

## Series Revelation

### Scripture #33 Revelation 21:9-22:5

The first eight verses of chapter 21, which we thought about in the previous message, described God's concluding activity of this age. John was given a vision of the "new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God." Today we will learn about this "new Jerusalem," the eternal dwelling place of God's people.

Let me put the "new Jerusalem" in the context of Scripture. God created the heavens and the earth to be a temple for His presence, His dwelling place. The universe had to be on a grand enough scale so that His infinite power and greatness could be displayed and understood by His human creatures (*see Romans 1:20*).

In order for the universe to be a suitable temple dwelling place for God, it had to be without any faults. It had to be perfect in purity in keeping with God's holy character. The earth was formed and filled with all the physical components necessary to keep it functioning as God intended. Adam and Eve were then created with all the spiritual qualities necessary for God to be with them and to interact with them. There was genuine love, intimate fellowship, and open communication between these first humans and their Creator. Their relationship was the perfect blending of the spiritual nature of God with the physical nature of mankind. It was a time when the infinite God and the finite creature were in perfect harmony. God was Immanuel; He dwelled among His creation.

The book of Genesis does not explain how long God was able to have this special relationship with Adam and Eve, but at some point in time, because of their disobedience, the perfect holy environment that God had created became contaminated by sin. As a result, the personal and intimate interaction between God and mankind was severed. It was no longer possible for God to dwell in His earthly "tabernacle." The entire creation was cursed (*Romans 8:19-22*), and, in place of the harmony and restfulness and enjoyment of the smoothly functioning order of God's good creation, Adam and Eve began to experience lives of painful toil.

The commitment of God to be close to humanity did not change when Adam and Eve disobeyed His instructions and He had to remove His presence from them. His overall plans and purposes were not altered, in fact, could not be altered because they were eternal. The Old Testament is our written record of how God began to reestablish His presence among the human race. The promises and covenants, prophets and priests, the system of laws and animal sacrifices, the special centers of worship represented by the wilderness tabernacle and Jerusalem temples, and even the miracles and other displays of supernatural power, were evidence of what God did to reach out and be close to His fallen humanity.

In the New Testament, God took other significant steps in order to bring fallen humanity even closer to Himself. The Father sent Jesus to dwell among the people of earth. Jesus, the living Word of God, became “flesh and made his dwelling among people.” Jesus made the Father known through His earthly actions and teachings, and, in particular, through His death and resurrection (*John 1:14, 18*).

The incarnation of Jesus was the pivotal moment in history when God accomplished everything necessary to insure that His ultimate purposes in regard to mankind would be achieved. The justice of God in regard to sin was satisfied. The power of sin and evil over people was broken. Redemption of fallen sinners became possible. Life after physical death became reality. However, as dramatic and significant as all of this was, it was not the final step in God’s plan. Scripture reveals two more stages in God’s plan through which His connection with people would become even tighter.

The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a major advance in God’s program to dwell with His people. At Pentecost each believer became a temple of the living God. (*See I Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19, and II Corinthians 6:16*). This was the fulfillment of an Old Testament promise, “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people” (*Leviticus 26:12*).

In the Old Testament, the cloud which hovered over the tabernacle assured the Israelites that God was with them, although not in a personal intimate way. In our time, in this present age, God provides assurance to His people through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In the age to come, after all remnants of evil have been dealt with, there will be the ultimate stage in the relationship between God and His people. There will be a new temple in which God will, in the fullness of His glory, dwell with His people forever. That is our subject today.

## Read Revelation 21:9-22:5

One of the angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues invited John to come see “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” What John saw was a city. In the passage we studied last week, these two metaphors were also blended: the new Jerusalem, the city, was described as “a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (*Revelation 21:2*). We can understand the metaphors if we think of the “bride” as the people of God, and the “city” as the place where God and His people will dwell for eternity. In John’s vision, both the people of God and the city of God were coming down from heaven.

The “city” will be an incredibly beautiful place and it will be filled with the glory of God. John observed that the “brilliance” of God’s glory was reflected throughout the city like a crystal-clear diamond reflects light. Everything in the city was transparent, so that the glory of God could be reflected into every corner and nook and cranny. This is indicated by phrases such as “clear as crystal,” “pure as glass,” “like transparent glass.”

