

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION:

Since chapter 12, when the dragon was hovering over the woman in labor as she gave birth to a man child representing Jesus, we have seen Satan bound and confined to the Abyss, released (still bound) from the Abyss to gather his forces for a great war called Armageddon, the destruction of Babylon (the harlot), and the two beasts cast into the lake of fire. Satan himself was ultimately overthrown and also banished to that eternal lake of fire. Through all of this and the final judgment of the wicked, we have symbolically witnessed the establishing of a “new order” in which no evil exists. The absence of evil equates with paradise, so it is only fitting that the last scenes we see in this study are of that paradise, the final reward for the faithful.

In many Bibles, headings and subheadings have been placed within the chapters by editors along the way. In my study bible, this chapter is divided into two sections: “**The New Heaven and the New Earth,**” and “**The New Jerusalem.**” We will use these divisions as parts 1 and 2 in our study of this chapter. The text for part 1 is printed below. As always, read it carefully and let the scene form in your mind, and the discussion will follow...

**The New Heaven and the New Earth**

**Verses 1 through 8**

*“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And 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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and*

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*murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*”

In John 14:2, Jesus said to His disciples, “*I go to prepare a place for you.*” The “*holy city, new Jerusalem*” John sees here coming down from heaven IS that place. The prophet Isaiah spent quite a bit of time describing this new order in chapter 34 of his Old Testament prophecy. He spoke of how the heathen nations would suffer Jehovah’s wrath, describing it as a “*melting of their mountains*” and a “*moldering away of their heavens,*” which he said would be “*rolled together as a scroll.*” Later, in chapter 51, he records that Jehovah’s own nation would also suffer; “*heavens vanishing like smoke*” while the “*earth shall wax old as doth a garment.*” It sounds as though he is describing the physical destruction of the earth, but he is actually speaking of a major change of order. The Old Covenant (the Law of Moses) only served one nation – Israel. Isaiah foretold that “old order” would be replaced by a “new order.” This new order (Christianity) was to be a “new law” that would encompass ALL nations. Of course, his prophecy was true. Christianity did replace the “Old Law” and Jesus’ death and resurrection ushered it in.

The “New Kingdom” Jesus established was two-fold: one part on earth, and the other part in Heaven. You’re probably familiar with the song, “*This World Is Not My Home,*” the lyrics implying that we are just temporarily camping here until our physical body gives up this life. Only then do we actually get to “go home.” After the events of chapter 20, the entirety of earthly creation no longer exists, so in chapter 21 it’s finally time to “go home.” This home is the ultimate result of that “new order.”

Some view this “*new heaven and new earth*” as an “improved” version of the world we live in now, minus the evil influences. That doesn’t fit the picture presented in these scriptures, though. In fact, if you carefully study Peter’s account of the new heaven and new earth (II Peter 3), he appears to be describing the same thing that John is here. They both point to the judgment at the end of time, the destruction of the ungodly, and the passing of the “old order” before the coming of the new.

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In the last phrase of Revelation 21:1, John says, “*and there was no more sea.*” The sea is known to be a symbol for turmoil, restlessness and instability, but I believe even more may be inferred here. Do you remember our description of the Throne Scene from chapter 4? There, before the throne of God was what is described as a sea of glass “*like unto crystal.*” We inferred that the sea of glass served to separate God on His throne from all who would approach. Now, here in chapter 21, John says “*and there was no more sea.*” He seems to be telling us that access to God is no longer denied! Now that all evil has been done away with, and the faithful have put on a new body (I Cor. 15) and been carried to the bosom of Abraham...they can now approach the throne!

Look at verse 3. It essentially says that God will “tabernacle” with His people – He will dwell with them! That sounds to me like those living in this “*new Jerusalem*” will be in direct contact with God. Keep in mind that one of the great blessings we acquire when we become a Christian is access to God through the avenue of prayer. Now, though, there’s no need to “travel down that avenue” because we see The Almighty face to face – just exactly like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, before they sinned! When God created this beautiful world we live in, His intention that He and man would forever “walk through the Garden together.” It didn’t take man long to ruin that. Once he sinned he was “unclean,” and could no longer be in the presence of God.

Sin is another “two-part” thing: First there is the desire – and then the action. The desire is part of the spiritual side of man – it comes from a mind influenced by Satan’s two beasts. Often, this desire leads to an action of the physical body. When we are truly forgiven of a sin, God cleanses our spiritual body by wiping the memory of that sin away. But He does not cleanse the physical body, so we have to live with whatever consequences that sin produced. The physical side of our existence therefore, cannot be in the presence of God. This is why Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden, and distance was immediately established between man and God. And that is why when a Christian’s life on earth is over he is given a “new body” – a spiritual body – that is free from sin and therefore worthy to be in the presence of God. If you want to hear about this from Paul himself, go to I Corinthians 15:5 - 49.

