

**The Revelation to John**  
**Chapter Twenty-one**  
**A New Heaven and a New Earth**  
Leon Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.  
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Now we can really get excited! The old is gone, the new has come. The last few chapters and these final chapters would have been a wonderful encouragement for the church of the first century and for all true churches of all ages. Judgment has come and our final place of existence is set before us. Anyone who does not get excited about these final two chapters is in trouble! Most of the imagery of this chapter reflects Isaiah 60, 65 and Ezekiel 40-48 as John brings the New Jerusalem vision of Isaiah together with the new temple vision of Ezekiel. We also see connections with the promises to the overcomers in the letters to the seven churches. The overcomers at Ephesus were granted the right to the tree of life (2:7; 22:2), those at Thyatira the right of the New Jerusalem (2:26; 21:2), and to Philadelphia the name of the City of God, the New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2). Also every major theme in Jewish literature can be duplicated from these last two chapters although there is the uniqueness of the Lamb's centrality in the city and the absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem. A chapter outline is difficult because of the usual Semitic style of duplicating and elaborating on previous concepts.

**Rev 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.”**

The meaning of “new heaven” and “new earth” is probably not that the old has been renewed although that is the understanding of some interpreters. John writes that he saw a new creation of heaven and a new earth. When John writes that the former have passed away he seems to mean that quite literally. We probably cannot infer any symbolism in these comments. Isaiah also prophesied of a new heaven and earth:

*Isa 65:17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”*

However his prophecy includes people living a long time, but still dying. Also his prophecy includes people having children but Jesus stated that such would not happen in the New Heaven and Earth.

- *Isa 65:20 “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 will be thought accursed.*
- *Isa 65:23 “They will 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.*
- *Matt 22:30 “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*
- *Mark 12:25 “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*

- Luke 20:33-36 *"In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her." (34) Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, (35) but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; (36) for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.*

I then am not certain of the era predicted by Isaiah because life in the new heaven and new earth will be forever and there will be no married people to have children. So how should we interpret these Isaiah verses? There are several possible methods:

1. Those interpreters who believe that the millennium will be on earth for a literal thousand years (premillennialists) maintain that Isaiah prophesied of that era. But that interpretation depends upon bringing backward from four verses in the last chapter of Revelation this 1000-year concept.
2. Postmillennialists maintain that the church age will bring about a period of great peace on earth after which Jesus will then return to establish the New Heaven and New Earth but that this time of peace is not a literal 1000 years. Certainly people holding that view could view the Isaiah prophesy as referring to that time of peace.
3. Jesus informed us that His second coming would be at a time on earth like that of Noah and certainly the people of that time thought that they were living in a very peaceful time from their standards but God saw it as all evil. This could be the time that Isaiah was describing:  
**Matt 24:37-39 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (38) "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.**
4. It may be that Isaiah is seeing two different portions of the "end times" since such a time began at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and still continues today. This could also fit within the postmillennialist position.

I will be content to not totally understand Isaiah's comments on the era he foresaw although I tend to think he was describing the days prophesied by Jesus as when He would return.

When I first read that there would be no sea many years ago I was sad because this seemed to say that I would not be able to sail in heaven! However I no longer think that not being able to sail would make me unhappy in heaven! I also realize that the sea in this era was a symbol of the sources of evil so the use of the sea could be a symbolism for no future source of evil. The sea has been seen as the source of the satanic beast (13:1) and the place of the dead (20:13). The Bible also uses the waves of the sea as an allusion of destruction:

*Ezek 26:3 "therefore, thus says the Lord God,' Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves."*

*Dan 7:3 "And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another."*

Since there is symbolism involved in this verse regarding the sea, there could also be symbolism involved in expressing that there is a new heaven and a new earth. Peter also wrote about the new heavens and new earth:

*2Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (11) Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, (12) looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! (13) But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

The burning up of the old heavens could be symbolic of God's fire purifying the old or it could be a literal meaning. John uses the Greek word for "new" (kaine), which means new in quality and fresh rather than new in time (neos). We cannot really know. All we can do is know that a day will come when there will be a new heavens and earth that will be declared good just like the original creation.

