

Understanding Revelation – Topic 33

A new heaven and a new earth

An exposition of Revelation Chapters 21 and 22

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Revelation Chapter 21

A new heaven

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. Revelation 21:1

The fact that a first heaven and a first earth are mentioned here implies that there is more than one. To discover which heaven passes away and is replaced by another, we need to examine other scriptures. In doing that we find that three different heavens are brought to view.

The apostle Paul refers to a third heaven:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago...was caught up to the third heaven...was caught up into Paradise... 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

Since there is a third heaven – *Paradise* – then there must be two other heavens.

The three heavens

1. The aerial or atmospheric heaven

...the birds that fly in the midst of heaven... Revelation 19:17.

Birds fly only in the atmosphere of our earth. In the original account of creation, Moses under inspiration used the term *firmament* to describe the atmosphere.

And God called the firmament heaven... Gen 1:6-8.

The aerial heaven extends for several hundreds of miles above the surface of the earth. Moses likened it to a blanket, because without it, life would be unbearable on earth.

Where were you when I made the foundations of the earth? ...When I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band. Job 38:4, 9

The atmospheric heaven keeps the earth warm. It is a protection from the killer rays of the sun and is a miracle of design.

2. The starry heaven (outer space)

The heavens declare the glory of God...in them he has set a tabernacle (dwelling place) for the sun. Psalm 19:1-4.

This second heaven contains the innumerable solar systems, constellations and nebulae and island universes. Along with the multiplied millions of suns in space, most of which are giants compared with earth's there are also planetary systems, as there is with our sun.

Human beings are constantly seeking to discover whether the planets of these other solar systems could be inhabited. Many conservative astronomers are convinced that

they are filled with life.¹ Scripture has taught for millennia that the universe is filled with life. David, Israel's king, sang under inspiration:

When I consider Your heavens.... The moon and the stars which you have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him? And the son of man that You visit him? Psalm 8:3, 4

In the light of the fact that there are millions of other worlds, David was understandably filled with wonder as to why the Creator could be so concerned with our little planet, and to such a degree that He should even live with the human race for thirty-three years.

Behold, the nations are as a drop (of water) in a bucket (of water) and are counted as the small dust on the scales... Isaiah 40:15

If the nations of our planet are as one drop in a bucket of water, or as the small dust left over on the scales after weighing the main material, what do the remainder of the bucket of water or the material that was weighed in the scales consist of? The answer is that they represent the vast abundance of life throughout the rest of the universe of God.

He who sits above the circle of the earth...who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. Isaiah 40:22

...the LORD who created the heavens...who formed the earth and made it...who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited. Isaiah 45:18

If God created our tiny planet to be inhabited then we naturally wonder about the millions of planets which are hundreds of times larger than ours. In our local solar system Jupiter is 1300 times larger than earth and Saturn is 734 times larger, with a magnificent lighting system. It is hard to believe that such remarkable and beautiful designs would have been created for empty, lifeless planets.²

Intelligent life in the heavens

John the Revelator clearly states that the heavens contain intelligent dwellers:

...rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!... Revelation 12:12

This passage also reveals that there is more than one heaven and that in each there are intelligent beings. Let us discover more about them.

...You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host.... The host of heaven worships You. Nehemiah 9:6.

This is referring not only to the third heaven – Paradise – but also to the second. The hosts of these two heavens worship God. Only intelligent, moral creatures are capable of worship, which suggests that the hosts of the second heaven have been created in the image of God just as humankind was originally created (Genesis 1:26, 27).

¹ Astronomers convinced that there is life on other planets include: O.M. Mitchell, W.W. Campbell, R.T. Crawford, G.P. Serviss, E.L. Larkins, Spenser Jones, James Jeans and Thomas Paine.

² This is not to infer that the planets in our solar system are necessarily inhabited.

Scripture indicates that our world is the only lost world and that all others are sinless. Luke's parable of the one lost sheep describes how the Good Shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep to seek the one that was lost.³ This applies most aptly to our lost world because

All we like sheep have gone astray... Isaiah 53:6

*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.
Luke 19:10*

Our world is the black sheep of the universe. However it excites more interest and attention than any other. God would not permit the cancer of sin to spread, so He limited it to this planet, and on this planet sin will run its course and burn itself out. This means that Heaven will never permit contaminated humankind to reach other inhabited worlds because wherever humans go, whatever they touch, they infect it with the sin virus.

3. Paradise

The third heaven is where the Tree of Life and the Throne of God are located⁴. It is heaven that is God's dwelling place.

And may You hear the supplication of Your servant...Hear from heaven Your dwelling place... 1 Kings 8:30

God has a dwelling place. Though the Deity is omnipresent, there is an actual place where the Creator resides. Jesus declared;

Our Father which art in heaven... Luke 11:2

*The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.
Psalm 103:19.*

We believe that in the vast illimitable universe of God there is an epicentre around which all heavenly bodies revolve. Christian astronomers believe this centre is the dwelling place of God, the third heaven. Isabel Lewis of the United States Naval Observatory declared:

All known objects in the heavens belong to one enormous unit⁵

Scripture declares that the third heaven is a country – a literal place.

