

# The New Heaven and the New Earth

by John F. Walvoord

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*The sermon describes the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, and the eternal state, highlighting the presence of God, the blessings of the overcomers, and the fate of the unsaved.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 21:1-3, Revelation 21:5, Revelation 21:7, Revelation 21:9, Revelation 21:12, Revelation 21:15, Revelation 21:18, Revelation 21:22-23, Revelation 21:25

**Topics:** "Eternal State", "New Creation"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches about the vision of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21, emphasizing the eternal state where God dwells with His people in the holy city, the new Jerusalem. The description includes the absence of the sea, the new creation, and the beauty of the city with its foundations of precious stones and gates of pearl. The eternal city is illuminated by the glory of God and the Lamb, with continuous day and no need for the sun or moon. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life have access, ensuring a perfect environment of purity and eternal life.

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## Transcript

The New Heaven and the New Earth Presented (21:1)

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Following the judgment of the great white throne depicted in the closing verses of chapter 20, John's attention is next directed to the new heaven and the new earth which replace the old heaven and the old earth which fled away (20:11). The expression "And I saw" is the first of three such statements in this chapter marking the major elements of the revelation (cf. 21:2, 22). The new heaven and new earth presented here are evidently not simply the old heaven and earth renovated, but an act of new creation (cf. discussion at 20:11). No description is given of either the new heaven or the new earth in verse 1 except for the cryptic statement "There was no more sea." There is remarkably little revealed in the Bible concerning the character of the new heaven and the new earth, but it is evidently quite different from their present form of existence. Most of the earth is now covered with water, but the new earth apparently will have no bodies of water except for the river mentioned in 22:2.

Only a few other passages in the Bible deal with the subject of the new heaven and the new earth, and these are often in a context dealing with the millennium (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13). The fact that

millennial truths are mentioned in the same context in all three of these major references has often confused expositors. However, it is a common principle in prophecy to bring together events that are distantly related chronologically, such as frequent reference to the first and second comings of Christ, actually separated by thousands of years (Isa. 61:1-2; cf. Luke 4:17-19). In a similar way there is mention of the resurrection of the righteous and of the wicked in the same verse, as in Daniel 12:2, events separated by a thousand years. And Malachi 4:5 speaks of the second coming of the Lord followed by verse 6 referring to His first coming. Second Peter 3:10-13 refers to the day of the Lord beginning before the millennium, as well as to the destruction of the heavens and the earth with fire at the end of the millennium. If all the passages are put together, the sequence of events becomes plain, and the allusions to the new heaven and the new earth are clearly set forth in the book of Revelation as following the millennial kingdom and immediately preceded by the destruction of the old earth and heaven, as previously mentioned. J. B. Smith's objection to the first heaven and the first earth passing away is not substantiated by any of the proof texts which he cites.<sup>338</sup>

The eternal state is clearly indicated in the absence of sea, for frequent mention of bodies of water occur in millennial passages (cf. Ps. 72:8; Isa. 11:9, 11; Ezek. 47:10, 15, 17, 18, 20; 48:28; Zech. 9:10; 14:8). The evidence of Revelation 21:1 is so specific that most commentators do not question that the eternal state is here in view.

#### First Vision of the New Jerusalem (21:2)

21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Though John is impressed with the new heaven and the new earth, his attention is immediately directed to that which is central in the vision, "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."<sup>339</sup> The expression "the holy city, new Jerusalem" is in antithesis to the earthly Jerusalem, which spiritually was referred to as Sodom in 11:8. Earlier in the writing of the New Testament canon, the earthly Jerusalem is referred to as "the holy city" (cf. Matt. 4:5; 27:53). In Revelation 3:12 the new Jerusalem is anticipated and referred to not only by this title but as "the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God."

Most important, however, is the fact that the city is declared to come down from God out of heaven. In the Greek, the expression "out of heaven" precedes the phrase "from God," just the reverse of the Authorized Version order. Nothing is said about the new Jerusalem being created at this point and the language seems to imply that it has been in existence in heaven prior to this event (for further discussion, see 21:9). Nothing is revealed concerning this in Scripture unless the expression of John 14:2, "I go to prepare a place for you," refers to this. If the new Jerusalem is in existence throughout the millennial reign of Christ, it is possible that it is a satellite city suspended over the earth during the thousand-year reign of Christ as the dwelling place of resurrected and translated saints who also have access to the earthly scene. This would help explain an otherwise difficult problem of the dwelling place of resurrected and translated beings on the earth during a period in which men are still in their natural bodies and living ordinary lives. If so, the new Jerusalem is withdrawn from the earthly scene in connection with the destruction of the old earth, and later comes down to the new earth.

