

THE LAMB IS THE LORD

A journey through the Book of Revelation

7 ► The Bridal City of God (21:1-22:21)



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Each of the gates of New Jerusalem is made from a single pearl (Revelation 21:21), and its gates are always open (Revelation 21:25). In this painting by Pat Marvenko Smith, we're looking through one of these open gates. We see the river of living water flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city; the tree of life flourishes on either bank (Revelation 22:1-2).

A New Heaven and a New Earth (21:1-8)

At home in God's presence

A new creation

The Lord Jesus has returned to Earth in His divine power and glory. The great and final judgment of the world has taken place. Now John sees "a new heaven

and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, . . ." (21:1). A new and perfect world comes into being, echoing what Isaiah prophesied centuries before (Isaiah 65:17).

We've seen previews of this new creation:

► John saw "a great multitude that no one could



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Peter writes that: “the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed . . . the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Peter 3:10,12). Peter seems to be telling us that the present universe will undergo a kind of ‘meltdown’ and ‘dissolution’. Through this process, it seems, the Earth and the heavens will be transformed into the new creation.

number, . . . standing before the throne and before the Lamb”, praising God and the Lamb (7:9). These victorious believers “are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple” (7:15).

- In 14:1, we saw “144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” with the Lamb on Mount Zion. “Mount Zion” here is New Jerusalem. We now see this city “coming down out of heaven from God” (21:2).
- And what we saw in 20:4-6 may well be another glimpse of God’s people in the new creation.

Now we see this new creation in all its glory. All of Revelation—indeed, the whole Bible story—has been leading up to this moment.

All things new

Jesus will return to Earth. He’s returning so He can live with us *here on Earth*.

And when He comes, there will be a new Heaven and a new Earth (21:1, 2 Peter 3:13). But what happens to this Earth when He comes? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth out of nothing. So will God completely destroy this old Earth, and then create a new Earth from nothing? Of course, God could do that. But I don’t think He will. It seems much more likely that He’ll restore and transform this old Earth.

Paul writes: “the creation . . . will be set free from its

bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). It seems that the present creation won’t be totally destroyed and replaced. It will be liberated and transformed. Peter gives us more detail: “the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed . . . the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Peter 3:10,12). Peter seems to be telling us that the present universe will undergo a kind of ‘meltdown’ and ‘dissolution’. Things that melt down or dissolve *do not cease to exist*. They are transformed.^[1]

Think about what happened when Jesus was raised from death. His resurrection body was *the very same body that He had during His earthly life*. Our own new bodies, too, will be ‘resurrection’ bodies. Resurrection, by its nature, presupposes *continuity*. What’s true of Jesus’s body and ours will surely be true of Earth. All this suggests there’ll be continuity between our present Earth and the New Earth.

Think of the way a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. The caterpillar pupates. Within the pupa, its body undergoes a ‘meltdown’; it’s then reconstituted into the body of the butterfly. Finally the butterfly emerges and takes wing. You’d hardly think that the caterpillar and the butterfly were the same individual. And yet they are.^[2]

So why do we read that “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (21:1)? As we read in 21:4, in that new creation, “the former things have passed away”. It seems that its *present condition* passes away.

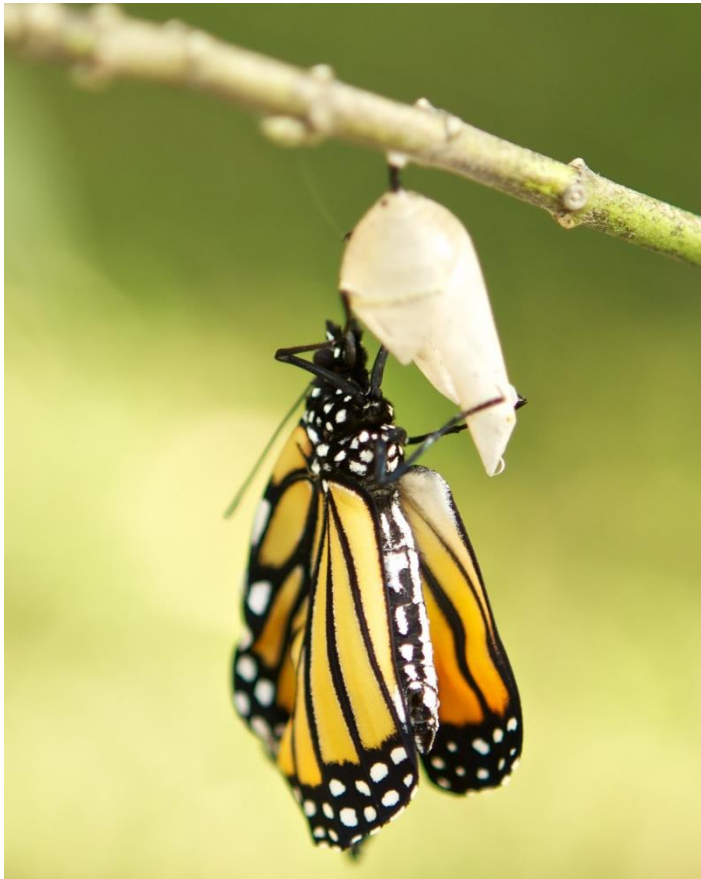


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A monarch butterfly that's just emerged from its pupa. Within the pupa, its body undergoes a 'meltdown'; it's then reconstituted into the body of the butterfly. You'd hardly think that the caterpillar and the butterfly were the same individual!

The old order of things passes away—Satan's evil kingdom, the world system that exists in rebellion against God, and all the devastating effects of sin on our world. In that new creation, “the sea” will be “no more” (21:1). The sea can symbolise the realm of evil forces, and opposition to God and His people—recall that the beast, one of Satan's henchmen, arose from the sea (13:1). That's what the sea symbolises here. And that's why the sea is “no more”. And all that blights our lives in this world will be no more. God “will wipe away every tear from” [our] “eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more” (21:4).

