

Chapter Twenty-One

The New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem The New Covenant

Whenever preachers go to the well of scripture to draw on the imagery of heaven, they inevitably end up in the last two chapters of Revelation. Paul was not allowed to say anything about what he saw in heaven. (2 Cor 12:4) So why is John is allowed to write extensively on the subject? Here's the answer everyone rejects: *because John is not describing heaven.*

The language does speak of a state of bliss. The descriptions painting a picture of the kingdom, and *especially*, God's new covenant relationship with mankind certainly sound heavenly. John is describing the *restored state of humanity to its Heavenly Father*. Heaven is just gravy. The core issue regarding all that Father, Son and Holy Spirit did involves reconciling mankind and God, returning us to a union with God. "Going to heaven" is not the greatest thing John is describing here, but the removal of the barriers that prevented God and man to rejoin again in heavenly glory.

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.

Although many believe the New Heaven and New Earth is a picture of their future state, Isaiah tells us differently. This seems to be a fulfillment of Isaiah 65, which should be read in its entirety. Isaiah 65:1-5 describes how the Jews rejected God, while verses 6-14 deal with separating the True Israel from idolatrous Israel. The wheat is separated from the tares. The unfruitful are cut away from the fruitful and burned up. Verse 15 states, "My servants will be called by another name (they will be called *Christians*)." Note verses 16-17:

He who is blessed in the earth shall be blessed by the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight! (The blood of Christ covers their sins) For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

The Holy Spirit is not speaking of heaven in Isaiah. We know this because verse 20 says, "No longer will there be in it an *infant* who lives but a few days, or an *old man* who does not live out his days; for the youth *will die at the age of one hundred* and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed." It appears that people will grow old and die in this "new heaven and new earth." Verse 23 also suggests that child-bearing will still be taking place: "They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they are the offspring of those blessed by the Lord, and their descendants with them." Isaiah and Revelation can be tied together.

Although most preachers will scoff, this is a description of the New Covenant. While many of us get hung up on a place (heaven), much of Revelation deals with conditions, as we've already seen. This wonderful imagery seems heavenly, but is in reality the depiction of how wonderful salvation truly is. We must use our inner eyes to "see," and not insist on these as literal descriptions of heaven.

First heaven and earth passed away: A reiteration of 20:11: "I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." There was no longer any room for the old dispensation. Paul emphasized that the kingdom of God was not physical (Rom 14:17); that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 15:50)

No longer any sea: As seen before, the sea is symbolic of nations. (See notes on 13:1) While the church exists on earth, all nations are welcome to come to God through the sacrifice of the Lamb—no one is excluded. There is no separation of the land and sea. There are no privileges connected to one's social position, gender, race, or national heritage such as that which existed under the Jewish dispensation. The reader will notice that Christ is not described here, since God is all and in all.

These are God's people, and God is with them Himself, but withal His tabernacle is with them. This is the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The assembly has her own character, is the habitation of God in a special way, when the unchanging state comes, and all is made new. God is the end, as the beginning. Him that is athirst now God will refresh with the fountain of the water of life—the overcomer shall inherit all things. The world for the Christian is now a great Rephidim.¹

This is the twofold portion of the final blessedness: he shall have God for his God, and be His son. Those who shunned this path did not overcome the world and Satan but chose to walk in iniquity—(they) would have their part in the lake of fire. This closes the history of God's ways.²

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.

Although described in terms of an inhabited city, the description of the New Heavens and Earth is really a description of the New Covenant and the church. Since most of us have been brainwashed into believing this is describing heaven, it's difficult to grasp, and most tend to reject it out-of-hand.

Holy city: The New Covenant—the church. Jerusalem is called the holy city. (Neh 11:1, 18; Isa 48:2; 52:1; Dan 9:24, 25) It is also mentioned in Hebrews.

You *have* come (not *will* come) to Mount Zion and *to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and *church* of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven... (Heb 12:22)

Coming down from heaven: The church *originates* from God as a result of His plan. Moses *came down* from Mt Sinai, holding the Law. (Exo 34:29) Thus, his *coming down* with God's covenant in hand was to effect a *change* in the Israelites by their coming to terms with God on His conditions.

