



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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**Volume 12 Issue 38**

**September 29, 2013**

## **The Glory of Heaven, Part 2**

Revelation 21:24-26, “And the nations [literally, “the gentiles,” “the nonChristians”] shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.”

These words that John wrote concerning our final state the New Jerusalem at first glance seems rather confusing. Since Revelation 21 is a description of the New Heavens and the New Earth how is it that there can be gentiles/pagan nations, and by implication, non-Christians coming into the city? The answer is seen when we understand that John is using the prophetic tool of telescoping where the future is seen in light of the present. Mounce in his commentary on

Revelation put it this way:

The solution to the 'problem' of the presence of the unregenerate in the age to come is that John has taken over from the prophets the language and figures of speech that presuppose the continuance of Gentile peoples on the earth after the establishment of the eschatological era. The prophetic perspective was to speak of the future in terms of the historical conditions of the present. (Mounce, 1997, p. 397)

John essentially is saying here, *"Think of the most notable and glorious king or ruler. If he this moment were in heaven, he would be humbled; he'd bring that which he considered to be most glorious and lay it at Christ's feet!"* To which we ask, "Why would a pagan king 'bring his glory' and lay it at Christ's feet? What does this mean?"

To answer this, think back with me to Jacob and the Near Eastern practice when a lesser person wanted to honor a greater person. When Jacob met his older brother for the first time after betraying him, what did he do?

Genesis 32:13-19, "...Then [Jacob] selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, 'Pass on before me, and put a space between droves.' And he commanded the one in front, saying, 'When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, "To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?" then you shall say, "These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us."' Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, 'After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him.'"

It is this practice that lies behind what is being described in Revelation 21:24-26. If the greatest of all men on this earth today could stand in heaven, they would willingly and quickly give the best of all that they had, they would forfeit their glory, in light of heaven because heaven is a glorious place.

And this is the point of Revelation 21. Revelation 21:24-26 is the climax of a passage that was written to illustrate the glory of heaven (Revelation 1:9-23), which raises these questions: What is it about heaven that is so glorious? If the greatest and most powerful men today would be as nothing in heaven, what must heaven be like?

### **Physical Description of Heaven, Revelation 21:10-21**

Revelation 21:10, "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain,

and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God<sup>1</sup>”

The Apostle John wrote Revelation rather late in his life. He had been exiled to the Island of Patmos “on account of the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 1:9). At this time, John was shown a Revelation of the things “...which are, and the things which shall take place after these things” (Revelation 1:19).

It was during this revelation that John was carried (not physically but in a vision) to a “great and high mountain” on the New Earth<sup>2</sup> and there granted a glimpse at the “holy city” the New Jerusalem. Now notice that which struck him most about the city, and thus heaven.

Revelation 21:11, “Having the glory of God, her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper”

The image here and in the proceeding verses is one of intense glory and splendor. As John saw the city descending to the earth, it resembled a sparkling, crystal, diamond-like stone blazing with the glory of God’s very nature! In fact, the rest of this chapter is nothing more than an expansion of this theme. As the elements of this Heavenly City are described, each detail is a further picture of the glory of our heavenly home!

### Heaven’s Security, Revelation 21:12-14, 21a

Revelation 21:12a-14, “It had a great and high wall... [skip down to v. 14 where the thought continues] And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”

In the ancient world, the first thing that provided for the security of a city was a wall. Now amazingly, the New Jerusalem is going to have a wall even though in the final state all of God’s and our enemies will have been cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-15)! That means we no longer will need protection! Yet we are told here that the New Jerusalem is going to have a wall! Revelation 21:17 says that the wall is “seventy-two yards” tall. Revelation 21:25 further tells us that the gates of these walls, “... shall never be closed.” So why have walls?

Think back to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived without the protection of any wall. Adam was the one called to protect the Garden! Yet what did he do? Nothing! Speaking of Eve:

Genesis 3:6, “...she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

Adam was there the entire time, and yet did nothing to protect Eve! Yet such will not be the case in the New Heavens and Earth. The prophet Zechariah speaking of the New Jerusalem wrote:

Zechariah 2:3-5, "And behold, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was coming out to meet him, and said to him, 'Run, speak to that young man [Zechariah], saying, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls...'"