But now they desire a better, that is a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them. Heb. 11:16.

Jesus promised:

*In my Father's house are many mansions... I go and prepare a place for you.
John 14:2.*

...in heaven your dwelling place... 1 Kings 8:30

If the rest of God's universe is physically real, then it follows that the epicenter of the universe is real. Scripture also tells us that there is a city in the third heaven.

³ Luke 15:3-7.

⁴ Revelation 2:7, 22:1-2.

⁵ Isabel M. Lewis, *Splendours of the Sky* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1919), 30.

...God...has prepared a city for them. Heb. 11:16

He (Abraham) waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb. 11:10.

In my Father's house are many mansions... John 14:2

In Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 it is confirmed that the city is formed of solid materials.

Which heaven passes away?

The heaven which passes away is the first heaven. As the apostle Peter penned:

But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved (in existence)...are reserved for fire until the judgment and perdition of ungodly men... the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the... both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 2 Pet. 3:7, 10

A new earth

Re-creation

The passage above does not imply creation of a new planet, but rather a planet whose surface or crust is renewed. The word *new* is used three times in Revelation Chapter 20. In the Greek there are two words for *new*. As used here it indicates freshness and renewal. There is to be a restoration of this planet to its original pristine condition.

...He may send Jesus Christ... whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:20, 21

At the time of the universal flood recorded in Genesis 7 and 8, the earth's surface was torn up and then laid down by the action of water, to a depth of at least thirty kilometres, according to geological evidence. We suggest that when the earth *melts with fervent heat* (2 Pet. 3:10, 12) the crust of the earth will be purified and re-laid in its original Edenic state.

When the consuming fire comes down from God out of heaven and envelops our planet, turning it into a lake of fire, then the atmospheric heaven and this present earth as we know it will pass away. But out of the holocaust the planet will emerge purified, renewed and restored.

...the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells: 2 Pet. 3:12, 13.

When the purifying fires of God have done their work we suggest that there could be a re-enactment of the original creation week. If so, a fascinating series of events await the saints of God. What we have accepted in faith - contrary to so-called scientific opinion - we may see enacted before our very eyes. We may witness stupendous events of creation as God performed them thousands of years ago. We may see the re-creation of earth's atmosphere as it was in its Edenic state, when

...a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. Genesis 2:6

The watering system of the planet was completely different in Eden. The current system began with the universal flood (Genesis 7:4, 12; 8:2). We may witness the reforming of the earth's surface, the emergence of the land masses. Instead of vast areas of water as now, there will be smaller seas and lakes perfectly located around the earth.

...Also there was no more sea. V1

Currently seventy percent of the earth's surface is water. In the renewed earth we believe this will be reversed. According to fossil evidence originally there was a universal subtropical climate. There were no frozen Polar regions or hot equatorial areas.

The Old Testament prediction that God will create a new heavens and a new earth will be fulfilled. Many Christians have applied this to the coming millennium but, as Revelation Chapter 21 shows, its fulfillment will be after the millennium (see Appendix A)

For behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and former shall not be remembered or come into mind. ...They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ...And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ...The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain (or kingdom) says the LORD. Isaiah 65:17, 21, 22, 25

A holy city

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...

Because it sounds humanly impossible, this verse has usually been given a symbolic application. However after the Second Advent, according to one principle of prophetic interpretation, predictions have a literal application. This must mean that the literal holy city, including the many mansions which Christ says He is preparing for His people, will, after the millennium descend by the power of God to this planet. Today in the light of man's ability to overcome the force of gravity, it is easy to understand how such a vast city could be lowered from heaven to earth. Surely our great Creator who upholds the mighty objects in the vast reaches of outer space is able to transport a city from heaven to earth.

Scripture states that the Tree of Life will be in the centre of the Holy City when it descends (see Revelation 22:1-2). Originally the Tree of Life was in Eden so we question whether this could be the same tree. Undoubtedly it is. The Garden of Eden remained on earth after Adam's fall, right through until the universal flood. At its gate the pre-flood faithful of God gathered to worship. There were visible tokens of the presence of the Deity (Genesis 3:24). Since the entire surface of the earth was torn up at the time of the flood, it is believed that at that time the Garden of Eden – Paradise – was transported to heaven and it is there that Christ is building the many mansions.

At the close of the millennium when the earth has been purified, the Garden of Eden (now within the city) is restored to earth. However if the city has already descended from heaven to earth at the Third Advent, before the final judgment (Revelation 20:9) this leads us to question what will become of it when the whole earth is consumed with eternal fire.

It is generally believed that just as Noah's ark was preserved during the destruction of the world by flood so the Holy City will be preserved in the final destruction of the earth

by fire. As the ark containing God's people rode upon the waves of water so the Holy City, we suggest, will ride upon the waves of flame when the world is on fire.