There were several occasions in the Old Testament when people were given a glimpse of the glory of God. When Moses went up on Mount Sinai to meet the LORD, the “glory of the LORD settled on the mountain” (*Exodus 24:15*). After Moses and the Israelites set up the tabernacle, “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (*Exodus 40:34*). After the priests had placed the Ark of the covenant in the temple built by Solomon, “the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (*1 Kings 8:10-11*). The sight of God’s glory on these occasions was an awesome experience for the people of the Old Testament, but nothing compared to the glory to be revealed in eternity.

John saw the Holy City from the vantage point of a great high mountain, and his description of the city is from outside to inside. He began his description with the city’s wall. The fact that the new Jerusalem has a wall does not imply that it is there for security reasons. All the enemies of God had been previously destroyed. There is no evil force to assail the holy city. The wall outlined the accommodations made available to God’s people. The wall was made of a precious material, like all the other materials of the city, in order that it might be worthy of the magnificence of God and radiate the glory of God.

John saw 12 gates in the wall, each one inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of ancient Israel, and he also noted that the wall of the city had 12 foundations upon which are inscribed the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. There is a reason for these references to the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles. The nation of Israel was called by God for a special purpose: to be His witnesses to the pagan nations of the earth. The Israelites were to be a “light to the Gentiles:” to be the “gateway” through whom God would draw all people to Himself — through whom He would bless all people groups on earth. Of course, we know that the Israelites were unwilling to serve God in this way, but nevertheless, their place in the purposes of God is acknowledged by having their names on the gates of the heavenly city.

The role of the apostles is acknowledged by having their names on the foundations of the wall. The apostles were the first individuals to proclaim the good news of the gospel and to oversee the expansion of the Church in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The Apostle Paul explained that the Church was like a building built on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.” Paul went on to say that “the whole building rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” (*Ephesians 2:20-21*). The acknowledgment of the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles of the Lamb underscores the method by which God accomplished His purposes throughout human history.

Next John was given the dimensions of the holy city. The angel determined that it was “12,000 stadia in length, width, and height.” Put into modern terms, this would be approximately 1500 miles in each aspect. This would be almost the same as the straight line distance from Milwaukee to Los Angeles.

There is a reason for the cube shape of the eternal heavenly city: all of the dwelling places of God have this shape. The Holy of Holies in the Old Testament tabernacle and temples was a cube. According to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, the Old Testament sanctuaries were “a copy and shadow of what was in heaven.” Moses was instructed to construct the tabernacle according to a specific pattern (*Hebrews 8:5; Exodus 25:40*). The Holy of Holies was where the glory of God resided. The perfect symmetry of both the ancient Holy of Holies and the new Jerusalem represents the perfection and completeness of the glory of God.

The wall of the city was determined to be 144 cubits thick, or about 216 feet. We cannot imagine such massive proportions. However, John's description of the enormous size and splendor of new Jerusalem should help us picture in our minds the greatness and awesomeness of God. The universe which was created at the beginning of time and the new Jerusalem which will be revealed after the end of time are both on a grand enough scale so that God's majesty and magnificence might be displayed. Both creations represent the ideal temple dwelling places of God.

Beginning in verse 18 the attention of John was drawn to the inner parts of the city. The city was not only huge but also beautiful. It was constructed of exceptional materials: precious jewels, pearls, and gold. Back in verse 11 we were informed that the city was brilliant like "a very precious jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal." Here in verse 18 we learn that the entire wall of the city was made of this material.

Inside the walls everything was made "of pure gold, as pure as glass." This means that everything had a transparent quality. The repeated mention of transparency indicates that the city is designed so that the glory of God might be transmitted and reflected in every direction. There will be no shadows in the city. The symbolism is not meant to give the impression of wealth and luxury but to point to the purity, holiness, and pervasiveness of God's presence.

Even the foundations of the city are adorned with precious stones. Amazingly, the foundation of this city is not underground, which is the nature of foundations as we know them to be. Rather, these foundations were visible. They must have appeared to John as layers built upon each other and extending all around the sides of the city. The words used here indicates that each foundation layer consisted entirely of one kind of jewel. "The first foundation was entirely of jasper, the second entirely of sapphire," and so on.

After the foundations, the twelve gates are described. Each gate consisted of a single pearl, which must have been enormous in size, since the walls were 216 feet thick.

Finally, the "great street of the city" is described. It is, like the other parts of the city, built of "pure gold, like transparent glass." Most commentators assume this is the main thoroughfare, and that there are many other streets in the city. All in all, the city defies imagination.

