

## The Heavenly Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-22

What will Heaven be like? Why would you want to go there? What is it about Heaven that stirs the heart and imagination of every true believer? Revelation chapter 21 gives us specific answers about this glorious, heavenly city. It is called "Jerusalem" meaning "city of peace." And this name, which includes the word *shalom* indicates more than just a lack of hostility. *Shalom* indicates a wholeness or completeness in a full-orbed perfection. This vision in the Revelation of Jesus Christ is about the New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1). The highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God's people will dwell in His presence forever.

### The Appearance of the Heavenly Jerusalem

**"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials [bowls] full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;"** (Revelation 21:9-11)

One of the angels who delivered God's judgment delivered the vision of God's Heavenly Jerusalem. The angel took the Apostle John to a great, high mountain. (When we see the dimensions of that city, we will see why it was necessary to go to such a high mountain!). And John wrote that the city will shine with the glory of God, like light shining through the facets of a beautiful gem. It is most intriguing that the angel said, "I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." Every Jewish person in that time knew the formula for those who were engaged to be married. It included the words that Jesus used to make a promise to His followers, **"...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 unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"** (John 14:2-3). The Holy Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is the fulfillment of Christ's promise to prepare a place for us. Just picture the excitement of a new bride exploring the new mansion that her husband had prepared for her.

Even the Old Testament saints longed for the coming of that great city described in Revelation 21. Abraham, who lived in tents in the Promised Land, **"...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"** (Hebrews 11:10). That is the Heavenly City of Revelation 21. In fact, the Scriptures testify about all the Old Testament believers: **"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"** (Hebrews 11:13). As the old song says, *"This world is no my home, I'm just a passin' through. My treasure are laid up somewhere beyond the blue..."*

The angel showed John the great city, the Holy Jerusalem; this city descended from God out of Heaven. Remember that when Christ died on the cross for our sins, the veil in the Temple was torn into. According to Matthew 27:51, that veil covering the Holy of Holies was torn *from top to bottom*. This illustration reminds us that it was God who graciously broke through to man. Man did not and cannot earn his way to God. God provided the only way. The only access we have to God is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Jesus was crucified, buried and raised from the

dead for our salvation. His ascension into Heaven, to the right hand of the Father, paves the way for us to be with Him in Heaven forever. By faith, Old Testament believers looked forward to the promised Christ who would come. By that same faith, New Testament believers trust the promise of the Christ who has come and will return to us again. And one day, the Holy City will descend to become the place where redeemed mankind will dwell with God. Then we will know that God has prepared a place for us. And the highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God's people will dwell in His presence forever.

## **The Construction of the Heavenly Jerusalem**

### **12 Gates and Angels**

**“And had a wall great and high, *and* had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.”** (Revelation 21:12-13)

The Holy City will have 12 gates named after the 12 tribes of Israel. An angel will stand at each gate. (However, some think that verse 12 means that there will be 12 angels at each gate. This could be.) There will be three gates in each of the four directions: East, North, South and West. The fact that these gates are named for the 12 tribes of Israel indicates that Old Testament believers will be residents of the Holy City.

Just try to imagine what the conversations will be like – between the believers of the Old Testament and New Testament – in that great city. But the highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God's people will dwell in His presence forever.

### **12 Foundations**

**“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”** (Revelation 21:14). The vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem is a mixture of Old and New Testament images. The walls of the city will rest on 12 foundations bearing the names of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb. This is a clear indication that New Testament believers will also be residents of the Holy Jerusalem.

### **Dimensions and Materials**

**“And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lies foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs [stadia]<sup>ii</sup>. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred *and* forty *and* four cubits, *according to* the measure of a man, that is, of the angel”** (Revelation 21:15-17)

According to verse 16, the Heavenly Jerusalem will be a cube of about 1400 miles in each direction (length, width and height). According to verse 17, the walls will be more than 200 feet thick. For comparison, the diameter of the moon, which is roughly spherical, is 2100 miles. To

the best of our understanding, the planets and stars in our present universe are spherical. But the Heavenly Jerusalem will be in the shape of a cube.

**“And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass”** (Revelation 21:18-21).

Verses 18-21 describe the building materials of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Some of the gems and metals listed here are known to us today; other gems are not as well known to us. The precious gems with gold convey the uniqueness of this coming Jerusalem.

With these precious stones in mind, two Scriptural illustrations come to mind. The first is the breastplate of the high priest described in Exodus 28:15-22. This description includes many (and perhaps all) of the precious stones named in the Heavenly Jerusalem. The high priest in the Old Testament was a vague picture of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14). In the Old Testament, the people had access to God through the intercession of the high priest of Israel. In the New Testament, every believer has access to God through Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest.

Another illustration also comes to mind. Ezekiel 28 describes the early existence of Lucifer: he had “been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was [his] covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold...” (Ezekiel 28:13). Perhaps these verses describe Satan’s early existence in the heavenly Eden, instead of the earthly Garden of Eden. In any case, it’s important to note that these precious stones were the privileged apparel of one who lifted himself up with pride. May God grant that we would not follow in those footsteps. All these precious privileges should draw our hearts to a deeper love for our Lord. And the highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God’s people will dwell in His presence forever.

### **The Lord and the Lamb are the Temple**

**“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”** (Revelation 21:22).

#### ■ The Tabernacles and Temples in Scripture

- The Tabernacle: A moveable tent placed in the center of the Israelite camp during the wilderness wanderings. This tent housed the Ark of the Covenant.
- The Temple in Jerusalem: This Temple was built by Solomon, David’s son. That Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt when the exiles returned from Babylon, 70 years later. The Temple (of Jesus’ day) had been renovated and enlarged by Herod.
- The Church: In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the church is called a temple. That section of 1 Corinthians addressed the divisions within that church. Those

divisions included a partisan or divisive spirit (chapters 3-4), tolerating immorality (chapter 5) or going to court against believers (chapter 6). 1 Corinthians 3:17 includes this terrifying warning: **“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye [plural] are.”** This is a strong warning for anyone who would cause division in a Christian congregation.

- **The Believer:** Each believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, **“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”** Each true Christian is God’s temple.
- **The Lord and the Lamb are the Temple:** This is the stunning explanation in Revelation 21:22. **“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”** (Revelation 21:22). This is the ultimate: no temple. In Heaven, men dwell in God: the Father and the Son. God the Father planned for this heavenly fellowship by sending His Son to sinful men. His Lamb fulfilled His saving plan. And now, repentant sinners are in Christ, just as we will be in the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb in the Heavenly Jerusalem. What a fellowship! What a joy divine!

■ Communion between God and men

**“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”** (Revelation 21:3)

To you, what is the most exciting part about Heaven? The Scripture describes it as the dwelling place of God with men. Do you want to go to Heaven just because the alternative is too terrible: that you don’t want to go to Hell? If avoiding Hell is your main reason for wanting to go to Heaven, it’s time to reconsider your spiritual condition. The most exciting part about being in Heaven is that believers will be in the presence of the Lord. Do you enjoy abiding in His presence now? Then you will be thrilled by His presence there! Do you avoid spending time with Him now? If so, why do you want to go to Heaven? The joy of Heaven is that God dwells with men. He will be their God and they shall be His people.

What will Heaven be like? Why would you want to go there? What is it about Heaven that stirs the heart and imagination of each true believer? The highest joy of the Heavenly Jerusalem is that God’s people will dwell in His presence forever.

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<sup>1</sup> A.P. Carter, “This World Is Not My Home,” accessed at <https://hymnary.org/text/this-world-is-not-my-home-im-just-a?extended=true>

<sup>2</sup> One stadion is about 607 feet