The Lord's Spirit *changed* Samuel into another man when the prophets *came down* from the

¹ *Rephidim* means 'rests,' and were literal rest stops in the wilderness between the wilderness of Sin and Mt. Sinai. (Exo 17:1, 8; 19:2; Num 33:14) The Israelites hoped to find water here, but to their distress, the streams were dry. God miraculously provided the water, which was an OT type of Christ. (1 Cor 10:4)

² John Darby's *Commentary on Revelation*, chapter 21

mountain. (1 Sam 10:5) James also confirms that “every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, *coming down* from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.” (James 1:17-18)

Thus, *coming down* is significant of a revelation and change wrought through God’s covenant. The law written on stone tablets *came down* from the mountain to change the Israelites into His chosen people. The gifts coming down in James’ text impart change to the Christian heart. This is the law written on the heart. (Rom 2:15; 2 Cor 3:3)

These women are two covenants, one proceeding (*coming down*) from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. (Gal 4:24-26)

Paul is referring to covenants coming down from two mountains, one summed up in Hagar, who was the “bride” bringing the Law to the Jews (“who are slaves”). The second woman bears the promise through Abraham, where the new covenant descends from the New Jerusalem. The apostle’s meaning is clear: the New Jerusalem is *our mother*. In other words, we have our origin and birth in the new covenant, or the New Heavens and Earth, not the old. In Galatians, we have covenants who look like women, who themselves are descending from mountains.

Made ready as a bride adorned for her husband: Highly figurative language describing the state of the Christian *attitude*. The new person who walks in Christ is pure, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:3) Some individuals stumble over this concept, seeing Christians as still being hamstrung by their old “sin nature.” How can the bride be a spotless virgin while on the earth? Is not this a *future* state? After all, no one is truly spotless while in the flesh, are they?

The explanation lies in the way God sees things, not how we see them. Jesus said, “He who believes in the Son *has* eternal life” (John 3:36), just as those who eat His flesh and drink His blood *have* eternal life. (John 6:54) It is the same with the unbeliever: He who does not believe *has been judged already*. (John 3:18) Therefore, God sees people as having eternal life *right now*, or being in a state of condemnation *right now*. While we tend to view life as a set of linear events measured by Time, God sees the end from the beginning. (Isa 46:10)

Secondly, the concept of justification implies that God has imputed righteousness to us *now*—today—not tomorrow—not when we get to heaven. Taken literally, we are spotless and without blame *now*. This is the whole tone of Paul’s letter to the Romans. “Therefore, *having been justified* by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom 5:1) Our “being made right” (IE, justified) takes place in this life, not at death.

Our hostile nature that was antagonistic to God no longer controls us, though we may battle it on a daily basis. (1 Cor 9:27) “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from *all sin*.” (1 John 1:7) Not just past sin, but future sins as well. This is why Christ is depicted as “a lamb *standing* (ministering) as if slain.” (Rev 5:6) Jesus is our *continual* (slain-yet-standing) sacrifice.

We tend to equate righteousness with deeds—specifically, our deeds. Yet God considers us righteous when we are in Christ. Christ’s works (deeds) are imputed to us.

The process of sanctification (setting apart for God's use) is life-long. Christians aren't baptized into the body, and then work their way into heaven by going through a set of weekly rituals. It goes much deeper than that. As the Wise Steward, the Father expects the hearts of his children to change, as He did with the Israelites. The mandate, "You are not to be like the nations around you" still has meaning today. We are *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. The Lord expects Christians to "complete their deeds." (Rev 3:2) This doesn't just mean rigorous attention to church attendance, but a total revamping of our hearts, and how we behold and treat others.

21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Loud voice: A testimony from heaven that is heard everywhere, both on earth and in the spiritual places. This is the final testimony, or "loud voice" heard in Revelation. It sums up the entire plan of God.

Tabernacle of God is among men: This doesn't say that men are now living in *heaven*, dwelling with God, but that God "shall dwell among *them*." This is in reference to another NT passage addressing the new covenant:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And *I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*" (Heb 8:10)

Is God going to wait until we get to heaven before writing these things on our heart? Or does He want us to get with the program now? The whole idea of Christianity is not to make us "good people," but to prepare us for heaven.

He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes: Literally, God shall remove all causes of sadness and desperation. Isaiah said, "...there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying." (Isa 65:19) The prophet is speaking of the New Covenant, not heaven. It is the Good News that gives cause for rejoicing and wiping away tears. It is not confined to a condition found only in heaven. For a fuller explanation, see notes for 7:17.

There shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away: The "first things" being the *elemental principles* surrounding the old covenant. They are replaced by *new things*, meaning, the new heaven and earth—the New Covenant relationship between God and man. Though we may view our lives on earth as a painful condition, it was death's stranglehold on the human race that overshadowed everything. It's true that there will be no mourning, pain, etc in heaven. And if preachers insist on using these scriptures as proof text, that's well and good. However, the text here is describing the Gospel dispensation *now*, not just a future heavenly existence *later*. To deny this is to tarnish the value of Christ's blood in saving us from misery and doom.