The cleansing of the planet involves not only earth but also the first heaven, the atmosphere, which extends for hundreds of miles above the earth's surface. The city, therefore could ride the flames from a great distance above the earth. Thus, when John sees the city descending out of heaven the fire has already accomplished its work.

There is an important truth encapsulated in the above concepts. The only way that the human race will ultimately achieve its ideal state is by descending from heaven. It will never evolve on earth - it must come from above. Only those who are spiritually reborn from above will finally share in earth's never-ending golden age.

...prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. V2

This passage does not necessarily suggest some kind of marriage. The marriage of Christ to the Holy City is consummated at the Close of Probation upon the conclusion of the judgment of the saints.⁶The Marriage Supper is celebrated after the Second Advent when God's people have been translated to heaven.⁷ We suggest that the above passage describes the glory and unsurpassed beauty of the New Jerusalem. It is prepared like a bride not as the bride.

God dwells with His people

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." V3

It is difficult to comprehend this amazing promise. God is to dwell among human beings. At the present time He dwells among us spiritually, however at that time it will be a physical dwelling with His people. Not just God the Son, but the Father also will dwell among us.

... the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it... Revelation 22:3

Whether this means that God the Father dwells continuously upon this planet is doubtful, but we suggest that at designated times He will visit His earthly people. The human race was created for God's pleasure.

*...For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.
Revelation 4:11*

KJV: ...For thy pleasure they are and were created.

God enjoys His children and we in turn will enjoy Him. What a prospect to look forward to.⁸

⁶ Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 21, 22, 26, 27.

⁷ A.P. Cooke, *Christ Triumphant*, (Sydney: Self-published, 1985),

⁸ A.P. Cooke, *A Glimpse of God on His Throne* (Sydney: Self published, 1985),

What will be absent from the New Earth

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes...

Certainly God the Father is the Great Comforter. On earth now we have the invisible spiritual Comforter – God, the Holy Spirit. In the kingdom of heaven we will have the visible, literal Comforter – our Heavenly Father. It seems that this expression as usual is culled from the Old Testament.

And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces... Isaiah 25:8

We suggest that this is a figurative expression denoting that sorrow will never again afflict the human race. To the question as to whether some may grieve over the loss of loved ones, we must remember that the saints will already have spent one thousand years in heaven. Some have concluded that there will be no remembrance of previous events on earth.

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind (Margin: come upon the heart). Isaiah 65:17

The saints will not recall anything that causes sorrow. Scripture tells us that God will not recall our sins (Heb. 8:12) but without doubt we will remember the awful results of sin. We will remember how we were delivered from sin's guilt and power by God's wondrous grace. Otherwise we would not be able to sing the Song of Moses and the Lamb, that song of experience and testimony to Christ's saving power. The saints would not be able to fully appreciate God's kingdom if they did not recall the terrible contrast of this sin-cursed earth.

...there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. V4

What a thrilling array of negatives. The fact that there are four negatives indicates that universally these plights will never arise again. A different world awaits the saints. Much of humanity's time is now occupied with these confronting conditions. For many this world is a vale of tears. In the future world medical services will never be required. Hospitals, chemists, doctors, nurses, etcetera will have no reason to continue. There will be no need for funeral directors, gravediggers, embalmers, crematoriums, cemeteries, or the like. There will be no stress, no pressure, no competition, no accidents, no longer any failure of any systems.

Imagine family life in such an existence. Scripture tells us that the infants of God's people, who died before the age of responsibility, will be restored to life by virtue of their parents' faith. These young ones will grow up in the kingdom. (Mal. 4:2)

However children will not be conceived or born in God's kingdom.

...The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage: But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. Luke 20:34-36

There will be no marriage either. The earth will have been populated. Originally when Adam and Eve were instructed to multiply they were to fill the earth. No doubt multiplication would then have ceased. Before sin entered conception must have been much rarer than after sin's entrance because God decreed of the woman:

I will greatly multiply... your conception... Genesis 3:16

This was essential in order to preserve the human race because with the entrance of sin, death came upon all men.

God gives a guarantee

Then He who sat upon the throne said, “Behold I make all things new”...

This earth will be Eden restored. So vastly different is the prospect before us and so incredibly glorious that many consider it too good to be true. The Lord knew that human beings would react that way, so He gave the apostle John a divine guarantee:

And he said to me, “Write (it down), for these words are true and faithful.” V5

The kingdom of glory is not “pie in the sky”. It is the restoration to humanity of what God originally gave it – Paradise. And to confirm His guarantee, He declared:

...It is done! ...

God has decreed it, so it cannot fail. It is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18).

...I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. ...

What God commences He concludes. What He promises He fulfils. Once He declares it, it is considered as having already been achieved.

Water of life

...I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. V6

Millions thirst for the water of life but they are unaware of it. Many are seeking spiritual satisfaction. The human race is largely deprived of the only way of true and lasting contentment, to be found in Jesus Christ. He offers every individual the water of life now, in this life. This represents the Holy Spirit who is received by believing in Christ.

