

Lesson # 74 Revelation 21:9-21 The Description of New Jerusalem

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⁹ Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶ The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷ He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. ¹⁸ The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. ①

I. The Lamb's Wife

vv. 9-11

Once again an holy angel – specifically, one of the 7 who had delivered the final plagues, brings John to the next scene God wants John to record in the book of Revelation. This time, the angel tells John he is about to see “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb”ⁱ. What John is about to see – the New Jerusalem, the city – is called the bride because it draws its character from those who occupy it, and by this time, in the eternal state, those who occupy it are the righteous, because all sinners and all evil have been banished. This will truly be a city in which only goodness dwells.

Even today we tend to associate well known cities with their inhabitants, don't we? When I say San Francisco, what do you think of? New York City? Las Vegas? Washington DC? Ottawa? In Revelation 21 the New Jerusalem reflects the character of those who love Christ and whom He loves with everlasting love. Here, we are forever united with Him and with one another. As we saw in lesson # 61, the Bride of Christ is a title used of the Church, but now, the ceremony has been completed (Rev. 19:7), the title now “*forever encompasses the redeemed of every age.*”ⁱⁱ

Just as had occurred in Revelation 1, John is carried away in the Spirit to be shown this great city. He arrives at a “great high mountain”. Remember when Christ returns the earth is reshaped and Jerusalem becomes the highest place on earth. Well, this is now the new earth (21:1), and it appears that once again, Jerusalem is given the place of prominence geographically, atop a great high mountain.

We are never given a description of the new earth in Scripture (aside from the fact that there is no more sea), although there is a detailed description of this city, showing us the glories of this capital of heaven. Therefore, we cannot be certain that there are no other mountains on the new earth, but we can be certain, that if there are, that this is the highest one.

We also don't know what the abilities and attributes of our glorified bodies will be. We know we will be “us”, but how do we access a city the size and height of this one? Will we be able to fly? Go into space? Float? Transport digitally? Drive? This city is a huge cube – 1,400 miles high. Surely access to the top is not going to be by elevators? If our apartments (mansions? rooms? – note that the word translated “mansions” in KJV in JN 14:2 is more literally “rooms” or even “nests”) are within this city, and we are on the top floor, how do we get there? We are simply not told, but it is fun to speculate even though we are not supposed to speculate.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the city is where it is coming down from. “Coming down out of heaven from God.” This is not something just created (I believe) but is rather the city described in **Heb. 11:10**, the city faithful believers have searched for throughout the entire scope of human history. This city is built by God's hands, prepared before the foundation of the world, and now finally brought down to the new earth to bless God's people and to glorify Him. Now, some make a connection here to **JN 14:1-3**, but is this the place Jesus went away to prepare for us? Maybe, I won't say that this interpretation is wrong, but I am convinced that what Jesus is really referring to in JN 14:1-3 is going to the cross and opening up access for His people into heaven, not building houses for us by hand. What He is doing in heaven for us is interceding for us – cf Heb. 7:25. At any rate, this city is described as a radiant rare jewel, glowing with the glory of God and the Lamb, a physical capstone to all God has ever created. ②

Note v. 11 – the first point John makes is that this descending magnificent city has the glory of God. This glory of God, the key ingredient in our eternal joy, will continue to radiate from this city throughout eternity. See **v. 23**, and compare **Isa. 60:19-20; 61:10-11**. God's glory is the sum of all His attributes, the expressed magnificence of His Perfection, and it is here displayed as blazing light that the sun and moon are no longer needed to provide light. These orbs currently define night, day, months and years for us, but in eternity there will be no more night, just one long eternal day. (Rev. 21:25)

The streaming brilliance from the light of God's glory causes the city to glow and twinkle like a precious jewel (of which it is constructed), and the light source is

from within. The city is described as ‘jasper, clear as crystal’, which is best understood as a crystal clear, unblemished and perfect diamond. The purpose for the clarity of it is to let out this glory-light of God’s presence to shine & light up the entire world order. Since it is clear, there are no shadows of darkness created by it.

II. The Gates and Foundation vv. 12-14

There is no need to swing over here to symbolic interpretation, although I understand why some people do & if there is a place for symbolism in Revelation, then is one place it would make sense. What John is describing is massive, unlike anything before it, and so it is tough to describe. However, we can understand what he says literally and realize that it is a real city, and though it may differ from any city we’ve ever seen, it is being described in language that we can connect with – walls, gates, streets, a foundation, etc.

John talks about the gates, walls and foundation in these 3 verses, and will later on (vv. 18-21) give us more detail, but he wants us to see the familiar aspects of the city, so we can understand the community factors of it, and the fact that it is a place in a geographic setting. Inside of its walls relationships will form and grow, people and angels will enter and exit, we’ll worship God, we’ll revel in all He has done for us and will enjoy the fact that calendars, hospitals, ambulances, police, fire departments and cemeteries will no longer be around.

③

The great high wall mentioned here is measured for us in vv. 16-17 – 12,000 stadia (1 stadia = 607 ft. or 185 meters) – or 1,380 miles high X 177 cubits (approximately 18”) or 2,592 ft. thick. The city is a cube, so the wall on each side is also 1,380 miles. Consider the fact that satellites now orbit earth at between 100 and 1,200 miles, which is called Low Earth Orbit or LEO.

In that wall there is a total of 12 gates (3 per side), with 12 angels at the gates (1 per gate). Each gate was named after a tribe of Israel, possibly in the same order (based on the compass) of the arrayed tribes around the Tabernacle in the wilderness.ⁱⁱⁱ Numbers 2,4 & 7 supply this information. We are given points of the compass in v. 13, so the new earth is probably a globe, although that is not necessarily so.