Part of the problem is that salvation doesn't wipe away tears and unhappiness. The fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, etc, (Gal 5:22)—provide the essence of our existence, but may take years to

blossom. Christians do not live trouble-free lives, but God provides the strength needed to get through troubles. We still have the assurance of God's blessing, which goes beyond death's pale. Romans 8 describes this in eloquent detail.

21:5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

Jesus Christ sits on the throne. It is He who makes all things new. The term *all things* is a thread woven throughout the bible. Note the usage in these various texts, keeping in mind that the "making new" refers to *all things*, not *some*.

- ◆ Paul spoke of the mystery of God's will (Eph 1:9), which is the summing up of *all things* in Christ.
- ◆ "We know that God causes *all things* to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28)
- ◆ In reference to a prophecy concerning Rome, the angel told Daniel, "There will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters *all things*." However, the context is referring to *nations*, saying, "it will crush and break all these (nations) in pieces." (Dan 2:40)

Exactly how this is to be done—the making of all things new—is seen in the next chapter, where the leaves from the Tree of Life heal the *nations*. Keep in mind that God gave His Son for the sins of the *world* (the nations), that whosoever believes in Him will have eternal life. (John 3:16) It is an offering to all men everywhere. This is the healing and the making new. It is the new covenant, a new opportunity, and a new way to God through the cross of Christ. A new heavens and new earth.

These words are faithful and true: God's Word is true and He is faithful in keeping His promises. Let God be found true, but every man a liar. (Rom 3:4)

21:6 And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."

It is done: This announcement appears in one other place in Revelation—after the final judgment is poured out upon the spiritual realm. (16:17) After Jesus tasted the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30) God's works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Heb 4:3)

In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, *then the mystery of God is finished*, as He preached to His servants the prophets." (Rev 10:7)

I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, *because in them the wrath of God is finished*." (Rev 15:1)

Thus, it is a two-fold announcement: the destruction of the old and the commencement of the new. The wrath of God was carried out on the cross, where sin was judged through His Son.

Spring of the water of life: Literally, words of life and the truth of God's word. The Lamb shall guide those emerging from the great tribulation to springs of the water of life. (Rev 7:17) It refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (John 7:38-39) This water is for the afflicted and thirsty. (Isa 49:10-13) Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst...the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of *water springing up to eternal life.*" (John 4:13-14) Water is connected to the word of God. (Amos 8:11-13)

The words of false teachers bring death, not life. In Amos, lack of God's word caused many false prophets to come forth, announcing that they had what the people were looking for. Peter spoke of false teachers, who were "springs without water." (2 Pet 2:17) They held out a *promise*, but they couldn't deliver from death.

21:7 "He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

The sense of the text seems to mean that *he who overcomes shall inherit the water of life*, since that is what was previously mentioned. However, the water of life comes from believing the word, which *then* results in eternal life. The caveat is that the Christian must overcome to the *end*. Such promises were made to the seven churches in the beginning of the book:

To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God. (Rev 2:7)

He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. (Rev 2:11)

To him who overcomes...I will give of the hidden manna...a white stone and a new name. (Rev 2:17)

He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations...and I will give him the morning star. (Rev 2:26-28)

He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. (Rev 3:5)

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God...and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem...and My new name. (Rev 3:12)

He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Rev 3:21)

The only other time overcoming is mentioned is in chapter 21. The understanding of this inheritance is spread out among the promises made to the churches in these earlier chapters. They are promised to those who overcome life's trials and tribulations. Although specific to the Jewish Christians living at that time, it still applies to all Christians throughout time.

21:8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving 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."

Cowardly: Those who fear having to “take up their cross” and following Jesus. These are the ones who are incapable of overcoming to the end. They are like the rich young ruler, who could not give up riches because he feared personal hardship.³ Early Christians facing persecution reverted back to paganism or Judaism when the courts and synagogues threatened to take their jobs, home, family, and property. “My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” (Heb 10:38)

Unbelieving: Those who refuse to acknowledge God so as to give up their evil deeds. (Rom 1:18ff)

Abominable: The word *abomination* and its variants are strewn throughout scripture, and include those individuals taken over by unnatural lusts. Child molesters, those who commit bestiality, homosexuals, and other types can be assured of a place in the Lake of Fire. A concerted effort has been gaining widespread support by the gay and lesbian community to have the word ‘abomination’ removed from the bible, since it has historical (scriptural) connections to their lifestyle.