God Himself now speaks. He “who was seated on the throne” declares: “Behold, I am making all things new.” (21:5). God, the Creator, spoke Heaven and Earth into being at the beginning (Genesis 1:1-2:3). Now He makes all things new. Our Creator God is the God of new things. He is *always* doing new things. He'll be doing new things throughout all eternity.

But, as God's children, we *already* experience a foretaste of the new creation. Paul writes, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed

away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The New Earth

The new Earth will doubtless differ from this present Earth in many ways. But we can be quite certain it will be at least as physical and solid and substantial as our present Earth—probably even *more* so! And the present barrier between Heaven and Earth will be dissolved. Heaven and Earth will be blended in a way we cannot now imagine.

The city from Heaven

In this new creation, there's a city. John sees “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:2). We saw this city trampled by the nations “for forty-two months” (11:2), and besieged by the forces of evil (20:9). Now she appears in her final glory and purity.

As we've seen, two contrasting cities dominate our vision in the final chapters of Revelation. One is “Babylon the great” (17:5). The other is “New Jerusalem” (21:2, see 3:12):

- Babylon symbolises mankind's attempts to create a perfect world by their own efforts. New Jerusalem's “designer and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).
- Babylon symbolises a world where people try to live without God. New Jerusalem is filled with the presence of God.
- Babylon symbolises mankind's godless civilisation under Satan's rule—“the kingdom of the world” (11:15). New Jerusalem symbolises God's world where He reigns—the Kingdom of God.
- The builders of the tower of Babel said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, . . .” (Genesis 11:4). Godless mankind wanted to reach up from Earth to Heaven. But New Jerusalem comes *down* from Heaven. John sees “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God . . .” (21:2).

The Bride

In 19:7 we saw that “the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready”. Now we know who His Bride is—she's a city, God's city, New Jerusalem. This holy city is prepared “as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). In Genesis, we see a man and his wife (Genesis 2:22-24). In Revelation we see a Man and His wife, the Lamb and His Bride (Revelation 19:7, 21:2,9).

Again, New Jerusalem is the complete opposite to Babylon. Babylon was pictured as “the great prostitute” (17:1), the consort of the beast. She was a fake wife.



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At its heart, the Bible story is a love story. So deep is God's love for His people, that He describes it in terms of this most intimate of all human relationships— *marriage*.

New Jerusalem is the true wife. She's a pure virgin, the Bride of the Lamb.

The great romance

At its heart, the Bible story is a love story. So deep is God's love for His people, that He describes it in terms of this most intimate of all human relationships— *marriage*.

At Mount Sinai, God brought His people Israel into covenant relationship with Himself. That covenant was like a marriage. God became the nation's Husband (see, for example Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 31:32).

That marriage imagery continues in the New Testament. We believers here on Earth are now *betrothed* to Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 11:2). To the Ephesian church, Paul writes, "**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church**" (Ephesians 5:25). Jesus gave Himself up for His beloved Church "**that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her . . . , so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, . . . that she might be holy and without blemish**" (Ephesians 5:25-27). Now, in the new creation, Jesus presents His Church to Himself in her final splendour. She is holy and without blemish.

"I will be their God, and they shall be My people"

John hears "**a loud voice from the throne**" proclaiming "**Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God**"

(21:3 NIV).

This was what God planned from the beginning:

- ▶ He promised Abraham: "**I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring . . . for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.**" (Genesis 17:7).
- ▶ To His fledgling nation Israel, God promised, "**I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.**" (Leviticus 26:11–12).
- ▶ Through the prophet Jeremiah God promised, "**this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, . . . : I will put my law within them, And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**" (Jeremiah 31:33).
- ▶ Through Ezekiel, God declared, "**My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**" (Ezekiel 37:27).
- ▶ And, of course, God lives in His New Testament people. Paul writes, "**we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"**" (1 Corinthians 6:16).

But in the new creation, God will be present among us more intimately, more fully, than is possible now in this present world. And in that world to come there'll be no sin to eclipse and interrupt our fellowship with Him.

The holy Almighty God, creator and sustainer of all that exists, delights in our presence! He wants to live with us

for ever. Isn't that absolutely amazing! And He wants to lavish on us all the countless and unspeakably wonderful blessings of life in His presence. As the Psalmist sang, "in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

Promises and warning

"These words are trustworthy and true"

John is told "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" (21:5). 'These words' probably means the whole book of Revelation. Recall that the great conflict between God and His people on one side, and the forces of evil on the other, is fought, not with weapons of steel, but with *truth* and *error*. The words we read here in Revelation and in the rest of Scripture are "trustworthy and true". They're weapons in our hands.

"It is done!"

God declares "It is done!" (21:6). On the Cross, Jesus cried: "It is finished" (John 19:30)—in other words, "It is accomplished!" On the Cross, salvation was accomplished and Satan was cast out (see John 12:31). All that Jesus set in motion through the Cross is now complete. A new people has come into being. A new world is here. A new age has begun.

"The Alpha and the Omega"

God declares, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (21:6)—expanding what He said in 1:8. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and omega is the last. God was before all things, and created all things. He governs all history. Now He has brought history to its conclusion. He has defeated Satan and all his forces. He has judged humanity. A new world has come into being.

The water of life

God says, "To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" (21:6, see also 7:17). These words echo Isaiah 55:1.

God *Himself* is "the fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13). Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38). The living water that Jesus promised is God's Holy Spirit (John 7:39). Like an ever-flowing spring of water, God's Spirit within each believer is the unceasing source of God's uncreated, eternal, abundant life. He supplies all they need. He satisfies all their longings. They will never thirst again (see John 4:13-14, John 6:35).

