

b. The New Jerusalem (21:9-27; 22:1-5):

On the eve of His execution Jesus comforts His beloved disciples with the glorious promise of *John 14:2-4*:

² *“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.”* ³ *“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.”* ⁴ *“And you know the way where I am going.”*

Similar to the ancient wedding custom, Christ – the groom – has left his betrothed – the church – in order to prepare a final residence for their forthcoming union. *Revelation 21* describes this blessed home in great detail. A radiant jewel prepared by our groom; a house in which we shall share intimate communion with the Lord of Lords.

This New Jerusalem will emerge from its current locale in heaven. Then, like a bride emerging from her chamber she will majestically descend toward the earth, and perch herself upon the soils of the radically refurbished planet.

Thought Question: In light of the fact that God spoke the universe into existence in six days, what can we anticipate about this heavenly residence which is at least 2,000 years in the making?

i. New Jerusalem as a Bride (9-11)

Observation Question: What does John see in *verses 10-11*? How is it described?

In *verse 1*, John identifies his tour guide as *“one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of full of the last seven plagues.”* This hearkens back to the description of the angel who displays the metropolis of Babylon in *chapter 17*. This subtle allusion contrasts the counterfeit and temporal beauty of Babylon with the majestic eternal grandeur of the New Jerusalem.

In the words of one commentator:

The great prostitute who is riding on the beast personifies the wicked city of Babylon the Great. The bride, however, is the wife of the Lamb and symbolizes the holy city. The prostitute is without a husband and is destroyed by the beast and his followers (17:15–

18). But as husband, the Lamb supplies his wife with everything she needs, honors her with great respect, and adorns her with attractive attire and exquisite accessories.⁷³

This contrast puts forward a choice. One can choose to cohabit with the whore of Babylon or live forever as a faithful bride in the New Jerusalem. No man or woman can be a resident of both cities.

Thought Question: How can this imagery of the bride city help Christians place the lures and temptations of Babylon in their proper perspective?

Consider the following verse:

Hebrews 11:13-16

¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

In *verse 10* the angel transports John to a high mountain so that he might view the celestial city from the perfect vantage point. John likens the city to a crystal clear jasper stone. Ask any geologist and she will tell you that jasper is usually opaque. This apparent discrepancy has caused many interpreters to question how literally we shall take this vision. Granted, the elements of the city are highly symbolic as John paints a picture of a city whose beauty mystifies our imagination. With that said, we should approach this with an understanding that the splendor of this description pales in comparison with the future reality. Thus, we should never tone down our interpretation in order to match our present perception of reality.

Regarding the transparent jasper stone, we should realize that John describes the appearance of the city “as” a crystal clear jasper stone. In other words, he draws upon an analogy. The holy city will look like a colossal diamond refracting the shekinah glory to the ends of the new heavens and earth.

⁷³Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. Vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Accompanying biblical text is author's translation. New Testament Commentary, Page 563. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.

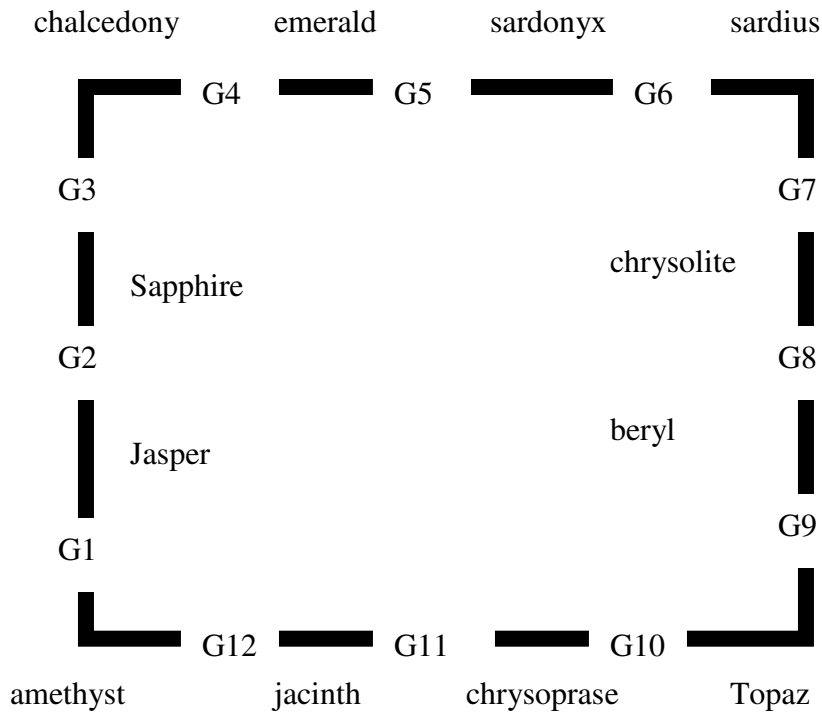
ii. New Jerusalem as a City (12-27)