Murderers: Especially those who hate a fellow Christian in their heart. (1 John 3:15)

Immoral persons: Those who embrace adultery, prostitution, fornication, Internet pornography, etc.

Sorcerers: The Greek word is *pharmakois*, where we get the word *pharmacy*. It includes those who practice witchcraft, where drugs were used to open up the mind to demonic influence. It is not referring to people who take narcotics to relieve pain, which, unfortunately, many Christians believe.

Idolaters: Not only those who worship idols, but includes greedy persons. (Col 3:5)

All liars: Those who deceive so as to lead the listener to a faulty conclusion resulting in a negative consequence. False teachers fall into this category.

Their part will be in the lake: Literally, their *right of inheritance* will be the Second Death.

The Second Death: This is the definition of the Lake of Fire. It literally means, *place of final judgment*. Prior to the first death, people have an opportunity to come to Christ for salvation. Once they die physically, however, there is no more chance at salvation. It is appointed to all of us to die. Afterwards, there is only judgment. (Heb 9:27) The Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that those who are dead will have one more chance to hear the Gospel.⁴ If this were true, why would we spend our time on earth obeying God, evangelizing others, and trying to live the Christian life, when we have a second chance to obey the Gospel from the grave? Let’s eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die (and THEN we’ll get saved)!

21:9 And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

In 17:1, an angel who also had one of the seven bowls of plagues tells John, “Come here, I shall

³ I read somewhere that Benny Hinn, a well-known false teacher, would not preach in India unless he was guaranteed \$100,000 up front.

⁴ Based on their understanding of 1 Pet 3:19.

show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.” He was brought *in the Spirit* to a wilderness to witness that event. Here, he is brought to a mountain, also *in the Spirit*. Ezekiel was brought to a high mountain and shown a “structure like a city.” There, he was told, “See with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for *you have been brought here in order to show it to you*. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see.” (Ezek 40:4)

Bride, wife of the Lamb: To understand the marriage of the church to Christ, we must understand the institution of marriage from the Jewish viewpoint existing during the 1st Century.

In our culture, marriage is seen as a *social* institution, whereas the bible (and Jesus) views it from a *theological* perspective. Father, sons, brethren, and so forth, illustrate the familial ties of Christians to God and to each other. We are related to Him and to each other due to the blood relationship of Christ.

With the Hebrews, married life was the normal life. Single adults were considered abnormal. According to the Talmud, “Any Jew who has not a wife is no man.” Of the three great events of life—birth, marriage and death—marriage was considered to be the most important. As such, the selection of the wife and arrangement of all financial and contractual matters connected with marriage was decided by the parents of both parties. This is seen in Jesus’ statement, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day.” (John 6:44) Just as the earthly parent looked for the right kind of wife for their son, so too does the heavenly Father look for the right kind of person for His Son, namely, he who is *sincere*.

During this process, there was a lot of bargaining concerning dowries, property, etc. To the Christian, “bargaining” consists of confession, repentance, denying self, and developing spiritual fruits (being cleansed, or *sanctified*). These conditions *must* be met before the believer can be delivered to Christ to live for all eternity. Salvation is free, but the Christian is expected to make changes in their lifestyle, rearrange their priorities, and have a different attitude. The majority of the NT letters bears this out. This relationship of the Christian to God is realized in the kingdom of God. It is “within you.” This is not to say that we work our way to heaven—entrance has been freely provided through the blood of Christ. However, God expects our submission to the Holy Spirit’s influence, so that we might be light-bearers, fruit-bearers, and doers of His will.

21:10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

This is significant of Moses being taken upon Mount Nebo to see the Promised Land. (Deut 34:1) The apostle is carried away to see the Great Harlot (17:3), and also to see the bride of the Lamb. (21:10) Both are female entities, and both times he is carried away *in the Spirit*. The term means *to be made spiritually minded*.

- ◆ David is said to speak from the OT *in the spirit*. (Matt 22:43)
- ◆ Simeon came to the temple *in the Spirit* to bless baby Jesus and foretell of His mission on earth. (Luke 2:27)
- ◆ Paul said that those who set their mind on the Spirit also *live in the Spirit*. (Rom 8:6, 9)
- ◆ We are justified “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and *in the Spirit*.” (1 Cor 6:11)
- ◆ The mystery of Christ was revealed to His holy apostles and prophets *in the Spirit*. (Eph 3:5)
- ◆ Christians are to pray *in the Spirit*.
- ◆ (Eph 6:18) Jesus was vindicated *in the Spirit*. (1 Tim 3:16)

Great and high mountain: Is John deposited on this mountain to give him a better view? If the church were coming down out of heaven, why would he need to see it from a mountaintop? Could he not have seen it easier from a flat plain? The text implies he was brought up *to* it, not necessarily deposited on *top* of it. The mountain and the holy city are one and the same entity. It is as the writer said: “You have come to Mount Zion *and* to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” (Heb 12:22) They are descriptions of the same thing. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the **city** of our God, His holy **mountain.**” (Ps 48:1) Isaiah also spoke of “My holy mountain Jerusalem.” (Isa 66:20)

I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain. (Zech 8:3)

21:11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.

