

## Revelation Chapter 21

### An Interpretation

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#### Introduction:

#### James Smith writes:

The most popular passage in the Bible dealing with heaven is Revelation 21:1-22:5. In these verses heaven is portrayed in three leading images:

- 1) the tabernacle (21:1-8) conveys the idea of perfect fellowship with God;
- 2) the city (21:9-27) emphasizes perfect protection; and
- 3) the garden (22:1-5) paints the picture of perfect provision.

John envisions a heavenly order replacing the present order. The idea of a new heaven and earth replacing an old one was first introduced by Isaiah. John is not necessarily referring to a new creation. He could be speaking of a complete transformation of the existing physical environment or he could be describing the spiritual realm that is popularly called *heaven*. The point is that God will have an environment suitable for the eternal habitation of the saints.

#### Revelation 21:

(1) Then 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.



Verse 1: All of the past is gone. No more war with the Devil and all of the heartache that involved. **The first heaven** and **first earth** are not suitable homes for the saved, so they are gone. We presently take this by faith. It remains in the future.

If the **sea** symbolized wicked nations, they are gone. If the sea was literal, it had served to separate John on Patmos from his brethren in Ephesus. There will be no more separation.

**(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.**

Verse 2: The figures of speech blend into one: **the city** and **the bride**. But the focus here is on the **city**, the new **Jerusalem**.

The **bride** will be discussed later. The word **adorned** renders the Greek word from which the word *cosmetics* is derived.

**(3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,**

Verse 3: The owner of the **loud voice** is not identified. Now God himself will literally **dwell among** His people. He will tent among them as he did in the wilderness for 40 years.

**'Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you . . .'**  
Leviticus 26:11.

**James Smith:** Eternally, the saints will be God's people. Here is a holy fellowship, a grand communion. The fellowship between God and his people will be unbroken and unending.

Discussion: How does the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:53) body fit this picture?

**(4) and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."**

Verse 4: No more sorrows or tears. Those were part of the old heavens and earth. This place is entirely different.

**James Smith**: Sin is the cause of all the distress in this life.

Five negatives depict the bliss of living in a world without sin.

**First**, there will be no tears. There will be nothing to call forth tears.

**Second**, there will be no death. For the Christian, Christ has "abolished death" (2 Tim 1:10). Jesus promised that whoever believes in him will never die (In 11:25).

**Third**, there will be no mourning. Now Christians sorrow, but not as others who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13). With no death, there is no occasion for mourning in that city.

**Fourth**, there will be no crying. Nothing in that city causes psychological or physical distress.

**Finally**, there will be no pain. There will be no hospitals or cemeteries in heaven.

The first things are the things associated with life here and now—things that cause sorrow, suffering and death. All such suffering is the result of evil in this world. At this point in the drama, evil has been destroyed. Elsewhere this same writer urges believers not to set their hearts upon the things in this world because the world is passing away (1 Jn 2:15, 17).

**(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."**

Verse 5: God is still dictating to a book: Everything is going to be **new**. While we are **new** creatures at present, the culmination of the process will take place at this future event. We are also reminded that not all words spoken in the spiritual realm have been true such as Revelation 18:7.

**(6) Then 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.**

Verse 6: God says that He is the A to Z in the Greek language, the beginning and the end. He is not within time, He stands outside of time. In Revelation 1:8, Jesus Christ also announced that he was the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus did not become God, he is one with the Father on the throne and always has been.

Every **thirst**, every desire, of the heart will be satisfied, fulfilling the promise of Jesus in John 4:13-14:

**Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."**

Discussion: Why is it important to understand that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were before time itself?

**(7) "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.**

Verse 7: The **inheritance** begins with a **sonship** fulfilled. God has always desired those whom he could call **sons**. The path to being called a **son** is being an overcomer. It is our choice, with God's added strength to be an overcomer.

**(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."**

Verse 8: The list of those not making it to heaven is recited and their whereabouts repeated.

The **cowardly** are first on God's list. These were people afraid to speak up, to stand against the crowd. They feared men

more than God. Perhaps they were afraid of becoming martyrs when their faith was challenged.

The **unbelieving** are on the excluded list. They looked at the evidence of who Jesus was and is, yet chose to reject it.

The **abominable** included those who sipped from the harlot's cup of Revelation 17:4. Their worldview and lifestyle had no place for God's ways.

**Murderers** includes those who kill the unborn.

**Immoral persons** (fornicators) let their desire for sexual relations override their common sense. God gave sex for our enjoyment and for multiplying the race, not as a toy to be used indiscriminately. In the pagan world, fornication was not even considered a moral issue. But it is with the Judge.

