THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



Artwork by Pat Marvenko Smith © 1982, 1992 www.revelationillustrated.com

Each of the gates of New Jerusalem is made from a single pearl (Revelation 21.21), and its gates are always open (Revelation 21.25). In this painting by Pat Marvenko Smith, we're looking through one of these open gates. We see the river of living water flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city; the tree of life flourishes on either bank (Revelation 22.1-2).

sixteen ► All Things New!

Introduction and Questions

Jesus's second coming

One day – perhaps soon - Jesus will return to Earth. He'll remove evil and evict every evil being from His creation, renew this ravaged Earth, and usher in a new age of history. God's Kingdom will arrive in its full and final glory.

Jesus will come ● **in person**, in His physical body; ● **in power and glory**, with legions of angels; ● **openly**: every eye will see Him; ● **unexpectedly**, like a thief in the night. But we believers must be ready for Him.

There's much debate about the end times and Jesus's return. One commonly held and relatively simple view is as follows (this is an **amillennial** view; it's explained overleaf): ► Jesus Christ will return to Earth. ► He'll complete His conquest of every evil power. He'll destroy the world system under Satan's domination, and its leader, the man of lawlessness (undoubtedly identical with the Antichrist). He'll consign Satan and every wicked spirit to eternal torment. ► Dead believers will be raised in their glorious resurrection bodies. Believers still alive at Jesus's coming will be transformed and receive their resurrection bodies without going through death; they'll be "*caught up*" with the resurrected believers "*in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*" (1 Thessalonians 4.17). This act of being "*caught up*" is often called 'the rapture'. Unbelievers will also be bodily resurrected. ► Jesus will judge everyone and assign them to their eternal destiny. ► Heaven and Earth will be transformed and renewed. ► Humanity, headed up by the Man Christ Jesus, will rule the cosmos. Evil will never trouble creation again. God's plan of redemption will be complete. And so the Kingdom of God will have come in its final glory!

The Millennium

Revelation 20.1-10 tells us about a 1,000-year period in which Satan is bound and cannot *"deceive the nations"*. When this period of 1,000 years is over, Satan will be released and *"will come out to deceive the nations . . . to gather them for battle"*. The satanically inspired people will surround *"the camp of the saints and the beloved city"*. But *"fire"* from heaven will consume them; the Devil will be thrown into the *"lake of fire and sulphur"* and tormented for ever.

This period of 1,000 years is the Millennium. This is a hotly debated topic! We can summarise the different views in two basic scenarios:

- Jesus returns *before* the Millennium – this view is **premillennialism**. There are two main versions; the simpler one is outlined here. When Jesus returns, dead believers are resurrected and living believers are raptured. Jesus will then reign bodily on this Earth in its present form with believers for 1,000 years – or at least a long period. During this period there'll be unprecedented peace and prosperity; nature will enjoy great blessing. Sin and death will still exist, but Satan will be bound and evil firmly restrained. After the Millennium the satanically-inspired nations make a last great assault on God's people. But Jesus defeats them. Then unbelievers are resurrected, the last judgment takes place, and the New Heaven and Earth come into being.
- Jesus's second coming occurs *after* the Millennium. The first major version of this view is **postmillennialism**. The Millennium is a long period prior to Jesus's second coming; this period may have already begun. The Gospel penetrates society, bringing a 'golden age' of peace and righteousness. A recent version of this view holds that society will be reconstructed along Biblical norms. The second (much more common) major version of this view is **amillennialism**. This view sees the Millennium as the whole period between Jesus's first and second comings. There's conflict between the kingdom of darkness and God's people throughout this period, a conflict that may well intensify toward the end. But the gospel will go out and a great multitude will be saved. Then Jesus returns and completes His conquest of the evil powers. After the rapture and general resurrection and the final judgment, the New Heaven and Earth come into being.

The Last Judgment



Sunset in Norfolk © tonyjgreen.com : Flickr.com (CC BY-ND 2.0)

A harvest scene. The Last Judgment is a harvest (Matthew 13.30,39; see also Revelation 14.14-20).

Everyone will appear before God's judgment seat. Passages such as Acts 10.42 show that it will be Christ Jesus Who will be seated on the *"great white throne"* of judgment (Revelation 20.11). He will assess everyone's life – even their secret thoughts. Each *"will give an account of himself to God"* (Romans 14.12).

Believers are judged, too, but not in the same way as unbelievers. Our names are written in the Book of Life. But the Bible indicates that there are degrees of reward for us. Our degree of glory and our ministries and responsibilities in eternity will flow naturally from how we've lived our lives here.