• **The Physical Dimensions and Details**

Observation Questions: How does John describe the walls and gates of the city (*vv. 12-14*)?

This giant city has three gates to the north, south, east, and west. Each of these gates is carved out of single pearl, and leads to streets of transparent gold. Above each gate is the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel guarded by an angel. Between each of the twelve gates rest the foundation of the walls comprised of various precious stones (see below) and labeled with names of the twelve apostles.

Thought Question: What is the significance of having the names of the apostles alongside the names of the tribes of Israel? What does this suggest about this new era for God’s people?



In *verses 15 to 21* John rehearses the spectacular dimensions of the New Jerusalem. After the angel measures the dimensions with a golden rod, John records that this cubed city

has a height, width, and depth of 1,500 miles. To gain an idea of how big this would be, the base would cover the western United States from the Pacific Coast to the Mississippi River. Further, the volume of this massive city would be approximately 65% of the moon. John also records that the city itself is girded with a massive wall of jasper which is seventy two yards wide.

Thought Question: In light of the fact that there will be no remote possibility of an invasion during the Eternal State, what message does God intend to convey to His people through such massive fortifications?

Each of the walls rests upon a base of precious stones. As shown from the diagram this is not a twelve layer base (as that would raise questions as to which of the materials is the base of the others). Rather, each precious stone is the foundation for a certain section of the wall. Much debate has ensued as to the selection of the stones. Three possibilities have surfaced within this discussion:

1. The jewels on the crown of the king of Tyre (**Ezek 28:13**)
2. The signs of the zodiac.⁷⁴
3. The high priest's breastplate (**Exod 28:17-20**).

The crown of the King of Tyre contains nine of these stones, and though this would convey royal imagery it seems improper to associate the splendor of the heavenly city with a pagan ruler. The association of these stones with the zodiac is fairly straightforward as Philo and Josephus noted that the twelve tribes began to associate themselves with each of the stones. Interestingly, John lists them in reverse order from the traditional rendering which may indicate a rebuke. But such an approach seems too subtle to John who openly opposed all things pagan within this book. Thus, its best to see these stones as associated with the priestly ephod (even though only eight of the stones clearly match). In the Old Covenant the privilege of direct fellowship with God was confined to the priest who wore the ephod. In the eternal state, all the residents of the sacred city will participate in the privilege.

Thought Question: What does the transparency of the walls as well as the mention of the ephod stones imply about what kind of relationship God wants to have with the residents of the New Jerusalem?

Observation Question: What is missing from the New Jerusalem and why (*vv. 22-25*)?

⁷⁴ Alan Johnson, CD-Rom.

In **verse 22** John makes a peculiar observation about the city, **“I saw no temple in it.”** The prophets of long ago foresaw a future temple in which the glory of God would return and dwell in the midst of His people. Yet, that day and age has already transpired during the millennium. A new age begins with the eternal state in which God’s manifest presence will no longer be confined to the walls of a building.

In the days of old, God enclosed Himself within the walls of the Temple behind the curtain of the Holy of Holies to protect His people. John explains in earlier writings, **“No man has seen God at any time” (John 1:18)**. Such a sight would overwhelm sinful man. But now, God’s light is no longer circumscribed to the inner chambers of a stone temple. Rather, His radiance shines through each transparent pane of crystal clear jasper illuminating the whole city.

