

Heavenly Minded

Revelation 21

There is just one last item on the Lord's agenda for man's reconciliation. The church age has demonstrated the benefits of grace. The righteous have been resurrected or raptured. The Tribulation is over. All evil has been purged from the cosmos having first been confined to planet Babylon then cast into the eternal torment of perdition. The old heaven and earth have vanished. And now...

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. It's a brand new start – the word for “new” here not only means “fresh” but “of a new kind”. So if you ever gazed over Yosemite Valley and marveled at its beauty – you ain't seen nothin' yet! For one thing, there'll be no more sea. This may be literal, but I'm a bit more inclined to believe that the imagery of Revelation remains consistent and thus, since the sea has represented the gentile nations, this may mean that there will be no more unbelievers, no more rebellious against or ignorant about God.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. I find it interesting that for the first time in his vision, John writes, “...I, John,...” as opposed to just “...I...”. By emphasizing the fact that John saw God's kingdom descending, this very well could be referring to the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy found in all three synoptic gospels - *- there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.* (Mat 16:28, Mk 9:1, Luk 9:27) And notice how the holy New Jerusalem is called the “tabernacle of God”. As we examine it in more detail, we'll see that the pattern of the earthly tabernacle did indeed align with the heavenly.

But most important is the amazing pronouncement that “God Himself will be with them and be their God.” With this, we're finally ‘back to Eden’ and even better than Eden. For the Lord, it isn't just forgive and forget but also fellowship forever. Praise God!

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” This is the blessed assurance of heaven. And it is the complete opposite of the damned. “no more pain” means “no more pain or great trouble”. Hallelujah!

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” This is the Lord's last command to write. I picture John just in awe, thinking ‘This is too good! I never thought it would be so fantastic!’ And so, it's like Jesus is saying, “Hey John, write it down. It really is true and trustworthy.”

Next, Jesus will declare that the revelation pertaining to the events of the last days is done. Yet, as He has done before, He will then give us some background information that covers a wide expanse of ‘time’. And here, as heaven is coming to earth, so to speak, it will help us to appreciate this marvelous conclusion. In the following, He will describe for us our eternal home. Are you ready?

And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. Since the church will be raptured before the tribulation, I believe that the majority of this book is intended for the Hebrew believers of the last days, else we would only have up to chapter four. That being said, the rest of the book of Revelation, though still focused upon the Hebrew saints, is intended as a blessing for all believers of the age of grace and tribulation.

The first thing Jesus wants us to know is that He is not only the Author but the Perfecter, the

Creator and the Completer. And the first thing He wants to do as our glorified Lord is to give us freely the continual refreshment of new life. I submit that although this will be completed in heaven, it is begun even now, in this life – it's all a matter of whether or not you thirst.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. “All things” means all things and so it seems that Jesus is saying that the overcomers will share with Him in His inheritance. What is this overcoming? I think it is sevenfold – we found that out in chapters two and three. Each church was admonished to overcome. Together, we are told to do this by:

- keeping our heart set on Christ and a deep love relationship with Him.
- holding on to our faith through all the circumstances of this life.
- searching out the truth of God's word, expecting Him to feed our souls, and serving.
- no compromising – no mixture but rather holding to “pure religion and undefiled.”
- stoking the fire of faith
- ‘keep on keeping on’
- choosing to obey the Father's will and trusting Him even in terrible trials.

Notice also, that He doesn't say that He will be our God and we will be His servants or

acquaintances or guests. We'll be His sons, His children!

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." Now, this is one of the reasons John will later be told not to seal the book, meaning that it should be read and understood. The consequences of evil are eternally disastrous. Recall, the new heaven and new earth are completed at this point and these people are already in perdition. So this isn't spoken as we look forward but it's a warning to all people from the time of the recording of this revelation until the Great White Throne judgment.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

As an encouragement and blessing for all of us as believers, John is now going to get a peak at perfection – the heavenly city as it continues its journey to the new earth.

