

## Commentary on the Revelation

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      - 1) The New Jerusalem: God among His people, 21:1-8
- “And I saw” introduces the seventh vision of John that spans from 19:11-20:8; it is the climatic one.

The era between the fall of mankind and the final judgments upon mankind have concluded with the closing of chapter 20. The garden, the first pristine habitation of God with His people, so blighted and twisted of God’s intended ends for it, has now been restored. The new creation, the New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God among His people in the purity of holiness, has begun!

It is important to recognize the parallelisms between Gen 1-2 and Rev 21-22, the creation of God and the recreation of God. The Bible begins with the creation of a habitant suitable for

God's presence among His people. It ends with the creation of a new dwelling place with God among His people. Between the creations is the fall, the disfiguring of God's creation and the story of its recovery through the triumph of Jesus, the redeemer of the world. This is the city that Abraham sought whose builder and maker is God!

A pastor, Bob Utley, summarized the point quite beautifully. "The new creation will be like the initial creation. Heaven may be a restored Garden of Eden. God, mankind, the animals, and all natural creation will fellowship and rejoice again! The Bible begins with God, mankind, and the animals in perfect fellowship in a garden (cf. [Genesis 1-2](#)). The Bible ends with God and mankind in a garden setting (cf. [Revelation 21-22](#)) and by prophetic implication, the animals (cf. [Isa. 11:6-8; 65:25](#)). Believers are not going to heaven; the new Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven (cf. [Rev. 21:2](#)) and coming to a recreated and cleansed earth. God and mankind are together again (cf. [Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 8:8,10; Rev. 21:3](#))."

a) The vision of God, vv. 1-4

Several facts become clear concerning the "new creation": it will have effected dramatic change; "heaven" comes to the restored earth; there is remarkable discontinuities between the old and new earth; and there are similarities.

(1) The new creation, v. 1

With the destruction of the old creation, the twisted cosmic order, the way is prepared for a new creation, this one without the blight of sin. The word, "new," suggests quality rather than chronological time. The emphasis here is on a dwelling "place" rather than what is in it. There will be a restoration, not a cleaning or purging.

The mention of the absence of "any sea," which often is metaphoric for the unruly, unmanageable, and sinister, indicates that dangers will no longer be present for the

children of God; the threat of evil, the false trinity, its source, cast into judgment, will no longer bother them.

(2) The holy city, v. 2

The new creation of v.1 is now designated; it is the “New Jerusalem” (the city being used metaphorically as the place that God determined to dwell among His ancient people symbolized by the Solomonic Temple). See 3:12.

In this closing major section of the book, John uses several metaphors for people of God (a wedding guest, [19:9], a city [21:22, 9; 22:2], and here a bride); each connotes the sense of intimacy and community. The allusion is to Isa 62:1-5 (the groom, God, rejoicing over His bride, the redeemed).

(3) The presence of God, v. 3

God being among His people is expressed in the image of the OT tabernacle. The wilderness experience of God’s ancient people is in mind, but the emphasis is upon dwelling with God, the “wilderness” is past. Further, in the wilderness access to God’s presence was limited to a single tribe, the Levites, and even more so as the high priesthood was restricted to the sons of Aaron. The presence of God is now the gift to all the people (the terms is plural, “peoples”) of God, not merely the ancient people who embraced the faith of Abraham; in fact, at this juncture, the eternal state, the distinction between the ancient and new peoples of God no longer exists.

(4) The experience of the presence of God, v. 4

In the “New Jerusalem” things that cause grief, anguish, and tears will no longer exist. The one cause for tears that is mentioned is death; physical death will not exist, life being in a vastly different realm of reality. See also 22:3, 5.

A final phrase, “the first things have passed away (NASB),” is more lucidly rendered, “the former things have ceased to exist (TEV).”

c) The declaration to John from God, vv. 5-6

(1) The commission of John, v. 5

There is some discussion as to the occupant upon the throne. In the original creation, God spoke things into existence through the agency of His son. This may be the case in the new creation.