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In verse 2 of our text, John says he saw the New Jerusalem ***“coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*** He calls it a **“holy city”** here, and to help us understand the full meaning of this, I want you to think back to chapter 11, beginning at verse 2. There John was given the rod to measure the holy city and was also told ***“But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles.”*** The Greek phrase translated *“leave out”* is **“ekballo exo”** which carries a much stronger meaning than simply *“omit.”* According to Henry Thayer, it means *“to eject”* – to cast out, to drive out, to expel – and send away! This is because originally the outer court of the tabernacle, which was ONLY entered by the Jews, was considered holy. But not long after Solomon built the temple, Gentiles were allowed to enter that outer court. By the time of Jesus, after the rebuilding and refurbishing of the temple by Herod, the outer courtyard was even named *“the Courtyard of the Gentiles.”* So in Chapter 11, this *“outer court”* is separated from the inner circle of the true believers and has been given to the Gentiles.

In the book of Revelation, any time the terms *“Gentile”* or *“Nations”* are used, they apply to either all mankind in general or that portion left after the true believers (the Church) are numbered. This Church is the kingdom Jesus established, to exist here on earth and in heaven for all eternity, in our text it is referred to as ***“New Jerusalem.”*** In chapter 11 this ***“New Jerusalem,”*** was to be trampled by Gentiles for 42 months (three and a half years) symbolizing that indefinite period left until the end of the world and judgment.

Well, the end of the world has come! So now that outer court of the unfaithful has been purged – cast out – and all that remains is the inner courts of the temple proper, where all may enter because the Church is all that remains. This, I believe, is the fulfillment of Our Savior’s words in Revelation 3:12: ***“to him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”***

After this John hears a great voice out of heaven saying, ***“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall***

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*be with them, and be their God.*” Earlier, I mentioned that God will “tabernacle” with His people in this New Jerusalem because there is “*no more sea.*” He will make His abode with the spiritual Israel, just as He said He would do with the original Israel in Leviticus. A “*tabernacle*” is usually considered to be a more or less temporary abode. If that meaning holds true here, it presents us with a beautiful parallel of God’s presence with Christians while we live in our temporary abode (this earth) but with the promise of an eternal dwelling together in the New Jerusalem when this world passes away.

In this Holy City “*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*” because these are all “former things.” They are part of a world that no longer exists and a vocabulary that will no longer be necessary. I believe this to be the fulfillment of even more promises made by Isaiah in relation to God being with His people when he says in 25:8, “*He will swallow up death forever...*” Perhaps John’s intent here is to remind us that even the memories of pain, death and sorrow will be wiped away because there is no place for any sadness in the “new order.”

The One sitting on the Throne then tells John: “*Behold, I make all things new. Write: for these words are true and faithful.*” We can count on God to say what He means and to mean what He says. Why? Because He is the Creator and the Judge! He speaks of Himself when He says, “*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.*” He was responsible for breathing this earth into existence and for deciding when to bring it to an end. And now He says, “**It is done!**” All that was contained in His plan has been accomplished. (*For Paul’s version of this summation, read the first 14 verses of his letter to the Ephesians.*)

“*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*” (Rev. 21:6-7) These are sobering verses. There’s no middle of the road with our God. You’re either “all in” with your Christian walk – in which case you will inherit “all things” – or you’re destined for the second death. God has left it up to us to make our decision.

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Back in chapter 17, John was led into the wilderness by an angel where he was shown the Harlot (Babylon), and told of her wickedness. Here in verse 9, he has a similar experience, only this time he's taken to a ***“great and high mountain”*** where one of the angels ***“which had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and talked”*** with him. This time he is shown the direct opposite of the Harlot and her wickedness! Instead he is shown the bride, the “Lamb’s wife” (that holy city New Jerusalem) – descending from heaven ***“having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”*** What a beautiful image! But what is represented by what John saw? We know by now that it’s not literal. We have already seen, for example, a great dragon, a beast with seven heads and ten horns, seven trumpets, seven bowls of wrath, and a battle called Armageddon. Even though none of those were literal, they represent real entities, forces or conflicts. So, this holy city, the New Jerusalem that John saw represents the promised eternal abode of those in His church. Literally speaking, there never was nor will be such a city, but what it symbolizes will exist eternally.