As John proceeds with the description of the eternal city He describes the city’s illuminating infrastructure. The source of light within this sacred city will be the Shekinah Glory of God Himself. For those unfamiliar with the term Nelson’s Bible Dictionary defines it as the following:

SHEKINAH [shuh KIGH nuh] (*dwelling*) — a visible manifestation of the presence of God (also spelled Shechinah and Shekinah). Although the word is not found in the Bible, it occurs frequently in later Jewish writings. It refers to the instances when God showed Himself visibly, as, for example, on Mount Sinai (**Ex. 24:9–18**) and in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and in Solomon’s Temple. The Shekinah was a luminous cloud that rested above the altar in the place of worship and lit up the room. When the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, the Shekinah glory vanished. There was no Shekinah in the temples rebuilt later under Zerubbabel and Herod.⁷⁵

Simply put, the Shekinah glory radiates the character of God.

Thought Question: What does the lucent light of God’s glory reveal about His nature? Why do you suppose God has decided to manifest Himself as light?

According to the Scriptures, **“God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (John 1:5)**. In other words, sin and evil do not dwell in His midst. This is the God who **“dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16)**. His light is too intense and too pure for sinful man to approach. **James 1:17** describes God as the **“Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”** While the light of God drives away evil, it insures His moral purity and gives us confidence that He will not break His blessed promises.

⁷⁵Youngblood, Ronald F., F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison, and Thomas Nelson Publishers. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.; Includes index. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1995.

The brilliance of God's glory does away with any need for the sun or the moon. Rather, God and the Lamb will serve as the source of light for all who inhabit the earth.

Thought Question: Given the fact that both the Father and the Son emanate the same light, what does this suggest about the nature of the Son in relation to the Father?

In *verse 24* we catch a glimpse of the breadth of God's redemptive plan. Both the nations and their kings enter and abide in the city. Previously in the Book of Revelation "nations" is a less than flattering term. "The nations" trample the Holy City underfoot (*11:2, 18*). They become intoxicated with the wine of Babylon (*18:3, 23*). Jesus Christ targets them for bloodshed when He returns (*19:15, 17-21*). And they receive eternal punishment at the Great White throne (*20:12-13*). Yet, a remnant of the nations will find themselves in heaven as the Angels sing in *Revelation 5:9* "*Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*"

This promise is fulfilled as we witness the nations and their kings offering their glory to the God of the Great City. In other words, they allow the irradiance of God's glory to obscure any prestige or honor they may possess.

Thought Question: Why do you suppose the kings relinquish their glory to God? In other words, why are they content to allow the light of God's glory drown out their own?

After discussing the comings and goings of the nations, John chronicles the perpetually open gates. The wide open gates will receive plenty of use as the nations come to the New Jerusalem to bring their glory and honor to God as a sacrifice.

Observation Question: Who is and isn't granted admission into the New Jerusalem (*v. 27*)?

Normally, in the ancient near east, the city would close their gates at night as a means of protection from marauders, criminals, and other dangerous elements. Yet, night will never fall in the New Heavens and earth. Thus, the inhabitants of the city have complete peace and security. Part of this assurance is grounded in God's promise that certain unsavory characters shall not enter through the open gates:

- **Nothing Unclean:** This refers to any unholy being or anything impure. It is a ritual expression transmitted from Judaism to Christianity. Old Testament rules

and regulations forbade anyone who was physically or spiritually unclean to enter the temple courts, and in New Testament times anyone who refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Lord is barred from receiving baptism and partaking of communion; and any member who refuses to repent faces church discipline.⁷⁶

- **No One Who Practices an Abomination and Lying:** This speaks of the abominations of those who lived in the lusty city of Babylon along with those who practiced regular deceit.

The reason why these two parties shall not enter is because their names are not recorded in the Book of Life. All such names absent from this blessed book will endure the divine punishment meted out at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Thought Question: According to the subtle contrast in **verse 27**, what impact does being in the book of life have upon the individual in their earthly life?

⁷⁶Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. Vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Accompanying biblical text is author's translation. New Testament Commentary, Page 575. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.