

The New Jerusalem

📖 Revelation 21:10-22:5

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Last time we looked at our ultimate destiny in a new heaven and a new earth in Rev 21. I take it that this is a totally new creation rather than a renovation of the present heaven and earth for three or four reasons. First, because in 21:1 John said "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away." In other words, his explanation for seeing the new one is that the old first had passed away. He was, therefore, not seeing a fixed-up version of the first one. Second, because in 2 Peter 3:10-12 Peter said that the present heaven and earth is reserved for fire and will be destroyed with intense heat. That leaves little room for a renovation, but ample room for a new creation. Third, because in Isaiah 65:17 the Lord said, "Behold, I create a new heaven and new earth." That seems to fit much better with a creation rather than a renovation. And finally, because sin has so corrupted the present heaven and earth that a new creation will be necessary. This only makes sense since our eternal abode will be one in which righteousness dwells, and it will more than likely not be created out of corruption. Putting all these passages together it appears that the new heaven and new earth will be a new creation, and not a renovation of the first one.

We also said that as far as the new heaven is concerned, the key characteristics John noted are that there will be no sun, no moon, and presumably no stars. Why is stated in verse 23, because "the city has no need of the sun or the moon, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the lamb." Since everything God creates has a purpose and the purpose of illumination will be filled by the glory of God, the sun, moon and stars will not be created. Now there are those who say that they will be created because it's only the city that will have no need of them, and they suppose that those who live out on the rest of the earth will have need of them. They describe the light from the glory of God dwindling as it passes through the walls of the city and out on to the surface of the earth. But verse 24 indicates that the kings who dwell out on the earth will walk by the light of the city. So my vision is that the source of light for the whole new heaven and new earth will be the glory of God and that it is centralized in the city and from there shines out on the earth. So the key characteristic of the new heaven is no sun, moon and presumably stars, because their purpose is being fulfilled by the glory of God and the Lamb.

Then, as far as the new earth is concerned, the key characteristic John noted is there will be no sea. This is a startling difference, since over 75% of the present earth's surface is covered by seas. The seas play a heavy role in

climate, weather and travel, so it's absence may indicate a very different environment. Someone asked whether things like the sea have any kind of further, symbolic meaning. It's difficult to tell, but I take the sea as literal, just as I take the sun and moon as literal. And in literal interpretation there is only one interpretation to the same set of words. What it might symbolize is conjectural, since the sea in other places represents chaos, demonic powers, etc...it's too hard to come to any consensus what it might represent. So I just take it to be the literal sea. Now, just because there will be no sea does not mean there will be no bodies of water. There will be a river that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the new Jerusalem. And we'll see more of that today, but usually a river flows into a body of water. So it's possible there could be bodies of water, but they would not be seas in the sense of large oceans. But there could be some other water cycle at work as well, such as the river going out on the new earth to water it and sinking into a hole and returning underneath the throne of God in a never-ending cycle. So, something like this is not clear, but the water itself will be crystal clear.

But the greatest characteristic of all is 21:3, the dwelling of God with His people. John heard a loud voice, probably that of the Lamb of God saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..." This is something God has been wanting to do, wanting to dwell among men, and He will do this. He will be among us. This is a remarkable theme in the Bible, at least to me. I wondered, "Why would God want to dwell among us?" He's perfectly content in and of Himself. But He does want to dwell among us. This is a major purpose of history. He dwelt with Adam and Eve in the garden. When fellowship was broken the only way He could dwell with men was through sacrifice. So He established the tabernacle and then the temple to dwell among Israel. When Israel rejected their Messiah, the Messiah sent His Spirit to dwell within believers. We are now the temple. And in the millennial kingdom the Messiah will dwell among them in the millennial temple. There is this constant desire of God to dwell among us. And He will do this in the new heaven and new earth. Finally, the fullness of God will be among us. What exactly this will be like is unknown, except to say that as the Father, He will not dwell among us in a physical body, for God is spirit. But His glory will be seen as a great piercing light. The Son, of course, will be in His resurrection body, and dwell among us bodily. But what all this will look like, exactly, is not known.

Now look what He will do in 21:4, **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.**

With the passing away of the first heaven and first earth will also be the passing away of **the first things** associated with that first heaven and earth. Now it's evident from the list that **the first things** that are wiped away are the things that resulted from the fall, that is, sin, and its effects upon the first heaven and earth. It's not evident that things that were righteous will pass away. Things that are righteous will never pass away. For example, the resurrection body of Jesus Christ will never pass away. The regenerated human spirit will not pass away. The fruit of the Spirit in your life will never pass away, as evidenced by the eternal rewards that will be received. So, there are things that cross over from the first heaven and first earth into the new one, but the things associated with the first heaven and earth that are sinful or corrupted by sin, will pass away.