Having the glory of God: This is said in the next chapter in a different way: “They shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them.” (Rev 22:5)

Very costly stone: God sitting on the throne is “like a jasper.” (Rev 4:3) Jasper is quartz, and, according to this verse, of the finest quality available. The New Covenant is flawless and transparent. Those within its embrace have no defilement or blemish.

21:12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

It’s difficult to not see this as a place, IE, *heaven*. That’s what we’ve been told by preachers our whole life. We have to remember that these are symbols describing something else. We don’t have a problem understanding that we are stones, being assembled into a building for God (1 Pet 2:5), but we can’t seem to grasp the concept that these chapters are not describing a literal city or place in heaven.

Great and high wall: Walls are symbols of protection from outside enemies. Walls around a city protected its inhabitants. Any breaches in them left the city open to invaders. (Neh 2:17) Walls were a defense (Isa 25:4), representing protection. (Zech 2:5) Concerning David and his soldiers, Nabal’s servants said, “They have been a wall (protection) around us day and night.” (1 Sam 25:16) In prophecy, walls are symbols of *salvation*, as seen in Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the church:

Violence will not be heard again in your land, nor devastation or destruction within your borders; but *you will call your walls salvation*, and your gates praise. (Isa 60:18)

A rich man relies on his wealth to save him. “A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination.” (Prov 18:11) Thus wealth is seen as both a “strong city” and the walls of protection around it. Not so with believers—*for the righteous shall live by faith.* (Gal 3:11) In Ezekiel’s vision, the wall was built around God’s city to separate the holy from the common. (Ezek 42:20) God said He would knock down the walls that had been whitewashed by the false prophets. (Ezek 13) Their

protection (salvation) was coated with a sense of false security and would be destroyed by the voice (hailstones) of God.

Twelve gates: Entrances into the New Covenant relationship with God. They symbolize the way into a condition with God. (Psa 24:7; 118:19) They were portals where people could enter in order to worship God. (Jer 7:2) Judgment was pronounced at the gates. (Deut 17:5; Zech 8:16) Cities without gates and walls considered themselves secure if they didn't feel threatened. (Jer 49:31; Ezek 38:11) City gates that had been breached were considered prey for vultures. (Lam 2:9 Ezek 26:10)

The number 12 is symbolic of national completeness, as seen in the 12 tribes of Israel making up the *whole* nation of Israel. The 12 apostles are indicative of the 12 gates, their words opening up the way into our covenant relationship with Christ.

Twelve angels: A messenger is posted at each entrance. The text suggests that the names of the tribes of Israel be fixed to the angels, not the gates themselves. This is most likely in reference to the "spirit of prophecy" seen in 19:10. Concerning angels facilitating entrance into the city, note the following verses:

Are (angels) not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels (*spirit of prophecy*) proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord (*spirit of prophecy*), it was confirmed to us by those who heard. (Heb 1:14 – 2:3)

Israel received the Law, and what was fulfilled in Christ guides us towards the covenant, described as "the holy city of God." This is symbolized as 12 gates, or entrances by which the nations may now approach God. Before, we couldn't approach God through the Law, since the Law only identified our sin and spoke to condemn us. Christ did what we could not do, serving as the gate by which to return to God. This is the subject of Romans and Galatians.

21:13 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.

Access to the New Jerusalem and this New Covenant begins from the "place of dawning," as the ancient Jews referred to the east. The number '3' signifies spiritual unity. These gates represent access to a union with God from the four corners of the earth (everywhere). All mankind can come to Christ in spiritual harmony based on the words of the apostles (gates).