“I am making all things new” does not express a current activity be the certainty of the activity; God is doing this in John’s vision.

John is commanded to write or record in words what he sees; this vision is “faithful and true,” meaning it is trustworthy. These words are repeated in 22:6 concluding the section of the new creation (21:1-22:5). They are also used in the book of Jesus (13:14, 19:11) and God’s speech (22:6).

(2) The proclamation of God, v. 6

“It is done” meaning that the promises of God expressed by the prophets have been fulfilled. In the day of eternity, all of God’s promises will be seen as true!

“Alpha and Omega,” the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, is a metaphor that indicates that God is the master controller of all events, from the inception to the conclusion of time, “the beginning and the end.” See 1:8, 17, 22:13).

The verse ends with a promise which functions as assurance to John readers, as well as an invitation (It is interesting that this is only the second time that God directly speaks in the book; the other is found in 1:8). “Springs” in the Scripture are frequently a metaphor for spiritual refreshment.

d) The application: the promises of God, vv. 7-8

(1) The exhortation, v. 7

The verbal tense of “overcomes” is present indicating continual action or, in the context of the book, the command to persevere in faithful without compromise to the world’s system of values for temporal security and wellbeing. It is clearly an applicational statement; John encourages the churches to continue faithfully in their profession of Christ. This particular phrase, “he who overcomes,” is found in each of the comments to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). It seems in the repetition of this phrase at the beginning and end of his book that John is helping us see that the book is to be read as a literary whole. All the promises to the seven churches are fulfilled as the book ends and the exhortation is the reason John was commanded to write it.

The promises made to the “overcomers” are fulfilled in this concluding section of the book indicating that we should read Revelation through the lens of the seven churches. What God promised to the seven churches will be fulfilled in the future; the seven churches become symbolic also of churches throughout time with promises of reward for remaining faithful, to those who do not compromise the faith.

“To eat of the tree of life in paradise” (2:7, 22:2)

“Inclusion in the New Jerusalem” (3:12, 21:22-23)

“Joining in a city from heaven” (3:12; 21:2, 10)

“Inscription with God’s name (3:12, 22:4)

“Names in the Book of Life” (3:5, 21:27)

“Garments as a reward” (3:5, 21:2)

“Reign with Christ (2:26-27, 3:21; 22:5)

“Deliverance from the second death” (2:11; 21:7-8)

The inheritance of “these things,” as a reward for faithful service, is eternal fellowship with the Father; it is the crown of eternal life granted to all God’s children.

(2) The warning, v. 8

The warning found here is in form of a literary technique to show John’s readers once more the difference between those who follow Jesus, however difficult that may be, and those who chose not to do so.

The description of those who turn back, likely in the context of suffering, and thus reveal that they were never truly faithful followers of Jesus is found in several words: “cowardly,” meaning those who change their allegiance “unbelieving” follows immediately in the text. Six descriptors further explain the types of people these are: abominable (a reference to idolatry [17:4]), “murderers (persecutors of the saints),” “immoral (involved in temple prostitution),” “sorcerers (witchcraft and magical conjuring),” “idolaters,” and “liars (the word has reference to false teachers in 2:2 and ethnic Jews claiming to be God’s true people and are not in 3:9).” Similar lists are found in 21:27 and 22:15.

The judgment of these unbelievers is described two ways: “the lake that burns with fire” and “the second death.” Thus, the casting into hell, eternal punishment, and the “second death” are synonyms.

2) The New Jerusalem: The climax retold, 21:9-22:5

The final section of the body of the book repeats and amplifies what has been stated in 20:1-8. It adds details not previously stated by bringing together such images as “the city,” “the temple,” “Garden of Eden,” and “new creation” into a single picture of God dwelling with His people forever and ever. It brings to conclusion the recreation of creation, commenced after the fall of the creation (Gen 3), in the new creation, the new garden. The city, the New Jerusalem, is the people of God adorned as a bride to live in the presence

of God (21:2, 9-11 ["I will show you the bride... he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem... v. 9-10]).