...having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Some people think the jasper is a diamond, but whatever it is, it's a "most precious stone". This speaks of beauty and purity while the glory of God speaks of brilliance. This is a shining, brilliant, transparent city.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. On the breastplate of the High Priest, the gemstones representing the tribes of Israel were arranged in four groups of three. Since there are gates on all sides, the picture is one of easy access. Yet there is a wall and not only a wall but a "great and high" wall which implies protection and security. We'll see that access is all a matter of 'family ties'.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Hmm. Twelve tribes and twelve apostles, joined together and surrounding the "tabernacle of God". Does that ring a bell? Of course. The earthly tabernacle was the place of God's presence and it was surrounded by two sets of curtains joined together by 50 gold clasps. We showed in

previous letters that these represented exactly what we see here – the church and the believing tribes of Israel surrounding heaven's holy place and joined together in Christ.

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. Now, this length, breadth and height are about 1377 miles. That makes it about one fifth the size of our moon if it's a cube. The phrase here "laid out as a square" implies a perspective from any vantage point, thus it seems to refer to a cube. If the twelve foundations are evenly spaced, that would represent over 22,750,000 square miles and each of the twelve layers would have its own sky over 100 miles high. It's a big, Big house. But why does God care that we know these dimensions? What's the point?

The city is already built. This isn't a plan or design. The original language specifies 12,000 "stadion", each of which is about 600 feet. However, of note, is that the word stadion also means "a race". Also, the fact that the angel used a gold reed implies that the standard he used to measure is of the highest quality and trustworthy.

Recall that the city is described above as having been *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

In addition, in chapter 19, we read of the Lamb's Bride, *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* The word "bright" here is specifically, "shining, brilliant and transparent" and "arrayed" is literally to be surrounded with a covering and indeed, can apply to a city.

Now, remember that the apostle Paul likened his ministry unto a race. In 2 Tim 4:7,8 he said, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness (or righteous acts), which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.* In Acts 20:24, he used the same word, "course" in the KJV, which is derived from the word meaning to run, specifically "of those who run in a race course". In Heb 12:1 we read, *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...* Clearly, each believer's life and ministry is a race with a prize going not to the winner but to the finisher.

So as this cube, New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb who is prepared by her adornment, descends out of

heaven, a trustworthy measurement reveals that her adornment or the measurement of what surrounds her is 12,000 “races” or 12,000 “lives of ministry unto the Lord”. But wait, it’s 12,000 on each edge and there are 12 edges on a cube. So there are 12 times 12,000 or 144,000 ministries which measure out her covering -- the “righteous acts of the saints”.

This should ring a bell for in chapter 14 we rejoiced to see in heaven, standing with Christ all 144,000 Hebrew saints who gave their all for the Lord during the tribulation and evidently led a huge number of people to saving faith in Jesus as a result. I suggest that the measurements we’re given here are a testimony to their races – they finished them and like Paul, they finished them in faithfulness. As a result, their righteous acts are forever part of the shining, brilliant, transparent adornment of the Bride.

Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. We can’t be sure whether this measurement is the height or the thickness of the wall. Since this angel seems to be the same size as a man, that would make it about 216 feet. Gold, in the Bible, speaks of faith and royalty

whereas “clear glass” would indicate purity. Unlike the city or throng of Babyon, this gathering is of those whose royal hearts are full of faith and purity.

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. We can clearly link in the original languages eight of the twelve gems listed here with those on the breastplate of the Hebrew High Priest which represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Considering that the names of the twelve tribes are on the gates, I’m very much inclined to believe that the four remaining gems are also a match with those in the breastplate.