Hell

God loves each one of us with a deep and measureless love - a love supremely demonstrated on the Cross. He's not willing for anyone to perish. God makes it

as difficult as He can for people to refuse Him. But He does not make it impossible. Some choose to reject Him. And that choice will set their eternal destiny. The strongest warnings and most graphic images of Hell in the Bible come from Jesus's own lips. Undoubtedly, much of the language that the Bible uses to describe Hell is symbolic. But it reflects a terrible reality. The underlying element of Hell's punishment is exclusion from God's presence. And those in Hell will stand forever under His holy displeasure. J.I. Packer comments, "The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying God, having God against him, and he shall have his preference. Nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so."

A New Heaven and Earth



Early Light © Tony Armstrong / midlander1231 : Flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

One day, God's presence will fill Earth. The barrier between Heaven and Earth will be dissolved. Heaven will invade Earth and blend with it in a way we cannot now imagine.

After seeing the final judgment, John witnesses this sublime scene: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'"*

There'll be a new Heaven and a new Earth. God's city, New Jerusalem, comes down from heaven. This city symbolises God's new humanity living in fellowship with Him in paradise. This is the Kingdom of God - God's perfect world where He reigns. Earth will be saturated with God's presence and glory. And from the throne of God and of the Lamb flows *"the river of the water of life"*, with *"the tree of life"* on either bank (Revelation 22.1-2). Life and blessing flow from God in overflowing, luxuriant abundance.

God will transform us. We'll be radiant with glory, powerful and immortal. We shall be perfect in spirit, soul and body, untroubled by temptation and incapable of sin. We shall - at last - bear God's image as He has always planned.

So deep is God's love for His people, that He describes it in terms of the most intimate human relationship we know - the marriage bond. John sees New Jerusalem *"prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Revelation 21.2). God's people are Jesus's bride. And we shall feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb. This banquet pictures the fellowship between God and His people.

What do we humans really long for? We long to love and be loved. We long for a special place and role in society. We're eager to explore, we thirst for knowledge and understanding. We look for ways to engage our creativity, our imagination and our intellect. Well, our life in glory won't disappoint!

We'll serve God as His priests, kings and prophets. As priests, we'll serve and worship Him in His presence for ever. As kings, we'll reign with Christ over the entire cosmos. As God's prophets, we'll be His friends and confidants - we'll know Him *"face to face"* (1 Corinthians 13.12) - intimately, perfectly.

And Jesus will be present on the new Earth as a Man with a human body, resplendent in glory. We shall see Him as He is!

Our journey comes to an end. We're with God in paradise. Christ Jesus rules Heaven and Earth and shares that rule with us, His people. And God the Father reigns supreme over all things.



But, in fact, our journey hasn't *really* ended. History simply enters a new phase and our journey continues in glory. As C.S. Lewis said at the conclusion of his *Narnia* series: "But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Bible passages and questions

Here are three of the questions that we asked right back in session 1. Read Genesis 1.1-3.24, Revelation 20.7-22.5 again, and review your answers to these questions.

- ❓ What links are there between these passages in Genesis and in Revelation?
- ❓ What do you find in the new creation described in Revelation 21 and 22 that you don't find in Genesis chapters 1 to 2?
- ❓ Why do you think New Jerusalem is pictured as a Bride (Revelation 21.2, 21.9 and also read Revelation 19.6-9)?

In addition, here are some further questions on this final study:

- ❓ Read Genesis 12.1-3, 17.1-8, 22.15-18, Romans 4.13, Galatians 3.14,16,29. How is God's covenant with Abraham finally fulfilled?
- ❓ Read Revelation 21.1-3, Matthew 5.18, 24.35, Romans 8.19-22, Philippians 3.20-21, 1 Corinthians 15.35-55, 2 Corinthians 5.1-5, 2 Peter 3.7,10-13, 1 John 2.15-17. Is the New Earth an entirely new creation, or is it our present Earth renewed?
- ❓ Read Hebrews 11.8-10,13-16, 12.22-24, 13.14, Revelation 3.12, and Revelation 21.2-3, 21.9-22.5, 22.14 again. Why does the climax of the Bible story centre on a city? And why is there no Temple in the New Jerusalem?
- ❓ Read Luke 19.11-26, John 5.24, Romans 8.1, 14.10-12, 1 Corinthians 3.11-15, 2 Corinthians 5.9-10, Revelation 20.11-15. How will God judge believers?