**Rev 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."**

Jerusalem had very special meaning for the Jews and now John sees a Jerusalem coming to earth that had been created in heaven. Thus it would be free from any imperfection and abuse by sinful man. It would then truly be holy as it was sent by God. The city would be beautiful as a bride is for her husband. The Christian view of heaven is very different from other religions such as Hinduism, which as a view of heaven as a giant sea in which each person enters like a drop of water in to it. Again John uses the Greek word for new that means new in quality and fresh rather than new in time. The old Jerusalem had become corrupt and even the place of the crucifixion of the Lord (11:8). Thus the new Jerusalem will be free of any corruption as God has prepared it ready as a bride adorned for her husband. This bride is the church purified for Jesus (Eph 5:27).

**Rev 21:3 "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,**

**Rev 21:4 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.'"**

John does not identify the voice but it comes from the throne of God. The announcement is that God will now live among His people. The word for people is really plural so the meaning is that all the people that He has chosen as His children from every part of the world will be identified as belonging to Him. There will then be absolute safety for all of His people. Since John is told that every tear will be wiped away by God, we see that He will take care of each of His children on an individual basis. Death will no longer exist in this new order. The enemy perturbed God's original creation so that it was polluted with death, mourning, crying, and pain. But in the new creation all that is gone.

*1Cor 15:54 "But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

There will also be no mourning, crying, or pain for the sources of any such discomforts will not be present. There will be no reason for any inhabitant to mourn, cry, or feel pain. The implications are huge! The old order is totally gone and replaced with a new order completely under the sovereign hand of God in all of the details.

**Rev 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."**

**Rev 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."**

This is one of the very few times that John records God speaking. It almost seems like He is repeating Himself. He probably is emphasizing this to John so that he could better grasp the newness of heaven and earth. He also seemed to have to remind him that he was to write what was being revealed. Perhaps John had been so overwhelmed that he forgot to write! God emphasizes the importance of getting this information to the churches. God then declares to John the finality of events. The "it" would then refer to all the judgment of evil described in previous chapters and the creation of the new order. He then fully characterizes Himself by stating that He is the first and the last and the beginning and the end. He has always been and always will be. He is the creator and sustainer of all things. He then declares that He is the source of every need and will fulfill every need from the water of life. We could not buy our salvation and we cannot purchase our needs in the new earth. God is the total provider!

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

The true children of God will persevere. We will overcome all odds because of His power in our lives. As His chosen children we will then inherit all that He mentioned above. We will inherit the new heaven and the new earth and all of the blessings of God that will be available only to His children.

- *John 1:12-13 "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*
- *Matt 19:29 "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life."*
- *Heb 6:12 "that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."*

There are two cities: the City of God and the City of Babylon. First God tells what awaits His children in the City of God and next He tells what awaits everyone else.

**Rev 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.”**

God has also provided for those who are not His children.

- *1Cor 6:9 “Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,”*
- *1Cor 6:10 “nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”*
- *1Cor 15:50 “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”*

The cowardly are those who proclaimed to be Christians but who denied Christ when under persecution. Since they do not endure they do not have faith (Matt 8:26; Mark 4:40). The unbelieving are those who never believed although they may have participated in earthly worship (Heb 6:4-6, 10:26; 2 Peter 2:21). The immoral are those who are fornicators and the other categories are self-evident.

We have already been introduced to this second death:

- *Rev 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*
- *Rev 20:14 “And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*

The rest of this chapter is devoted to a description of the new city.

**Rev 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.””**

John does not tell us which angel speaks to him. The wording is the same as we have previously seen:

*Rev 17:1 “And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,”*

Some interpreters have said that perhaps John is telling us that this is the same angel as before and that all of God’s messengers do His bidding regardless of the task. In the first place the angel brought word of great judgment and now he is bringing wonderful news of this great new city. The word “come” is a command and not an invitation. Of course

the Lamb is Jesus. The wife of Jesus is the collection of all of His bondservants and is the church as seen earlier in the analogy of an earthly wedding:

*Eph 5:23 “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”*

Of course in this end time there is no distinction between Israel and the church and we previously stated that the 144,000 was probably all of the people of God. Even all of the Old Testament sacred writings speak of the one salvation available to all people:

*2Tim 3:15 “and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

This bride is contrasted to the great prostitute who was the great system of satanic evil. This bride is pure and faithful to God and the Lamb.

**Rev 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,”**

John was not physically transported but he was given a vision that is somewhat of a repeat of what he saw and reported in verse one. Remember that the vision of “Babylon” was on a plain and the holy city is seen from a mountain. It seems that the symbolism is that the new city is overshadowing any man-made city. This city is sent by God from heaven as we discussed earlier. John’s vision will be a reinterpretation of the Ezekiel vision of a temple (Ezek 40-48). Verse 9 stated that John was to be shown the bride of Christ and now he describes a city. The bride is the people of God in their glorified bodies so the descriptions must be symbolic and not actual. John is using his language to describe what he sees and most of it is from the OT imageries.