The inheritance of God's children

"Those who are victorious will inherit all this" (21:7 NIV)—"all this" being the blessings of living in the New Earth and Heaven. That includes all the blessings promised to overcomers in the seven churches (2:7,11,17,26-28, 3:5,12,21). We who are born again have "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4).

That word "inherit" leads on to what God promises next: "I will be their God and they will be my children" (21:7 NIV). Faithful believers have been adopted as sons into God's family (see Romans 8:14-17, Galatians 4:4-6). And so, as sons, they inherit a place in their Father's home—the holy city, New Jerusalem. And they inherit a share in their Father's royal authority (5:10, 20:6, 22:5)—an authority they're already given here and now, but will fully possess in the new creation. Corporately, as we've seen, God's people are Jesus's beloved Bride (19:6-9, 21:2, 21:9-11). As individuals, God's people are His beloved children.

But only the ones "who are victorious" (21:7 NIV)—the ones who remain faithful to Jesus, come what may—will inherit. Paul writes: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ". Then he adds, "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Romans 8:16-17).

The people destined for the second death

Now we're told about who'll be outside the city. Their "portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death" (21:8). They are "the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, . . . murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars" (21:8).

The first two on the list are the "cowardly" and the "faithless". The last is "all liars". These are probably people associated with the churches, who compromised with the pagan society around them. The churches in Pergamum and Thyatira had people like these (2:14-15,20-24). They weren't courageous; they weren't faithful to Jesus; they embraced lies and falsehood.

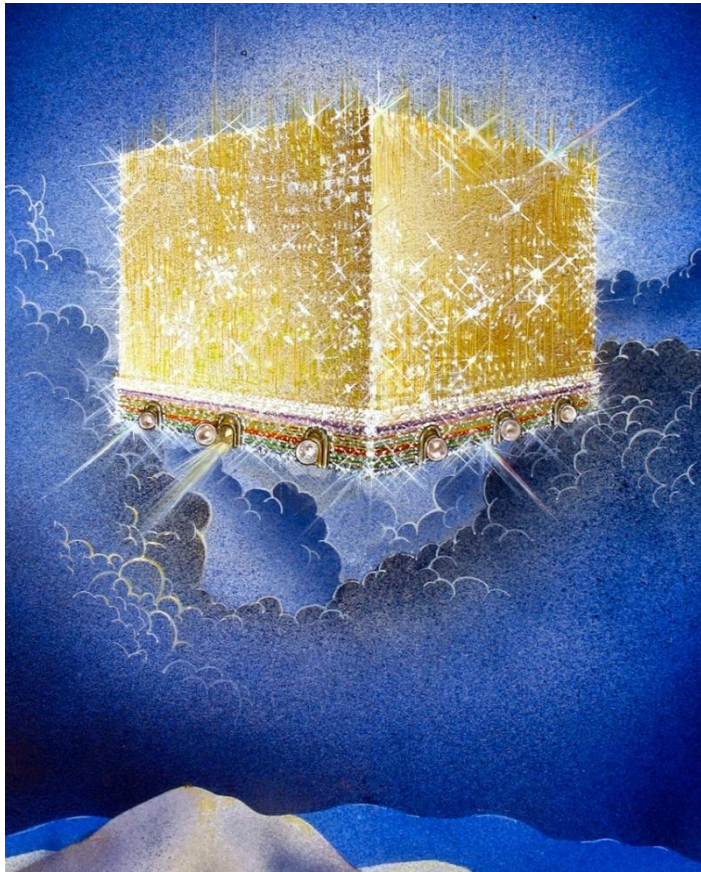
Who are the other five kinds of sinners in this list? The fact that they're sandwiched between "the cowardly, the faithless" on one side and "all liars" on the other seems to suggest that the focus is again on people associated with the churches (although it obviously includes other unbelievers, too).

Now, it's important to note that John isn't speaking about those who gave in to the pressure of

persecution, but later repented. No; these are people in the Church who, in the end, proved themselves to be false believers. They turned their backs on the truth. They threw in their lot with this idolatrous and sensual world, joining in with such things as pagan practices, shady business deals, and sexual immorality.

Remaining faithful to Jesus may be costly—it may bring ostracism and mockery, poverty in terms of this world's goods, violence, perhaps even bodily death. But cowardice, faithlessness and the other vices listed here also have a cost. It is a terrible cost. It is the second death.

The New Jerusalem (21:9-27)



Artwork by Pat Marvenko Smith © 1982, 1992 www.revelationillustrated.com

New Jerusalem's length, width and height are equal (21:16)—in other words, it's a cube. In this artist's depiction, we see this cubic city, with its twelve foundations each adorned with a different kind of jewel, and with gates, three on each side, each of a single pearl, coming down out of Heaven from God.

The glorious Bride of Christ

"I will show you the Bride"

In 17:1, "one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls" said to John, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute . . ." Now "one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . ." says to John "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). This repetition is significant. These two women are complete opposites of each other.

In 17:1-19:3 we were given a good hard look at the filthy prostitute "Babylon the great". Our Lord wants us to know *exactly* what she's like and *exactly* what her destiny will be. He does this so we'll never allow ourselves to be seduced by her.

Now Jesus gives us an in-depth look at His pure virgin Bride, New Jerusalem. He wants our hearts and minds

to be so captivated by her glory and beauty, that we'll forsake everything else to follow Jesus and be citizens of this city.

On God's mountain

To see Babylon, John was carried away "in the Spirit into a wilderness". To view New Jerusalem, John is again carried away "in the Spirit". But now he's carried to "a great, high mountain" (21:10).

John sees "the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, . . ." (21:11). We can imagine John transfixed with awe and wonder as he views this city.