Why was John taken up on a high mountain? The message seems to be that the glory of this city is so immense it can only be fully appreciated, and its scope only fully viewed from this lofty position. It may interest you to know that the term ***“holy Jerusalem”*** only occurs this one time in the whole of the Bible. Let’s discuss the symbolic description of that city:

***“Having the glory of God”*** – In Exodus 40, when the original tabernacle was completed and the Mercy Seat was placed inside the Most Holy Place, it is recorded that ***“God’s glory filled the tabernacle.”*** It became the abiding presence of God, manifested by a great light. The light was said to be like a most precious stone – even like a jasper stone – clear as crystal! Modern jasper doesn’t look like that because of impurities that can’t be polished away to achieve the clarity described in scripture. In fact, many commentators believe pure jasper can no longer be found. Those pure stones were always red in color, but when polished to the maximum became almost clear. They were so translucent that light shining through them gave off a beautiful red hue, which John uses to characterize the brilliance of God sitting on His throne.

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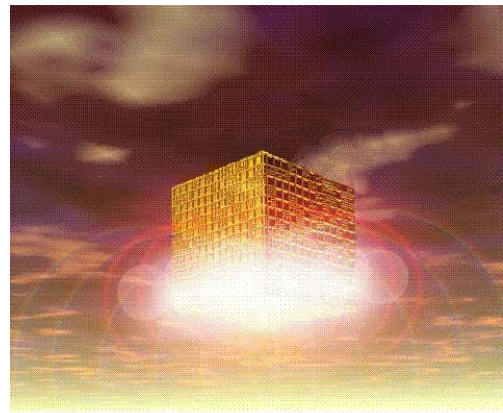
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The city itself was surrounded by a great wall with twelve gates, each guarded by an angel. I feel certain this represents the absolute security of the city – there would be no further assaults on it! The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were engraved on those gates – one name on each gate. Twelve is considered the “religious number” derived by multiplying the number 3 (referring to “Deity”) by the number 4 (the symbol for creation). It represents totality. Deity x Creation = everything there is! With that in mind, notice the walls. They were built on twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles were engraved.

We are not told of a cornerstone here in Revelation, but Paul described it in Ephesians, 2:20, “...*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.*” Again in 1 Peter 2:6 Peter writes: “...*I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*”

The next three verses, 15 -17, speak of the size of the city, again in symbolism: “*And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.*” Often, we tend to take from this description the wrong mental image. The city is not just “laid out as a square.” Yes, its footprint is square, but the city is as high as it is wide. So, picture the city like a cube where each side is the same as its height. (*The image at right is only someone’s idea of how it looked.*) The city is surrounded by four walls that also form a perfect square around the city, but those walls are not as high as the city. (*The bright white glow in the image is from the wall reflecting God’s light as is described below.*) You may remember that the “Most Holy Place” in the original tabernacle and later in the temple was also a cube. In the original tabernacle it measured 10 cubits per side and 10 cubits tall.



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Just to stir your interest, let's do a little math. A first-century furlong is said to be about 600 feet. So:  $12,000 \times 600 = 7,200,000$  feet. Converting that to miles we divide 7,200,000 by 5280, (number of feet in a mile), and we get just a bit more than 1,636 miles per side. That gives you a city with an area of 1,859,504.132 square miles. Almost two billion square miles, and the city is a little over 1600 miles high.

Of course the math is just for fun because – you know what I'm about to say: The description is not literal! It is better to focus on the symbolism of the number 12 when you see "12,000 furlongs": 12 (deity x creation) multiplied by 1000 (power or completeness) symbolically gives us the concept of "Totality" – In other words, there is room for everyone.

One more math reference now that we've been reminded of the meaning of 12 and 1000. Do you remember in chapter 7 when the 144,000 were sealed? That was 12,000 from each tribe:  $12000 \times 12$  tribes = 144,000. The message is clear: **The faithful of all time are made partakers of the heavenly promise.**

But when the angel measured the wall it only measured 144 cubits high. Not much of a wall for a city that measures a little less than 1650 MILES high. I believe this emphasizes the complete safety and security of its occupants because the truth is, there is no need for a wall – there is nothing to keep out!

*"The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass It was made of jasper, we are told, and the city was of a gold so pure it was like clear glass."* What is the message here? Exceeding brightness and purity!



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Commentators struggle in their efforts to describe what we're seeing in these verses. We know it's all symbolic, but we can't get the "realness" of gold and diamonds out of our minds, and therefore we work too hard trying to "see" all of it.

The way I deal with it is by reminding myself of the point of all the size references, and mentions of precious metals and stones: the beauty, the glory, the magnitude of heaven contrasted with this place where we live now is so far beyond our ability to imagine in our minds eye... that it can only be *approached*... just barely... by mere words. The truth is, "you have to see it to believe it". And if our names are in the "book of life," see it we shall.

