

## Revelation 21 - A New Heaven and a New Earth

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COURSE  COMMENTARY 

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### 21:1 - new heaven and earth

- **a new heaven and a new earth**

The first heaven and earth were restored prior to the Millennial Kingdom, but death still continued and the dead still were in the earth. At the conflagration of the first heaven and earth, the earth and sea gave up the bodies of the dead ([Rev. 20:11-15](#)). The new heaven and earth are without sin and death ([Rev. 21:4](#)). It was revealed to the Old Testament prophets that the first heaven and earth would perish ([Ps. 102:25-26](#); [Isa. 51:6](#)). Isaiah saw the new creation ([Isa. 65:17](#); [66:22](#)), but not in strict chronological sequence.

- **the first heaven and first earth has passed away**

The restoration prior to the Millennial Kingdom was not a new creation like Isaiah described or John would have said that the *second earth* had passed away. The continuance of the dead within the dust of the earth until now also shows this is the first and only *new* heaven and earth since the original order. Jesus emphasized that *God's Word is more permanent than our present reality* ([Mat. 5:18](#); [24:35](#); [Mark 13:30](#); [Luke 16:17](#); [21:33](#)). Knowing that the present order will not last should be a motivator for godly priorities ([1Cor. 7:29-31](#); [2Pe. 3:11-14](#)).

- **no more sea**

This also indicates the new creation *follows after* the Millennial Kingdom where the sea still existed.

### 21:2 - the New Jerusalem

- **the New Jerusalem**

In the same way the earthly Temple corresponds to a greater reality in heaven, so the earthly Jerusalem corresponds to the heavenly Jerusalem. Although the earthly Jerusalem was restored during the Millennial Kingdom ([Isa. 62](#)), the New Jerusalem has been in heaven being prepared for the residence of the saints ([John 14:2-3](#)).

- **prepared as a bride**

"Prepared" is *hetoimasme'nen*, perfect passive participle: *having been prepared*. The passive form contrasts with the active form of preparation given for the bride at the marriage of the Lamb ([Rev. 19:7](#)). This bride is *inanimate*, whereas the bride at the marriage is *animate* -- comprised of resurrected saints. It is God who has prepared her ([John 14:2-3](#); [Heb. 11:8-10](#)). She is a bride both in the sense of *the city itself* (Jerusalem, the city of God) and *her residents* (the glorified saints). See the discussion concerning the [Marriage of the Lamb](#).

- **adorned for her husband**

"Adorned" is *kekosmeme'nen*, a perfect passive participle: *having been decorated*. Used of furnishing a room (cf. [John 14:1-3](#)). God previously promised that she would be decorated with precious stones and that He would rejoice over her as a bridegroom over his bride ([Isa. 54:1](#); [62:1-5](#); [Eze. 16:1-8](#)).

## 21:3 - tabernacle of God with men

- **the tabernacle of God is with men**

"Tabernacle" is *skene'* : lodging, dwelling, tent. God's *habitation*. Through His work on the cross, Jesus created the temple of the believer -- the Holy Spirit indwelling the heart of the believer (1Cor. 6:19; 2Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22). But born-again believers in this age do not yet enjoy the fullness of intimacy with God as they will in the eternal state (1Cor. 13:12).

- **He will dwell with them and they shall be His people**

"He will dwell" is *skeno'sei* from the same root word as *skene'*. The same root word describes how God *dwelt* among men in the incarnation (John 1:14). His *habitation* will be with men and He will *inhabit* (commune) with them! This is the *greatest promise in all of Scripture* -- the culmination of the scarlet thread of redemption and the elimination of all the **Temples through history** where God met *in a limited way* with sinful man. In the New Jerusalem, man will be without sin and see God *face to face* (Rev. 22:4) !