Let's look at the six things mentioned here that will pass away. The first thing He **will** do, which is an awesome thing, is to **wipe away every tear from** our eyes. This is erasing the memory of things from this present life that cause pain and suffering and loss in this world. The loss of a child or a spouse, a mother who died unsaved or a friend. All of that will be erased from your memory. You won't have tears from thinking about those losses. You won't think about them anymore. That is the meaning of wiping **away every tear**. It is different from no **crying** which is mentioned later in the verse. But before we get to that, the second thing stated is **there will no longer be any death**. The reference is to any kind of **death**, physical and spiritual. Since death is separation, there will be no more separation. There can be nothing there that can cause separation. The first creation had the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If Adam sinned against God by eating from this tree it would cause spiritual separation or death, that would work its way out toward physical death. And that happened. But in the new heaven and new earth there will be no tree like that that can be the instrument bringing about a separation. This means it will be impossible to fall into sin. This gets into the issue of 'free will' a bit. People think that for man to be truly man he must have free will. And they think that if man does not have free will then man is a robot. But in the new heaven and new earth, man will not be able to sin and he will be freer than he has ever been. I think the problem is they misunderstand what it is to be man and what it is to be free. To be a man is to be in the fullness of the image of God free from sin. And to be free is to be free from sinful inclination. So, freedom is not the freedom to sin; because sin enslaves. But freedom is the freedom from sin so that there can only be righteousness. So the time when man will have his ultimate freedom is in the new heaven and new earth when he is no longer free to sin. The third thing states is **there will no longer be any mourning**. This is intense mental anguish caused by sin in the world. With its absence mourning will also be absent. Also no **crying**. This is different from Him wiping away every tear, as that relates to taking away bad memories. This means there will be no things that happen in the new heaven and earth that cause tears. And no **pain**. All these things are listed as absent in the new heaven and earth because there will never be another fall into sin. It will be a whole new order of things where righteousness dwells eternally and man dwells in perfect communion with His Creator.

A few things in verse 6. **Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.** In some contexts, this description of thirsting and receiving from the spring of the water of life without cost refers to receiving the gospel invitation, as for example, in John 4:10, the Samaritan woman, to whom Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." But sometimes it refers to a future reception of spiritual blessings, as for example, in Rev 7:17, where the multitude who responded to the gospel invitation as preached by the 144,000 will in the new heaven and earth have the Lamb as their shepherd who "will guide them to springs of the water of life..." It's somewhat unclear to me which meaning is best in this verse.

In verse 7, **He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.** The one **who overcomes** will be an heir of the new heaven and new earth and all it entails. He will enjoy a close Father-

son relationship as **God** will be **his God** and the heir **will be** God's **son**. The emphasis is on a close intimacy, the closeness of dwelling with God Himself.

But verse 8 shows that no spiritually dead person will ever be in the new heaven and new earth. The list here is depictive of their character. It does not mean that they did all these things. It means that they are characterized by these things. No believer can be characterized this way. Again, that does not mean that they did not do some of these things. It simply means they are not characterized by them. The point of the passage is to clarify that every believer will be a part of this new order of righteousness, whereas no unbeliever will ever be part of it. Note the first word of contrast in verse 8, **But for the cowardly and unbelieving** (or untrustworthy), **and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death**. The **second death** relates entirely to those who are spiritually dead, so no believers are described in verse 8. It is simply a distinction between believers and unbelievers at this point to make sure we understand who will be in the new heaven and new earth.

Now we want to turn to the new Jerusalem. John mentioned seeing it for the first time in 21:2, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." We dealt with the view that this refers to a previously created new Jerusalem that Jesus went to build after His ascension, which served as a satellite city for the resurrected saints during the millennial kingdom, now descending to rest on the new earth. We showed that it is a view without merit that set out to solve the supposed problem of resurrected people dwelling among non-resurrected people. But that is not a problem to begin with, as Jesus did that for forty days and nights with no problem. And Jesus did not go to prepare this city. The preparing the place was done by means of His death and resurrection, so that we know the way is through faith in Him. So John saw this city descending from heaven and its appearance was beautiful, as a bride is adorned for her husband. It is a remarkably beautiful city, which we will now look at in 21:10ff.