So wait, here we are told that the City won't have walls! But then again, it will:

Zechariah 2:5, "'For I,' declares the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

So the New Jerusalem is pictured as having walls, yet the gates of the walls will never be closed AND the walls themselves really will be the Lord Himself. Sound confusing? Maybe a little; just don't miss the point behind the description. Because the walls of the New Jerusalem serve no functional purpose, they therefore proclaim a glorious message; the New Jerusalem is Inviolable thus safe and secure! In Christ we need never fear and will never fear! God is our protector! Never again will we be vanquished or even harassed by sin! That is the testimony of the walls, what about the gates?

Revelation 21:12-13, "It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west."

Revelation 21:21, "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl..."

Once again by this we see the glory of Heaven! While pearls may NOT be quite that special to our generation, to the readers of this letter, the description would have been nothing short of amazing! Pearls were the most highly valued gems in the ancient world and often were bought as investments, much as diamonds are today. The Talmud spoke of pearls as being beyond price. Some Egyptians and Romans held the pearl in such awe that they worshiped it. It was reported that Lollia Paulina, the wife of Roman emperor Caligula, often wore a vast fortune in pearls in her hair and on her ears, neck, wrists, and fingers. Cleopatra is said to have owned two extremely valuable pearls, each of which would be worth several million dollars in today's market. And as a sign of one's extravagance: when a ruler wanted to flaunt his wealth he would sometimes dissolve a pearl in vinegar and drink it in his wine!

All of this points to the HIGH esteem that was placed on the pearl in Christ's day, making it, as noted above, the most valued gem in the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> Why were pearls so costly and desirable? First, they are beautiful. Second, they were small and easily transportable- great amounts of wealth could be kept in a very small place. Third, they were extremely difficult to harvest! Diving for pearls was quite hazardous- in fact, many divers lost their lives or ruined their health in obtaining the oysters that contained the pearls. As such, pearls were extremely precious and often rare. Finally, there was little, if no, preparation required before selling the pearl.

Combined, these factors led to the extreme value placed on the pearl in ancient times. And so, to read that the gates of the New Jerusalem each will be composed of “one large pearl” speaks of the incredible glory of Heaven! And yet, could it be that there is more implied here? Why pearls? Why not have the gates made of something else valuable? One suggestion given was on account of how the pearl is made! In Christ’s day as in our own, most knew that pearls only came after an oyster had been injured from a small pebble trapped in its shell. From this perspective, isn’t it amazing that the gates which served as the means of entrance into the New Jerusalem would be made of a substance that only could be created through the injury of another?

Regardless, notice the glory of heaven.

- Walls that speak of the security of heaven.
- Gates that speak of the sacrifice required to enter into heaven.

The picture presented just in the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem speak volumes when it comes to the glorious revelation of Heaven!<sup>4</sup> And yet we see it in the dimensions of heaven as well.

### Heaven’s Dimensions, Revelation 21:15-17

Revelation 21:15-17, “And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod [which would probably have measured about 10 feet in length; that was the typical length of a measuring rod in Christ’s day] to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.”

Those are some interesting measurements which translate into this picture. First the New Jerusalem will be perfectly symmetrical AND it will be huge! It will be a massive cube 1,500 miles square and 1,500 miles high! As such, it will cover a surface area of 2.25 million square miles the distance from Maine to Florida squared! In other words, the New Jerusalem is a place of immense size and unearthly majesty and beauty; it is huge and there is room for all! Christ said this speaking of heaven:

John 14:2, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.”

Christ is describing the gigantic house of a king, well-known at the time, in which dwelling place after dwelling place would be connected one to another to form one household large enough to house the king, his family, his extended family, and so on through the ages. It draws to mind

the image of a Spanish villa with house connected to house all facing an inner court.

You say, how could such a structure exist in which ALL the Saints of glory could live? It would be enormous! Christian, heaven will be enormous! 1,500 miles squared and 1,500 miles high! There will be room for every child of God who has ever lived, is living, or will live!

And yet there is more here. Did you notice that the description given here of the New Jerusalem tells us that it will be the shape of a cube? What image would have come to the mind of a First Century Jew with this description? Only one, but let me give you some background.