## 21:4 - no more death

- **there shall be no more death**

The Old Testament prophets has seen this day (Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14). Death was not part of the original created order, but came as a result of the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:19). Even though Christ abolished death in His work at the cross (2Ti. 1:10; Heb. 2:14-15), the shadow of death continued even past His Second Coming and into the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 65:20). Prior to the new creation, the last enemy that would be destroyed, death (1Cor. 15:26), was cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14). The curse of Genesis 3 is now removed completely (Rev. 22:3).

## 21:5 - all things new

- **Behold, I make all things new**

"New" is *kaina'* : new in quality or kind, better. *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him* (1Cor. 2:9). This redemption is much broader than the individual redemption of sinful men, as important as that is. It includes the redemption of the *earth* and the entire *created order* (Rom. 8:19-23).

## 21:6 - It is done!

- **It is done!**

"It is done" is *ge'gone* , perfect tense: *it has become!* The words emphasize the completion of the new order with effects which extend forward in time. This recalls the words of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished!" *Tete'lestai* : *it has come to an end, been brought to completion, accomplished!* His death brought closure to the old order and legally brought the new reality. Now, the legal reality has become physical reality.

- **I will give of the fountain of the water of life**

"Free" is *dorea'n* : *as a gift, without payment, undeservedly, without reason*. The water of life is a metaphor for *redemption* (Ps. 36:6; Isa. 12:3; Jer. 2:3; Zec. 13:1; John 7:37-38; John 4:10-14; Rev. 7:14; 22:1, 17). Redemption is infinitely costly. The price of redemption was the death of God in the person of the Son of God (Rev. 1:18). No man could pay it so God paid it. This is why it is free (Isa. 55:1) ! No man could afford to contribute even the least to obtaining redemption!

## 21:7 - he who overcomes

- **He who overcomes shall inherit all things**  
"He who overcomes" is *ho niko'n* : the overcoming one. This inheritance includes all the promises to the overcomers of the seven churches ([Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21](#)). By identification with the True Overcomer ([John 16:33; 1Jn. 4:4](#)), believers inherit all that is Christ's ([Rom. 8:15; 1Cor. 3:21](#))! The inheritance is never at risk of loss: incorruptible ([1Pe. 1:3-4](#)).
- **I will be his God and he shall be My son**  
The inheritance is based upon our adoption into the family of God ([Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 1:3-5; 1Jn. 3:1-2](#)). The relationship between the overcomer and God is one of intimacy, modeled after that of the Son with the Father ([John 1:1](#)).

## 21:8 - part in the Lake of Fire

- **Works of the Flesh**  
These are the works of the flesh ([Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5-7; 1Ti. 1:8-10](#)).
- **shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire**  
These are the ones who *continued in these activities without repentance*. During this age of grace, all who practice these sins can turn to God to be washed, sanctified, and justified by the Holy Spirit. This was the experience of some in the church at Corinth ([1Cor. 6:9-11](#)). The unrepentant stood in the Great White Throne judgment and, not being found in the *Book of Life*, they were cast into the Lake of Fire ([Rev. 20:15](#)).

## 21:9 - the Lamb's wife

- **I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife**  
There is an intentional contrast between two *great cities* : the *Harlot*, Babylon and the *bride*, the New Jerusalem. Concerning Jesus' title as Lamb, see our discussion of [Revelation 5:6](#). See the discussion concerning [Jerusalem's marriage to God](#).

## 21:10 - carried in the Spirit

- **he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain**  
John is transported by the Holy Spirit, as when he first ascended to heaven in his vision ([Rev. 4:2](#)) and when he was shown the Harlot ([Rev. 17:2](#)). Ezekiel had a similar experience when he was shown the millennial Jerusalem ([Eze. 40:2](#)). The high mountain may be a vantage point, or it may also correspond to the site upon which the New Jerusalem descends, like the *mountain of the Lord's house* during the Millennial Kingdom ([Isa. 2:2-4; Zec. 8:3-4](#)). This would provide the necessary elevation for the River of Life to flow from the city ([Rev. 22:1](#)).