As presented in Revelation 21 and 22, however, the new Jerusalem is not seen as it may have existed in the past, but as it will be seen in eternity future. The possibility of Jerusalem being a satellite city over the

earth during the millennium is not specifically taught in any scripture and at best is an inference based on the implication that it has been in existence prior to its introduction in Revelation 21. Its characteristics as presented here, however, are related to the eternal state rather than to the millennial kingdom.

The only description of the new Jerusalem given in verse 2 is embodied in the phrase "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Because of the fact that the church, the Body of Christ, is considered under the symbolism of a bride in the New Testament in contrast to Israel as the wife of Jehovah, some have attempted to limit the new Jerusalem as having reference only to the church. Snell argues at length that the new Jerusalem is specifically the bride, that is, the saints of the present dispensation, the church. He believes rather than a literal, physical city in the eternal state that the new Jerusalem represents the church as the people of God. The church is seen in this section as in the millennium rather than in the eternal state.<sup>340</sup> Van Ryn also takes a common position when he says, "This city is apparently a symbolic description of the Bride herself."<sup>341</sup>

The use of the marriage figure, however, in both the Old and New Testaments is sufficiently frequent so that we cannot arbitrarily insist that figures are always used in precisely the same connotation. The subsequent description of the new Jerusalem in this chapter makes plain that saints of all ages are involved and that what we have here is not the church per se but a city or dwelling place having the freshness and beauty of a bride adorned for marriage to her husband.

F. W. Grant holds that the new Jerusalem will contain the saints of all ages. On the basis of Hebrews 11:10, 16 where Abraham is said to look for a heavenly city, Grant concludes that while it is the bride-city, it nevertheless has other occupants:

Why should it not be the bride-city, named from the bride-church, whose home it is, and yet contains other occupants?... the heavenly city, the dwelling-place of God, permitting none of the redeemed to be outside of it but opening its gates widely to all.<sup>342</sup>

Jennings likewise includes the saints of all ages in the heavenly Jerusalem:

But since thus all saints of the olden times, be they prior to any distinction, as Enoch; or Gentile, as Job; or Jewish, as Abraham, may have their place in this city, she [the new Jerusalem] must by no means be accounted as characteristically Jewish. The Jerusalem of the Jews is ever and always on the earth, nor does she come out of heaven at all, since she has never left the earth; but the glory of the Lord rises upon her there (Isa. 60:1)... . Every child of God through all the ages, whose earthly tabernacle has been dissolved, shall be at this time in his heavenly house, and thus together form the heavenly city.<sup>343</sup>

God to Dwell with Men (21:3-4)

21:3-4 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

As John beheld the vision of the new heaven and the new earth and the lovely new Jerusalem, he heard a great voice from heaven giving the spiritual significance of this scene. This is the last of twenty-one times that "a great voice" or "a loud voice" is mentioned in the book of Revelation. The fact that the voice is great connotes that the subsequent revelation is important and authoritative. The voice declares, "Behold, the

tabernacle of God is with men." This tabernacle (Gr., ske,,ne,,) is in contrast to the Tabernacle of God in the wilderness in which God dwelt and also to the tabernacle of God in heaven (13:6; 15:5). It symbolizes that God is now present with men in the new earth and in the new Jerusalem. The verse itself explains the meaning in the words "he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." The word for "dwell" (Gr., ske,,noo) is the verb form for the noun translated "tabernacle" (cf. John 1:14; Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6). The presence of God in Scripture frequently connotes fellowship and blessing. Here it is stated that the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem will be the people of God and that God will not only be with them but will also be their God, a thought which is often repeated in the Scripture. J. B. Smith finds twenty-one instances.<sup>344</sup> Some manuscripts add an s to "people," but the Authorized Version reading is preferred.

The presence of God assures an entirely new state for those who inhabit the new Jerusalem. In contrast to their former suffering which included going through the tribulation for many of these saints, God is stated to "wipe away all tears from their eyes." The expression "all tears" is singular in the Greek, literally "every tear" (Gr., pan dakruon), as if God wipes away every single tear. There is no just ground for imagining from this text that the saints will shed tears in heaven concerning the failures of their former life on earth. The emphasis here is on the comfort of God, not on the remorse of the saints. The tears seem to refer to tears shed on earth as the saints endured suffering for Christ's sake, rather than tears shed in heaven because of human failure. This is in keeping with the rest of the passage which goes on to say that other aspects of human sorrow such as death, sorrow, crying, or pain will also be no more in existence. The summary given at the end of the verse is "The former things are passed away." The "crying" mentioned refers to vocal response to sorrow in contrast to tears which are a silent response. The new situation is the consummation of divine grace and is the assurance of the estate of ineffable blessedness for those who were once lost sinners. The Scriptures make plain that not only the old earth and heaven pass away but also all the details and associations that belong to it which would mar the situation in the new heaven and the new earth.

