

Revelation 21

A New Heaven and a New Earth (21:1)

1And 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.

In this vision John sees both a "new heaven and a new earth."

Our present heaven and earth have "passed away" (come to an end, disappeared).

The Psalmist declares that the present creation will "perish" (be destroyed, vanish). It will grow old "like a garment," and God will change it the way we change clothes, that is, by putting on a new, different set of clothes (Psalm 102:25-26; Hebrews 1:10-12). God also explained the same to Isaiah. In the midst of a prophecy of judgment on the nations Isaiah looked ahead and saw that "all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll" (Isaiah 34:4). He also saw that "the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6). God will create a new heaven and a new earth, and it is this new heaven and earth that will remain (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22).

Jesus also recognized that the present heaven and earth will pass away (Mark 13:31). So did Peter (2 Peter 3:10-12). Some do take "melt" (2 Peter 3: 10) to mean "be untied, loosed, broken up" and believe this is merely a renovation of the surface of the present earth. But 2 Peter 3: 12 uses a different word for 'melt,' which in this context can only mean to be melted away. The implication is that the total matter in the universe will be transformed into heat energy-something science shows to be perfectly possible (as is the case, for example, when electrons and positrons meet).

The New Jerusalem Comes Down from God (21:2)

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

The 'new Jerusalem' is truly holy, set apart for God in a special sense. It already exists in heaven (Galatians 4:26). It is the city that Abraham looked for and all God's people still look for. God himself is its architect and builder (Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:10,13,16). It is a prepared place for a prepared people.

3 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. 4And 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.

"The tabernacle [dwelling] of God" from this point forward will be with mankind on earth. In a sense, heaven and earth will merge.

No longer will we be on earth and God's throne and the special manifestation of His presence be in heaven. He will be with His people forever (compare Leviticus 26:11-12; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:27; Zechariah 14:9; Hebrews 8:2; 9:11).

Next, the "great voice out of heaven" continues with wonderful comfort and assurance for the overcomers.

God will "wipe away all tears," including the tears shed on earth while the believers were enduring suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel. By this we see that the effects of sin will be forever removed. It will be the final and ultimate consummation of all that was purchased for us by Christ's death on the cross and guaranteed to us by His resurrection.

This means there will be no more death, for death is the wage of sin (Romans 6:23). This victory is a great triumph, for the last enemy to be destroyed is death (compare 1 Corinthians 15:54).

There will be no more "sorrow" (mourning) or "crying," nor any "pain" (distress, affliction, hardship, fruitless toil, suffering), for never again will there be anything to cause sorrow, pain, grief, or guilt.

Possibly even the memory of those things will be gone, though we will undoubtedly remember the good things God has done (Isaiah 65: 17).

⁵ 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.

Assurance for Overcomers (21:6-7)

⁶ 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. ⁷He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished." Now God says, "It is done."

Because He will make all things new, we can be sure He has something new for us now. If we thirst for God (Psalm 42:1-2), His invitation comes to us to take "freely" of living water. (Compare John 4:14; 7:37-39, which relate the water to the Holy Spirit, both in giving eternal life and in giving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. See also Revelation 22: 1-2, where the river and the trees of life are provided in the New Jerusalem.) This receiving and continued drinking of the Spirit is the secret of being overcomers. And the promise of an inheritance in the New Jerusalem and this relation with God are for the overcomer.

Those who overcome, that is, those who are victors through persevering faith and obedience, will inherit everything. In the letters to the seven churches Jesus promised that these things will include eating of the tree of life in the paradise of God, not being hurt by the second death, eating of hidden manna, a white stone with a new name written on it, power over the nations, white raiment, one's name confessed before God the Father and his angels, being made a pillar in the temple of God, with the name of God and the city and Christ's new name written on him, and the privilege of sitting with Jesus on His throne. Now all the blessings and joys of the eternal state will be theirs because by faith they have kept on winning victories.

The Doom of Unbelievers (21:8)

⁸But 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.

