

Hope of Heaven, Part 3

Revelations 21:8-14

This is week three of our study of the vision of the new heavens and new earth (the new city) that John records for us in Revelation 21:1-22:6. Thus far, we've seen that the new city (the city of God) is to be understood in contrast with the city of man that we live in today. What makes the city of God so beautiful is not just what it does contain, but also what it doesn't.

In the City of God there will be no mothers mourning the death of a child, no criminals unjustly set free or innocents wrongly convicted, no one sleeping on the street with no place to go, no one suffering and dying from disease or lack of food, no one getting rich on the backs of others or trying to decide which bill not to pay at the end of the month. *In the city of God there will be no sorrow, no injustice, no corruption, no suffering, no poverty, no senseless violence, no pain, no tears no death.*

We've also seen that the city of God is referred to as a "new" city and that this word "new" is a redemptive word. God is not planning to vaporize all we know and replace it with something new. Rather, He is going to fix what's broken. The sick will be made well. The filthy will be made clean. Everything that is ugly and distorted by sin will be made beautiful again. But fix *what?* Heal *what?* Cleanse *what?* And, what will He make beautiful? We'll see that John is not talking about a *what*. He's talking about a "who."

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5(a) (ESV) – *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...*

1) What kind of a house is Peter talking about here? Who are the living stones to which he's referring?

1 Corinthians 3:9 (ESV) – *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

2) What this "building" that Paul is talking about here? Of what is it built?

Revelation 21:2-3 (ESV) – *And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”*

3) As a matter of review from last week, what is John saying about the "city" when he then directly ties it to bridal language? Who or what is the bride all throughout the bible and particularly in the New Testament?

4) Also, what do these verses in Revelation teach about the definition of a city? What's the key ingredient? Is it infrastructure? Good leadership? Cultural activities? Effective zoning plans?

5) How would you finish the following statement: "The city of God is the place where God and man _____"

Revelation 21:6-8 (ESV) – *And (Jesus) said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

6) According to these verses, who are the people of God and who are not?

7) What is the difference between the people of God and those who are not?

8) How does verse 8 make you feel?

9) What effect should the reality of heaven and hell have on us as followers of Jesus?

Revelation 21:9-11 (ESV) – *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and (he) spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.*

10) Jewels can only reveal their beauty in the presence of light. What does this tell you about the glory that will be ours in the city of God?

Revelation 21:10-13 (ESV) – *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.*

11) Compare the layout of this city with that of the encampments that the Israelites set up in the wilderness around the tabernacle of the Lord in Numbers 2. What do you think John is communicating about the New City by borrowing this pattern? Why is God drawing this connection?

Revelation 21:14 (ESV) – *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

12) Why do you suppose that the gates of the city bear the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (the names of Jacob's 12 sons) *BUT ARE BUILT* upon the foundation stones bearing the names of the Apostles? Didn't the tribes come before the Apostles? What might this say regarding the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel?

Matthew 16:18 (ESV) – *Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (Greek—"A stone"), and on this Rock I will build my church."*

13) Who or what is the "Rock" in this passage? What does this say about how God fulfills His promises (see also Rev. 21:19-20)?

14) How is the Church (with a capital "C") doing at attacking the gates of hell? And what does today's lesson teach us hangs in the balance?

For next week...

Revelation 21:15-21 (English Standard Version)

¹⁵And the one who spoke with me^(A) had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia.^[a] Its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷He also measured its wall, 144 cubits^[b] by^(B) human measurement, which is also^(C) an angel's measurement. ¹⁸The wall was built of^(D) jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. ¹⁹^(E) The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and^(F) the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

Footnotes:

- a. Revelation 21:16 About 1,380 miles; a *stadion* was about 607 feet or 185 meters
- b. Revelation 21:17 A *cubit* was about 18 inches or 45 centimeters

Cross references:

- A. Revelation 21:15 : Revelation 11:1
- B. Revelation 21:17 : Deut 3:11; Revelation 13:18
- C. Revelation 21:17 : Revelation 21:9
- D. Revelation 21:18 : Revelation 21:11
- E. Revelation 21:19 : Isa 54:11, 12
- F. Revelation 21:21 : Revelation 22:2

This text is rich with imagery. Take some time this week to meditate on the various descriptions of this holy city, it's size, scope, beauty, and imagine what it might be like.

Look for symbolism, correlations to other scripture, familiar numbers, etc., in the imagery God revealed to John.

In general, if you saw this vision with your own eyes, what your impression be? What would be your response?

How does your impression of this city differ from the "City of Man" in which we now live?