In the ancient world, the square was a symbol of perfection. That is why the City of Babylon was built to be perfectly square as many other cities in the ancient world. However, beyond the perfection of a square was the cube, this was the “Moby Dick” of all geometric shapes at the time. No ancient city was built into a cube; they couldn’t be. Such a structure could not exist, *except in Palestine!* Speaking of the time when the holy of holies was built 1 Kings records this:

1 Kings 6:20, “And the inner sanctuary *was* twenty cubits in length, twenty cubits in width, and twenty cubits in height, and he overlaid it with pure gold.”

Did you get that? The only cubed-shaped structure/building known to the ancient world, in fact, THE standard of perfection, was the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God on the earth! Accordingly to a Jew reading this passage, it would be this incredibly sanctified and holy place that would come to mind. Dr. Mounce put it this way:

This particular shape would immediately remind the Jewish reader of the inner sanctuary of the temple... the place of the divine presence. A city foursquare would be the place where God has taken up residence with his people. (Mounce, 1997, p. 380)

With this we see the awesome glory of Heaven. Heaven is nothing less than the Holy of Holies for eternity! It is the Sanctuary of God, the place of God’s presence with man! The place of ultimate perfection!

## Heaven’s Walls, Revelation 21:18

Revelation 21:18, “And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.”

The description is almost incomprehensible.

- Jasper: In Christ’s day, the word for “jasper” was not limited to the type of stone we call jasper, but could designate any translucent precious stone.
- Pure Gold, like clear glass: while this sounds strange to us who are only familiar with

gold that is not transparent, John is describing a precious metal so pure that it is translucent!

The emphasis in both of these descriptions is on the transparency of the walls and buildings of the New Jerusalem! Though made from the most costly jewels and metals, nevertheless the entire heavenly city will appear as though it was made of glass which no doubt is why there is no need for the sun; in fact God's glory will radiate the entire city making it dazzling, brilliantly shiny!

Revelation 21:23: "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb."

Wow! And yet the description continues.

### Heaven's Foundation Stones, Revelation 21:19-20

Revelation 21:19-20, "The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper [a translucent rock crystal green in color]; the second, sapphire [a deep blue stone with spangles of iron pyrite]; the third, chalcedony [a green silicate of copper found near Chalcedon in Asia Minor]; the fourth, emerald [a green stone]; the fifth, sardonyx [a layered stone of red (sard) and white (onyx)]; the sixth, sardius [a blood-red stone commonly used for engraving]; the seventh, chrysolite [which lit. meant "gold stone"]; the eighth, beryl [a green stone]; the ninth, topaz [a greenish gold stone]; the tenth, chrysoprase [an apple-green, fine-grained hornstone, colored by nickel oxide and highly translucent]; the eleventh, jacinth [a bluish-purple stone similar to the modern sapphire]; the twelfth, amethyst [a purple transparent quartz crystal]."

All these precious stones have one thing in common; they are brilliantly colored jewels. There are various greens, sky blue, red, golden, violet, and other radiant hues. That is the foundation of the New Jerusalem! Now along with the glass-like gold and translucent walls, this forms a picture of unbelievable and indescribable beauty. As God's glory radiates throughout the entire city, colors are mixed to form an awesome and indescribable appearance! To use the words of Dr. Mounce again:

The city is magnificent beyond description. As the eternal dwelling place of God and his people, it is described in language which continually attempts to break free from its own limitations in order to do justice to the reality it so imperfectly describes. (Mounce, 1997, p. 383)

With this we are brought full circle, back to Revelation 21:22-22:2.

Revelation 21:24, "And the nations shall walk by its light [the light of the glory of God

that permeates the city], and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.”

In light of the incomprehensible Glory of Heaven, the greatest of all kings on this earth is nothing! They could offer the most glorious mountain range or the largest treasure, and it would be as nothing in comparison to what awaits us in Glory! Truly, Heaven is a glorious place!

The question of the hour is this one: “Is this a literal city?” While this passage seems literal enough, notice Revelation 21:9:

Revelation 21:9, “And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’”

With this, he then showed John the New Jerusalem! After describing the worldly system of Satan and his wicked followers- and so not a literal city, but the evil system of Satan which is flourishing today and will flourish in the last day- the angel told John:

Revelation 17:18, “And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”- by way of note, this woman is contrasted here with the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem!