Beginning in verse 22, John changed his style of description: he mentioned some things he didn't see. Previously, he had written that there will be no death, mourning, crying or pain in the heavenly city. Here he lists four more missing characteristics. First, he noted that there was no physical temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The radiance of their presence filled the city. The absence of a temple would have been surprising to Jewish readers because all their religious practices were associated with a physical temple. However, according to the Scriptures, it was the presence of God in the Holy of Holies that made the temple sacred. What John was describing meant that the entire heavenly city was the Holy of Holies of eternity.

Secondly, the city required neither sun nor moon. The glory of God was sufficient to illuminate everything in the city, from side to side and top to bottom. We are also informed that the Lamb is its lamp, which means He is the Source of light. When He was on the earth, Jesus referred to Himself as the Light of the world as well as the Life of the world. At the present time in this age, the Light and Life He offers is not recognized and understood by most people, but in the new Jerusalem of the future, His true nature will be recognized and appreciated. The glory of God and the Lamb will be so intense that nations, kings, and everyone will walk by their light. In the new Jerusalem, "nations" and "kings" represent the great diversity of people who have been redeemed from many cultures, from many levels of society, and from many periods of history. The diversity of people groups will not be diminished in eternity.

Third, there will be no night there. Consequently, there will be no need to ever shut the gates of the city. Usually, city gates are closed during the nighttime hours to prevent enemies from entering the city under cover of darkness. Because there is no night and no longer any enemies, there is no possibility of secretive, subversive activities. In his Gospel account, John sometimes used the term "night" as a symbol for sin (*for examples see John 9:4; 11:10-11*). Since the influence of sin had been eradicated, there will be no more need of protection and security, and therefore, there will be open access to the city.

Fourth, John informs us that nothing impure will ever enter the city, nor will anybody enter who is guilty of shameful or deceitful deeds. The point is that the eternal city will be a pure, sacred place. Only those who were registered in the Lamb's book of life will be qualified to be in God's presence.

Finally, in the verses from chapter 22, John describes the purposes and objectives of God. The emphasis is on the river of life and the tree of life.

First the angel showed John “the river of the water of life.” This river flowed out of the throne of God and the Lamb. The water will be available at all times to the thirsty. The central affirmation is that in the eternal state the faithful will have access to the source of the life-giving stream which proceeds from the very presence of God.

Second, we are told that the tree of life was growing on each side of the river. The mention of this tree takes us back to the book of Genesis, to the garden planted by God in Eden. The tree of life was in this garden. Before their disobedience, Adam and Eve could partake freely of the fruit of this tree, but in their sinful condition, they lost their access to it (*Genesis 3:22-24*).

In eternity, the people of God will once again eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life. In fact, hungry and thirsty citizens of heaven will be encouraged to eat and drink to their heart’s content. Both the abundance and variety of fruit are emphasized. God’s provision is ever new and always more than adequate.

Not only does the tree provide fruit to be eaten, but its leaves are therapeutic and bring about healing. The healing power of the leaves ensure the complete eternal absence of physical, emotional, and spiritual deficiencies.

In verse 3 John notes that there will no longer be any curse. This is another clear reference to Genesis. After the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the ground was cursed so that it produced thorns and thistles and hindered the labor efforts of humanity (*Genesis 3:17*).

The greatest privilege in this passage is in verse 4: redeemed people will be able to look into the face of God. In the Old Testament God told Moses, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (*Exodus 33:20*). In this present age, believers are able to recognize the Father in the person and works of the incarnate Jesus (*John 1:14, 18; 2:11; 14:7, 9; 17:3*). These experiences are significant, but the Apostle Paul described them as “like the poor reflection of a mirror” (*I Corinthians 13:12*). Remarkably, in the age to come, redeemed people will see Jesus “as he is” (*I John 3:2*), even face to face (*I Corinthians 13:12*). What we now experience by faith will give way to the reality of sight.

Verse 5 emphasizes again that God is the source of light and life. His glorious presence makes unnecessary all other sources of light. And in the light of God's presence, the inhabitants of the holy City will participate in the rule of the Lamb forever and ever.

Verse 5 relates to one of the ancient blessings in Scripture. "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace" (*Psalms 118:27; Numbers 6:25*). That will be the reality of the saints in eternity.