The first thing we note is the city's appearance. Verse 11, the city is illumined by **the glory of God**. Now usually **the glory of God** is manifested as a flame of fire or smoke or light and this is called Shekinah Glory, which is a visible manifestation of God's presence. And that may be what this is, but it seems to be more than that, though I can't tell you what exactly it is because we're simply not told. But what I mean is that it seems to be a presence of God more intense than what OT Israel enjoyed in the wilderness wanderings and in the tabernacle and temple. It may be more like what Moses experienced when he would commune with God and his face would afterwards shine. But I sense it is even more than that. So in some sense, the fullness of God is in the city. The fullness of God is described consistently as pure light. For example, in verse 23, **the glory of God has illumined it**. In other words, **the glory of God** is the source of light for the whole new heaven and new earth. Thus, no reason for a sun, moon or stars. Then John compares the illumination it brings to the city as **like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper**. What is this **jasper**? **Jasper** today is a stone that is a vari-colored

opaque gemstone, so you can't see through it, but the description here is something **crystal-clear** that indicates that ancient **jasper** is not the same as modern **jasper**. Frankly, we don't know exactly what their **jasper** was. But John described it in terms familiar to his audience. If he were to describe it in our terms today, he would say the city appeared like a diamond, gleaming in appearance, crystal clear, and translucent, so that light is passing through the walls from **the glory of God**.

If you look at verse 18, we see more about these walls. These walls are stated to be **jasper**, which again, is a crystal clear substance, like a diamond. In verse 12 there's more about the walls. **It had a great and high wall**. You may be wondering why the city has **a great and high wall** if there are no unbelievers there, no opportunity for a fall, etc... Well, it is to communicate the invincibility of the city. But I do think there is a literal wall. I don't doubt that at all. The wall is given extensive description. Here we are only told it is **a great and high wall**, but there is more in other verses. In verse 17 some angel **measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements**. In other words, it's not saying that all angelic measurements correspond to human measurements, but it's saying that in the measuring of this city for John's and our benefit, the measurements that were used were human measurements used at the time, that way we can have a true perspective on the wall. The problem is we're not told if the **seventy-two yards** is the thickness of the walls or the height of the walls. This gets into the shape of the city and whether it is a square or a pyramid. Either could be indicated by the description in verse 16 where we are told, **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**. There is no way to determine whether these dimensions are of a cube or a pyramid. There are strengths to both opinions. But the only way the walls could even possibly be **seventy-two yards** in height is if this was a pyramid, for then the walls might extend straight up for seventy-two yards and then begin their angle to the tip of the pyramidal form. But frankly, I have always preferred the view that the **seventy-two yards** are the thickness of the walls, and thereby the city is a perfect cube; **fifteen hundred miles** long, **fifteen hundred miles** wide **and fifteen hundred miles** high. In part, I prefer this because in both the tabernacle and the temple, the most holy place was a perfect cube. But my conclusion is only speculative; it's still possible it's a pyramid. In either case the walls are **seventy-two yards** and just as clear as a diamond so that the glory of God passes through and gives light on the new heaven and new earth, drowning out all darkness, for there is no night there, it is always day.

In verse 12 we learn more about the **wall**. The **wall** has **twelve gates**. So three gates on each side; E, N, S, W, for a total of twelve gates. You'll see the number **twelve** is used repeatedly in the passage.

Moving on from the **walls**, we now look at the **gates**. John says, **and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names 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**. At each of the twelve gates there is an **angel** manning the gate. As spirit beings, we don't know how they will

appear to us. Appearances of angels to humans in Scripture are either as men comparable in size or as super-giants. I prefer to view them as super-giants. Whatever form they appear, they will be awesome. There will be twelve of them stationed, one per gate. This is further evidence of the security and invincibility of the city. No evil can or will enter the city because once this order is established good and evil will remain separate forever.

In addition to the angels manning the gates, there were **names written on the gates**, and each name is one of **the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel**. So Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Judah, Reuben, Dan, etc... We don't know which twelve tribes will have their names on the gates, but that is a question because Joseph was given two tribes through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, meaning there are a total of fourteen tribes. Yet every list only mentions twelve names, meaning some names are left off of each list. Of the nineteen lists, none are identical, the missing names are different every time. So we don't know exactly which twelve names will be on these gates, but we do know they represent **Israel**.

Another thing we know about the **twelve gates** is in verse 21, **And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each one of the gates was a single pearl**. In the ancient world the **pearl** was the most precious stone. It could not be perfected by human tools. Perfect pearls were rare and therefore expensive. These pearls must be huge, since each gate is **a single pearl**.

The last thing we know about the **twelve gates** is verse 25, **In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed**. Since you can't turn off the glory of God, it will always be daytime. And since the gates will never be closed they **will** always be open. In the ancient world the gates were closed at night to protect against enemies. But there will be no enemies in the new heaven and new earth, and so no need to close the gates. The fact the gates are always open is a picture of free access to all who dwell in the new heaven and new earth.