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

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

This city appeared with the glory of God. A jasper stone is not clear so John is trying to describe the indescribable. Earlier jasper referred to the appearance of God (4:3). The city that he saw was gleaming with light but was clearly seen through the brilliance. He describes the city as protected with a great, high wall and with twelve gates. Since all of the enemies of God and His children have been destroyed there is no need for a protective gate other than just as a symbol of the security of the city. The angels may have been placed there mainly to symbolize the majesty of the gates. They also could be the gatekeepers. Remember that God placed angels at the entrance to Eden to keep man away from the tree of life:

*Gen 3:24 “So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.”*

God keeps His promises to His original chosen people as He places the names of the twelve tribes over the gates as similarly reported in Ezek 48:30-35. The names of the twelve tribes are probably the same as quoted in chapter seven.

**Rev 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.**

**Rev 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.”**

John is then shown that the gates are symmetrically placed about the city in groups of three. These gates may be like the triple gates now seen in the excavated wall of old Jerusalem. John then saw that the wall had twelve foundation stones and the names on the stones were the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. [I think the twelve includes Paul and not Matthias as I discussed in my commentary on Acts 1.] God is being inclusive as He chose Israel to carry His message during the Old Testament era and the Apostles to do the same in the church age. Ancient cities had huge foundation stones on which rested the stones of the walls. The first-century walls and foundation stones of Jerusalem have been excavated and the foundation stones are huge. Some of them are about five feet wide, four feet high, and thirty feet long and weighing 80 to 100 tons each. They go 14-19 layers below the present ground level.

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

**Rev 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.”**

The size of the city is incredible! It is a perfect cube 1500 miles on each edge! Remember that space starts at 50 miles and that the distance from New York to Houston is about 1500 miles and we have an idea of the immense size of this city. There is room for all of God’s children. Jesus promised that He was preparing a room for us and He indeed did!

*John 14:2-3 “In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*

Of course there is no reason to think that this is a literal representation of the city. In ancient units the city is 12,000 stadia that is 12x1000 or representing completeness. The cube reminds us of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (10x10 cubits) and in the temple (20x20 cubits). The measurements are symbolic of the paradox of the completeness of infinity in God and of the fulfillment of all the promises of God.

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

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

He does not state whether the dimension is its thickness or its height but it probably is the height. As stated previously, a wall is not needed for protection since all of the enemies of God and man have been destroyed. Seventy-two yards is high enough for the wall to be impressive and to signify that the inhabitants are under God’s protection. It is 144 cubits and some translations add that this is its thickness. The measurement is 12x12 again showing its completeness. He does not state that the wall is clear jasper as previously but that it is made from jasper, a very precious stone. So the wall is impressive in its height and in its appearance. Of course gold is opaque and he does not say that the gold of the city was clear. He says that the appearance of the city was like clear glass and gold. Clear glass was extremely expensive in John’s time so he is saying that the wall and the city are made of the most precious commodities that are fit for a king’s palace. Certainly God is King of kings and Lord of lords so He deserves the best of all of His creation. Remember that the city is the bride so it is shown to be priceless as indeed are God’s children.

**Rev 21:19 “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;**

**Rev 21:20 the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysopease; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.”**

Remember that the foundation stones of the city represent the Apostles of Jesus Christ so certainly they would be represented by rare, precious stones. The stones also seem to be the same as on the breastplate of the high priest:

*Ex 28:15-21 “And you shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it <sup>16</sup>It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width. <sup>17</sup>And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby, topaz and emerald; <sup>18</sup>and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; <sup>19</sup>and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; <sup>20</sup>and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. <sup>21</sup>And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes.”*

The names of the stones are not exactly the same in the two texts but that is not unusual as names of some precious stones are not always the same. John would also have had to translate the Hebrew names into Greek if he was trying to say that they were the same. I like the analogy in that God is saying that He reveres His messengers of both



dispensations the same and that they both took the same message to His chosen people of all time.

**Rev 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.”**

John now saw that each of the gates was a single pearl. Pearls were very expensive in his time period and such huge pearls would certainly have been impressive. Pearls are also made by a wound in the oyster by some material and could even represent the result of the wounds of Jesus Christ forming the material for the gates. Jesus did refer to Himself as the door, or entrance, to salvation so the pearls might symbolize the entrance through Jesus.