...“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me...out of his heart (from within him) will flow rivers of living water.” (But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing Him would receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37-39.

If we receive the spiritual water of life now, we will receive of the literal water of life in the kingdom. But notice that we will be given the fountain (or spring) of the water of life, meaning that we will have an everlasting supply.

The overcomers' reward

He who overcomes...

While eternal life is a gift from God (Rom.6:23, Eph.2:8) the reward we receive after eternal life has been bestowed is based upon definite conditions. These conditions are summed up in the word overcomer, which is mentioned eight times in the Book of Revelation. Eight often represents regeneration and resurrection and it will be in the resurrection that the saints will receive their full reward.

...shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. V7

All that God has promised His people will be fulfilled in the earth made new. However, the greater reward will be when God the Father publicly and privately receives each one of us as His own son or daughter. Perhaps there is more involved in this than meets the eye. When the beloved Son ascended to heaven after His sojourn upon the earth, He was received by heaven in triumph and with celebration. When the Son approached the Father we believe that His arms encircled the Son and that the angels were instructed to worship Him.⁹

This is a beautiful glimpse of the affectionate nature of the Godhead.

The fate of the unsaved

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. V8

In this passage God lists eight types of sinners:

1. The cowardly: The fearful. Those who are afraid of public opinion, who will not serve God because of criticism from their friends, etc.
2. The unbelieving: Those who lack faith – who cannot trust God. This is a basic sin, - *without faith it is impossible to please him* (Heb. 11:6).
3. The abominable: Those who are disgusting and detestable in their person and behaviour. Also those who have drunk of Babylon's cup of abominations (Revelation 17:4, 5) and thereby have been debased in character.
4. Murderers: Those filled with hate as well as those who have no respect for life.
5. Sexually immoral: Those whose lifestyle consists of fornication, plus many forms of illicit sexual behaviour.
6. Sorcerers: Those who are involved in the occult, especially mediums, psychics, etc.
7. Idolaters: Deliberate transgressors of the second commandment, whether their idols be either literal or spiritual.
8. All liars: This includes those who knowingly teach false doctrines as well as those who engage in deliberate deceit.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 834.

The *lake which burns with fire and brimstone* alludes to the burning earth after the final judgment of Revelation 20:12-15. When fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours the unsaved, the same fire envelops the globe and it becomes a lake of fire. This is the final fate of the unsaved. This is the hell (Gk. Gehenna) of Mark 9:43-48. However this is not eternal torment, for the apostle John declares that this is *the second death*.

Death is the exact opposite to life. The unsaved cannot live on endlessly in torment when final punishment is in the lake of fire which is the second death. If a person, or the soul or spirit of a person, was to exist in torment, it would mean that they were continuing to live. However this event is termed the second death and represents total extinction.

All humankind is subject to the first death as a result of Adam's sin. The second death is purely the result of one's own sins. Every person who rejects the death of Christ on their behalf must pay the penalty for their own sins. The gospel of Christ is the *power of God unto salvation*. Not only does Christ save the sinner from the guilt of their sin, but also from the power of sin. *He shall save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21). There is overcoming power in the gospel, however if the professed believer does not take advantage of this power their end will be with all the other sinners in the lake of fire.

The New Jerusalem described

Introduction

Read Revelation 21:9-27

This passage provides a graphic description of the New Jerusalem. Most scholars have concluded that it is a symbolic portrayal of the Christian Church and undoubtedly there are valuable spiritual lessons for God's people from this description. However symbolic portrayals cease at the Second Advent and from then onwards predictions apply literally. This is because in the kingdom of grace depictions are spiritual and symbolic but in the kingdom of glory depictions are natural and literal. The dividing line between these two kingdoms is the Second Advent.¹⁰ This passage applies after the Second Advent and is thus a description of the literal, physical New Jerusalem (also see *Item 3. The third heaven – Paradise above*).

Many Christians cannot accept that the kingdom of glory is literal, perceiving heaven to be a totally spiritual realm. This is the result of pagan concepts which originated with Manicheanism (a branch of Gnosticism) being received into the church in the early Christian centuries. This philosophy held that matter was inherently evil and that harmony in the universe would only be achieved by the destruction of matter.¹¹ The outcome was that the eternal realm was considered to be purely spiritual. Biblical descriptions of a literal, physical Hereafter were interpreted as having a spiritual or symbolic application. This concept is still extant today, being held by the cults of the east.

The detailed description of the New Jerusalem presented in Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 demands a literal application.

¹⁰ A.P. Cooke, *Lightnings, Thunderings, Voices* (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

¹¹ Le Roy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 1:222-225.

The bride of Christ

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." V9

The angel delegated to show the New Jerusalem to John is same angel who previously talked to John about the punishment of the harlot.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters." Revelation 17:1

It is apparent that angels are delegated particular tasks and responsibilities:

- *The angel of the waters* (Revelation 16:5)
- *The angel from the altar* (Revelation 16:7)
- *The angel who had power over fire* (Revelation 14:18)
- *The angels holding the four winds* (Revelation 7:1)
- *The seven angels with the seven golden bowls* (Revelation 15:7)

The same angel is employed possibly in order to reveal the contrast between the *harlot* and the *bride*. One receives the plagues of judgment, the other the glory of God.

