

22. The Completion of the Revelation of God (Revelation 21)

The beast and the false prophet, the great city Babylon, the dragon, Death and Hades, and all those whose names were not written in the book of Life have found their fate. John's vision turns to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. The readers of John's revelation learn about the tree of life, the river of life, and the invitation of the Lord.

The Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-7)

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

John's vision turns to one of a "new heaven and new earth." The new heaven and new earth are also spoken of by Peter in 2 Peter 3:13, "13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." Peter calls the new heaven and new earth the home of the righteous. In keeping with the images of the entire revelation, John describes the new heaven and new earth as the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Revelation 19:8, taught that the righteous acts of the saints adorn the bride. The "home of righteousness" and "righteous acts of the saints" fitly describe the church. Paul had called the church a pure virgin in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." In Ephesians 5:25-33, Paul also speaks of the church as wife of Christ.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. . . . 32 This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

There can be no mistaking the fact that the church is the bride; and if the bride, then, the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, and the new heaven and the new earth. The spiritual nature of Christians and the church transcend the physical earth and the physical heaven that pass away. The saints are not of that physical world. Jesus prayed in John 17:14-17, "14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." In 2 Peter 1:3-4, Peter concurred with this transcending nature of Christians and the church, "3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

The extended metaphor of this present passage finds its exact counterpart in Hebrews 12:22-29, "22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." Once again, the metaphoric chain is taut: the church of the firstborn (Christ), is the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, Mount Zion.

The new heaven and the new earth is the church, the bride of Christ, when John wrote, now when we live, and forever and forever. The church, the bride of Christ, exists now and in all eternity.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The passage where the vision appears is in the past tense. The loud voice from the throne (who is God in verse 7) speaks in the present tense. The present nature of the statements reflects a condition existing as the voice speaks. Therefore, it is the bride, the church, as she exists of earth, of whom the voice speaks. The church in the passages that follows will have a present, yet transcending nature. The voice speaks of the church now and forever.

This transcending nature of Christians and the church receives emphasis from the loud voice. That the dwelling of God is with men and that He will live with them repeats the last promise of the saviour while on earth. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

It is interesting that the dwelling of God is with men, for mankind has generally thought the opposite: that we are going up to heaven to live there with God. The teaching of the gospel is extensive and comprehensive, leaving no doubt that God lives with us now and forever. In Romans 8:9, Paul wrote, "9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you." He repeated the principle repeatedly. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, he said, "16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" 2 Timothy 1:14 reiterates, "14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." John also taught in his letters that God dwells in us now, "12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." 1 John 4:12. In 1 John 4:15-16, John added, "15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us."

That he will wipe away every tear also speaks of the church in its present but also its transcendent form. Even now when earthly troubles overwhelm the saints, they rejoice. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:6-7, "6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." A few verses later in 1 Peter 1:8-9, he concluded, "8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Paul also wrote, in Romans 8:37-39:

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul describes how the love of God equips and strengthens us:

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Christians transcend death itself because of the victory of Jesus over death and the abolition of death as his last enemy. As in chapter 20, for those blessed and holy made by the first resurrection, the second death has no power, and therefore no sadness and no sorrow. (See notes on Chapter 20:6).

The New Order (Revelation 21:5-8)

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The statement that the old order of things has passed away leads directly into the next statement by one seated on the throne, "I am making everything new!" The previous verses show that the new heaven and new earth—spiritual in nature—replace the physical earth and heaven—material in nature. The Holy City replaced the great city, and the heavenly Jerusalem replaced Babylon. The King of kings, the Lord of lords, replaced the beast, the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy replaced the false prophet. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Revelation 11:15). The Lord God Almighty destroyed the dragon. These are the changes made in detail in the course of the revelation. That God is so able to clothe the earth is clear from Hebrews 1:10-12:

10 He also says,

"In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

11 They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

12 You will roll them up like a robe;
like a garment they will be changed.

But you remain the same,
and your years will never end."

The one seated on the throne, commanded John, "Write this down, for these words are faithful and true." The phrase, *these words are faithful and true*, also appears in chapter 22:6 where it directly relates to the impending end of the revelation which is said to be soon taking place. In the very next verse (21:6), the one seated on the throne says in the present tense, "It is done." That he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, echoes Revelation 1:8: "'8 I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" "It is done," refers to the completion of God's revelation and the

accomplishment of his eternal purpose in Jesus. Accordingly Ephesians 1:9-10 taught, “9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” So it was that Jesus said, as the old order passed, on the cross in John 19:29-30: “30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John had heard these words – *it is done* – before in Revelation 16:17: “17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’” This occurrence of the statement followed the prediction in Revelation 10:7, which said, “7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” Thus, what is done here and what must soon come to pass is the final complete revelation of God’s mystery to be written by John, the last of the apostles and prophets. The concluding event of that great mystery was His Christ’s victory on the cross, chronicled and described throughout these pages by John.