*John 10:9 “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”*

John saw that the street of the city was gold and appeared like transparent glass. Note my previous comments about gold. Also note that there is only one street. Could this one street emphasize that there is only one way to salvation? I am puzzled over how there can be three gates at each compass heading but only one street but that could just be a topological problem that God solves! Each gate could have the one street going from gate to gate and meandering through the city. Details! Some interpreters also state that this is the main street that could have side streets attached to it.

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

John now turns to life within the city. There is no need for a temple anymore. In verse three John has related that God dwells in the city with His people. We also know that there has not been a need for a temple since the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the final sacrifice so there is no need for any further sacrifices in the temple.

- *Heb 9:26 “Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”*
- *Heb 10:12 “but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,”*

Since that time God lives in His people in the essence of the Holy Spirit and in the new city He will be with them everywhere with no need for a temple.

- *1Cor 3:16 “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”*
- *1Cor 6:19 “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”*

Paradoxically there is no temple but God and the Lamb are its temple. In another sense the entire city is a temple in that it is patterned after the Most Holy Place. This construct is opposite to any Jewish expectation for they expected a rebuilt temple and the restoration of the Ark of the Covenant. John sees a fulfillment of the promises of God in that God's presence is there and the Lamb with the sign of the new covenant is the fulfillment of the restoration of the Ark of the Covenant.

**Rev 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.”**

There is no need for a temple and there is no need for any source of light other than God.

*Isa 60:20 “Your sun will set no more, Neither will your moon wane; For you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be finished.”*

Note that he is not saying that there is no sun or moon. There is a new heaven with a new sun and moon. But the city has no need of the sun or moon for its illumination. Presumably there will still exist a dependence of life for the energy of the sun since originally all such was declared good by God. But now the city is totally illuminated by God's presence so that there is also no darkness anywhere in the city. John is repeatedly told about the presence of the Lamb to emphasize the importance of Jesus as the Son of God. There is a fulfillment of Isaiah 60:19-20 in that there is no need for any natural or artificial lighting because the glory of God will dim any other source of light. In the tabernacle and the earthly temple there was the seven-branched lampstand but the Most Holy Place had no such lighting because of the Shekinah glory of God. So in the New Jerusalem God's glory fills the place.

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

Now I am going to go beyond anything else I have read in any other commentary. John is seeing the new city of God on earth. Now we are told that the nations will walk by the light of the city and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. These words tell me that people are also living outside of the city. Even though the city is huge, there is still a lot of the earth remaining outside of the city and its wall. We know that there will not be any person living on this earth who has not been chosen by God for all of His enemies are in hell. But this city could be the only governing city on earth and other people declared holy by the blood of Jesus could be living in other locales. John says that the nations walk by the light of the city, which means that their lives are governed by the rule of God. The rulers of other regions of the earth bring their reference of God as they also interact with Him in the city and so there is a need for gates in the wall. All the people on earth would be His children with the one major city as the gathering point. I may be elaborating too much here but how else will we interpret this verse? I see nothing problematic about this explanation. The new time will be just as the original Eden in that God shares the work load with His children. Some people have mistakenly interpreted

this verse as God allowing repentance so that unsaved people may still come into the New Jerusalem but we will see in verse 27 that such is not allowed.

**Rev 21:25 “And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed;**

**Rev 21:26 and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;**

**Rev 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.”**

In John’s time, and earlier, the city gates were closed at night for the protection of the people living in the city. Night in a city now is also a time when crime rates increase and cities try to illuminate all its streets to minimize darkness sought by the criminals. But in this perfect city there is no night. All of the enemies of God and man have been eliminated so there is no need to ever close the gates. People walk into the city freely to bring the honor and glory of the nations into it as I elaborated above. The only people living on the earth are those whose names are in the Lamb’s book of life so there is no need to police the gates. The angels there are then placed at the gates to glorify the entrances into the city and not as a means of protection. What a wonderful time this is as there is no sin anywhere on earth! Interestingly there are some similarities between ancient Babylon and the New Jerusalem. It was also four-square and magnificent beyond all other cities. Ancient writers give its dimensions in stadia and those of the wall in royal cubits. There was also one great street down its center. But the comparison is only another statement of the jealousy of Satan as he tried to model his city after that of God.