In Verse 9 it is plain that the Bride of Christ is the New Jerusalem. However other scriptures declare that the Church is the Bride of Christ.¹² There are two brides in scripture - the spiritual bride (the Church) and the literal bride (New Jerusalem).

Descends from heaven

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. V10

Here John is drawing his imagery from the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, who also was taken to a high mountain and shown the promised city that God was to build for ancient Israel.

In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me upon a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like the structure of a city. Ezekiel 40:2.

These predictions of Ezekiel were not fulfilled to Israel. They were conditional prophecies (see also Ezekiel 43:10, 11). Israel failed to fulfill the conditions and therefore these Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel now apply to the Christian church which is spiritual Israel. Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 are the fulfillment of the final predictions of Ezekiel (see Appendix B). Altogether there are at least thirty parallels between Ezekiel Chapters 34-48 and Revelation Chapters 21-22.¹³

¹² A.P. Cooke, *Lightnings, Thunderings, Voices*.

¹³ A.P. Cooke, *Gog and Magog – Must Russia invade Palestine to fulfil Ezekiel 38 and 39?* (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

Construction

...having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. V11

This describes the magnificent external appearance of the holy city.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. V12-13

Verse 12 indicates that only true Israelites can enter the New Jerusalem. An Israelite is one who is God-ruled, a prince of God, an overcomer.

The walls and gates described in Verse 13 demonstrate the beauty of heaven's perfect design and organization. With the millions of spiritual Israelites who will belong to the city coming and going, order and organization will be necessary but this will never impinge on the perfect freedom of any individual.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. V14

There are twelve groups of twelve in the description of the New Jerusalem. Twelve denotes divine organization. The names of the apostles on the foundations indicate that the city is a Christian city. It is an acknowledgement of, and a reward for those twelve brave humble men who pioneered the gospel. This memorial will speak its message throughout eternity.

And he... had a golden reed to measure the city, its gates and its walls. V15

The purpose for measuring the city is to acquaint the saints with the reality of it all and to help us to believe that it is real.

The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth...twelve thousand furlongs (or stadia)...

This means that its size would be approximately 550 kilometers (or 350 miles) square.

...Its length, breadth and height are equal. V16

The word equal may also be translated *proportionate*. This appears to be confirmed by the following:

Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. V17

Surely this could only refer to the height of the wall which means that it is around eighty-eight metres (288 feet) in height, if the cubit of Ezekiel is used. John's description is based on Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 40:5, 43:13)

The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. V18

The gemstone jasper today is an opaque form of quartz, either spotted or speckled: it comes in a range of what appear to be layered colours, the most prized being a combination of red and green.

The buildings of the city and the streets (see v21) of transparent gold must look stunningly beautiful amidst the abundant greenery that will undoubtedly adorn the city.

The foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all kinds of precious stones... (read V19, 20)

John lists the twelve foundations, each of which is constructed of a different coloured gemstone.

The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. ... V21

The gates of solid pearl must look truly magnificent.

Temple located outside

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. V22

This does not mean that there will be no temple in the new earth. It means that the location of the temple has been altered. Originally it was within the city. However, in Ezekiel's vision the temple is shown as being outside the city. Apparently it is the same when the reign of sin ceases, because John reveals that the saints are before the throne of God and *serve him day and night in His temple* (Revelation 7:15).

Undoubtedly, the temple will serve a different function in the Hereafter because sin has ceased to exist, meaning that priestly services will not be required. Instead of the Priest King, Christ will be King of kings.

Divinely illuminated

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. V23

In this present kingdom of grace Christ is the spiritual Light of the World, the Sun of Righteousness. In the kingdom of glory, Christ and the Father will be the literal light. That vast city of approximately 550 kilometres square will have no need of artificial lighting. The light of God's glory will diffuse throughout the whole city and into every dwelling.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light...

There will be no earthly nations saved as a whole. The one holy nation of spiritual Israel is comprised of saints from every nation. However when one contemplates the number of the saved, one can understand why they are described as nations.

...I looked, and behold, and lo, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations... standing before the throne... Revelation 7:9

Even today we may number the peoples alive on earth, but the number saved in the kingdom will be so vast that it will be humanly impossible to count them. Because God's kingdom is a place of perfect order, no doubt the saved will be organized into appropriate groups – *the nations of those who are saved*.

Kings will be there

And the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. V24

This description is borrowed from Isaiah Chapter 60 where the prophet foretold how had she been faithful, ancient Israel would have become the centre of the kingdom of God. This prediction will be fulfilled to spiritual Israel in the last days in a spiritual sense. It will also have a literal fulfillment in the new earth. Much of the imagery used by John in Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 is borrowed from this chapter in the Book of Isaiah (see Appendix C).