#### All Things Made New (21:5-6)

21:5-6 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

As if in contrast to the great voice out of heaven in verse 3, verse 5 specifies that the One sitting upon the throne now speaks. It is probably too much to infer from the use of the singular "he" that God the Father is specifically meant here and not Christ the Son, though it is true that the mediatorial aspect of the kingdom is surrendered at the end of the millennium (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28). The Son will share the throne in this situation much as He has done in the past. The special character of His rule over the earth and His contest with the wicked, however, will be ended. An announcement is made: "Behold, I make all things new." Like the announcement of verse 3, this is introduced by the term "behold" (Gr., idou), the imperative form of horao,, meaning "to look" or "to see." The word introduces the great pronouncement "I make all things new." The verb "make" (Gr., poieo,,) means "to make, form, or construct" and is a common verb occurring many times in the New Testament for a work of accomplishment. To argue, as some have done, however, that this proves that there is no new heaven or earth created at this time because the specific word create is not used is building too much on too little. The same word poieo,, is used in Matthew 19:4 where God is said to have "made" Adam and Eve using both the word create (Gr., ktizo,,) and the word made (Gr., poieo,,) for the same act. Everything, of course, is not created on the occasion of the new heaven and the

new earth, as all the saints involved have come from the old creation; but all things are made new in the same sense that Eve was made a new creature though formed from the rib of Adam. The word for "new" (Gr., *kainos*) means to be both new in character and new in the sense of recently made. It connotes a drastic change.

John is so astounded by the announcement and all the previous revelation that he has to be reminded, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." The message from the throne continues in verse 6 with the utterance "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." The reference is to the work accomplished throughout the whole drama of human history prior to the eternal state. This statement does not mean that there are no future works of God but that a major work has been brought to completion and that the works now relating to the eternal state are beginning. The speaker now introduces Himself as the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." It is by this precise title that Christ is introduced in 1:8, and the phrase is again found in 22:13. While the expression is appropriate for God the Father, the fact that it is introduced in 1:8 in reference to Christ seems to confirm the idea that Christ is also in view in this passage as sitting on the throne. With the beginning of the eternal state, there is a difference in the divine undertaking but not a difference in the divine majesty of the Second Person. The first of three promises made in verses 6 and 7 then follows, where water from the fountain of the water of life is promised in abundance to the one who is thirsty. A similar assurance is given to the martyred throng of tribulation saints in 7:17. It refers to the abundant character of eternal life and the blessings which flow from it and is a fulfillment of the invitation of Isaiah 55:1 as well as that of Christ in John 4:10, 13-14.

#### The Blessings of the Overcomer (21:7-8)

21:7-8 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Another promise now extended to the glorified saints described as overcomers is that they shall inherit all things. This in turn is an extension of the additional promises to each saint that God will be his God and that in glory he shall be "my son." Frequently in Scripture, particular promises are given those who triumph in faith, but here the generous provision is made that they shall inherit "all things" rather than some particular aspect of the divine provision (cf. Matt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Heb. 1:14; 9:15; 1 Peter 1:4; 3:9; 1 John 5:5). Promises to overcomers are included in the messages to the seven churches and are anticipated in 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

In contrast to the abundant blessings on the child of God is the sad inheritance of unbelief outlined in verse 8, where the unsaved are characterized as "fearful," "unbelieving," "abominable," "murderers," "whoremongers," "sorcerers," "idolaters," and "all liars," whose destiny is to be burned with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. The unsaved are here pictured in their principal characteristics. A similar list is found in 21:27 and another in 22:15. Some of the saved were guilty of like offenses but availed themselves in proper time of the grace of God through faith in Christ. No true believer could be categorized by this list of sins. While there is further mention of the fate of the unsaved later in the book of Revelation, this is the last mention of the lake of fire and of the second death specifically.

#### The New Jerusalem as the Bride (21:9-11)

21:9-11 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

With this survey of the eternal state and its blessings before him, John is now invited by one of the seven angels who had poured out the seven vials of the wrath of God to behold the bride, the Lamb's wife. This angel may have been the one mentioned in 17:1 who showed John the vision of Babylon, the harlot, but it is impossible to prove that it is the same one of the seven. In keeping with the earlier revelation of 21:2, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is here characterized as "the bride, the Lamb's wife." Since a city is not a bride nor a wife, the truth here represented is that the city, the residence of the saints of eternity future, is to be compared to a bride for beauty and is intimately related to Jesus Christ the Lamb.

