

## **The New Jerusalem or Heaven on Earth**

When a Sunday school teacher quizzed her fifth-graders about how one gets to heaven, she got all correct answers: One doesn't get there by being good, giving away money, or being a nice person. "Well, then," she asked, "how does one get heaven?" Before any of the regular students could answer, a boy who was visiting the class that week shouted out, "You gotta be dead!" (David Jeremiah. *What You Always Wanted to Know about Heaven*, 100).

The visitor was correct. "It is appointed to man to die." If you are a believer when you die or are raptured, the last two chapters of God's Word describes Heaven your future eternal home.

John ends his prophecy of end time events in the book of Revelation with two chapters devoted to Heaven. God reveals to John that there will be a New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. The New Heaven is the really the first and second heaven with the curse removed and the New Earth is our planet that has been renovated with fire (2 Peter 3:7). The New Jerusalem is the third Heaven, where God dwells now, but in eternity will be on earth in the New Jerusalem according to 21:2-3.

So literally, Heaven will be on earth in the New Jerusalem. An angel gives John a guided tour. The guided tour begins from a distance from an aerial view where the architecture of the City is described. Then the angel proceeds inside to admire the interior decorations of the New Jerusalem.

The point of the tour is not for us to be awestruck with the beauty of the City. The New Jerusalem is a literal city with symbolic meanings so we will be awestruck with God and His Lamb.

***I. The New Jerusalem Described Externally (21:10-20) This is the aerial view.***

**A. The City is brilliantly illuminated with all the outward manifestation of all of God's attributes i.e., His glory (21:11).**

The City is crystal clear so nothing blocks God's glory. The City is not the center of attention but God and Christ who light it up.

The City reminds us of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:14 and 16: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." God lets His light shine for eternity for His glory.

***B. A Great and High Wall (21:12).***

When the walls of Jerusalem were down in the OT, God's people were vulnerable to attack and thus God's name was in reproach (Nehemiah 2:17). The enemy would taunt God's people, "Can't your god keep the walls up around His city?" This reproach on God fired Nehemiah to rebuild the walls.

When we see these massive walls around the New Jerusalem we will want to sing with great Reformation warrior for justification by faith, Martin Luther, "A mighty fortress is our God a bulwark never failing."

**C. Twelve Gates guarded by angels (21:12-13).** Robert Thomas says these are large gate towers of which smaller gates were a part. On these gates are the names of the 12 Tribes of Israel who represent the Old Testament people of God.

The Old Testament people of God will be living in the New Jerusalem protected in this gated community with angels as security guards. These OT believers would remember that one angel in the OT killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night and was not even winded at the end.

We will be forever reminded of our eternal security in Christ.

**D. Twelve Foundations (21:14)** are visible unlike most foundations and bear the names of the 12 apostles who represent the New Testament people of God or the Church. Israel has not replaced the Church in this age nor the age to come.

Also in Ephesians 2:20, Paul says that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles."

Those massive foundations will not let us forget that we are in Heaven because our lives are founded on the Word of God.

**E. The City is 1400 miles square (21:15-16).**

This is the city Abraham looked for according to Hebrews 11:8-10. If this city were to land on America instead of Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem would cover the USA from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian mountains to California. That is 2 million square miles of land area just on the bottom floor.

Randy Alcorn in his book on Heaven estimated if there are 12 feet between each floor there could be 600,000 floors which equal 1.2 billion square miles. There be will room enough for all the believers of all the ages and all the babies who have died or been aborted since Roe vs Wade in 1973 which is about 1 million each year.

The city is an eternal object lesson of the greatness of God's grace.

**F. Walls of Jasper are 216 feet thick (21:17-18).**

John will now return and give additional information about the previously mentioned sections of the city. It is as though, John could not tell us everything at once about the glorious city. It would overload our circuit and blow all our fuses.

The wall is measured by an angel. A. T. Robertson interprets this phrase, “Though measured by an angel, a human standard was employed” (Word Pictures in the New Testament, VI, 474). The New Jerusalem is not a state of mind.

J. Oswald Sanders denies the literalness of John’s description: “Gates of pearl and streets of gold are plainly figurative and should be so interpreted. So, to the question, Is heaven a place? The answer is, Yes and no. It is not a place in the material sense in which, say, Jerusalem is a place while heaven is not an actual city, it is like a city.”

Millard Erickson says the New Jerusalem is both a state of mind and a literal city. To which Wayne Grudem responds: “Something either is a place or it is not a place” (Systematic Theology, 1159). Jesus promised his discouraged disciples in John 14:3, “I go to prepare place.” End of argument.

The walls like the city are crystal clear so again they will not filter the glory of God.

***G. The Twelve Foundations are twelve different jewels which allow the glory of God to shine through like a giant prism of beauty (21:19-20).***

While the wall is crystal clear each of the 12 foundations is a different color such as deep blue, bright green, red and white, deep red, gold, pale-green, sea-green, yellow-green, violet, and purple. The glory of God shines through these foundations like a spectacular prism reflecting the glory of God for all to behold.

***H. The Gates are Pearls (21:21).***

These pearls are not the size of peas strung together to make a necklace. These pearls are as big as large tower gates in a wall nearly as thick as a football field.