21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The salvation (wall) of this new covenant is based on what the 12 apostles did, namely providing a witness and testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:33) Likewise, Christians are added to this spiritual building as "living stones." (1 Pet 2:5) The wall is our defense against the world and evil. It is essentially the truth of the Word of God built upon the solid foundation of the apostles' letters and work. As Christians, we must be careful to heed Paul's advice here:

According to the grace of God, which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:10-11)

“Even if we or an angel from heaven preach a Gospel to you beside what we preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Gal 1:8) The Book of Mormon is a Gospel *besides*, or *alongside* of the original apostolic foundation of truth. Legalism is another foundation laid alongside the original. These doctrines are placed near the Truth to make them seem legitimate, just as Satan placed a single false word inside of God’s statement to legitimize his deceit. (“You shall *not* die.”)

The pop media has painted an un-biblical picture of Satan being a nasty-looking monster. The truth is more frightening, however: he’s a guy wearing a suit, speaking soothing words of comfort, usually from behind a pulpit. His ministers wear official-looking robes and mutter “religious” words, or come from the television and radio preaching false gospels, making promises never to be kept. He is the Pharisee, the gold that glitters and attracts. He never humbles himself to the position of a carpenter or ignorant janitor. He never tells the plain truth, but coats it in frosting to make it attractive to ignorant men and women. He always tells them—like he told Eve—things designed to inflate the ego and appeal to the natural man.

21:15 And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.

In chapter 11, God’s temple, the altar, and those who worshipped in it were all measured, meaning they were checked for consistency and in accordance with God’s standards of righteousness. In the New Jerusalem, this measuring device is made of gold, symbolizing its precious value. The New Covenant (Christ’s blood atonement), the way into the city (faith built upon the Gospel testimony of the apostles), and the fortification against enemies (the Word itself) are all measured by a righteous standard of Truth.

21:16 And 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.

Laid out as a square: Actually, as a cube, since the height is mentioned. The kingdom of the church is equal on all sides. There is no *difference* in its perspective; everything is encompassed in perfect equality and symmetry:

For you are *all* sons of God through faith (*coming through the gates*) in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female (*no variance in height, width and breadth*); for you are all *one* in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26-28)

Fifteen hundred miles: Other translations say 12,000 stadia (KJV = furlongs) According to Strong’s, the length of 600 Greek feet (1,500 feet by today’s standard) determined running competitions. The one who outran his competitors and reached the goal first received the prize. Courses of this description were found in most of the larger Greek cities, and were like that at Olympia. It could signify the extra measure needed to win the prize and achieve the goal.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor 9:24-27)

This then is the *measurement* of how we are to run: with self-control in all things, and with a definite aim. Those who abide by God's covenant relationship with Him must be mindful to keep themselves aligned to the righteous standard (gold measuring rod) of Christ's will (He is the Head). This is not to say that those who fail are automatically cast into darkness, for our God is a merciful God. Only He can establish a perfect goal, which is summed up in Christ.

21:17 And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.

The means of protection and defense is weighed for consistency and righteousness. This wall has already been seen to symbolize salvation based upon the Truth of God's Word. The testimony of Jesus (human measurement) is the same as the spirit of prophecy (angelic measurement). (See Rev 19:10) This is seen in the next chapter, where John writes, "These words are faithful and true" (they stand up to the golden rod of measurement); and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel (*heavenly measurement*) to show to His bond-servants (*earthly measurement*) the things which must shortly take place.

Seventy-two yards: Literally, the determined measure of the testimony concerning Christ. Measuring in yards was unknown in ancient times, and is more accurately translated by the KJV as 144 cubits. This is the square of 12, meaning that the height and breadth of nations (12 = national completeness) are to be determined by the standard of God's word. The 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles stand together to determine the wall's thickness or degree of *impenetrability*. No enemy can break through nor hope to penetrate such a sturdy and massive bulwark of truth.

21:18 And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

Just as the church in verse 11 displays her brilliance *like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper*, God's salvation is perfect and crystal clear.

City was pure gold: Demonstrating the extreme and precious value of the church in spiritual terminology. This gold, however, is unlike earthly gold; it is clear as glass, symbolizing the church's transparency to light (truth). There are no shifting shadows or murky entities lurking within the true church, regardless of who may be sitting in the pews.

21:19-20 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.

Although commentators have determined some of these stones to be relatively worthless, the text

confirms that this wall was adorned with *every kind* of precious stone. Stones that we consider common today were considered rare and valuable in John's day. Some of the most beautiful quartz stones are of relatively little worth. Two things may be determined:

- (1) It is the *foundation* that is festooned with these stones, not the wall itself
- (2) They *adorn*, or *beautify* the foundation.