While there may be kings in this world who will be saved in the kingdom, nevertheless they are not saved as kings, but as born again children of God. Earthly kings will not resume their kingly positions in the Hereafter. The kings who will bring their glory and honour to the New Jerusalem in acknowledgment of the worthiness of the Lamb are:

1. The twelve apostles.

Jesus said to them...in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you have followed Me will also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28.

We suggest that the twelve tribes of Israel represent spiritual Israel.

2. The twenty-four elders will also be kings.

...the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb... saying... You...have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:8-10.

The passage of time

...there shall be no night there. V25

Since this refers to the holy city, we naturally question whether this means that there will be no days and no weekly and monthly cycles as there are now.

In the restored earth, while time is replaced by eternity, there will still be days and nights but no darkness. The day will still be divided. As Isaiah declared, speaking of the restoration of his people,

Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound. Isaiah 30:26

This does not mean that the sun will be seven times hotter, but rather seven times brighter. Thus, while there will be a difference in the renewed earth between day and night, so-called, there will be no darkness. Because glorified mankind will experience no weariness or fatigue, there will be no need for sleep.

...they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

That time will be structured into weeks and months is revealed by Isaiah who declared of the new earth state:

“And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another (monthly) and from one Sabbath to another (weekly) all flesh shall come to worship before me,” says the Lord. Isaiah 66:23.

This means that from around the renewed earth the multitudes of the saints will come to the holy city each Sabbath and each month, firstly for worship and secondly to partake of the tree of life which yields its fruit every month (Revelation 22:2).

Character of the occupants

And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it (the New Jerusalem). V26

The redeemed will not exist in a state of inactivity in the new earth. As the author of the Great Controversy has so beautifully described it:

Immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God’s redeemed.¹⁴

No doubt the honour and glory of the achievements of the redeemed, will be acknowledged and displayed before the hosts of the saved in the New Jerusalem; but instead of man being exalted, the credit and praise will rightly be rendered to God.

But there shall by no means enter into it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. V27

This verse reveals why the Deity has gone to such pains to prepare a people for the kingdom of God. The well-being, happiness and security of the universe are based upon obedience to God’s eternal law. Originally it was disobedience to that law that brought disharmony and war in heaven. For over six thousand years God has permitted the reign of evil in order to convince the whole universe of the secret of real happiness. When the reign of sin has ended the standard of entrance to His kingdom is reaffirmed. Only those whose guilt has been atoned for by the Lamb of God and who have retained their names in the Book of Life by successfully overcoming evil by the power of the Lamb (Revelation 3:5) will abide in that better land.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 677.

Revelation Chapter 22

The New Jerusalem

Introduction

The description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation Chapter 21 gives an external view of the New Jerusalem. Revelation Chapter 22 describes the literal city from within.

Main features

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. V1

The first and central feature of the New Jerusalem is the throne of God. The second feature is the sparkling waters which emerge from the throne. These are the antitype of the healing waters described in Ezekiel 47:1-9, and are an impressive demonstration of the creative power of God.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing (or service) of the nations. V2

Every month (see Isaiah 66:23) the redeemed come to the tree of life to eat its fruit. When one considers the innumerable multitude of God's people, what an abundance of fruit must be produced by this tree! In the original Garden of Eden it appears that in order to perpetuate immortality it was essential for Adam and Eve to continually eat from the tree of life.

...And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever Genesis 3:22

Yes, immortality is bestowed upon the saints at the resurrection and translation at the Second Advent:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (or die) but we shall all be changed - in a moment... at the last trumpet. ...this mortal must put on immortality... death is swallowed up in victory. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

But human beings are not naturally immortal. Nor do they possess an immortal soul. Therefore it is necessary to perpetuate immortality. The delegated source is the tree of life. This will be a continual reminder to the redeemed that even in their sinless, immortal state they are still dependent upon God for life.

And there shall be no more curse... V3

The curse that Heaven placed upon the world in the beginning was threefold:

1. The curse upon the ground as a result of Adam's sin. This prevented the soil from giving forth its full production (Genesis 3:17).
2. The curse upon Cain because of the murder of his brother (Genesis 4:11). The Hebrew may be interpreted as *You are more cursed than the earth*.
3. The curse upon the earth at the Flood because of the moral corruption of the race by which *the world that then existed became the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word* (Genesis 8:21; 6:1-7; 2 Pet. 3:6, 7)

*The curse did not come all at once.... Since the Flood, as the human family have forgotten God... the curse has rested heavier and heavier upon men and upon the beasts. The trees and all vegetation also have felt the effects of the curse.*¹⁵

Little do we realize the sad effects of the curse upon the earth, but in the great restoration when the earth and all in it exhibit their pristine freshness and beauty, we will comprehend.

But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it...

This may mean that the Father takes up permanent residence in the renewed earth or that at various times the Father will visit this earth and enter into fellowship with His children. Originally in Eden, God visited His children and communed with them.