When I think about the description of the eternal abode of God's people, I gather two major impressions: first, it is altogether beautiful in appearance and radiance, the glory of God shining forth filling the "city." Second, it is a safe place, a protected place, where fears, torments, disappointments, adversaries will not exist any longer. For those in the seven churches, and us in ours, we will finally be home. The wall is thick and high with angels guarding each gate, not to keep us out, but safe from intruders. The vision of the city is cubic suggesting that from below, from above, or horizontally nothing can come to harm us anymore. It is a safe place from all the dangers and vicissitudes of this life; it is a place of aesthetic beauty that will enrapture us with delight and pleasure.

a) The overall vision of the city, vv. 9-14

(1) John's invitation to see the city, v. 9

This verse is quite similar to the phrasing of v. 2 indicating that John is repeating himself. The phrase "Come here, I will show you..." is repetitious of the phrase found in 17:1, the description of the harlot, the "city of Babylon." John is drawing a contrast between the woman, the seductive harlot, and the beautiful bride of the Lamb.

(2) John's sight of the city, vv. 10-14

(a) Its beauty, vv. 10-11

John is transported away and is shown a city, a magnificent city, descending from heaven that he designates as "her," meaning the bride of the Lamb (see vv. 2-3). The clothing of the bride is the glory of God.

(b) Its wall, v. 12a

The protective walls surrounding the city, the bride, the people of God, most likely are the promises of God revealing His covenantal faithfulness to His people. Jerusalem was the city God promised to

place His name, to dwell among His people. John uses the city metaphorically as the eternal habitation of God with His people, the new temple of God.

(c) Its gates, vv. 12b-13

Twelve gates allow access into the city, an angel guards each of the gates. Each gate bears the inscription of a tribe of God's ancient people. It seems in the vision that they are symbolic of wholeness or completeness.

(d) Its foundation, v. 14

The wall is supported by twelve foundation stones each having the name of an apostle of Christ, the Lamb. The twelve tribes and the twelve apostles are symbolic of those who have inherited the promises of God in ancient Israel and the church.

b) The measurements of the city, vv. 15-17

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that some scholars see the shape of the city, being a cube, as suggestive of the Holy of Holies, the presence of God among God's ancient people (the Holy of Holies was also a cubic structure [I Kings 6:20]). In this line of reasoning the Holy of Holies was a prefigurement of God's greater presence among His people later.

(1) The city, vv. 15-16

The measuring of the city suggests the protection of God's people, as did the sealing of the 144,000 (7:3). In chapter 11:2 the temple was measured, but only the inner court; here it is the entire city-temple. The point seems to be that in measuring the "city" in 21:15-16 the protection of God's people is complete. Clearly this is a vision of the greatness of the city.

(2) The wall, v. 17

While the city is a perfect square and cube stretching 1,500 miles in three directions, the walls do not rise to the height of the cube. If the cube's dimensions are taken literally, John's image would be roughly the size of the Greco-Roman world of that day. This would



perhaps imply that the nations will come into the city, meaning the redeemed of the nations. It may simply mean the inhabitants will be Jews and Gentiles.

c) The material of the city, vv. 18-21

(1) The wall, v. 18a

The wall is of jasper; a stone that John saw in his vision of God on the throne (4:3). The point seems to be that God's glory, the glory of His holiness, will shine forth in the city.

(2) The city, v. 18b

It would seem that, like the wall, the city is made of metals and stones that reflect light; in this case, it is the light of the glory of God. The gold would remind readers of the glory of the Solomonic Temple (I Kgs 6:20-22).