Pearls speak of beauty out of pain. The little oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around this offending article that may be has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster layers over it and over it, again and again until it builds a pearl (Stephen Davey's sermon).

As we go in and out of the City we will be prompted over and over again of the gigantic sufferings of Christ. “Those pearls, hung eternally at the access routes to glory will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree (John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, 254).

These last two chapters are the climax to the Revelation of Jesus Christ so we are not surprised that Christ will be fully unveiled in the New Jerusalem.

Now the angel giving John and us the guided tour takes us through the gates of pearl into the City to continue our worship and wonder at God's greatness.

## **II. The City is now Internally Described (21:21-22:5). Not only is God a master architect but He is also a skillful Interior Designer.**

### ***A. Streets of Gold (21:21)***

What men die for and sacrifice health and family for (gold) will be asphalt in Heaven. The gold is transparent so that we can see through it but more importantly so that God's glory can shine through it. Our eternal focus will not be on any literal material. Nothing in the City draws attention to itself. It is just a means for us to worship God.

This is no argument against the literalness of the City. My gold wedding ring which is never ending until broken by some outside force symbolizes my commitment to my wife till death us do part.

### **B. No Temple (21:22) or central place of worship as in the OT and NT**

Now the entire City is the temple filled with God's presence. We don't go to worship as with other central places of worship because we are always in the presence of God to worship. The whole City has become the Holy of Holies.

The Shekinah glory that filled the Holy of Holies once a year will in eternity penetrate every corner in The New Jerusalem constantly.

### ***C. No Need of the Sun (21:23)***

Because there is no night the gates are never closed. Even Disneyland, "the happiest place on earth" closes its gates at night. All who would disturb the city, all those who love darkness rather than light are now in the Lake of Fire (21:27).

### **D. River of Life (22:1-2a)**

The River of Life constantly flows down from the throne of God right through main street symbolizing our never ending eternal life. This river of life is also crystal clear so we are not awestruck with this cascading waterfall as if we were standing at Niagara Falls.

The River of Life originates in the throne of God. There is no submersible pump continuously recycling the River of Life. The River of Life forever reminds us that our salvation also originated with God and is eternal.

### ***E. Tree of Life (22:2b)***

The Tree of Life spans the street of gold through which the River of life flows. The Tree of Life provides 12 different kinds of fruit each month for our enjoyment not preservation. This is perhaps a reminder that God has given us “all things richly to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17) so that we unceasingly praise Him for all of His unspeakable gifts.

Not only does the fruit symbolize the luxuries of Heaven, but the leaves picture our eternal wellbeing. The River of Life symbolizes our eternal life while the leaves symbolize our eternal wholeness which includes physical as well as mental and emotions.

Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic, wrote of speaking to a class of mentally handicapped Christians. They thought it was great when she said she was going to get a new body. But when she added, “And you are going to get new minds,” they broke out into applause. They knew of their unique struggle; they knew of their limitations. Heaven offered for them unique healing.

Joni wrote further, “I still can hardly believe that I, with shriveled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body – light, bright, clothed in righteousness, powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope this gives someone like me? Or someone who is cerebral palsied, brain-injured, or who has multiple sclerosis. Imagine the hope this gives someone who is manic-depressive. No other religion, no other philosophy literally promises new bodies, new hearts, [new emotions] and new minds. Only in the gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible [promise] (Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, p. 286).

The therapeutic leaves reminds that one day "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" (Revelation 21:4).

#### ***F. Worship at the Throne (22:3-5)***

So far in our tour of God’s City we have seen God’s glory penetrating through clear, diamond like walls that surround a transparent gold city and a crystal clear River of Life.

But now grand finale and the crescendo are reached in 22:4: “We shall see His face.” This is the text on which Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled the Heaven in Heaven. This stands in contrast with John’s first statement of this subject in John 1:18, “No man has seen God at anytime.”

What Moses in his natural body was not permitted we in eternity in our resurrected and glorified bodies will be allowed.

Jesus promised, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

This is what suffering Job longed for, “though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

Walvoord believes seeing of God is behold His glory: "Immediate access to the glory of God will characterize the saints in the eternal state....The fact that they shall see His face demonstrates beyond question that these are glorified saints (1 John 3:2)" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 332).

MacArthur similarly writes: "The saints in the New Jerusalem will also see God's face. Being perfectly holy and righteous, they will be able to endure the heavenly level of the glorious light from God's presence without being consumed---something impossible for humans on earth (Exodus 33:20) (*Because the Time is Near*, p. 327).

"Viewing the glory of God is a limited privilege in the here and now but barriers will disappear when the redeemed enter the bride-city" (Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, p. 487).

"This seeing of God 'face to face' has been called the beatific vision, meaning 'the vision that makes us blessed or happy'. To look at God changes us and makes us like him: 'We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). This vision of God will be the consummation of our knowing God and will give us full delight and joy all eternity: 'in your presence there is fulness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore'" (Ps. 16:11) (Grudem, p. 190).

Now we have access to God's presence through prayer but then we will talk with Him face to face in His unfiltered and spectacular glory.