And they (Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day... then the LORD God called to Adam... Genesis 3:8, 9

...and His servants shall serve Him. V3

What delight and satisfaction there will be for the saints in being able to serve a visible God.

They shall see his face...

Face exhibits character. Beautiful faces have a magnetic attraction and our heavenly Father is absolute perfection. We suggest that God's face will be so awe-inspiring, so impressive, so moving, so overwhelming that the saints will be unable to contain themselves. They will burst forth into uninhibited praise. Maybe this is the basis for the unceasing praise of the cherubim revealed in Revelation Chapter 4.¹⁶

...and His name shall be on their foreheads. V4

This reminds us of the 144,000:

...one hundred and forty-four thousand, having his Father's name written on their foreheads. Revelation 14:1

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), 4:192

¹⁶ A.P. Cooke, *Two armies, two suppers, two destinies* (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

No doubt this means that since in Scripture name indicates character, and no one enters heaven who is lacking in moral fibre, all the redeemed will have God's name on their foreheads.

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

Will God's name be in the redeemed's foreheads in a spiritual sense, as with the 144,000 or will this be a visible sign of identification. We suggest the latter. Among the multiplied millions of unfallen beings of other worlds as well as the millions of the angels of God, the redeemed will possess the visible name of God, indicating their special experience in having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

For an exposition of verse 5, see above under Revelation 21:25.

The time is near

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. V6

Once more God confirms the certainty of the kingdom through his angel spokesman (refer Revelation 21:9). This promise is repeated three times (see Revelation 19:9; 21:5; 22:6).

...By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (Matthew 18:16).

Our Father longs for the salvation of His lost children so He helps us to believe.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. V7

Six times in Revelation the expression, *I am coming quickly!* is used. The first three times it seems to refer to Christ coming to in judgment, but Revelation Chapter 22 all three references relate to His second coming. The number *three* confirms the certainty of the promise (Matthew 18:16). In Verse 7 the expression is used to emphasise the fact that keeping the sayings in Revelation is imperative. Special instruction and special preparation are essential for the Second Advent.

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And...I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that: for I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." V8,9

It appears that as in Revelation 19:10, John again was so overwhelmed at the marvelous revelation he had received from the angel that he involuntarily fell at his feet. Once again the angel gently reminds John that angels are fellow creatures and that God alone is to be worshipped.

And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book for the time is at hand." V10

The prophecies in the Book of Revelation commenced fulfilling in John's day. Therefore as far as God's people are concerned, nothing in the book is to be sealed or kept secret.

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. V11

Some Greek scholars prefer:

Let him that is unjust, do injustice still; and let the foul pollute himself still; and let the righteous do righteousness still; and let the holy sanctify himself still.

These character traits represent all classes of the godly and ungodly. It seems that the significance of this verse is in the word *still*. As Dr. Weymouth states:

*The word seems to denote development and crystallization of character immediately preceding the coming of the great Judge of all.*¹⁷

This verse declares the destiny of all prior to the Second Advent. Jesus in the parable of the wheat and tares explained that in the period of the end of the world there will be a separation of the just and unjust (Matthew 13:37-41). This means that at a particular time, a decision must be made as to where every individual stands. This is one of the purposes of the pre-advent judgment. It determines, after investigation, who has failed. The above decree announces the close of human probation.

A message from Jesus

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. V12

Eternal life is not the reward. That is repeatedly declared to be a gift.¹⁸ The saints' reward will be received after they have received the gift of eternal life and have reached the kingdom. This reveals that the Lord takes note of the work of the saints. Even though we cannot earn our way to heaven, God will reward our efforts to promote His cause. The unsaved will also be rewarded in accordance with their works.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” V13

This is a repetition of Revelation 1:8, 17. The term Alpha and Omega represents Christ as the great Revelator, knowing and revealing all. The expression *the First and the Last* refers to Jesus as the complete victor over all His and His people's enemies.¹⁹

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. V14

Antinomians dislike this verse and prefer translations from the Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus manuscripts. However these manuscripts are notorious for their many corruptions.²⁰

¹⁷ Richard Francis Weymouth, *The Modern Speech New Testament* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1903), See footnote to Revelation 22:11

¹⁸ See Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8

¹⁹ A.P. Cooke, *Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega*.(Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

The entrance of the saints into the city and access to the tree of life is after the Second Advent. Eternal life is given at the resurrection and subsequent translation of the saints. The privilege of entry into the city and eating from the tree of life is part of the saints' reward. Since the reward is in accordance with our works (obedience) the word "commandments" is appropriate.

The word "commandments" also agrees with verses 7 and 9:

...Blessed is he who keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book. V7

...and of those who keep the words of this book. V9

The saints are clearly instructed to keep the commandments of God.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman (the church) and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12:17.

Here is the patience of the saints, here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Revelation 14:12

Revelation 22:15 confirms that Verse 14 refers to commandment keeping because it shows that those outside the city are commandment breakers.