The foundations (v. 14) which support the weight of the massive walls are 12 in number (between the gates), and on each was the name of “1 of the 12 apostles of the Lamb”. It is a certainty that Judas Iscariot is not one of the 12 names, so it is either Paul (II Cor. 12:11-12) or Mathias (Acts 1). It can only be speculation to say which one of these 2 it is, although the most popular opinion, as you can imagine, is Paul.

The fact that both OT saints and the apostles are named here shows that God has eschatological roles for both Israel and the Church. Had these 2 groups simply merged into one at some point, there would be no 12 & 12 named, but 24.

By saying that the 12 apostles were “of the Lamb”, John is emphasizing the distinct focus of the Lamb and His glory associated with this heavenly city. It is also interesting to note that John would have read his own name on one of those foundations, and yet humbly does not share this.

III. The Walls

vv. 15-20

Just as in Ezek.40:3ff, and Rev. 11:1, the city, its gates & walls are measured by the angel who brought John here to observe it. Two things stand out here: 1.) this city has a definite size and shape is not just a ghostly apparition floating in mid-air, because it has dimension and can be measured; and 2.) what is being marked out is that which belongs to God.

We have already noted the dimensions and the fact that the city is a cube – L, W & H are the same. Some have postulated that it could be a pyramid instead of a cube, but pyramids have almost always been associated with paganism, and more recently, with the New Age eastern religions. Furthermore, a cube was the shape God specified for the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple, so a cube here is most likely.

Henry Morris is convinced of the cubic design and postulates that we will have the ability to travel in any direction, including up and down, so a cube poses no problem for access to upper areas if he is right. A cube this size would also pose no mathematical problem for housing billions of people in vastly comfortably sized apartments. ④

We have already examined vv. 16-17, however, but notice an odd statement in v. 17 – “by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement”. Although an angel did the actual measuring, the dimensions are in human terms. This means just what it says, but it also says to me that these are not spiritual or symbolic measurements, but actual measurements. Many people see here how often the number twelve or multiplications of it are used and see symbolic perfectionism, but I think this phrase tells us “these are the dimensions”. If they also have some spiritual importance as well, then so be it.

In vv. 19-20, the foundations of the walls (with the 12 names of the apostles) are now described as being adorned with every kind of jewel. The city was pure gold, but transparent, clear as glass, and now there are numerous jewels. These verses list a total of 12 jewels, and remember the walls themselves are jasper (diamond) as is the first jewel for the foundation that is mentioned. Here are the 12:

- Jasper – diamond / clear *
- Sapphire – brilliant blue *
- Agate – sky blue with coloured stripes *
- Emerald – green *
- Onyx (or sardonyx) – red and white stripes *
- Carnelian (or sardius) – reddish quartz stone *

- Chrysolite – gold or yellow
- Beryl – yellow / green *
- Topaz – yellowish green *
- Chrysophase – gold tinted green
- Jacinth (zircon) – blue violet to red-brown *
- Amethyst – purple *

Ten of these stones are found on the breastplate of the high priest in Ex. 28:17-20 & 39:10-13. (see asterix). Some of them have been renamed and even have different names in different Bible translations, so perfect identification is not 100% assured. However, what is certain is that this city, with the light of God's glory beaming outward, will be the most spectacular created sight ever seen.

IV. Pearly Gates and Streets of Gold v. 21a

John now turns his attention to the 12 gates and each one was made by a single pearl. Imagine a single huge pearl, and there are 12 of them! The scene just continues to defy imagination and increases in beauty and splendor doesn't it?

John Phillips comments on the gates; *“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl. How appropriate! All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster – the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or wound, and around the offending article which has penetrated or hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. The pearl, we might say, is the answer of the oyster to that which injured it. The glory land is God's answer, in Christ, to wicked men who crucified heaven's beloved and put Him to open shame. How like God it is to make the gates of the New Jerusalem of pearl. They saints as they come and go will be forever reminded, as they pass the gates of glory, that access to God's home is only because of Calvary. Think of the size of those gates! Think of the supernatural pearls from which they are made. What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl! Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ. Those pearls, hung eternally at the access routes to glory, will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree and whose answer to those who injured Him was to invite them to share His home.”*^{iv} ⑤

Then we turn our attention to the streets of gold, and I'll quote James Hamilton here from his commentary on Revelation, *“John wrote in 21:18 that “the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.” All these precious stones and metals are shouting limitless wealth. This city, like this world we all get to live in, has resources can scarcely be imagined. Notice that in both verses 18 & 21, the gold is called pure and likened to transparent, clean glass. This gold has a quality & purity superior to the gold in Fort Knox, but it isn't locked away in a vault. Rather, God uses it to pave the streets! We can think of Moses being instructed to remove his sandals because the ground was holy where God appeared to him (Exodus 3:5) and this picture of streets paved with pure gold that is transparent like clean glass points to the ultimate holy ground. The people who*

walk these streets are going to have clean feet because of the blood of Christ. The inhabitants of this city will be holy, and the streets of gold will never be smudged with dirty feet because there won't be any dirty feet there. They have all been washed clean by the Servant who "loved them to the end" (John 13:1-20)."^v

This concludes John's report of the external appearance of the city, the New Jerusalem.

Next lesson – Lesson # 75 -- Rev. 21:21b-27 Inside the City

ⁱ See lesson # 61 for a prior discussion of this topic, and also lesson # 73, II

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, p. 278

ⁱⁱⁱ See James Strong, The Tabernacle of Israel, Kregel, 1987, p. 77.

^{iv} John Phillips, Exploring Revelation, Moody Press, 1974, pp. 270-271

^v James M. Hamilton Jr.; Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches; Crossway Books; 2012; P. 397