**Sorcerers** are those who practice witchcraft. Many understand the use of street drugs to be included here.

**Idolaters** worship some god besides the Lord God, and channel their praise to that deity. Money, power and sex are worshiped in our time.

**All Liars.** The great struggle with the beast has been about truth. **Lying** has become a way of life for some. They do not have a place in the heaven of truth.

These law breakers had their day of choice and chose evil. Now they are sent to eternal punishment. Death is a separation and this is the final separation from the God of Righteousness.

This scene is finished. Now we see what God has for those who did their best in this life.

**(9) Then 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 will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

Verse 9: Now John was invited to see **the bride, the wife of the Lamb**.

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

Verse 10-11: This look required a trip. John may be repeating what he saw in verse 2.

Here was an entire **city** coming down **from God**. It was glorious because **God** had added His **glory**.

The false church was called Babylon and a harlot. Now the true church is called the **holy city** and the wife of the Lamb.

**Jasper** is usually red, yellow, brown or green in color, depending on what impurities are within. This **jasper** was like our diamond—flawless and brilliant. No impurities. It was truly an appropriate appearance for the dwelling place of God.

**(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 the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.**

Verse 12. Now begins the first of eight items bearing the number **twelve**. The high walls were penetrated by **twelve gates** and at each gate there were **angels**. It is not clear if there was one **angel** at each gate or **twelve**. Those within had absolute security.

The names of the **twelve tribes of Israel** were written on the **gates**. The **twelve tribes** were God's people when they came out of Egypt and figurative stand for God's people, the church, today.

**And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Galatians 6:16.**

**(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.**

Verse 13: The city is accessible for all who are of God's people. The gates were placed for convenience.

**James Smith**: In the symbolism of Revelation, the one door (John 10:7) becomes twelve gates, the one Spirit becomes seven spirits; the one foundation becomes twelve foundations.

**(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.**

Verse 14: If each of twelve stones had the names of the **twelve apostles**, then the list of names appeared twelve times. The church (the city) is built on the foundation of the **apostles**. Ephesians 2:19-20 reads:

**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone . . .**

The prophets in the churches spoke the will of God and when they died, their work being local, did not continue, but the work of **the apostles** was permanent and written as they had the power-of-attorney for the **Lamb** throughout the age. Jesus had said in John 16:13:

**But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and**

He will disclose to you what is to come.

**Discussion:** Besides the 12 apostles, where else does the number 12 show up in the Bible story?

**(15) The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.**

**Verse 15:** This angel who had been showing John the city had a **golden measuring rod** so every detail about the city could be **measured**. His findings appear next.

**(16) 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. (17) And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.**

**Verses 16-17:** Just as the Holy of Holies in the temple was a perfect cube (1 Kings 6:19-20), so is the city from God. It is a giant Holy of Holies where the priests of God can serve him forever.

**Hinds:** That this number should be taken symbolically seems to be unquestionably demanded. Such an enormous city, all beyond human imagination, if taken literally, indicates the ample provisions our God had made for the final home of his obedient children.

**(18) The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.**

**Verse 18:** In our world, transparent **gold** is impossible, but this vision was not in our world. It symbolizes the purity of the city. Earth's richest jewels and precious metals are but symbols of the richness of God's provision for His saints who have prepared for heaven.

**(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; (20) the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. (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.

Verses 19-21: The materials list for the city is beyond our earthly grasp. The paving for the **streets** has no earthly equivalent.

Each **gate** was of **pearl** and pearls are made through suffering. A **pearl** is produced within the soft tissue of a living shelled mollusk.

**(22) I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.**

Verse 22: There is no place of worship (temple) because the Lord God and the Lamb are there. No place to meet God is designed into the heavenly city because God is everywhere. The whole city is a place of worship as the Holy of Holies pre-pictured.

**(23) And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. (24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.**

Verses 23-24. **Light** from **the sun** or **the moon** is not needed because **the glory of God** provides the illumination. Gentiles are included because of the word **nations**. This is not just for physical Israel. **Kings** of the nations had received **glory** as **kings**, but now they surrender their own **glory** in favor of the King of Kings.

Discussion: It seems that John saw more than just a tiny group in heaven. What is the evidence for this in verse 24?

**(25) In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its**

**gates will never be closed; (26) and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;**

Verses 25-26: About June 21<sup>st</sup> each year, the sun can be seen around the clock near the North pole (December 22 for the South pole.) But in the city from above, there will be light continuously. There will be **no night**.

Ancient cities closed their gates at night, but these city gates will always be open. Those on the lists can enter any time. All enemies have been sent to the lake of fire so there is no danger by having the **gates** open.

**(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.**

Verse 27: John receives a reminder of the exclusion list of verse 8. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people and those who do not want to prepare by getting on the **Lamb's** list will miss out.