These passages raise the possibility that what is being described here is NOT simply a city, BUT (1) the heavenly reign and rule of God and/or (2) the Bride of Christ- which is the church. So which is it? Is Revelation 21 a literal description of the physical characteristics of Heaven? Or is this passage a figurative description of the bride of Christ?

While commentators vary as to their response, the fact that John went to such great lengths to describe the physical measurements and its appearance have led many to believe, and I think rightly, that this must be a literal place which houses the bride of Christ and so a literal city!<sup>5</sup>

However, the fact that this New Jerusalem clearly is in contrast with the Whore of Babylon<sup>6</sup> AND is called “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” has led many a commentator to believe, and I think rightly, that this is a figurative description of “the descent of the eternal order” (Mounce, 1997, p. 378)<sup>7</sup> which is nothing less than the manifestation of the reign of God amongst His people and so His church.

So is this a description of a literal city or a figurative one? As with many of the prophecies of God in the Old Testament which have a dual reference,<sup>8</sup> the answer is, “YES!” Beasley-Murray put it this way:

...the symbolism of the bride and the city depict fundamentally the same thing, namely, God’s people in fellowship with their Redeemer. 21:9ff., therefore, virtually identifies the bride with the city- they appear together. To say then that the saints rule with Christ and that the city of God comes down from heaven to earth is to portray a single



reality. (Beasley-Murray, 1974, pp. 315-316)

So herein we see the glory of Heaven. As a city, it is the dwelling place of God, the eternal Holy of Holies! As the body of Christ, it is a bride that has been glorified and made ready to meet and fellowship with God forever! This is why men and women of old were willing to suffer so much for the cause of Christ in this life- because they had their eye on this New Jerusalem!

Hebrews 11:13-14, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own."

Family of God, stop living for the things which perish, but for that which shall endure for eternity! Set your mind on the things above! Listen to that which encourage the Apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

William Walsham How wrote this poem praising God for His servants whom He has sent to this world on account of which we believe today:

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;  
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well fought fight;  
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

For the Apostles' glorious company,  
Who bearing forth the Cross o'er land and sea,  
Shook all the mighty world, we sing to Thee:  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

For the Evangelists, by whose blest word,  
Like fourfold streams, the garden of the Lord,  
Is fair and fruitful, be Thy Name adored.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

For Martyrs, who with rapture kindled eye,  
Saw the bright crown descending from the sky,  
And seeing, grasped it, Thee we glorify.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
All are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,  
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,  
And win with them the victor's crown of gold.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;  
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;  
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blessed.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of glory passes on His way.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
And singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

I can't wait! Can you? Until then, we must allow this reality to encourage and strengthen us for life and service before us today!

## **Bibliography**

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Testament). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> N.B., this could refer to the source rather than an action. If the former, the statement simply is to say that God is the source of the New Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> This is in contrast to the desert to which John was carried to witness the doom of Babylon, cf. Revelation 17:3.

<sup>3</sup> In light of this, 1 Timothy 2:9, Matthew 7:6, and Revelation 21:21 take on a whole new meaning.

<sup>4</sup> That both the 12 tribes of Israel and the names of the 12 apostles are joined together in one picture speaks of the unity of the Covenant of Grace. The Israel of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament are combined to comprise the outer boundary of the New Jerusalem!

<sup>5</sup> This is the view of R.C. Sproul in *Surprised by Suffering Tape Series*, Leader's Manual, Session 12, pg. 111 and John MacArthur in *The Glory of Heaven*, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> See Leon Morris's work in *Revelation*, TNTC, pg. 241, and G. R. Beasley-Murray's work in *Revelation*, NCBC, pp. 315, 318.

<sup>7</sup> See also Hoekema's work in *The Bible and the Future*, p. 285.

<sup>8</sup> For example, for Isaiah 7 to make any sense at the time of its writing, it clearly referred to a maiden living at the time of Isaiah, and yet, from Matthew 1:23, we also know that it referred to Christ. This phenomenon in biblical prophecy is known as Dual Fulfillment: One prophecy with two intended events in mind.

## VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 29, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.