Expositors have differed as to whether the vision here introduced is chronologically subsequent to the scene of 21:1-8, or whether it is a retrospect of the millennial situation. Though the book of Revelation is not written in strict chronological style in that the events in certain chapters such as 17 actually occur before some of the preceding chapters, the decision can be reached only by a study of the contents. Those who consider this a millennial scene hold that after the preview of the new heaven and the new earth, John returns to consider the new Jerusalem as descending to the millennial earth. Those who follow this form of interpretation believe that the new Jerusalem during the millennial reign of Christ will be suspended above the earth and will be the habitation of the resurrected dead. William Kelly gives an extended defense of the interpretation that the narration returns to the millennial scene beginning here.<sup>345</sup> In his later work, *Exposition of Revelation*, he takes a similar position.<sup>346</sup>

Arno C. Gaebelain likewise believes that beginning in verse 9 the millennial state is once more introduced,<sup>347</sup> Edward Bennett also believes 21:9 through 22:5 is descriptive of the holy Jerusalem during the millennium rather than in the eternal state. He finds confirmation of this especially in 22:2 relative to the use of the leaves of the tree "for the healing of the nations."<sup>348</sup> He does not seem aware of the possible explanation of this problem, namely, the translation "health" instead of "healing" which would be in harmony with the eternal state.

Other expositors, however, have concluded that there is not sufficient justification for returning to the millennial scene after the tremendous events portraying the close of the millennium and the introduction of the new heaven and the new earth. For these scholars Revelation 21:9 through 22:7 is a description of the new Jerusalem as it will be established in the new earth in eternity to come. In other words this passage would refer to eternity rather than to the millennium.

A number of considerations support the conclusion that the eternal state is in view in Revelation 21:9 through 22:7. There is good reason for concluding that the order of Revelation beginning in chapter 19 is chronological; a retrogression in time would violate the structure of the last great section of the book. The description of the holy city as given in 21:2 is obviously identical to the description in 21:9. As most expositors grant that 21:2 is the eternal state, it would follow that 21:9 should be considered the same. The implication of 21:2 and 21:10-11 is that the holy city arrives on the new earth. Prophecies governing the millennial earth do not allow for such a city on earth. The apportionment of the Holy Land and the description of the Temple as found in Ezekiel's description of the millennial earth (Ezek. 40-48) are entirely different. The heavenly city is obviously seen as it will appear in the eternal state in the entire passage

beginning with 21:1.

Hoste supports the idea that this is the eternal state rather than a reversion to the millennium: "The usual interpretation of a certain school, that the closing description of the Heavenly Jerusalem merely reverts to a millennial scene, seems untenable, if carefully considered."<sup>349</sup> Hoste admits that there are similar reversions in the Apocalypse but states that in each case previously there have been clear indications which are not found here. He notes that references to the nations, to the kings of the earth, and to the healing of the nations, and other expressions which seem to refer to the millennial earth all have a satisfactory explanation and relate to the eternal state.

Ottman concludes that this section deals with the eternal state and not the millennium:

This expanded vision of the New Jerusalem does not, for its interpretation, demand a return in thought to the conditions existing during the Millennium... A return to the Millennial earth in this vision of John would be incongruous and perplexing. There may be difficulties in the way of harmonizing what is implied in the terms of this vision with our own thoughts of eternity, but this should not discourage us, for eternal conditions may be altogether at variance with our ideas of them. The all-important question is, What does the Word of God say? We must again insist upon the fact that the New Jerusalem that descends from God is a literal city, built by Him, and is to be forever the link between the new heaven and the new earth.<sup>350</sup>

As demonstrated in the exposition of this passage, there is insufficient support for chronologically placing this scene as contemporaneous with the millennium. The new Jerusalem apparently is seen here as it will be in eternity future after the millennium has been completed. However, as previously intimated, there is a possibility that the holy city will also be in existence during the millennium and, though not described in that character in this passage, may indeed be the dwelling place of the resurrected and translated saints during the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. The problem passages of this section, which are offered by some to equate it with the millennium, upon examination prove to yield another conclusion, that eternity future is in view here.

In interpreting the description of the heavenly city, the problem of symbolic interpretation comes to the fore perhaps more than in any other section of the book of Revelation. Even the most conservative scholars are not necessarily in agreement on the extent to which this description should be taken literally. The problem depends ultimately upon the human judgment of the expositor. Certain guidelines, however, can be laid down.