In contrast to the overcomers who share the blessings of life in the eternal state, we are given a list of those

who will have their part in the lake of fire, that is, the second death.

First on the list is the "fearful," that is, the cowardly, those who are timid because of a lack of faith. These include those who let the disapproval or threats of any person or of society cause them to turn away from Christ and the hope of glory. They are more concerned about personal safety than loyalty to Christ. They are quick to compromise with the truth. They are not overcomers. They are losers, not winners. (See Mark 8:35; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:12-13.)

Second are the 'unbelieving;" they treat the gospel and the promises as something incredible. They include those who have never believed, those who have rejected the truth of the gospel, and those who once believed but fell back into the practice of the lusts of the flesh, for those who make such things part of their life-style cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

Third are the "abominable," those who are detestable to God and arouse His wrath. Both the Old and New Testaments show that to profess a faith in God and continue to practice evil or anything idolatrous is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. (In the Old Testament this word is often used of idolatry, but here it is more general.)

Fourth are "murderers," those who deliberately, willfully, take human life.

Fifth are "whoremongers," including those who practice any kind of sexual impurity or sexual immorality.

Sixth are "sorcerers," who use poisons, drugs, and magic potions, often in the name of religion.

Seventh are "idolaters," who worship false gods or who put something else in the place of God.

Eighth are "all liars, " especially including all false persons, such as false prophets and false apostles, as well as those who deny their faith in Christ.

The Bride and the City (21:9-11)

9 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 show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. 10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed 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.

² But in Old Testament language a city was often identified with its inhabitants. In the New Testament Jesus did the same when He wept over Jerusalem, having the people in mind (Matthew 23:37). Just so, the New Jerusalem will be as real as the present Jerusalem, and its people will be what makes it a city. That is, the city New Jerusalem will be the home city of the Church, and that for all eternity.

The angel then carries John away in spirit (or in the Spirit) to a "great and high mountain." The language here is similar to the experience of Ezekiel, who was taken by a lock of his head and lifted by the Spirit and brought in the visions of God to Jerusalem, where he saw its idolatry and corruption as well as the glory that was about to depart (Ezekiel 8:3 to 11 :23). It is also similar to the language where the devil took Jesus up into "an exceeding high mountain" and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Matthew 4:8). But from this high mountain John sees a vision of the great city, the holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God .

The Twelve Tribes of Israel (21:12-13)

12 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: Bon the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

The fact the city has a "wall, great and high" speaks of security, especially to the readers of John's day. It also indicates that the city is real and has limits. The twelve gates indicate that there is abundant entrance, in fact, free access in and out of the city. The city will be the home and headquarters for all the redeemed, but they will be free to go out into all the new earth. It may be also that they will be able to explore and enjoy all the new heavens as well.

The angel at each gate (which is what "at the gates twelve angels" means) does not seem to be a gatekeeper to keep anyone out, for nothing evil or sinful will exist in the new heavens and the new earth. It is true that only those qualified can enter, but the angels seem to be welcomers and encouragers. (Compare Isaiah 62:6 for similar language concerning watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem.)

The Twelve Apostles (21:14)

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The "twelve foundations" with the names of the twelve apostles inscribed in them show that the New Jerusalem is built on the foundation of the apostles, making the New Jerusalem a proper home for the Church. The names will include Matthias, since he was accepted as God's choice to replace Judas and must have been still among the Twelve when they are mentioned in Acts 6:2. They will already have been judging, or ruling, the twelve tribes of Israel during the Millennium in fulfillment of Christ's promise (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). Now they are recognized as foundation apostles for the building of the Church and consequently their names are put on the foundations of the city.

Even now the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, having become a holy temple for the indwelling of God by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).

The City Measured (21:15-16)

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16 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.

The angel talking with John now produces a "golden reed" (made of gold but thin like a reed) as a measuring rod for measuring the city, its walls, and its gates, which he does as John watches.