(3) The foundation, vv. 19-20

The twelve precious stones that make the foundation have a clear parallel in the breastplate of the high priest that, in turn, has a counterpart in the Holy of Holies.

(4) The gates, v. 21

If the wall is over 200 feet high, the gates, each of a single stone, is impressive. I take it that John is describing his impression of the city's utter beauty. The language here is figurative, but he is using a figurative manner to describe a real observation.

d) The internal features of the city, vv. 22-27

What is found in this section is an expansion of vv. 1-8; thus, it serves in the same manner as vv. 9-21. It adds information to create a more complete picture.

(1) The omissions in the city, vv. 22-24

(a) No temple, v. 22

There is no temple in the city, because what the temple, and even the tabernacle, prefigured is there; God among His people.

(b) No lights, vv. 23-24

There will be no luminaries in the city because God

will be the light. In the Genesis account of creation, “light” appeared on the first day but luminaries on the fourth. Thus, the “light” of the day was the presence of God within the creation. In the new creation, the New Jerusalem, God’s light will beautify His people; there will be no luminaries because God is the light.

(2) The occupants of the city, vv. 25-27

(a) Access to the city, v. 25

I take it that when John refers to the nations coming into the eternal city, he means believers who enter to worship (5:9-10). Remember this is a vision so the details should not be the focus, rather the impression. People will worship forever in the presence of God.

The idea of no night suggests that the city will never be closed; access will be unhindered to the people of God. It would be wrong to conclude that nations will exist outside the city and come into it since the city is the totality of the new creation. The nations, the Gentiles of faith, belong to the city.

(b) Glory brought to the city, 26

(c) Unbelievers excluded from the city, v. 27a

(d) Entrance into the city, v. 27b

The phrase, “Book of Life,” occurs five times in the Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15). It suggests the security of the people of God.

## Applications

1. Though a subject of comment in previous teaching points, the issue of the unity of the Bible focusing on one central theme is important in reading the book. The bookends of the Bible (Gen 1-2, Rev 21-22) tell us much.
  - a) That God has a purpose for all that he allows and we can rest confidently in Him that our knowledge is not the limits of His mercy, nor our pain outside His care.

- b) That God has called us to be faithful to Him in our earthly sojourn, in spite of the difficulties it may entail, with the constant pressure to compromise convictions or shade of moral dereliction.
  - c) That God has prepared a place for us, as Jesus promised (John 14:1-3).
  - d) That the bright destiny promised to us should be an encouragement as we journey along.
  - e) That the garden God created and was tragically blighted is on a time clock. There is a new “garden” coming.
  - f) That God longs to be in the presence of His people so that they can behold His beauty and respond in praise and adoration forever.
- Does this not thrill you? Does this not give you some insight as you read the Bible? Does this not help you to put today in perspective?
2. The great message in our passage is that God is preparing a place of safety, protection, and security for us. Can you imagine a world without fear, without threat, without intrusion? We can draw several applications from this: first, are you living your life focused on creating your own protective comforts (financial portfolio, family, the quest for health) that, while important are greatly exaggerated foundations for peace and security? Do you value securing the comforts of this life as your ultimate source of protection? Do you live in hope, do you teach hope, as the only secure place of rest today? Are you burdened and frightened by the newspaper and social media reports? Are you finding comfort in the elimination of fears or in a person? We all long for security, but there will come a day when our earthly encouragements will fade with the infirmity of age or memory loss. What is the Lord telling us through this book?
  3. Pause to imagine a world without predators (stalkers of our children that prey on innocence and naivety, exploiters of get-rich-quick schemes with self enhancement motivation, human trafficking, international conflicts, ethnic cleansings); that is heaven in a nutshell. You and I will be safe forever. Does that not thrill you? Does that not motivate you to do all you can now to bring heaven in some small, shadowed degree into people’s lives now? What are you doing to make earth look a little like heaven?
  4. While we focus on the benefits of heaven for God’s children, I think we miss the primary point of why God created the first garden and why He is recreating it now and will finalize it in the new garden.