John actually saw what he recorded, and what he saw is to some extent interpreted to him. Obviously what he saw transcended any earthly experience, and it was necessary for him to describe what he saw in terms that were meaningful to him. This must not be construed, however, as an inaccurate description because John was guided by the Holy Spirit when he wrote, and the description must be viewed as accurate insofar as it is possible to communicate. The passage itself, however, as in the description of the gold, implies that the material substances were different from what exists in this present earth.

Of major importance are the facts that John actually saw a city, that this city was inhabited by saints of all ages, and that God Himself was present in it. Until further light is given, it is probably a safe procedure to accept the description of this city as corresponding to the physical characteristics attributed to it.

Responding to the angel's invitation, John is carried away in spirit to a great and high mountain. The inference is that he is not actually transported, but only experiences what follows as if he had been taken

to a vantage point where he could see the entire scene. A similar experience was afforded him in 17:3. As John beholds, he sees "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." Again the contrast is evident between this city and Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18. A similar description is given in 21:2 where the city is declared to be holy and to have come from God out of heaven. It is to be distinguished both from Babylon and from the earthly city of Jerusalem which in its history had also fallen into evil ways.

In verse 11 a general description of the new Jerusalem is given. The city is characterized as having "the glory of God." It should be noted that the heavenly city is introduced in verses 1 and 2 as "holy," then as "new," "out of heaven," and "from God." Most of these details are repeated in verse 10, and in verse 11 the city is said to have the glory of God, and to have a brilliant light. As the glory of God is the sum of His infinite perfections in their manifestations, so the new Jerusalem reflects all that God is.

The city is ablaze with light compared to the brightness of a precious stone such as jasper, and clear as crystal. The stone here described as a jasper has its name transliterated from a similar word in the original (Gr., *iaspis*), a name used for stones of various colors, but here specifying the qualities "precious" and "clear as crystal." The mention of this stone which is costly to men but used lavishly in the new Jerusalem (cf. 21:19) is designed to manifest the glory of God. Later in the passage (v. 23), the fact is revealed that the city does not originate its light or radiance, but all illumination comes from the Lamb. The believer in Christ does not generate the light of Christ, but he should both reflect and transmit its glory without blurring the beauty and loveliness of Christ.

#### The Wall and the Gates of the City (21:12-14)

21:12-14 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The scene which John sees is tremendously impressive. After giving the general appearance of the city, he now itemizes the specific details. Expositors have differed as to the degree in which this description should be taken literally, some believing that the city is actually nonexistent and presented only as a symbolic presentation of the blessings of the saints in eternity future. Such a view, however, is difficult to harmonize with the specific details given which are nowhere explained in other than the literal sense in the Bible. There does not seem to be any solid objection to the concept that the saints in the new heaven and the new earth will have as their home precisely such a city, glorious in every aspect, reaching to tremendous heights into the new heaven, and embodying characteristics to remind them of their spiritual heritage.

The first important fact mentioned by John in verse 12 is the wall of the city, described as "great and high," an obvious symbol of exclusion of all that is unworthy to enter the city. Though countless saints will enjoy its glory, there is this reminder that only those qualified may enter. In the wall are twelve gates guarded by twelve angels and inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. In keeping with the square shape of the city, the gates are located on each of the four sides as specified in verse 13. In the description of the new Jerusalem, the number twelve is very prominent as seen in the twelve gates and twelve angels in this passage, the twelve tribes of Israel (21:12), twelve foundations (21:14), twelve apostles (21:14), twelve pearls (21:21), and twelve kinds of fruit (22:2). The height, length, and width of the city are described as

12,000 furlongs each, or 1,342 miles (21:16) and the wall's height is said to measure twelve times twelve cubits, that is, 144 cubits, or over 200 feet (21:17).

The twelve angels mentioned are apparently apportioned one angel to each gate and serve in this capacity as an honor guard. The book of Revelation does not indicate the particular name of each gate. In the description of the city of Jerusalem which will be on earth during the millennium, Ezekiel gives the names of the twelve tribes of Israel as inscribed on the gates of the city at that time. The new Jerusalem that descends from heaven, however, is an entirely different city from that of Ezekiel and is much larger in every dimension.