The message from the voice from the throne sets the great, concluding dichotomy of the revelation of God – they who overcome will receive God’s great reward, and they who fail receive God’s condemnation. For the righteousness, there is the spring of the water of life. They will be children of God. The fate of the unrighteous needs no explication: “8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” Nor does this list of ungodly acts need elaboration, for in it are all those sins that lead inexorably to the mark of the beast and the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The Bride, the Wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-14)

9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Previously, in chapter 17, one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came to John to reveal the fate of the great prostitute, the great city, Babylon. Now we have one of those same angels coming to John and saying he would show him the bride, the wife of the lamb, which is in verse 10 the heavenly Jerusalem, the Holy City. This study has already concluded repeatedly that the bride, the wife, the Holy City, and the New Jerusalem are the same. That these terms all refer to the church now and to come forevermore is evident in this passage. Once again, the Holy City comes down out of heaven; it is not earthly, for heaven and earth pass away. Although John describes what he sees in material terms, the terms represent something essentially unlike their material nature. This is the very meaning of metaphor and symbolic language.

The first statement in the description is a clear non-symbolic plain language statement, “It shone with the glory of God.” Fortunately, direct insight comes from Hebrews 1: 3, “The son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” When one looks to the bride, the wife of the lamb, one finds this same glory of God. Jesus said in John 14:9-10,

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” Just as Christ reflected God’s glory so does the bride. What they see is not flesh and blood, but the divine nature.

The next statement, “Its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal,” is a simile. Once again, the bride reflects the bridegroom. John had written in Revelation 1:16, “16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”

The city had a high wall with twelve gates. The names of twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates, where stood twelve angels. The symbolism relates the heavenly city to those saints under the Old Testament law who brought the world to Christ. Israel of the world brought the world to the spiritual Israel. The metaphor begins with David who wrote in Psalms 24:7-10:

7 Lift up your heads, O you gates ;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, O you gates ;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty –
he is the King of glory.

Among others, Isaiah also spoke of the gates of the heavenly city in Isaiah 54:11-14:

11 "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,
I will build you with stones of turquoise,
your foundations with sapphires.
12 I will make your battlements of rubies,
your gates of sparkling jewels,
and all your walls of precious stones.
13 All your sons will be taught by the LORD,
and great will be your children's peace.
14 In righteousness you will be established:

In a figure, it was through Israel and the law that the Lord brought us to Christ. In Galatians 3:23-24, Paul wrote, “23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” And again in Romans 10:4, he said, “4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Therefore, through Israel of the flesh all men had opportunity to become this spiritual Israel. In Romans 9:6-8, Paul wrote:

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

The city also had twelve foundations and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Since there are twelve apostles with names on the gates, one might ask which twelve are they, and what of Matthias and Paul. Common in the gospel was the designation twelve apostles or twelve disciples. Paul designated the apostles and prophets as the foundation of God's household in Ephesians 2:19-21:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

Measuring the City (Revelation 21:15-21)

15 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. 17 He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. 18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19 The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

This is the second time for a measuring of the Holy City. The first occurred in Revelation 11:1-2 and excluded the outer court because the persecution of the Holy City, still going on. However, the temple of God, the altar, and worshippers were measured. In the current passage, the trials and temptations are over; the bride, the wife of the Lamb is complete. It is done. The angel will measure the Holy City in its entirety.

The angel measures the city, its gates, and its walls in an extended metaphor that speaks to the city's overwhelming greatness and beauty. The measurements are with man's measure, which illustrates the city's overwhelming proportions. The size of the city is magnified by the large numbers, when it is so measured. The city is a cube of equal width, length, and height: 1,400 miles each way. Each part of the city is laid with the most beautiful stones and metals. Peter reveals the mystery of this beautiful description in 1 Peter 2:4-10:

4 As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
 "The stone the builders rejected
 has become the capstone,"

8 and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble
 and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The very size of the city reflects a magnificence and munificence beyond comprehension. 1,400 miles cubed is approximately the size of the land mass settled by the descendents of Noah in Genesis 10. One must imagine that size cubed, as high as it is long and wide.



The transparency of the street is the same image used for the surround, before the throne in heaven, in Revelation 4:6: "Also before the throne, there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal." The beauty and magnitude of the city defies comprehension.

The Temple: the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (Revelation 21: 22-27)

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

That John did not see a temple confirms the spiritual nature of the Holy City. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of this spiritual city. The spiritual nature of the Holy City is such that there need be no sun or moon for the glory of God give it light. An earthly kingdom or city would need the sun and the moon. Verse 11 has already taught that the Holy City shone with the glory of God. Through gates that will never be closed, the glory and honor that once belonged to the nations will be brought into it. Finally, nothing impure will enter into it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful. Those who enter the beautiful city will be those whose names are written in the lamb's book of life.

The church, the bride of Christ, is now the transcending and eternal Holy City.