

Revelation 21:1

Throughout the Book of Revelation the author catches and holds the reader's attention through careful orchestration of his visions. He breaks open the waywardness and corruption of humanity expressed through the exposition of the faults and failings of the seven churches, while also being careful not to neglect the good things that they have done. The first glimpse of heaven is through one open door (Rev. 4:1) but we are given a panoramic and detailed description of what was to be seen and heard and what was to be inflicted on those who failed to accept and worship the One on the throne. Here, evil has not yet been laid to rest. The ultimate destruction of evil in every form is the subject of Chapter 20.

Apocalyptic literature is visionary and inherently metaphorical. The words: "I heard..." and "I saw..." feature strongly. The book is continuously drawing all the prophetic themes of the Old Testament into a new and final Christian revelation. Richard Bauckham suggests that what Revelation is about is how the beginning of the "Lord's Prayer" "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" will be fulfilled and how this culmination of the hopeful expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom will come about. It is about the renewal of the whole cosmos. The "new heaven and new earth" is a return to paradise. What is important is not just about what happens in heaven but that earth can and should reflect these actions. The ultimate hope is for all of creation, not just of believers being spirited out of this world....but a theocentric creation where everyone and everything is related to the glory of God. The themes of the Garden of Eden reappear – the tree of life and the water of life reappear in the context of a city...it is not just a return to paradise; it goes further than paradise, it is now a story of the fulfilment of human history.

In the cosmic victory of Christ, all residual elements of the fall (sinfulness) will be removed and the universe returned to its pre-fall perfection for all eternity. The author, in Chp 21:1 says: "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." The "sea" or "the waters," the symbol of chaos for the ancient peoples, was a dark and mysterious place where sea monsters lived and in which one could be "swallowed up". In this new heaven and new earth the sea no longer exists but we do have "the river of the water of life" flowing from the throne of God (Ch 22: 1). What the Celts call the "thin line" or the "thin Space" between heaven and earth has been joined and it seems that heaven now

contains earth and earth contains heaven; but it is a new heaven and a new earth. In the new heaven and new earth there is the absence of death, mourning, sin, crying and pain. Ezekiel's (37:7-14) 'bones' will evidence life and breathe again and experience joy and the return of the spirit of God. This new creation is not only about absence but also more importantly about presence; God's presence that will never again be taken away. The images that the prophets have spoken of throughout the Old Testament come together. It is a story of hope. According to N T Wright, God has already launched the new creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus because it encapsulates God's condemnation of evil. Already heaven and earth are working in tandem because God through the Gospel, puts people right and through these same people, He can put the world right. God's justified people are God's world-transforming people. The God who has created all things is the same God who brings it to completion and we are a part of that process.

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