## 21:11 - having the glory of God

- **having the glory of God**  
This is the *Shekinah glory*, the visible manifestation of God's presence. Because of God's radiant glory, the city has no need for the light of the sun or moon ([Isa. 66:19-20; Rev. 22:5](#)). The light and clarity of the city speak of her purity, which is analogous to what is said about the living bride ([Eph. 5:25-27](#)).

## 21:12 - twelve gates

- **twelve gates... and names written on them, which are the names of the children of Israel**  
There are three gates on each of the four sides of the city ([Rev. 21:13](#)). "Children" is *hio'n* : sons.

The names of the *tribes* (representing Israel) are on the gates and the names of the *apostles* (representing the Church) are on the foundation stones ([Rev. 21:14](#)). Even in eternity, a distinction is made between the two peoples of God: Israel and the Church, the body of Christ. Both will inhabit the eternal city.

## 21:13 - three gates

- [three gates on the east... north... south... west](#)

The layout of the gates is similar to the camp of Israel in the wilderness where groups of three tribes camped in each of the four cardinal directions ([Num. 2](#)). Since there are no Levites camping around a tabernacle here, the layout is most probably like that of the millennial city ([Eze. 48:30-35](#)). Again, we see that the earthly arrangement (both in the wilderness and the Millennium) reflects a greater eternal reality.

## 21:14 - twelve foundations

- [twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles](#)

In a similar way to how the tribes are memorialized by the gates, the apostles are memorialized by the foundations. The apostles are said to be the foundation of the dwelling place of God in the Spirit, the church ([Eph. 2:19-22; 3:5; 4:11](#)).

## 21:15 - measure the city

- [a gold reed to measure the city](#)

"Reed" is *me'tron ka'lamon* : a measuring stick. Ezekiel saw the Millennial Temple which was measured by an angel who had a similar device ([Eze. 40:3-5](#)). Previously, John was instructed to measure the Tribulation Temple ([Rev. 11:1](#)). The New Jerusalem is measured as an indication of her importance to God ([Zec. 2:1-5](#)) and to indicate her *real physical dimensions*.

## 21:16 - laid out as a square

- [twelve thousand furlongs](#)

The base of the city is square, like the millennial city proper ([Eze. 48:16; 48:30-35](#)).

- [twelve thousand furlongs](#)

"Furlongs" is *stadi'on*, a distance of about 1/8 mile. Depending upon the exact length of a stadia, the city is between 1,380 and 1,500 miles on a side. The base is immense--covering 63% of the forty-eight contiguous states of the USA. Some find this too fantastic. But, remember: this is a *new creation* within which "all things are new!" We have no idea how large the earth is or any other aspect of physics. And how fantastic is such a city in light of God's ability to create an *entirely new* heaven and earth?

- [its length, breadth, and height are equal](#)

The entire city is fashioned after the "holy of holies" from the Temple which was 20 cubits long, wide, and high ([1K. 6:19](#)). The entire city is a "holy of holies."

## 21:17-18 - measured its wall

- [Then he measured its wall; one hundred and forty-four cubits](#)

A *cubit* is the length of the forearm of a man, about 18 inches (0.46 meters). The dimension of the wall is about 216 feet (65.8 meters). Since the wall is said to be "great and high," ([Rev.](#)

21:12), and the city itself is of immense height, this dimension is probably the thickness of the wall.

- **The construction of the wall was of jasper... pure gold like clear glass**

Both "pure" and "clear" are from the same word: *katharo's*, clean, pure, free from dirt. Those who inhabit the New Jerusalem are without sin. The city is translucent and pure--the glory of God shines even through its walls.

## 21:19-20 - precious stones

- **The foundations of the walls of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones**

"Were adorned" is *kekosmeme'noi*, perfect passive participle: *having been decorated*. This was how she was prepared for her husband (Rev. 21:2 cf. Isa. 54:11-12). Eight of the twelve stones are like those of the high priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:17-20), but attempts to correlate all twelve have met with limited success. Besides, the foundations memorialize the *apostles*, not the tribes. In any event, the visual result is no doubt stunning!

