

Hope of Heaven

Part 4

For the last 4 weeks we've been studying John's vision of the new heavens and earth in Revelation 21. We've seen that his primary emphasis is on the new city, or the city of God. Last week we developed the idea that the city of God is *not* the giant superstructure that John describes in this vision. Rather, the city of God is you. It's me. It's all of the people of God, both Jew and gentile, throughout all of the ages, who have been saved by Christ and followed Him into this New City. *We are the foundations, the walls, the superstructure.* John employs the metaphors and images and poetic language of a city in order to tell *you* what *you* will be like in the new heavens and new earth and also something of what life will be like for you there.

A Quick Review...

Read 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, it's radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.*

We saw two major themes last week that we'll see again:

Theme #1: God redeems our suffering

(cf. Rev. 1:3-4) When the angel tells John he's going to show him the "bride," what does he show him? The city! The city and the bride are one. *You* are one of the living stones that make up the city! John also reveals God's people as shining (literally, "having the glory of God") like precious jewels, diamonds (better translation than jaspers)! As we saw last week, black, dusty lumps of coal are turned into diamonds by means of great heat and pressure.

1) Can you identify a time in which you experienced suffering that God used for good in your life and/or in the life of someone else? If you're comfortable doing so, share it with your group.

2) Is there suffering in your past that you still don't understand? That seems "unredeemed?"

Part of the hope of heaven, it seems, is that when you get there, you'll see how even your deepest sorrows and pain were a part of God's perfect justice, love and wisdom. In fact, God will reveal how he used *everything in your life* to turn you from a lump of coal into a diamond!

Major Theme #2: The City of God is where *God dwells with his people!*

Revelation 21:12-14 (ESV)

¹²It 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—¹³on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Last week we also saw that in John's vision the city of God (God's people) resembles the encampment of ancient Israel as they wandered in the desert, setting up camp around the tabernacle which represented the presence of God in their midst. Note that in John's vision the heavenly city is four-square and oriented to the east. The three tribes of ancient Israel encamped to the east of the tabernacle correspond to the 3 gates in the eastern wall of the heavenly city, which are named after 3 of the tribes of Israel, etc. (also cf. Rev. 1:3, the words "dwelling place" are actually "tabernacle" in the Greek language). We'll see this theme again this week: *The city of God is the place where God dwells with his people! John cannot be more emphatic about that.*

Here's where we pick up from where we left off last week.

Revelation 21:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵And the one who spoke with me 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. Its length and width and height are equal.

John tells us that the heavenly city is 12,000 stadia in length, width and height. That's about 1,500 miles!

3) Realizing that this city is the people of God, what do you think that these staggering dimensions are meant to communicate about God's people and about what life will be like for us in the new heavens and new earth?

4) John describes the new city as a perfect cube. Can you think of anything else in the bible which was created as a perfect cube? If you can, what do you think that John is trying to communicate here?

5) Why do you think that God's presence with his people is such a huge theme in this vision? What will be special about the kind of presence with God that we will enjoy in the new heavens and earth?

Revelation 21:17 (ESV)

¹⁷He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

144 cubits is only about 216 feet. That's a mighty small wall for a 1,500 mile high city. Clearly, John is speaking in exaggerated (i.e., metaphorical, poetic) language to try to communicate to us who or what we will be like in the new heavens and earth and what our lives will be like there. With that said, John then notes that the measurements there are equal to the measurements here.

6) Why do you think that John notes that a human measurement is the same as an angel's measurement? What is his point in telling that to us? (cf. Rev. 21:5)

Revelation 21:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. ¹⁹ 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 chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

John tells us that the foundation stones of the city, representing the 12 Apostles who preached the gospel upon which the city of God is built, are covered over in precious stones and then he lists them all for us. The image is that of a ziggurat, which was a stepped pyramid with its roots in the ground and its top in the heavens. In ancient days, it was viewed as a stairway to heaven and contained a shrine at the top which was often painted in a blue enamel to make it appear to simply fade into the heavens. The 12 jeweled foundations here form the 12 steps of the ziggurat with the cuboidal city perched on the top as the "shrine" where God and man would meet.

7) What do you think the point of this image is?

8) How does this compare with the Garden of Eden, which was also 4-square, oriented to the east, on a mountain (the rivers flowed down from it), and associated with precious stones and gold (Gen. 2:10-14). What do the similarities between this ziggurat and the Garden of Eden suggest?

Revelation 21:21 (ESV)

²¹And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

Alas, we come to pearly gates. Please note that St. Peter isn't standing there in order to question anyone! Anyway, this is the first substance out of which this metaphorical city is noted to have been built that isn't something that is dug out of the ground (jewels and precious metals). The pearl is formed organically inside the lonely, dark, submerged home (shell) of an oyster. It is also formed by the oyster as a means of overcoming the pain or suffering caused by some form of irritant in it's shell (sand, etc.)

9) What do you think that John is trying to convey about our lives in the world to come by telling us that the gates, the means of entrance into the city, are made of pearl?

For next week...

Read Revelation 21:22-27

²²And^(AQ) I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city^(AR) has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for^(AS) the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light^(AT) will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth^(AU) will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and^(AV) its gates will never be shut by day—and^(AW) there will be no night there. ²⁶They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But^(AX) nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's^(AY) book of life.

AQ [Revelation 21:22](#) : [John 4:23](#)

AR [Revelation 21:23](#) : [Revelation 22:5](#); [Isa 60:19, 20](#); [Revelation 21:25](#)

AS [Revelation 21:23](#) : [Revelation 21:11](#)

AT [Revelation 21:24](#) : [Isa 60:3](#); [Revelation 22:2](#)

AU [Revelation 21:24](#) : [Revelation 21:26](#); [Isa 60:5, 16](#)

AV [Revelation 21:25](#) : [Isa 60:11](#)

AW [Revelation 21:25](#) : [Revelation 21:23](#)

AX [Revelation 21:27](#) : [Revelation 22:14, 15](#); [Isa 35:8](#); [52:1](#); [Ezek 44:9](#); [Joel 3:17](#); [Zech 14:21](#)

AY [Revelation 21:27](#) : [Revelation 3:5](#)

Think on these things:

Why is there no need for sunlight? What does the “Light of the Lamb” represent?

“By its light the nations will walk...” What common social struggle does this address?

“The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it...” What will leaders do with their position?

“It's gates will never be shut...” Why will there be no need to close the gates?