The real point is not us; it is God. God does all that He does for Himself (Rom 11:36). God, who possesses no lacks, no needs, created to multiply the extension of the display of His glorious beauty (thus the cosmos). He did so to extend His inter-Trinitarian praise beyond Himself to receive it back upon Himself. God desires the praise of His people, not because He has a lack, but because it is His altogether a self-oriented, holy desired to be endlessly glorified. Heaven is about us, but it is more about God. Do you see heaven as a place of escape from this world only or a place where your service to rendered God praise will be unsullied forever, a place where the praise of God will be endless, and as such you will be most fulfilled?

5. The shape of the “city” entices me; as we indicated, it is a perfect cube, a six-sided structure (a top, a bottom, and four sides), actually a metaphor or picture of something. It is the “place” of God’s presence and the protection of God’s people. Additionally, the cubic structure is in the shape of the Holy of Holies, the presence of God’s dwelling among His people in the tabernacle and the Solomon temple (Christ was that temple when He dwelt among us). The Holy of Holies prefigured the presence of God in the “New City.” The Bible is an amazing book, many books but a single storyline or metanarrative. Further, the dimensions of the city are also symbolic, but John uses things he knows to picture greater things, invisible things, throughout the Revelation. The dimensions are equivalent to the Greco-Roman world of John’s day. It seems reasonable to say that John sees the “city” as being inhabited by the nations of the world, meaning redeemed people, Jews and Gentiles, from the nations of the world.

I must tell you that there is a thrill, inner delight, excitement that has come from studying, meditating upon, and praying through this book that I hope you experience as you we have read it together week after week. It brings tears to my soul, as well as eyes, to think of the majesty, greatness, and condescending mercies of our God. You and I have a real home to look forward to someday. I hope you are as thrilled and excited as I am! I simply want to jump for joy inside and out!

6. In depicting the city, its twelve gates are guarded by angels. In the vision, they are constantly open, which is strange because there is no

longer a need to have them closed. Predators cannot enter because they are confined outside the domain of the city in an everlasting hell. Nor will there be a need to close them to keep the saints in since their wandering days are over. So why is their reference to these angels? I think the presence of them is to indicate the degree of our protection; we are safe from darkness, pain, death, sorrow, intimidation, and threat. The devil is gone from us, his minions (demons and humans) vanquished forever from us. The angel in Gen 3:24 was stood at the entrance to the garden because we were unfit to enter it; here they are stationed to keep us in it. What does this tell me? Between the action of the preventive angels (refusal entrance in to the original garden [Gen,]) and the action of these angels something has happened that has changed God's attitude toward us forever. It is because of the action on our behalf by the Lamb who was once slain but now lives (5:6). Sin pushed us out of God's guarded presence; forgiveness through the Son of God welcomes us in forever with guardian protection from above. Can you thank God enough? Do you thank Him every day? Does you life your life in a world of praise and thankfulness?

7. The point of describing heaven for us is not only to fill us with hope of a bright forever tomorrow; it is to fill us with resolve to live for God today. It is to give us encouragement when our surroundings are not so encouraging. Today, many Antipas' (2:13) will offer themselves to God by giving themselves up as dying sacrifices expressive of their uncompromising loyalty to Jesus Christ; others will face intimidation and privation. They will join the ranks of the martyred-many before God's throne pleading, "How long of God will you allow justice to be unrequited (16:10)." For most of us sacrifices of obedience are asked. This book was written for us to encourage us in our sacrifices for Jesus not to despair, compromise, or quit. Are there areas in your life today where you are considering compromising for the sake of convenience? Will you heed God's instruction and, instead, do what honors your Lord? Will you let temporal distress cause you to dishonor the God of love who sacrificed for you far more than the exigencies of today requested of you? God will welcome you, when it is your time, into heaven!