Is John simply viewing the city from a mountain? Or is the city itself on a mountain? Both, it seems. Mountains can (among other things) be associated with *the presence of God*. For example, Solomon built God's Temple on Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1), which became known as Mount Zion. Mount Zion also took on a symbolic, spiritual significance as God's "holy mountain" (for example, Psalm 48:1-3). New Jerusalem is a place where God is present. So it's not surprising that it's on a mountain.

"Having the glory of God"

New Jerusalem has "the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal" (21:11). This recalls the vision of God and His throne-room in 4:1-11. There, God had "the appearance of jasper and carnelian", and before His throne "there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal". Jasper is an opaque stone that is most commonly red. But this jasper is "clear as crystal"—it may be transparent, or shining and sparkling like a brilliant jewel. The city is God's home. It glows with the resplendent beauty and glory of God. It's saturated with God's presence. The vision of it is almost beyond imagination.

The walls and gates and foundations

The walls

The city has "a great, high wall" (21:12). Most ancient cities were walled, to provide security. This city's wall is strong and high. Everyone in the city is completely safe and secure.

The gates

But walled cities need gates for access. New Jerusalem has twelve—three on each of its four sides (21:12-13). Stationed at each gate is an angel (21:12). They seem to be guarding the gates. But in the sinless new creation, why would the gates need guards? Two reasons spring to mind:

- Firstly, to reinforce what the walls symbolise—to show that everyone in the city is secure.
- Secondly, the angels at the gates may be linked to what we read in Genesis 3:24. After Adam and Eve sinned, God had to stop them eating from the tree of life. So at *“the east of the garden of Eden”*, God *“placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life”*. The city is like a new Garden of Eden. It, too, has the tree of life (as we’ll see in 22:2). The garden was guarded by angelic beings and a fiery sword. This city is guarded by angels. God closed the Garden of Eden. No human could enter it. But, in contrast, the angels here stand guard at *open* gates. Its gates are never shut (21:25). *Everyone in the new Earth has access to God’s home. Everyone has access to the tree of life.*

On the gates are inscribed *“the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel”* (21:12). This is doubtless to show who can enter the city. But who exactly *are* these ‘twelve tribes’? In 7:3-8, we saw that the ‘144,000’ sealed *“from every tribe of the sons of Israel”* pictured *the complete number of all believers*—God’s faithful people in both the Old and New Testament periods. And so it is here: *“the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel”* symbolises the complete number of God’s faithful people *“from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages”* (7:9). They are citizens of New Jerusalem. And so they have the right to enter the city.

The wall’s foundations

The wall of the city has *“twelve foundations”*. On them are *“the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”* (21:14). What does this mean? Paul helps us here. In Ephesians 2:20-22, he tells us about God’s *“holy temple”*. This temple is God’s people, who are *“being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit”*. That temple is *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”*. The ‘cornerstone’ here most likely means the key foundation stone at one corner of a building. It would be used to correctly align the other foundation stones and the whole building. Jesus is the Cornerstone. The apostles and prophets, it seems, form the rest of the foundation.

The apostles and prophets were the ones whom God

first entrusted with the gospel, and who first proclaimed and taught it. And the apostles, with others, wrote the gospel in the form of the New Testament—writings that, though penned by men, are *“breathed out by God”* (2 Timothy 3:16). The gospel was made known even in Old Testament times (as Galatians 3:8 shows). *But it was first proclaimed in its fulness by the apostles, and recorded in the New Testament.* It is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

And that surely explains why the city’s foundations bear the names of the *“twelve apostles of the Lamb”*. The apostolic gospel is foundational to God’s people. By believing it we’re saved and become citizens of God’s city. By feeding on it, we grow to maturity in Christ.

The names on the gates and the foundations

The twelve foundations bear *“the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”* (21:14). In contrast, the gates are inscribed with *“the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel”* (21:12). How do the names on the wall’s foundations relate to the names on the gates? It has been suggested that, together, the names represent the Old Testament and New Testament people of God. But it seems more likely that they *both* represent *all* God’s people, but highlighting different aspects:

- The names on the gates tell us *who* may enter the city. *All* God’s people may enter.
- The names on the foundations show *how* they enter. God’s people become citizens of New Jerusalem *only by believing the apostolic gospel—the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The city’s dimensions

Measuring the city

The angel measures *“the city and its gates and walls”* with a golden measuring rod (21:15). This recalls 11:1-2, where John was given *“a measuring rod”* and told: *“measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there”*. The Temple, the altar and the worshippers are all images of God’s people. Measuring them symbolises that *God is protecting them.*

But John wasn’t to measure *“the court outside the temple . . . for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months”* (11:2). The holy city is *also* an image of God’s people, as we see here in this vision of New Jerusalem. The nations will ‘trample’ the Temple’s outer court and the holy city. In other words, while God’s people seek to remain faithful to Jesus and witness to Him, they’ll suffer. They’ll be tempted to compromise with the world. They may suffer persecution.

But now all the enemies of God and His people are in the lake of fire. And so the holy city *is* measured. New Jerusalem is secure. All its residents are safe. The walls told us this. The angels at the gates may be telling us this. Now the city's measuring tells us this. All the threats and dangers that daily assail us will be no more!

And the gates of the city **"will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there"** (21:25). Darkness can symbolise the realm of evil; believers are not **"of the night or of the darkness"** (1 Thessalonians 5:5). And night-time is the time of danger, when evildoers can move about unseen. In those days, city gates would be shut to keep evildoers out. But in the new creation, there will be no evil, and so there will be no danger.