It may be, however, that names are assigned to the gates of the new Jerusalem in a similar way as those on the gates of the earthly city of Jerusalem in the millennium. If so, the names of these gates will correspond to the twelve tribes according to Ezekiel 48:31-34 in the following pattern: on the north side, going east to west, Levi, Judah, and Reuben; on the east side, going from north to south, Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan; on the west side, going from north to south, Naphtali, Asher, and Gad; on the south side, going from east to west, Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun. The order of the gates on each side is derived from the fact that Ezekiel seems to proceed from the northwest corner eastward, then southward, then westward, and then northward. It can only be assumed, however, that the same arrangement is true of the new Jerusalem. The implication from the fact of gates on each side of the city, however, is that those properly qualified have freedom to go in and out. The new Jerusalem will have the distinction of being the residence of the saints, but it is implied that they will be able to travel elsewhere on the new earth and possibly also in the new heaven.

Also prominent in connection with the wall and the gates are twelve foundations, mentioned in verse 14, inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. There has been much speculation as to why the names of the twelve apostles are used in this connection, but the most obvious answer is that they have a prominent place in the program of God in relation to the new Jerusalem. The twelve apostles on the one hand were of Israel and were called out of Israel to be leaders in the church in the New Testament. They are, in some sense, representative of both Israel and the church, though their primary significance seems to be that the saints of the church age are included in this eternal city.

It is noteworthy, however, that not only are the twelve apostles represented but also the twelve tribes of Israel. This should settle beyond any question the matter of the inclusion of Old Testament saints. It apparently is the divine intent to represent to the reader that the new Jerusalem will have among its citizens not only the church, or saints of the present age, but also Israel, or saints of other ages, whether in the Old Testament or in the tribulation period. Later on there is mention also of Gentiles. The careful expositor, therefore, on the one hand will not confuse Israel and the church as if one were the other. On the other hand, he will not deny to both their respective places of privilege in God's program. The anticipation of Hebrews 12:22-24 is specifically that the heavenly Jerusalem will include not only God and an innumerable company of angels but also the general assembly and church of the firstborn, that is, the saints of the present age and the spirits of just men made perfect, that is, all other saints. As far as this scripture is concerned, there is only one eternal resting place for the saints, and that is the new Jerusalem. All saints, therefore, must necessarily participate in the city, just as many of them did also in the millennial scene without destroying the distinction between different companies of saints.

The Dimensions of the City (21:15-17)

21:15-17 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

Having introduced John to the wall, gates, and foundations of the city, the angel next measures the major dimensions of the new Jerusalem. Using a reed, a measure about ten feet long, the unit of measure common among the Jews, with which to measure the city, its gates, and its walls, the angel finds that the city is square, its length and breadth being the same, twelve thousand furlongs. Since a furlong is equal to 582 feet, the measured distance is equivalent to 1,342 miles, often spoken of roughly as 1,500 miles.

According to verse 16, the tremendous dimension of the city's length and breadth is equaled by its height which towers an equal distance into the heavens. Nothing is said as to the shape of the city except as the reader is guided by its square dimensions. Some have assumed it to be a cube. J. B. Smith, for instance, considers any other view as "reducing it to dimensions far inferior to those indicated by divine inspiration."<sup>351</sup> Inspiration, however, does not indicate the shape; it also could be in the form of a pyramid with sides sloping to a peak at the height indicated. Hoste believes the city is in the form of a pyramid.<sup>352</sup> This would have certain advantages, not necessarily because smaller, but because this shape provides a vehicle for the river of life to proceed out of the throne of God, which seems to be at the top, to find its way to the bottom, assuming our experience of gravity will be somewhat normal also in the new earth.

McGee, assuming that the city is in space, offers another suggestion, namely, that the city is a cube within a crystal sphere. He writes:

Several times attention is called to the fact that the city is like a crystal-clear stone or crystal-clear gold. This emphasis leads us to believe that the city is seen through the crystal. We live outside the planet called earth, but the Bride will dwell within the planet called the New Jerusalem. The glory of light streaming through this crystal-clear prism, will break up into a polychromed rainbow of breath-taking beauty.<sup>353</sup>

Whatever its shape, a city of large dimensions would be proper, if it is to be the residence of the saved of all ages including infants who died before reaching the age of accountability. It is not necessary, however, to hold that everyone will live continually within its walls throughout eternity. The implications are that there is plenty of room for everyone and that this city provides a residence for the saints of all ages.

In addition to measuring the city itself, the angel measures the wall which by comparison is much smaller, namely 144 cubits or, assuming that a cubit is 18 inches, a height of 216 feet. This measurement is described as being "the measure of a man, that is, of the angel." A. T. Robertson interprets this phrase: "Though measured by an angel, a human standard was employed, man's measure which is the angel's (Bengel)."<sup>354</sup> Robertson identifies the word measure (Gr., metron) as "the accusative case of general reference in apposition with the verb emetre,,sen."<sup>355</sup> The implication of this statement is that whether man or angel measured it, the measurement would be the same.