The size of the city is almost beyond comprehension. It will have plenty of room for all the believers of all time. "Twelve thousand furlongs" (i.e., the Greek stadium, equalling almost 607 feet, but shorter than the English furlong) equals about 1,380 miles. This would stretch about halfway across the American continent. Some have speculated that this would call for the new earth to be much larger than the present one.

The city is "foursquare" (laid out as a square; literally, "fourcornered," or "four-angled," with the angles equal), the length, width, and height equal. The word "foursquare" is used of squared stones prepared for building and for cubical objects. Many take this to mean that the city will be a perfect cube—as was the Holy of Holies, where God manifested His presence in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple (1 Kings 6:20). This corresponds to God's filling the city with the manifestation of His glory and holiness: It is all a holy of holies.³

The Wall Described (21:17-18)

17 And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. 18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

The height of the wall is given in terms of the ancient cubit instead of the Greek stadium. The cubit was a little less than 18 inches, making 144 cubits equal about 215 feet. (Some take it that the wall of the city would have to be as high as the city, that is, about 1,380 miles, and therefore they suggest that the thickness of the wall is what is measured here, rather than the height)

The wall is built of jasper or, as we would call it, of blue-white diamonds. The beauty and brilliance of these diamonds was used to describe the glory of the city as a whole (21:11). Now we see the wall is built of such diamonds. How beautifully they will reflect the glory of God!

The city within the walls is built of "pure gold, like ... clear glass" (the Greek can also mean clear crystal). This seems to be a description of something in the new heavens and earth that is better than gold. The gold we know in the present earth can be beaten until it is only a few molecules thick and then be put on a window as gold leaf, but it cannot obtain the transparency of glass. (John is trying to describe something to his readers that is new to the human experience and consequently almost beyond description.) In its clarity and transparency this "gold" will also reflect the glory of God in a marvelous way.

The Foundations of the Wall (21:19-20)

19 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; 2^othe 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.

The twelve foundations of the wall inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles are also "garnished" (adorned, decorated) with all kinds of precious stones. This indicates that the foundations of the city come to rest on the surface of the ground when the New Jerusalem comes down to earth, so the foundations, visible for all to see, are glorious and beautiful. With their jeweled adornment they add wonderfully to the splendor of the city.

The Gates and the Street Described (21:21)

21 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.

"Every several gate," that is, each gate, of the twelve (having the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on them) is a giant pearl. The pearl in ancient times was owned only by the very wealthy. Jesus in a parable spoke of a pearl of great price, worth everything a person possessed (Matthew 13:45-46). Such giant pearls will surely be a special creation created by God himself.

"The street of the city" is wide (Greek, *plateia*,) as well as of a gold so pure as to be translucent. The singular 'street' may also be used collectively, referring to all the streets of the city.

No Temple in the City (21:22)

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

In Old Testament times God manifested His presence and glory in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of first the tabernacle and then the Temple of Solomon. With the Church Age, believers' bodies became the temples (sanctuaries) of the Holy Spirit, and whenever we come together in Christ's name we are the Body of Christ, the temple where God manifests His presence through the Holy Spirit. But in the New Jerusalem, the whole city will become the temple, the sanctuary, the habitation of God and Christ. God's glory will be everywhere present in it. We who dwell in it will be in constant and direct contact with the Lord God Almighty and His Son, His Lamb who saved us. We will dwell in the temple, that is, in the midst of the manifestation of God's presence. This will also mean that we (all believers of all ages) together will continue to be the holy temple in the Lord, "buildded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:20-22).

This fellowship in the immediate presence of God and Christ will surely be the greatest blessing and joy in the Holy City. The psalmist David recognized that in God's presence there is "fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). How much greater will be that fullness in the New Jerusalem!

The City's Light and Lamp (21:23-24)

23 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. 24 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 honor into it.