But outside (the city) are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. V15

Dogs represent humans who are backbiters and hateful toward others:

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers... Philipians 3:2

But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another. Galatians 5:15

This verse repeats what was stated in Revelation 21:27, thus emphasizing the high standard of heaven. No one who rebels against its standards will enter there.

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." V16

The messages of the Book of Revelation are the messages of Christ. Neglecting them may lead to eternal loss.

The name *Root and Offspring of David* alludes to both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. He is the God-man, connected with both the Godhead and connected with humanity.²¹

The name *Bright and Morning Star* is also appropriate because Jesus is the one who heralds the end of the night of sin and the coming of the everlasting day.

²⁰ The Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus manuscripts render Revelation 22:14 as "Blessed are they that wash their robes."

²¹ A.P. Cooke, *The Slain Lamb and the Sealed Book*. (Sydney: Self published, 1985).

God's final appeal

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who (spiritually) thirsts, come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. V17

This is God's final appeal for humanity to respond to the gospel and be fitted for the kingdom of heaven. Those who either reject or neglect this appeal are sadly shortsighted.

A warning

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life (margin tree of life) from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. V18-19

This is a dire warning from God that if anyone - no matter who - tampers with the Book of Revelation they will suffer eternal consequences. It emphasizes how important this book is in God's estimation.

Jesus' final message

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly"...

This is the final word of Christ to His people. He is returning to our world. He will keep the promise He made on earth to come back again. This blessed hope will soon be realized.

Conclusion

...Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus. V20

John's fervent response to Jesus' final message should also be that of every sincere individual who reads and accepts the messages of the Book of Revelation. He concludes with a prayer that:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. V21

Appendices

Appendix A

Promises in Isaiah fulfilled in Revelation Chapters 21-22

Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 depict the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to ancient Israel that God would finally restore them to a kingdom of glory upon the earth.

Altogether there are ten passages in the writings of Isaiah that embrace the above promise. These are – Isa 11:5; 24:23; 25:7-8; 33:20-24; 35:1-10; 40:31; 55:12-13; 60:18-19; 65:17-25; 66:22-23.

Some have mistakenly applied these promises to the millennium but Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 demonstrate that they will be literally fulfilled in the renewed earth **after** the millennium.

Appendix B

Parallels between Ezekiel 40-48, Revelation 21-22 and other scriptures

Ezekiel 40-48	Revelation 21-22 and other scriptures
Shown city from a high mountain. Ezekiel 40:2	Shown city from a high mountain. Revelation 21:10
City measured with a reed measuring stick. 40:3-5	City measured with a reed measuring stick. 21:15
Temple was separate from the city. 42:1,20	No temple in city – situated elsewhere. 21:22; 7:14,15
Names of 12 tribes on gates. 48:31	Names of 12 tribes on gates. 21:16
The city was four square. 48: 30-34	The city was four square 21:16
Three gates on each side of city. v. 30-34	Three gates on each side of city. 21:13
God's glory came from the east. 43:5,7	God's glory comes from the east. Matthew 24:27
God's throne in midst of city. 43:5,7	God's throne in midst of city. 22:3
Waters issue from the throne forming a river of life. 47:1-3	The river of the water of life issues from the throne. 22:1
Trees on both sides of the river. 47:12	Tree of life on both sides of the river. 22:2
New fruit produced every month. 47:12	New fruit every month. 22:2
Leaves of tree for medicine. 47:12	Leaves of tree for healing. 22:2
Name of city – <i>The Lord is there...</i> 48:35	He shall dwell with them and God himself shall be with them... 21:3
The land divided by lot according to the tribes 47:21,22	The saints receive their or inheritance (or lot) in the renewed earth. Dan. 12:13, Isaiah 65:17, 21-25
Saints assemble for worship on Sabbath. 46:1, 3	Saints assemble for worship every Sabbath. Isaiah 66:22,23
No stranger or uncircumcised in heart or flesh, ie only purified people shall enter. 44:9.	No one who defiles or causes an abomination or a lie, ie only purified people shall enter. Revelation 21:27.

Appendix C

Parallels between Isaiah Chapter 60 and Revelation Chapters 21 and 22

Isaiah 60	Revelation 21, 22
<i>..your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night...</i>	<i>Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). 21:25</i>
<i>...that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles (or nations)</i>	<i>And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. 21:26</i>
<i>...and their kings in procession. V11</i>	<i>And the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honour into it. 21:24</i>
<i>Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders... v18</i>	<i>...there shall be no more death, nor sorrow nor crying...no more pain... 21:4 And there shall be no more curse...22:3</i>
<i>The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you...</i>	<i>The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it... 21:23</i>
<i>...But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory v19</i>	<i>...for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. 21:23 and 22:5</i>
<i>...and the days of your mourning shall be ended. v20</i>	<i>And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes 21:4</i>
<i>Also your people shall all be righteous...</i>	<i>But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie...21:27</i>
<i>...they shall inherit the land forever... v21</i>	<i>...And they (the saints) shall reign forever and ever. 22:5</i>

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