"The city lies foursquare"

The city's length, width and height are equal (21:16)—in other words, it's a cube. As a cube, it's the same shape as the Most Holy Place in the Temple (1 Kings 6:20) and in the Tabernacle (calculated from Exodus 26:1-37). The Most Holy Place was the special room where God lived on Earth (see Exodus 25:22, Numbers 7:89).

So the *whole city* is a Most Holy Place. *Everyone in the city lives in God's Most Holy Place!* In the Tabernacle and in the Old Testament Temple, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only under the strictest conditions. Now *all* God's people can enter. And they don't just enter on special occasions, *they live there!*

God's sanctuary—from Eden to New Jerusalem

The *whole city* is a Most Holy Place. That explains why John didn't see a Temple there: he writes, **"I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb"** (21:22). Think back to the city of Jerusalem in the days of Solomon, or in Jesus's day. The Temple was by far the most magnificent and important building in the city. Yet here in New Jerusalem there *is* no Temple.

This recalls what we see in the Garden of Eden. There was no Temple in the garden. Why? Because, in the beginning, there was no sin there.

For God to live in this sinful world, He must have a holy place that's separated and shielded from sin. Before Adam and Eve sinned, God didn't need to live in a holy place separated from sin. There *was* no sin. So *the whole garden* was His dwelling place. It seems that God used to come **"in the cool of the day"** to enjoy fellowship with Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:8).

But Adam and Eve rebelled, and sin entered this world. God had to send them out of the garden (Genesis 3:23). God could no longer meet with mankind in the way He'd done in the garden. And sinful people couldn't

bear to be in the presence of the holy God.

But God didn't give up on us! He *wanted* to live here on Earth among us. The great question was: *how* could our holy God live here on Earth again among sinful people? How could He do that without His holy presence consuming them (compare Exodus 33:5)?

Fast forward thousands of years, and we find God's first solution. God's chosen nation Israel was encamped at Mount Sinai. God commanded Moses, their leader, **"let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst"** (Exodus 25:8). He showed Moses the blueprint for the Tabernacle, where He planned to live among His people.

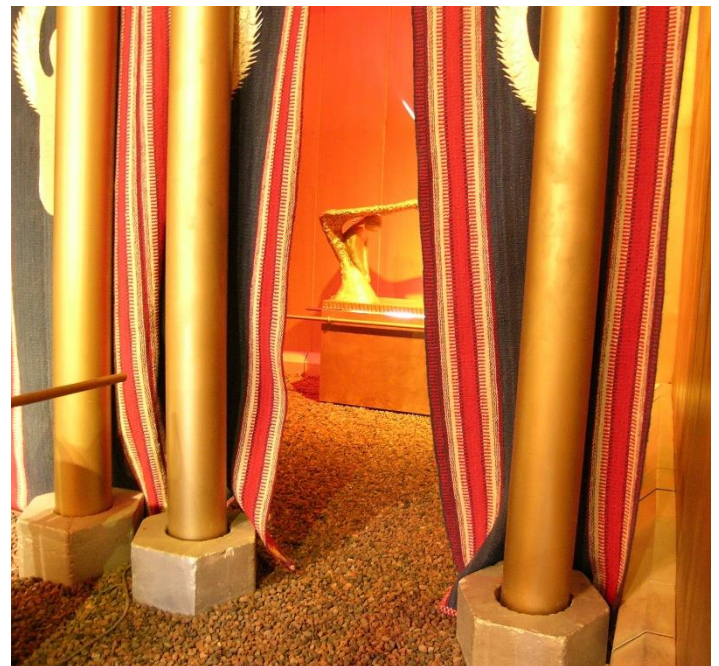


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Inside a full-scale replica of the Tabernacle, Timna Park, Israel. This image shows the inner curtain drawn aside to show the interior of the Most Holy Place containing the ark of the covenant. Only the high priest could enter this room, and only on one day each year, under the strictest conditions.

Stepping inside the Tabernacle was like stepping into a different world—a world of holiness and beauty and fragrance. It was, in fact, a kind of new creation—a glimpse and foreshadowing of the glorious new creation that we see in Revelation 21. And it wasn't pitched in a special place far away from the camp of the Israelites. It was right in the centre of the camp. *God lived among His people.* Of course, God is present everywhere (see 2 Chronicles 6:18, Psalm 139:7-10). But here in the Tabernacle, God made His home in a special way. It was a holy place (see Exodus 40:9) in the midst of a sinful world.

Hundreds of years later, Israel was in the Promised Land. King Solomon built a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem. Again, God took up residence in it. God told King Solomon that, if Israel was obedient, He would dwell **"among the children of Israel . . ."** (1 Kings 6:12-13).

Centuries later, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). God the Son became man. God lived among us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

And, from the Day of Pentecost onwards, God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—*has made His home within believers* (see John 14:16-17,23). Paul writes, “. . . your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (1 Corinthians 6:19). God, by His Holy Spirit, is present within each believer. And God’s people *corporately* are a temple. Paul says, “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16, see also 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:19-22).

But now, here in New Jerusalem, we see a world without sin, a place of spotless holiness (see 21:27). We read that “nothing unclean will ever enter” the city, “nor anyone who does what is detestable or false” (21:27). This recalls the list of evildoers in 21:8, whose “portion will be . . . the second death”. And, since there’s no sin, there’s no need for God to have a holy sanctuary cordoned off from the rest of the city. The city’s Temple is “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22). Everyone in the city lives in the presence of God and of the Lamb!

The city that fills the Earth

And the city is vast. Each side measures “12,000 stadia” (22:16). In literal terms, this is around 1,450 miles, which (taken literally) would mean the city would have stretched from Rome in the west to Jerusalem in the east. In other words, it would have occupied the bulk of the world familiar to people in the Roman empire. These measurements seem to be telling us that New Jerusalem *fills the new Earth*. In any case, other details of the city suggest this. The whole new Earth is the Most Holy Place; *the whole Earth is God’s dwelling-place*. The whole Earth is saturated with His presence and glory. Habakkuk’s prophecy is thus fulfilled: “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14 and see Isaiah 11:9).

