

FPFWC Christian Development



The Great Hope of the Saints

August 2022

Summer Quarter

August 13, 2022

Lesson #2 – A New City

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Revelation 21:10-27

ICE BREAKER –

1. When you think of moving to a “New City” what questions come to mind?
2. What are the benefits of being a citizen of God’s Kingdom?
3. How does John’s heavenly vision provide a peace and hope for a follower of Christ?

Key Verse: *“The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”—Revelation 21:14*

LESSON BACKGROUND

First century Greco-Roman cities—such as Rome, Athens, and Corinth—were often spoken of in high regard by ancient philosophers and writers. They would go to great lengths to laud a city’s accomplishments, while providing stirring descriptions of the city for unfamiliar readers. In today’s Scripture text, John sees a great city coming from the heavens. He describes it in a manner that stirs the hearts of believers for what they can expect.

Prophetic visions of a city of God were not uncommon in biblical and Jewish texts. The psalmist described the beauty of the city of God, forever made secure by the presence of God (Psalm 48). The prophet Isaiah envisioned the centrality of God’s city, Jerusalem, in the last days (Isaiah 2:2–3). This New Jerusalem would be the source of joy for all God’s people (65:17–19).

Tobit, a Jewish text written in the intertestamental period, describes a heavenly Jerusalem, very similar to John’s. The city would be rebuilt with precious stones and gold; it would become a place where the God of Israel would be worshipped (Tobit 13:16–18).

A vision of the prophet Ezekiel provides the most notable Old Testament comparison to John’s vision. Ezekiel was taken to a mountain and shown a vision of what appeared to be a city (Ezekiel 40:2). The bulk of Ezekiel’s vision includes the dimensions of a heavenly temple and its courts to reflect God’s glory (40:5–43:12). The vision includes a life-giving river flowing from the temple (47:1–12), and the boundaries and divisions of a reestablished Israel (47:13–48:29). The vision culminates as Ezekiel sees the gates and dimensions of the city (48:30–35).

A close comparison between the visions of Ezekiel and John will reveal differences. However, John’s vision is in fundamental harmony with the theological tradition that was at the heart of Ezekiel’s. Throughout history, God’s people have held firmly to the truth that God will provide for His people at the end of time. These visions, while not necessarily depicting a physical location, nevertheless point to God’s faithfulness to His people.

LESSON COMMENTARY

John was carried to a high mountain rather than the harlot's wilderness (17:1). **Wife of the Lamb** (v. 9) indicates the faithful city, new Jerusalem, in contrast to the harlot (17:3). It reflected the **glory of God** (v. 11). God's glory is intrinsic divine light that emanates from His person. Her **brilliance** (lit., shining star) was like top-grade jasper.

21:12–21. The **high wall** (v. 12) signifies its unchallenged safety. The names of **the twelve tribes of ... Israel** on the **gates** bring to mind Ezekiel's millennial temple (Ezk 48:30–35). Another parallel is drawn by the reference to the **twelve apostles**, whose names are on the **foundation stones** (v. 14). Some equate the twelve tribes with the Church, which is represented by the apostles, but it is better to see the apostles not only as the foundation stones of the Church (Eph 2:20), but also as distinct representatives of Israel and the leaders of the faithful remnant of Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30; Rm 11:1–6). It appears, therefore, that Israel and the Church maintain distinct identities throughout eternity, though together they comprise a unified people of God. Whether or not this suggests different functions for the two in heaven is not clear. Although some have envisioned the city as a pyramid, it will probably be a cube, extending **1,500 miles** in each dimension (v. 16). **Seventy-two yards** (v. 17) is more likely the thickness of its wall than its height. Apparently **angelic measurements** are similar to those used by humans. The material of the wall was "like" a costly stone, and "as" **jasper**, which has been compared to clear quartz. The material was not jasper, but similar to the earthly stone with which John was familiar. Other materials listed in the passage should be probably be understood in a similar fashion. The street was "like" gold and the gates "like" pearls, and so on. The interior buildings were as **pure gold** (v. 18). The colors of the stones covering the wall spanned the spectrum of a rainbow, from yellow and green to fiery red, purple, and blue. Each gate consisted of a **single pearl** (v. 21). The **street of gold** was so free of impurities as to be clear.

21:22–27. The most glorious feature of the city was not, however, its beautiful architecture. Far more impressive were its rulers, the **Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb** (v. 22). The glory radiating from the two would provide all necessary light. The presence of **light** (v. 24) and absence of **night** are literal here, but still reminiscent of Johannine theology of purity and sin (Jn 1:4–5; 1Jn 1:5–7; 2:8–9). The Godhead dispels all negative influence. The **nations** were Gentiles who had persevered in resisting the beast and Babylon, finding their joy in serving the Lamb in the new city. The words **nothing unclean** (v. 27) introduce another set of exclusions (21:6). Unbelievers who lived in habitual sin while on earth would have no part in the new Jerusalem. What should most excite believers about heaven is not its admittedly astounding beauty and bliss. Instead, they should look forward to being with the wonderful Father and the Lamb forever, without sin or physical distance to limit fellowship.

LESSON NUGGET – I'm sure our jaws will drop when we see the magnificence of heaven, with all these precious metals and stones being used as building materials. We regard these materials as being precious and valuable, but the amazing thing about God is that He just sees them as building materials and decoration. He doesn't treasure them. He treasures you.

We are His treasure; we are what He values most, Peter said that we are “rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (1 Peter 2:4). Value is usually determined by rarity, and God only made one of you. He loves you and values you and has invited you to be a part of His eternal family. What a wonderful thing.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*