The city taken as a whole is pictured as descending from heaven to the new earth, and the fact that it has foundations and comes from heaven to the earth seems to imply that it rests on the new earth itself. This also is implied in the fact that people go in and out of the gates, which fact is difficult to visualize unless the gates themselves rest upon the earth.

## The Beauty of the City (21:18-21)

21:18-21 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

With the dimensions of the city graphically given, John next describes the glory of the city. The wall is said to be of jasper in keeping with the general description of verse 11 and probably clear as crystal also. The city as a whole is portrayed as made of pure gold like clear glass. This description would indicate that it is gold in appearance but like clear glass in substance, namely, glass with a gold cast to it. Employing the language of semblance, John is endeavoring to give a description of a scene which in most respects transcends earthly experience. The constant mention of transparency indicates that the city is designed to transmit the glory of God in the form of light without hindrance.

Attention is next directed to the foundation of the city which is said to be garnished with all kinds of precious stones. This is a sight of indescribable beauty with the light of the city playing upon the multicolored stones. The city's first foundation is again the familiar jasper stone mentioned twice previously. The various foundations are represented as layers built upon each other, each layer extending around all four sides of the city. On top of the jasper stone is a second foundation, the brilliant sapphire, a stone similar to a diamond in hardness and blue in color. The third foundation is chalcedony, an agate stone from Chalcedon (in Turkey), thought to be sky-blue with stripes of other colors running through it. The fourth foundation, an emerald, introduces a bright green color. The fifth, the sardonyx, is a red and white stone. The sixth foundation, the sardius stone, refers to a common jewel of reddish color also found in honey color which was considered less valuable. The sardius is used with the jasper in Revelation 4:3 in describing the glory of God on the throne.

The seventh foundation is formed of chrysolite, a transparent stone golden in color according to the ancient writer Pliny,<sup>356</sup> and therefore somewhat different from the modern pale-green chrysolite stone. The eighth foundation, the beryl, is sea-green. The topaz, the ninth foundation, is yellow-green and transparent.<sup>357</sup> The tenth foundation, the chrysoprasus, introduces another shade of green. The eleventh foundation, the jacinth, is a violet color. The last stone, the amethyst, is commonly purple.

Though the precise colors of these stones in some cases are not certain, the general picture here described by John is one of unmistakable beauty, designed to reflect the glory of God in a spectrum of brilliant color. The light of the city within shining through these various colors in the foundation of the wall topped by the wall itself composed of the crystal-clear jasper forms a scene of dazzling beauty in keeping with the glory of God and the beauty of His holiness. The city is undoubtedly far more beautiful to the eye than anything that man has ever been able to create, and it reflects not only the infinite wisdom and power of God but also His grace as extended to the objects of His salvation.

Built in the walls are the twelve gates described as each being made of one huge pearl, leading to the streets of the city described as pure gold transparent as glass, that is, golden in color and appearance but having the translucency of glass. The word street (Gr., *plateia*) is in the singular but is used generically to describe all the streets of the city.

## The Temple of the City (21:22)

21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

The next phase of the vision is introduced with the familiar clause "And I saw," indicating a new and important phase of the divine revelation. John, as he searches the city, finds no temple therein. This is in contrast to the situation in the Old Testament where Israel first had the Tabernacle and then the Temple. This is also a sharp contrast to the millennial situation where a temple is built for the worship of God. Here the shadows are dispelled and, as the Scripture indicates, the Lord God Himself and the Lamb are the temple of the new city. No longer is the structure necessary, for the saints are in the immediate presence of the Lord with no need for an earthly mediator or for shadows of things eternal. The word for "temple" (Gr., naos) is the word used for the sanctuary, or God's dwelling place, the Holy of Holies, in the Temple of Israel. Believers now have access to the most sacred, intimate fellowship with the Lord their God in fulfillment of the many promises given to the saints.

## The Light of the City (21:23-24)

21:23-24 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

In contrast to the millennial earth and all preceding history of man, the new Jerusalem does not need the light of the sun nor the moon, for the Scriptures indicate that God Himself is the source of light in the city. Tucker points out that the new Jerusalem is distinguished by the things that are missing. There will be no temple, no sacrifice, no sun, no moon, no darkness, no gates to shut, no abomination.<sup>358</sup> This is another indication that this is the eternal state rather than the millennial situation, because if the sun or the moon were in existence, it would shine upon the city. The form of expression would not make impossible the existence of the sun and the moon, as this scripture merely says there is no need of them. But the position of the city on the new earth in the dimensions indicated is impossible to accommodate with the millennial scene; and as pictured here, the city is portrayed in its eternal character rather than in its existence in time. That God Himself should be the light of the city is of course entirely in keeping with many passages in the Old Testament comparing God to light; and this new situation correlates with Jesus Christ Himself being the light of the world (cf. John 1:7-9; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35). Because God is light and there is no darkness in Him, believers are exhorted to walk in the light in their present existence on this earth in keeping with their future in heaven (1 John 1:5-7). The whole of the city of the new Jerusalem is designed to transmit the light in all the beauty and color previously described.