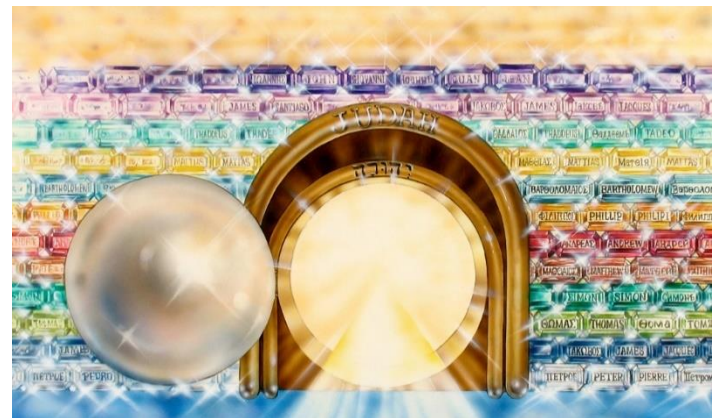
As we’ve just seen, each of the city’s sides measures “12,000 stadia”. The number 12,000 is significant. The angel also measures the wall; it is “144 cubits . . .” Literally, this is about 216 feet. This probably refers to its thickness rather than its height. But what’s important is the number 144. The number 144 is 12 times 12. The number 12,000 is 12 times 10 times 10. Both 12 and 10 are highly significant. We explained the key numbers in Revelation in session 4. ‘Twelve’ seems to symbolise *organisation*— and so is the number of perfect organisation and government. It especially symbolises God’s Kingdom, and the community of God’s Kingdom—that is, God’s people. ‘Ten’ and its multiples (a hundred, a thousand, a million) are ‘round

numbers’—unspecified but complete numbers whose total only God knows.

This city is the Kingdom of God in its final glory and perfection. All God’s faithful people from every age are living there. They’re a countless multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (7:9).

God’s building materials

The wall is “built of jasper”. And the city is “pure gold, like clear glass”; its street is “pure gold, transparent as glass” (21:18,21). When archaeologists uncover articles made of gold, they find them amazingly bright and untarnished. It’s as if they’d been placed in the ground only the day before! Hundreds, even thousands of years, have not tarnished their beauty. And so gold is a fitting symbol of beauty, majesty, value, purity, and indestructibility. But this gold is even more glorious than earthly gold. It’s like glass. Through it, God’s glory radiates throughout the city.



Artwork by Pat Marvenko Smith © 1982, 1992 www.revelationillustrated.com

An artist's impression of one of the gates, made of a single pearl, and the surrounding twelve foundations, each adorned with a different kind of jewel.

We’ve already seen that the city has “twelve foundations”. The names of the Lamb’s “twelve apostles” are written on them (21:14). Each foundation is “adorned” with a different jewel (21:19-20). It seems likely that these foundations weren’t merely inlaid or faced with these jewels, but actually made of them. The sight of these twelve differently-coloured jewels would have been a dazzlingly beautiful kaleidoscope of colour. But what’s their significance?

- New Jerusalem is prepared “as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). Every bride of John’s day would have adorned herself with jewels (see Isaiah 61:10, and compare Ezekiel 16:10-13). This faithful bridal city is arrayed as no earthly bride has ever been, with precious jewels of heaven, and gold radiant with God’s glory. What a contrast to the other city, Babylon! She got her clothes and jewels through greed and callous exploitation. Babylon glorified herself (18:7); New Jerusalem has “the glory of God” (21:11, see 21:23).
- The precious stones recall the gemstones on the

breastpiece of Israel's high priest (Exodus 28:15-30). Each of these was engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes. Every time the high priest entered the Holy Place in the Tabernacle, he took these gemstones—which together represented the whole nation—in with him. We read: **"Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD"** (Exodus 28:29). Those twelve gemstones—representing God's people—came into God's presence every time the high priest did. But *these* twelve gemstones—again, representing God's people—are *permanently* in God's presence! They're foundations. *They're built into the very structure of the city, which is filled with God's presence.*

- The gold and gems of the city echo the creation account in Genesis. A river **"flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers"**. The first, Pishon, **"flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there."** (Genesis 2:10-12). Ezekiel connects gemstones to Eden, too. In his lament over the arrogant king of Tyre, he says: **"You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, . . . and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings."** (Ezekiel 28:13). In Revelation 21:1-22:5 we're seeing God's *new* creation.

And New Jerusalem's jewels echo something that Isaiah prophesied: **"O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones."** (Isaiah 54:11-12). What Isaiah prophesied all those centuries ago, will ultimately be fulfilled in the new creation. Through Isaiah, God comforted His afflicted people Israel. Now John comforts and encourages God's embattled people in this New Testament age. We may be storm-tossed, afflicted and sorely tempted. But our destiny is to live in this glorious city for ever. *We're to keep that destiny embedded in our minds and hearts.*

Finally, the twelve gates are **"twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl"** (21:21). These aren't the 'pearly gates' of popular imagination—gates decorated with pearls. No: each gate is a single pearl. They are huge, way beyond any found in this world. We can only enter New Jerusalem through these gates—we can only become citizens of this city through the *gospel*—**"the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation"** (Ephesians 1:13). But why would the gospel—through which we enter the city—be symbolised by pearls? Perhaps there

are two reasons: ● Pearls were of great value in ancient times—how much more these enormous pearls! So was the price of our salvation. We **"were bought with a price"** (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23), which was **"the precious blood of Christ, . . ."** (1 Peter 1:19, see also Ephesians 1:7, Revelation 5:9). It was a price above calculation. ● And secondly, jewellers can cut and shape and polish emeralds, sapphires, and other precious stones. But they can't improve on the natural beauty of a pearl.^[3] Similarly, we can't contribute anything to our salvation. Paul writes, **"by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, . . ."** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The light of God and of the Lamb

As we've seen, John tells us that the city's temple **"is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb"** (21:22). Notice again how closely the Lord God and the Lamb are associated. We see so clearly that *the Lamb is divine*. We see this elsewhere in Revelation. For example, in 5:13, God and the Lamb are worshipped together. And in 22:1, we read of **"the river of the water of life, . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb"**.