The foundation of the apostles' testimony is not just rock solid, but their words also contain beauty. Paul wrote, "How shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the *feet* (foundation) of those who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (Rom 10:15) The spiritual significance of these stones cannot be determined from clear scriptural evidence. I believe the Holy Spirit's intention was to portray our salvation (wall) as being built on things deemed valuable to those living at that time. The liberal and extravagant use of these precious materials, such as "a pavement of sapphire" serves to illustrate man's priceless relationship with God.

- (1) *Jasper*: The brilliance of the New Jerusalem was "as a jasper, clear as crystal." (Rev 21:11)
- (2) *Sapphire*: Next to diamond, sapphire is the hardest natural stone known. God's people were promised to have their foundations set in sapphire (stability). (Isa 54:11) God's throne sat on a sea of sapphire. (Ezek 1:26) A pavement of sapphire, clear as glass, sat under God's feet. (Exo 24:10)
- (3) *Chalcedony*: The Greek word literally means *copper-like*. It is from the word *chalkos*, a metal that was used in the process of hollowing out a vessel or container. The Israelites were promised a land, where copper could be mined from the mountains. (Deut 8:9) Chalcedony received its name from Chalcedon, a city in Asia Minor. Agate, bloodstone, carnelian, chrysoptase, flint, jasper, and onyx are all varieties of chalcedony.
- (4) *Emerald*: A deep green variety of beryl and a gem of great worth. Emeralds were also an article of trade between Tyre and Syria. (Ezek 27:16)
- (5) *Sardonyx*: This is the only reference found in the bible for sardonyx. It was not one of the stones found in Aaron's breastplate, although the word may be translated from the Hebrew as *onyx*. The shoulder stones of Aaron's ephod were onyxes with the names of six tribes of Israel engraved on each stone.
- (6) *Sardius*: In Hebrew, it means *Adam*, because of its red color. Also translated *ruby*.
- (7) *Chrysolite*: The word comes from two Greek words: *lithos* (common stone) and *chrysos* (article of gold, such as an ornament or coin) Jesus is called a precious stumbling stone. (1 Pet 2:6-8)
- (8) *Beryl*: Probably a topaz, according to Strong's. In Daniel's vision of the "man dressed in linen," his body was like beryl. (Dan 10:6)
- (9) *Topaz*: Also one of the stones in Aaron's breastplate. Also known as chrysolite.

- (10) *Chrysoprase*: Another “utility” metal, as defined by Strong’s. It was a green stone and also found in the breastplate of judgment. The second half of the word (*prasos*) means *leek*, a green, onion-like vegetable.
- (11) *Jacinth*: A yellow-orange stone of the zircon family.
- (12) *Amethyst*: A purple-colored stone.

Though not in the same order, the Jewish mind would instantly recognize these stones in correlation to the stones on Aaron’s breastplate. As the breastplate symbolized the closeness of the 12 tribes to the high priest, so too do these refer to the value of the church.

21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” (Matt 13:45-46) The word of God is considered to be a hidden treasure, requiring men to “seek” it. (Prov 2:1-4) Thus, the word *pearl* is understood in the Greek to mean *oyster-pearl*, one of the hidden treasures of the ocean. This highly figurative language suggests the degrees of worth and protection found in God’s new city. Note:

O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and your foundations I will lay in sapphires. Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies, and your gates of crystal, and your entire wall of precious stones. And all your sons will be *taught of the Lord*; and the *well being of your sons will be great*. In righteousness you will be established; you will be far from oppression, for you will not fear; and from terror, for it will not come near you. (Isa 54:11-14)

Isaiah therefore compares valuable gems to being taught by the Lord, resulting in people having confidence and well-being in His salvation.

The gates represent 12 paths into the city, allowing spiritual entrance from the 4 corners of the earth. Yet, there is but one street mentioned, and it is made of pure gold. The symbols show that every tribe, tongue, people, and nation can enter into a renewed relationship with God by embracing the word of truth written down by the apostles. Once they are inside the covenant relationship, they walk (live) on a single street, which shows the unity of focus and direction toward God. It is not, as many believe, a multi-lane freeway, where any faith leads one to God.

21:22 And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.