We are accustomed to John's many "***And I saw...***" sentence starters for the pieces of his visions. In verse 22, he tells us the opposite – what he didn't see: "***But I saw no temple in it***". This would be cause for alarm among believers if it weren't for his quick explanation. "***The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.***" The Holy of Holies — where God "resided"— was first located in the Tabernacle, then the inner sanctuary of the temple, only accessible by the high priest. Here in this New Jerusalem, God's glory and presence pervades the entire city where all the redeemed worship as priests or servants of the Almighty God.

Verse 24 says, "***The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.***" A keen eye will notice the terms "*the nations*" and "*kings of the earth*" recalling that up to now they have been used to refer to the unrighteous. But in this verse, a very important qualifier has been added: "***of them which are saved.***" Isaiah prophesied, "***And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.***" (Isaiah 60:3) This verse is probably a fulfillment of that prophecy, indicating that some of them were converted to Christianity.

Then John says "***the gates of the city shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.***" I believe this is another reference to Isaiah. (60:11) There, Isaiah speaks of a city whose gates were always open during the day for ordinary coming and going, but shut at

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night to keep out enemies. We're familiar with that idea. We close gates and lock doors to keep out intruders, especially at night when we're sleeping and could otherwise be caught unaware. We also know that mischief often takes place under cover of darkness. In our context here, there are no enemies left! They have all been cast into the lake of fire. And there is never any darkness anyway, for the presence of God is a continual source of light.

And the chapter closes with this observation: *“And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”*

As I am writing this in 2021, national news reports a billionaire's plan to build a city somewhere in the United States (as yet undetermined) called Utopia, his idea of “heaven on earth.” Anyone wishing to live there must apply and wait to be accepted. What a fantasy! We know that the Heaven spoken of in scripture only exists beyond this earth and that only those fitted for an eternity in paradise – those who have lived their lives following the pattern Jesus gave us in the Scriptures – shall enter. Their names are found written in the Lamb's book of Life.

### A footnote concerning the jewels mentioned in scripture:

I thought it might be good to offer an expert view of these jewels, and perhaps the best source is Pliny's “Natural History” published in 77 AD containing descriptions of the stones of his time.

*Jasper...* The jasper was, as the Bible referred to it, “clear as crystal” and had a sparkling, brilliant blue-white light. Very likely it is the same as the modern Diamond.

*Sapphire...* Not the same as our modern sapphire. This stone ranked next to the diamond for its hardness and was different shades of blue.

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**Chalcedony...** No such modern stone exists. It is thought to have acquired its name from the area of Chalkedon where there were large copper mines. It was a green stone about the same color as the green tail feathers of a peacock, but is said to have had an iridescent glow when in bright light.

**Emerald...** The emerald was the same then as it is now. There are different grades: The most prized is the stone with the velvety green translucent color. (Back in Chapter 4, in the Throne Scene, the green light from the Emerald formed a halo over the Throne. ***The emerald is the symbol of God's mercy on His people!*** And remember, in the Throne Scene, the emerald glow was described as a Rainbow to show the faithfulness of God to keep His promises!)

**Sardonyx...** From Arabia, it was a vivid red stone similar to a ruby, but it had a transparent white layer, or vein, running through it.

**Sardius...** Sometimes called a "Sardine" stone, it is described as the color of raw flesh. (Although its color varies in different shades, it's always spoken of as red with many of the ancient historians referring to it as a "fiery red" color. ***The sardius is thought of as the symbol of Divine Judgement and Justice.***)

**Chrysolite...** A transparent stone that gave a glow with the color of gold when light passed through it. It was often purposely placed next to gold to enhance the gold's color.

**Beryl...** A milky sea-green color, but with a hardness that allowed it to be polished to a high luster and sparkle.

**Topaz...** A stone held in high regard in early times for its special green tint. (It was actually preferred, sometimes, over the emerald for its special color of green and for its translucency.)

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*Chrysoprasus...* A stone similar to red coral.

*Jacinth...* This would more closely resemble the blue sapphire of modern time.

*Amethyst...* A purple variety of quartz.

The point being made about these stones is simple. They are to be seen as symbols of beauty, purity, chasteness, humility and holiness, and they are the traits of a Christian, which makes up the pure church!

Here's a bonus tidbit I noticed for the first time while researching the stones in Revelation 21:19-20. In Exodus 28 we see a list of the stones to be placed into the breastplate of the high priest. It is clearly stated that each stone is representative of the month in which the leader of the tribe (a son of Jacob) was born, and that they were to be placed into the breastplate in that order.

Here is the surprising part: These very same stones comprise the list found in Revelation 21... but in the original manuscripts the order is OPPOSITE to the order of the same stones in the breastplate. Could this refer to Jesus' statement that the "First shall be Last?" I don't know, but I find it interesting.