Having looked at the city's appearance as a brilliant diamond radiating the glory of God, the city's walls as translucent crystal-clear allowing the light of the glory of God to illuminate the new heaven and earth, and the twelve pearl gates remaining open and manned by angels, we now look at the foundation stones of the city, in verse 14. **And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb**. Now we don't know if the **twelve foundation stones** are stacked, as in pancakes, or if they are more like a pinwheel. In either case, the strength of the city is being emphasized, as it has twelve foundation stones, it can never falter. And here again we see the number **twelve**. But this time, rather than the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them, it's the **names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb**. The twelve names will be the twelve the Father chose and revealed to Jesus, minus Judas Iscariot, and one other, usually suggested to be either Paul or Matthias. I maintain that the twelfth apostle is Matthias (Acts 1:25-26), and that Paul was another apostle, of another category, like Barnabas (Acts 14:14). The twelve apostles seem to be those who were with Jesus from His baptism until His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22), whereas the other apostles seem to

have only seen Jesus in His resurrection body (cf 1 Cor 9:1). In any case, the **twelve apostles** represent the Church.

So an important theological point to make is that even in the new heaven and new earth, there is still a recognized distinction between Israel and the Church. Note that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the twelve gates and the names of the twelve apostles who represent the Church are inscribed on the twelve foundation stones. So even in eternity the distinction between Israel and the Church will remain as an eternal reminder of the distinct ways God used Israel and the Church to accomplish His purposes in history.

In verse 19 we see more about the twelve foundation stones and their adornment. **The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone 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; the twelfth, amethyst.** These seem to be **precious stones** of adornment, that are fixed to the foundations to give a beautiful appearance.

So now we have seen the city's appearance, from the outside as the glory of God illumines the city like a brilliant diamond, the walls of the city a clear substance allowing the transmission of the glory of God out to the new earth, with twelve gates, each of a single pearl for entrances to the city, and twelve angels, one at each gate guarding the gates, which remain perpetually open, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel upon them and twelve foundation stones, each adorned with precious stones and the names of the twelve apostles of the Church written upon them, we come to the size of the city, which I take to be a perfect cube. Verse 16 says, **the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.** Therefore, **the city** is very large, and if placed on the United States of America, would cover roughly half of it.

Now, we move inside the city to see what the city is like inside the walls. In verse 18, **the city was pure gold, like clear glass.** The city is translucent gold, and if the city is composed of buildings they are made of this pure gold. In verse 21b we read more, **And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.** So the buildings and the street are both composed of pure, clear, gold that permits light to pass unhindered. And, of course, the light is **the glory of God, and its lamp is the Lamb.**

In 22:1 John says, **Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street.** So we are to know, as I mentioned last week in 1 Cor 15:21-25, that after Christ has reigned the thousand years and put all enemies under His feet, that he hands the kingdom over to the God and Father, so that He might be all in all, but what that means is not that Christ ceases to rule, but that both the Father and the Son will co-rule. And that is the picture here, as **a river of crystal clear waters flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.** Since it is most likely that His throne is seated far above

the city, at its greatest height, then the waters cascade down like waterfalls into the streets below. Perfect, clear, clean water that run down the middle of the street, a street which will pass out all twelve gates onto the new earth. And in 22:2 we see more about this river. **On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits.** Here is another use of **twelve**. This time referring to the variety of **fruits** that will be borne by **the tree of life**. The remembrance of the garden of Eden in Genesis is notable, as is the absence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree evidently puts forth different fruits in different seasons. As we're told, **yielding its fruit every month.** So that one tree produces multiple kinds of fruits, one for each month of the year, and these can be partaken of by all freely. And not only are the fruits valuable but **the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.** Where **healing** should be translated "health." They are for the good health of the nations. Even Adam and Eve had to eat to support good health in an unfallen world that was perfectly good. So it will be in the new heaven and new earth, at least for the **nations**. And this is the third division of mankind; **the nations**, in addition to Israel and the Church. As these were quite obviously believers from **the nations** that were neither part of Israel or the Church, and are therefore believers from the time of the millennium and possibly those from after the flood when God divided the nations until the time of Christ, such as Ruth, the Moabitess, since in the final destiny every nation will be represented. So they will remain forever as a testimony to the nation's God established.

In 22:3 it is repeated that **There will no longer be any curse;** The **curse** from the fall of man upon man and nature will be completely absent and further, **the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it.** There will be one throne and upon it will be both the Father and the Son, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and they will co-reign for all eternity. And **His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.** This is our destiny, to reign with God forever and ever as true servant kings.