The city **"has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb"** (21:23). And its residents **"will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light"** (22:5). The glory of God bathes the new world in light. There's no need for the sun and the moon. This is imagery, of course—there may or may not be a physical sun and moon in the new creation. John is simply picturing the overwhelming glory of God and of the Lamb. His words echo Isaiah 60:19: **"The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory"**.

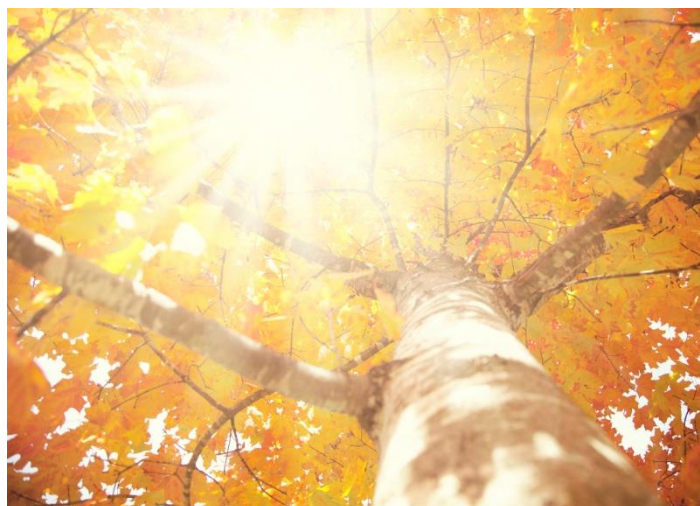


Image from [Lightstock](#)

The whole New Earth will be saturated with God's presence and glory. Habakkuk's prophecy is thus fulfilled: **"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea"** (Habakkuk 2:14).

Through the Bible, we read of others who saw something of God's glory. Moses saw only God's "back", but not His face (Exodus 33:18-23, 34:5-8). On Mount Sinai, Moses and 73 others "beheld God" (Exodus 24:9-11). Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel each saw a vision of God. Paul was "caught up into paradise . . . and . . . heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Corinthians 12:3-4). But in the new creation, *we'll live in the very presence of God*. We shall see His glory, not in a fleeting vision, but *all the time*. Perhaps a faint parallel to this is the experience of God's people in the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land. We read that "the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys" (Exodus 40:38). Day and night, the people of Israel could step out of their tents and actually see a visible manifestation of God. How wonderful that must have been! But even that is, in comparison, a faint foreshadowing of what we'll enjoy in the new creation.

The salvation of the kings and the nations

John tells us that "the nations" will walk by the city's light (21:24). In other words, the nations will walk in God's presence.

The "kings of the earth will bring their glory" into the city. And they (probably the nations) "will bring . . . the glory and the honour of the nations" into the city (21:24,26). This is an act of worship. The "kings of the earth" and "the nations" worship God.

It seems that "the kings of the earth" and "the nations" are entering the city here. And, of course, the fact the city has gates also implies that people enter the city. But God's people also live *in* the city. We can't be too rigid about interpreting the symbolism. As elsewhere in Revelation, we're given more than one 'camera angle'. Each shows a different but complementary aspect of the whole picture. These gates are symbolic. People are not literally outside the city and entering it. After all, we saw earlier that New Jerusalem seems to fill the new Earth—and, if so, there wouldn't *be* any places outside the city! The gates inscribed with the twelve tribes' names symbolise that God's people are citizens of the city. They have unrestricted access (as we'll see below) to "the river of the water of life" and "the tree of life" within its walls (22:1-2).

But who are "the nations" and "the kings of the earth"? Earlier, we saw that "the nations . . . will trample the holy city for forty-two months" (11:2). We saw that "all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of" Babylon's "sexual immorality" (18:3). We saw that "the

kings of the earth" had committed "sexual immorality" with Babylon (17:1-2, see also 18:3,9).

So how did any of "the nations" and "the kings of the earth" get into the new creation? They got in the only way anyone can get in—by repenting of sin and receiving Jesus Christ as their Lord. Nothing unclean "will ever enter" the city, "but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27).

Jesus told His disciples, "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Every member of the nations who believes the gospel, repents, and becomes a disciple of Jesus, will live in the city of God. Recall what God promised Abraham: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). In 11:3 we saw God's "two witnesses" prophesying to the nations. In 14:6 John sees an angel "with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people". And the gospel bears much fruit. In 7:9 a "great multitude . . . from every nation . . ." stands triumphant "before the throne and before the Lamb". In 11:13 all except those killed in an earthquake "gave glory to the God of heaven"—surely evidence of repentance and conversion. In 15:4 we read: "All nations will come and worship you". This surely speaks of their willing and heartfelt worship, not their unwilling subjection. By His blood, Jesus has "ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9). From the beginning, God planned that His city would be filled with people from every nation. For example, Isaiah declared: "Your gates shall be open continually; . . . that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession" (Isaiah 60:11).