## 21:21 - twelve pearls

- **The twelve gates were twelve pearls**

Each gate is made of a single large pearl. Like the other materials of the city, the pearls denote great value and beauty. The pearl, being from a Levitically unclean source (an oyster Lev. 11:10), also carries the connotation of *Gentile* or *unclean*. In order to move the gospel to the Gentiles, Peter was given a vision of unclean animals and told to eat them. He refused. God replied that he must not call common (*koi'nou*) that which God *had cleansed*: this referred to the Gentiles.

Here, John is told that nothing "that defiles" (*koi'noun*) will pass through the gates into the city (Rev. 21:27). The pearls stand as a witness that those which were once defiled have been cleansed and are guaranteed access.

Jesus paid for both a treasure hidden in a field (Israel) and a pearl of great price (the Gentiles) (Mat. 13:45-56).

## 21:22 - no temple

- **But I saw no temple in it for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple**

Throughout history, God had purposed that there be a Temple where a holy God could meet with sinful man in a limited way. Now man is sinless and can have full intimacy with God. This was made possible by the work of Jesus on the cross (Mat. 27:39; John 2:19; Col. 1:19; Rev. 5:9). In a sense, the *entire New Jerusalem* is a Temple. There is now no separation between the sacred and the mundane. Significantly, God the Father and God the Son are *equally* considered to be the Temple. Jesus is equivalent to the Father--Jesus is God (John 1:1; 10:30; Col. 2:9; Rev. 1:8, 18)!

## 21:23 - no need of sun or moon

- **The city had no need of the sun or of the moon**

Most take this passage to indicate there will be no sun or moon in the eternal state. But all the passage says is that the *city* has no need for the sun or moon because God's glory provides its light. Eternal promises which are tied to the continuance of the sun and moon seem to imply they may continue in the eternal state (Ps. 89:35-57; Jer. 31:35-37).

- **the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.**  
Again, the Son and Father are equated as God. Both produce the *Shekinah* glory. The Old Testament prophets saw that one day God's glory would shine brighter than the sun ([Isa. 24:23](#); [60:19-20](#)). Previously, the sun and moon never shone in the holy of holies which was only lit by God's glory. What has happened? *Man is now within the holy of holies with no separation from God!*

## 21:24 - kings of the earth

- **the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light**  
Some find the mention of "nations" (*e'thne*) to be surprising in this context. It indicates that the redeemed are from many different nations ([Rev. 5:9](#); [13:7](#); [14:6](#)). It also implies (with "kings" below) the continuance of national entities in the eternal state.
- **the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it**  
These kings appear to have their primary residence or place of activity *outside* the city, but bring gifts of worship *into* the city. Some have suggested that these may be those left living at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. Perhaps the original conditions in the Garden of Eden--Adam and Eve living in sinless perfection--may be recreated in the eternal state. We discuss this suggestion further in the next session.

## 21:25-26 - gates never shut

- **its gates shall not be shut at all**  
"Not" is the double-negative, *ou me*, indicating there is *no possibility* that the gates will ever be shut. This is because there is nothing unclean to require the gates to be shut. The gates remain open for the nations and kings to access God and the Lamb and to obtain the leaves of the Tree of Life ([Rev. 22:2](#)).
- **there is no night there**  
There is no night *there*. That is, *in the city*, for the glory of God continually illuminates it.

## 21:27 - the Lamb's Book of Life

- **there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles**  
"Defiles" is *koino'n* : unclean. All who inhabit the eternal state had been washed in the blood of the Lamb ([Rev. 1:5](#)) and are now incapable of sin.
- **only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life**  
This does not imply that the sinful are refused access to the city at the gate. The sinful are eternally incarcerated in the Lake of Fire in "outer darkness" and will never be found here. This statement reiterates the necessity of exercising faith in the work of Jesus Christ in order to enjoy the new heaven and earth with the New Jerusalem.

For additional information on this topic, see the [commentary](#).