We see here a *city*, which is a population of *individuals* called *the church*. *Church* literally means *called out*. Christians are *called out* from the world and *into* the kingdom of Heaven. A great wall of salvation surrounds this group. “Inside” the called out ones we find God and the Lamb. They live in the midst of their *communion*:

We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (2 Cor 6:16)

An unfortunate concept propagated today is that of autonomy. In theory, each congregation is a stand-alone entity, and not answerable to a “mother” church. Although this has scriptural basis, Christians have come to misunderstand and misapply scriptural autonomy. They want to accommodate God’s plan within a man-made construct. For example, most congregations believe that once you “identify” with a congregation, you should not be “going to church” with any *other* congregation, except for occasional or circumstantial reasons. Fellowship is not a valid reason for visiting another congregation. Fellowship with another congregation is “letting down” your own spiritual family. Some have even gone so far as to publicly chastise members for “attending services” elsewhere. God’s plan, however, is not to set up boundaries and restrictions on fellowship. The church is the family of God, and many have forgotten Paul’s words that there is *one* body. (Eph 4:4) Peter did not say that we were being built as congregational-based spiritual *houses*, but “as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual *house* for a holy priesthood. (1 Pet 2:5)

Although high-sounding arguments have been put forth on the legitimacy of “remaining faithful” to one’s local congregation, the real concern is more down-to-earth: preachers don’t want their members dropping money into another church’s offering plate.

21:23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

The church is not illuminated by physical elements, but by the spiritual glory of God and His Messiah. Its degree of light is not based on seasons or times, New Moon festivals, or Sabbath days, but is *continuously* illuminated by God.

Jesus said that believers are the light of the world. (Matt 5:14) He also said that He was the light of the world; that the person who followed Him would not walk in darkness, but would have the light of life. (John 8:12) Again, “I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.” (John 12:46)

21:24 And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.

This particular verse disputes the idea that we’ve been reading about heaven. Nations don’t walk by heaven’s light; they walk by the light of the church. Earthly kings do not come into heaven to bring their glory inside. The next chapter speaks of the leaves of the tree of life “healing” the nations. (22:2) Such concepts relate to the earth, not heaven, since there will be no nations in heaven, much less those needing healing.

Walking denotes *living*. (Rom 8:4; Eph 2:10, 4:17, etc) Christians live according to the Golden Rule of loving their fellow man. It is this rule that is to be guiding the nations.

The kings of the earth—the Jews—bring their riches, glory and excellence into this new covenant. How do they do this? By the church inheriting the Jews’ rich history, the fulfillment of the law, and the heritage of King David, among other things pertinent to their legacy.

21:25-26 And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;

This is in reference to the OT:

Your gates will be open continually; they will not be closed day or night, so that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. (Isa 60:11)

Zechariah speaks of the establishment of the church on earth:

It will come about in that day that there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light (*no more sun and moon*) And it will come about in that day that living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea (*the word will go out into all the world*); it will be in summer as well as in winter (not seasonal). And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one. (Zech 14:6-9)

Thus, there are no boundaries that prevent men from seeking and finding God. The gates of Hell shall not prevail over the gates of the church. (Matt 16:18) In other words, Satan's empire may surround the church's gates and walls, but it cannot prevent the lost from seeking salvation.

21:27 and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Sinners *shall never* come into it. They may enter a building set aside for religious use, but they'll never be part of the New Covenant. Entrance into it is the result of seeking the Truth. (Matt 7:7, 8) They "shall never" is not because they're trapped in Hell, but because of their sinful condition.

A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. **The unclean will not travel on it**, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it. No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; these will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there. (Isa 35:8-9)

There are those within the church who make a pretension of holiness, who are "wolves in sheep's clothing."

They went out *from* us, but they were not really *of* us; for if they had been *of* us, they would have remained *with* us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. (1 Jn 2:19-20)

John says that antichrists—those opposed to the Gospel—originated from within the church (they went out from us). He then clarifies himself by saying, "they were not *really* of us." So although these pretenders seemed authentic, based on what they had gleaned from Christian doctrines, they were not truly sons of God. This is why John says, "But *you* (as opposed to *them*) have an anointing from the Holy One, *and you all know it.*" How did they know they were anointed? Paul affirms that all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, and that His Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom 8:14-16) In other words, the Spirit leads our walk in life; the two are in agreement. We are in harmony with the will of God (His Spirit) and show it by our manner of living.

Jude speaks of "men who are *hidden* reefs" in the church, and further illustrates true membership in the Body of Christ by referring to the OT:

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, which the Lord, *after saving* a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. (Jude 5)

All of the Israelites were called out of the land of Egypt, but most of them were wiped out because of unbelief *after He had saved them*. Jesus confirms this notion by also saying, “Many are *called* but few are *chosen*.” (Matt 22:14) There will certainly be pretenders, hypocrites and unbelievers who have their own agenda for adopting the name ‘Christian.’ These weeds are allowed to grow up with the wheat, but will be separated and burned at the judgment. (Matt 13:20)

While the church is on the earth, unbelievers may be in our midst. On a *spiritual* level, however, they are not true members of the Body of Christ. The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His.” (2 Tim 2:19)