

The New Jerusalem, Part 3: A City Foursquare (Revelation 21:1–21)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/3/2016)

Introduction

The final chapters of Revelation describe the glorious new creation in its full consummation at the return of Jesus Christ.

These verses declare that when we are gathered to Jesus Christ, we are not going to some ethereal and non-corporeal existence to float on clouds and strum harps forever. We are going to inhabit a real place prepared for us.

It will be the restored Eden, the temple of God, where we will have full and free access to behold the endless glories and beauty of Jesus Christ forever.

The text before us reminds me of 1 Corinthians 2:9: “*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*”

I. A Brief Review

1. A *vision* of four glorious truths (vv. 1–4; Isaiah 65:17).
 - a. “*First things have passed away*” and the *sea* is no more—the woes inflicted because of sin (with its chaos and rebellion) are gone forever.
 - b. A *new home*, a perfect home prepared for a *glorious bride*, comes from God out of heaven (John 14:1).
 - c. An *announcement* of the fulfillment (the *Immanuel* theme)—God is truly dwelling with man.
 - d. A realization of a *new intimacy* with God as He personally comforts His own with everlasting joy and gladness.
2. A *message of assurance* from the throne (vv. 5–8).
 - a. John is commanded to *write* what is affirmed as “*trustworthy and true*” by the sovereign Lord (v. 6). A threefold guarantee of the message is issued in chapter 22: (1) by God, the Author (22:6); (2) by Jesus, the revealer—the faithful and true witness (22:16; cf. 3:14); and (3) by John, the faithful recorder (22:8).
 - b. The Bridegroom joyfully announces His intention (v. 6; 22:13, 14).
 - c. Two *promises* are given in support the grooms’ intention (vv. 6–8).
 - 1) The *thirsty* soul shall be satisfied without cost (v. 6).

The first addresses the *need* of the regenerate heart (7:16, 17). Are you a really thirsty saint? Have you that deep and urgent longing for something more of Christ and His kingdom? Or are you satisfied with this life and with what this broken earth provides (3:14ff)?
 - 2) The *overcomer* will inherit all things (v. 7).

This second promise involves the spiritual conflict which God’s people face. Each letter to the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 closed with a similar promise: “*To him that overcomes, I will . . .*” The promise relates to two things: (1) the inheritance given to

God's adopted sons and (2) their legal authority as sons. Christians who have suffered in the world, often being dispossessed and homeless, are now rewarded with royal authority over the nations (11:17, 18).

d. These blessings are contrasted with the fate of the unregenerate sinners (v. 8).

Some commentators suggest that the contrast is between true believers who by God's grace overcome sin and triumph in spite of great opposition and those who are hypocritical mere professors betraying Christ's kingdom through self-interests. The judgment of the wicked has already been described in chapter 19. The word translated "part" in v. 8 is a word related to property that is part of an inheritance.

II. A Glorious Portrait

1. The loveliness of the Lamb's bride is sketched out (vv. 9–14).

a. The city presented here is not a place, but *people*—the bride herself, the church of Jesus Christ.

1) This glorious woman is contrasted to the shoddy counterfeit, the harlot Babylon. This fact is demonstrated by observing that the same angel holding the seven bowls of wrath shows John both women (comp. 17:1 and 21:9). Both visions end with the same affirmation of truthfulness (19:9; 22:6). In both cases, John falls down to worship the angel and is rebuked for it (19:10; 22:8, 9). Also note that John is carried by the Spirit into the *wilderness* to see the harlot (17:3), but to see the bride, John is taken to "*a great, high mountain*" (21:10). *Wilderness* is a place of spiritual drought and banishment. *Mountains* are symbolic of God's dwelling place (Psa. 48:1, 2).

2) This glorious woman is described as a city of massive dimensions and precious materials. The description given should immediately alert us to the fact that it is symbolic (see 1:1).

b. The descriptive given is intended to leave the impression that the reality is beyond John's ability to relate adequately.

1) The glory of the bride is compared to jasper, one that is clear as crystal. Jasper is a fairly common opaque stone that is brownish yellow to red in color. It is never clear nor is it particularly precious. It certainly does not belong with rubies, emeralds, sapphires, or diamonds. John is telling us that the renewal and transformation experienced after Christ's return will be unbelievable. Jasper will be transformed into a gemstone of exceeding radiance and beauty. The same is true of gold. Gold is not transparent now; it will be then (v. 21). Both a common stone and a precious metal are used to show the glorious beauty of those who belong to Jesus, having been transformed by His grace and glory.

2) The bride is also described in terms of having high walls and guarded gates. These gates number twelve, a number that appears regularly: twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve foundations, and twelve apostles of the Lamb. The number does not end here, as we will note under the next heading. The cherubim that guard each gate remind us of those who prevented sinful Adam from returning to the Garden of Eden.

God is careful to assure us that this city is secure—His people are secure, very secure! Never again will the church be trodden under the feet of the enemy (11:2).

These angels are also there to beckon the nations to come in. The twelve gates face the four directions of the earth. No longer is the Israel of God one blood but is composed of believers from every tongue tribe and nation (*comp.* 7:1–8 and 9–17).

- 3) The twelve foundations inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles speak of the Word of God. Nothing is more important to the church than God’s Holy Word. It is our food, our light, our guide, our instruction, our comfort, and our joy. Jim Elliff recently posted that he has read the Bible for fifty years. Now he finds the Bible to be the only book he really wants to read.
2. The portrait is completed with dimension and color (vv. 15–21).
 - a. John, like Ezekiel of old, is given a measuring rod (Ezek. 40:1–4). A measuring rod signifies ownership and possession.

Dennis Johnson writes in his commentary, *The Triumph of the Lamb* (loc 3401): “In Ezekiel 40–42 the precise measurement of each and every feature of this vast visionary temple (extending for 91 verses) dramatizes God’s promise to the Jewish exiles in Babylon that the promise of his presence and love will yet see new and unimaginable fulfillment. That fulfillment focuses on the incarnation of the Son of God, ‘tabernacling’ among us (John 1:14; 2:19–21) and reaches its consummation in the new Jerusalem, which needs no separate building to function as a sanctuary, ‘for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple’ (Rev. 21:22). The dimensions that John is about to report dwarfed those of Ezekiel’s temple, showing not only the symbolic nature of the vision but also, more importantly, the breathtaking majesty and magnitude of Christ’s church.
 - b. The dimensions of the city defy the imagination.* It is 12,000 stadia four-squared. In American terms, it is 1,365 miles wide and high. That dimension puts the top of the city in the path of low-orbit of man-made satellites. The city is a cube like the Holy of Holies in the temple. A cube has 12 edges.
 - c. The stones show that it is a building of quality and irresistible attractiveness. (Compare Ex. 28:17–20 and Ezek. 28:12–19.)

Application

ARE YOU MAGNETIZED BY JESUS’ BEAUTY?

“Yes, He is altogether lovely! This is my Beloved—and this is my Friend!” (Song. 5:16).

“Perhaps the most serious charge that can be brought against modern Christians is that we are not sufficiently in love with Christ. The Christ of evangelicalism is strong, but hardly beautiful. It is rarely that we find anyone aglow with love for Christ. I trust it is not uncharitable to say that a great deal of praise in conservative circles is perfunctory and forced and downright insincere. When we become magnetized by Jesus’ beauty and adore Him—we will want to pour ourselves out at His feet. We don’t have to be urged to do it. No one who knows Jesus intimately can ever be flippant in His presence.”

—A. W. Tozer, <http://www.gracegems.org>

“If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed!” (1 Cor. 16:22).