In verse 24 the nations of the saved as well as the kings of the earth are declared to walk in the light of it and bring their glory and honor into it. Some have arbitrarily assumed that because the nations are mentioned this must be a millennial situation and not the eternal state. This is an unwarranted assumption, however, for the text specifies the nations of them which are saved. The word nations (Gr., ethne,) is the word for Gentiles. The meaning is not that political entities will enter into the new Jerusalem but rather that those who are saved Gentiles, who belong to the non-Jewish races, will be in the new city.

In the eternal state, therefore, not only saved Israelites and the church will be present but also saved Gentiles who are not numbered among either Israel or the church. That the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into the city means that those among the saved who have honored positions on earth will ascribe the glory and honor that once were theirs to their Lord and God. There is no need to strain at the

preposition "into" (Gr., eis) as if the kings of the earth will not actually enter into the city as J. B. Smith holds.<sup>359</sup> This preposition is the normal one to indicate ingress, though it may not actually mean this in every instance. The text does say, however, that they bring their honor and glory not "to" the city but "into" it. The implication is that the honor and glory are brought inside and not left outside the gates. As a matter of fact, these kings are saved and have access to the city even as others.

Larkin introduces the startling point of view that children will be born in the eternal state who unlike the posterity of Adam and Eve will be sinless.<sup>360</sup> There is no indication whatever in Scripture that resurrected and translated beings have the quality of human sex, much less the capacity to produce offspring.

#### Access to the City (21:25-27)

21:25-27 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

A further word is given concerning the fact that the gates of the city are never shut, because in the city there is continuous day, hence no night. Here again is a contrast to the millennial situation in which day and night continue as the norm for the entire earth. The brilliant light of the city, however, dispells any possible darkness. Believers in their glorified bodies do not need rest, and their lives are full of continuous activity even like the holy angels.

As if in repetition of the thought of verse 24, that the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into the holy city, verse 26 indicates that the glory and honor of the nations themselves come into it. Here again the word nations should be translated "Gentiles," referring to the Gentile glory in contrast to the glory of Israel or of the church. Expositors too often have forgotten that God has a purpose for the Gentiles as well as for Israel, and He glorifies Himself through them also. Whatever among the Gentiles can be used to bring honor and glory to the Lord is here also brought into the eternal state.

Verse 27, however, indicates plainly that nothing will ever enter the city which is in any sense evil, as only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life are eligible for entrance. There does not seem to be any attempt made to keep them out. This fact is another reminder that all who are there have entered the city as the objects of God's grace, otherwise they too would be excluded. This will be a perfect environment in contrast to the centuries of human sin, and the saints will enjoy this perfect situation through all eternity to come. The inhabitants of the city will be characterized by eternal life and absolute moral purity.

338 A Revelation of Jesus Christ, p. 281.

339 For various views on the new Jerusalem, see John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. Vol. XXIV: Revelation, pp. 389-92, and Robert Govett, The Apocalypse Explained, pp. 549-610.

340 H. H. Snell, Notes on the Revelation, pp. 231-45.

341 August Van Ryn, Notes on the Book of Revelation, p. 218.

342 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, p. 231.

- 343 F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Revelation*, pp. 566-67.
- 344 Smith, p. 283.
- 345 *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, pp. 459 ff.
- 346 *Exposition of Revelation*, pp. 248 ff.
- 347 *The Revelation*, pp. 158 ff.
- 348 *The Visions of John in Patmos*, pp. 278-99.
- 349 William Hoste, *The Vision of John the Divine*, pp. 176-78; cf. Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV, 131.
- 350 Ford C. Ottman, *The Unfolding of the Ages*, pp. 458-59.
- 351 Smith, p. 289.
- 352 Hoste, p. 178.
- 353 J. Vernon McGee, *Reveling Through Revelation*, II, 104-5.
- 354 *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, VI, 474.
- 355 *Ibid.*
- 356 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 897.
- 357 Topaz, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 746.
- 358 W. L. Tucker, *Studies in Revelation*, p. 378.
- 359 Smith, p. 292.
- 360 Clarence Larkin, *Book of Revelation*, p. 207.

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