The High Priest, who represented Jesus Christ, wore the breastplate as a symbol that the twelve tribes were always on the heart of the Lord. It was, however, called the breastplate of judgment. But in Isa 59:17 and Eph 6:14, the breastplate donned by the Lord and by believers is called the breastplate of righteousness. This is a fitting picture in two ways – first, the judgment upon Christ for our sins made the church righteous in Him. Next, in the tribulation, the judgments of God upon Israel will bring forth a turning to the Lord and thus His covering of righteousness

as well. I think that is why these same gems adorn the wall. They will serve as a continual reminder that God’s ways are always right, His judgments always just. Those who enter will consider that they do so because of God’s faithfulness to His people.

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. This is one of the clearest and most powerful pictures in Revelation. How do you enter the heavenly city? You must pass through a pearl. This completes the picture of the surrounding wall of heaven – whereas the gemstones speak of the pressure and heat of judgment bringing forth righteousness in the Hebrew saints, the pearls speak of the righteousness obtained purely by grace. I’ll explain. You see, to enter you won’t pass through a wall, you’ll pass through a gate. Even though righteousness came to the Jews by way of the shock treatment, the judgments of the tribulation, even they have to enter heaven by grace. Righteousness is a ‘boundary’ requirement but grace is the point of entry. The church was made righteous and enters heaven by the gracious blood of Christ which covers all our sins. It took the judgments of the tribulation to drive the Jews to seek righteousness. They too enter only by this precious blood.

But what is a pearl anyway? It is a piece of dirt, a piece of grit, that

has been covered and covered and covered and so on with countless layers of beautiful nacre. That’s exactly like those who accept Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary. We are dirty, gritty, full of sin and our own ways, and we need a Savior. His grace covers and covers and covers our lives as often as needed and as a result, we are beautiful in His sight. Those who enter heaven by way of a pearly gate will be forever reminded of this wonderful truth.

But I saw no temple in it, for 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. “Temple” here means the holy places of the temple so of course, with God Almighty and the Lamb present, they are the holy places. The word for “glory” can and usually does mean a shining, but it also means a judgment or opinion. As such, it is saying that not only does the shining brilliance of God illuminate heaven but the judgments (in the sense of teachings) of God bring wisdom to those in heaven as well.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light,... Though it is in the Greek, “walk” alludes to the Hebrew notion of how you conduct your life. And Who is “its light”? The Lamb! The word “light” is actually “lamp”

or “candle” – that which gives forth light having been set upon a lampstand, a prominent place. You see, *there is only one Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved* – Jesus Christ. Ever since His resurrection, the gospel has been taken to the whole world and those “nations” or literally ethnic peoples who have turned to it have indeed conducted their lives, crafted their laws, by its light.

...and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Again, this is background. Who are the spiritual leaders (kings) of Israel (the earth)? To answer that, we must note that the verb tense here for “bring” is in the present active. In other words, it was happening at the time the Revelation was given. The only leaders bringing people to heaven up until that time were the Apostles and disciples of Christ, the vast majority of whom were indeed Jewish.

Bringing people? Yes. Here’s what “glory” can be translated as - *the glorious condition of blessedness unto which it is appointed and promised that true Christians shall enter.* And honor? It is literally *a valuing by which the price is fixed.* Makes sense since Jesus paid that price for us with His life and receives the value of all the souls saved in return.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night

there). Because of Calvary, the gates are always open. That’s why Paul said, *We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.* He knew that to die while saved only meant immediate entrance into Christ’s presence. (2 Cor 5:8)

And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

The “nations” are the gentiles, and combined with the future tense in the verb, this seems to be saying that “they” – believers in general -- will first bring the gentiles to salvation. That has proven out historically. Nevertheless, we know from our studies in Revelation that God is definitely NOT done until all the redeemed remnant of Israel are gathered to Himself as well. Paul wrote of the Jews, *Now if their fall is riches for the world and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!...For if their casting away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?* (Rom 11:12,15)

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Though God has provided salvation, entry into heaven, to those who accept Jesus and walk in His light, He does not permit anyone else access. If you are in the Book of Life, “Come in!” If not, don’t you think it’s time to give your heart to Him??