The full revelation of God's glory in the city will make the sun and moon unnecessary. In this present earth most of the energy we need for light and for all our life processes comes from the sun either directly or through the photosynthesis of plants. In the New Jerusalem, Christ will be the light (literally, the "lamp"). That is, He will be the immediate source of all the power, energy, and light we need for our life and all our activities throughout all eternity. Our glorified bodies will be like Christ's and will be able to stand the full impact of God's glory. (See Exodus 33:20-23; 1 John 3:2).

No intermediate source, such as the sun, will be needed. Energized by Christ we shall no longer need sleep nor will we need the succession of day and night. Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world spiritually, now will be the light of the New Jerusalem and the new heaven and earth in a full and complete fulfillment. (Compare John 1:7-9; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35; 1 John 1:5-7.)

Isaiah saw a glimpse of this when he looked beyond even the millennial restoration of Zion to a time when 'the sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory Thy people also shall be all righteous. ... I the Lord will hasten it in his time" (Isaiah 60: 19-22). "Thy God thy glory" is the central truth in this passage.

From verse 24 we see that the New Jerusalem is the capital city, the headquarters of the believers. The glory of God that lights the city will be continuous and inexhaustible. Consequently, the nations (people) who are saved will continue to walk (and live) by means of this light forever. No longer will kings or people exalt themselves, but all their glory will be brought into the city that God's glory might be all in all.

"Nations," though often translated "Gentiles," is often used in a general sense (see Acts 17:26; Matthew 28:19; compare Acts 1:8) and would not exclude Israel. (Even the Old Testament word *goyim*, "nations, Gentiles," sometimes includes the Jews.) It does not necessarily refer to nations in the sense of nationalistic states or to peoples with specific national identities. Therefore, it is better to look at these "nations" as people with various backgrounds and from various parts of the present earth. The important thing here is that they are all saved and they all walk in the light of the glory of God.

Some writers take this verse to mean that only certain ones among the believers live in the city, that there are other nations and kings outside the city who walk in the light of it. ^s That might be true of the present Jerusalem when it receives its fulfillment in the Millennium. However, the New Jerusalem is an entirely different city. The meaning here is rather that the nations, or peoples, who are saved are the same ones who are resident in the city. This verse is simply giving further information about them: They will all be brought together, whether ordinary people or kings, and whatever glory or honor they had, they will bring into the city and present it all to God, to whom it is due.

Gates Forever Open (21:25-27)

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26 And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. 27 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.

Unlike the ancient cities of John's day whose gates were always shut at night, the gates of the New Jerusalem will remain open, because there will be "no night there." The inhabitants of the city will be free to go in and out.

The fact that there is no night is a further indication that the new earth is brand-new, not the present earth merely renovated. For after the flood God promised that "while the [present] earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). In the final state the only darkness, the only place where there will not be the light of the manifest presence and glory of God, will be in the outer darkness of the lake of fire.

Although Psalm 148:6 (as well as Jeremiah 33: 19-22) might seem to contradict this, in the light of the rest of the Bible, it does not seem to mean that the present heaven and earth could not be replaced by a new creation. As in Genesis 8:22, these various aspects of the natural world apply and give assurance only "while the earth remaineth."

Again it is emphasized that the "glory and honor of the nations," that is, of all who are saved, will be brought into the city. All that glory and honor really belongs to God and comes from God.

Finally, the readers of the Book of Revelation are warned that when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, only those written in the Book of Life will share its glory. These are the redeemed of all ages. All others will be in the lake of fire, in outer darkness, completely outside the entire new heavens and new earth. Although the city's gates are open, three categories of offenses will, nevertheless, prevent entry: first, anything "that defileth," including anything unclean, impure, or common (in the sense of being touched by any kind of impurity), that is, anything not cleansed by God (Acts 10:15,28; 11:9,18); second, whatever "worketh abomination," whatever practices abomination, or whatever is detestable in God's sight; and, third, whatever "maketh a lie" or practices falsehood or false religion or makes a false profession of loyalty to

Christ.

God keeps records, and the names of all those who can enter the New Jerusalem will be in the Lamb's Book of Life.