Of course, "all nations" (15:4) worshipping God doesn't include every individual. But it *does* include a countless multitude. Our Lord does not wish "that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Judgment and salvation

Throughout the Book of Revelation, we see both God's judgment and His salvation. Woven through all the scenes of judgment is a blood-red thread of salvation—purchased at incalculable cost by the sacrifice of the Lamb. But Revelation doesn't tell us *how* many are saved or lost. All we know is that *many* will be judged and thrown into the lake of fire, and *many* will be saved and live in New Jerusalem. *Our* concern is simply to repent and be born again, and remain faithful to Him. And our commission is to call others to do the same.

A new Garden of Eden (22:1-5)



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John saw “the river of the water of life . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life” (22:1-2).

The river and tree of life

The river of the water of life

There’s no Temple in this city. But there *is* a throne—“the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1,3). Flowing from it is “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal”. It flows “through the middle of the street of the city” (22:1). We’ve met this living water earlier in Revelation—in 7:17, and 21:6.

This river here in 22:1 reminds us of the river that “flowed out of Eden to water the garden” (Genesis 2:10-12). The river *pictures the uncreated life of God Himself that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb*. This life is eternal life, life in fellowship with God, life in His presence. It’s life in the Spirit, the life that the Holy Spirit gives us. This life is abundant life (see John 10:10), which brings fruitfulness, fulfilment and joy without limit.

The prophet Ezekiel also saw a river like this (Ezekiel 47:1-12). Water flowed from the Temple. This stream grew into a powerful river, and turned the salt-laden waters of the Dead Sea fresh, so that fish could live and multiply there. Wherever this river goes, “everything will live”. John is seeing the fulfilment of what Ezekiel saw centuries before.

The tree of life

On either side of the river is “the tree of life” with “twelve kinds of fruit” (22:2). Like the river, the tree of life first appears in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). When Adam and Eve sinned, God had to “guard the way to the tree of life”, to prevent them eating from it. Now *everyone has full and free access to the tree of life!*

All kinds of trees flourished on either side of the river that Ezekiel saw: “they will bear fresh fruit every month, . . . Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (Ezekiel 47:12). Now we see what seems to be a whole grove of “the tree of life” flourishing on either bank of the river. They yield fruit every month. And they bear leaves “for the healing of the nations” (22:2).

But why is healing needed in the new creation? Perhaps it’s the healing that we receive when we *enter* the new creation, when God “will wipe away every tear”. But I think it’s more likely that the leaves *maintain* our health and wellbeing—just as the fruit borne month by month provides a *continual* source of nourishment. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). Just as the branches are constantly fed by sap supplied through the vine, so God and the Lamb are our unceasing

source of life and nourishment and health and wellbeing.

A transformed Garden of Eden

New Jerusalem is not only the new and final Most Holy Place. It's also the new and final Garden of Eden. God met with Adam and Eve in the garden. Now, here in New Jerusalem, ". . . the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, . . ." (21:3). And, like the Garden of Eden, the city has the tree of life in it, and a river (22:1-2).

But New Jerusalem is far more than just a restored Garden of Eden. It's a *transformed* garden. God planned for mankind—in dependence upon Himself and guided by His Spirit—to extend and transform it into a garden-city that extended across the entire Earth. Now we see God's final garden-city: it's New Jerusalem!

This city is the place where God Himself dwells with His people. And it's a place of human community and culture. New Jerusalem symbolises God's perfect world—the *Kingdom of God*.

No more curse

In the new creation, no longer will there be "anything accursed" (22:3). After Adam and Eve sinned, God said to Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, . . ." (Genesis 3:17-18). And He said to Eve, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16).

Now, instead of thorns, there's the tree of life, bearing fruit for food and leaves for health. Now, instead of the curse, there's manifold and measureless blessing. Instead of death, there's "the river of the water of life" (22:1). There's no longer any pain (21:4).

Zechariah prophesied: "Jerusalem will be raised up . . . People will live there, and never again will there be a curse of complete destruction. So Jerusalem will dwell in security." (Zechariah 14:10-11 CSB). That 'curse of destruction' was God's judgment because of sin. But through the death of the Lamb (see Revelation 5:6,9) God's people are released from the penalty, the power, and now—in the new creation—the very presence of sin. There's no more sin. So there's no more curse!

God's priests and kings

Priests in God's service

In this city, God's servants "will worship him" (22:3). Notice that John says "him", not "them". He does this

twice in the next verse, too. Is he referring to God or to the Lamb? Probably *both*—they're so united, it seems he can use the singular pronoun!

The word "worship" can also be translated "serve" (as, for example, in the NIV). This word is used for what priests do (see Hebrews 8:5, Revelation 7:15). The Old Testament priests worshipped and served God. Christ has made us "a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (1:6) In the new creation we'll serve God in all kinds of ways. It will be *priestly* service.

God put Adam in the garden "to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). These two terms are also used together for the Levites' priestly duties in the Tabernacle (Numbers 3:7-8, 8:26, 18:5-6). All this suggests that, before they sinned, Adam and Eve were serving as *priests*. Adam and Eve served God as priests in the first garden; we'll serve God as priests—but in a new and wonderful way—in this new garden, the New Jerusalem.

Reigning with Christ

We read that God's servants "will reign for ever and ever" (22:5, and compare 3:21, 20:4, 2 Timothy 2:12). From the beginning God appointed men and women to be His viceroys—to rule the Earth on His behalf (Genesis 1:26,28, and Psalm 8:4-8). But because of Adam's sin, the human race can't subdue and rule the Earth as God intended. Jesus is the Second Adam. In Him, humanity's role as viceroy is restored. At His coming, creation will be transformed into a perfect paradise. He will rule the New Earth, and we will reign with Him.

So Adam and Eve's role as God's priests and kings is now fulfilled here in this new, expanded and completed Garden of Eden—God's garden-city, New Jerusalem.

The elders and the living creatures

In the throne-room vision of 4:1-11, we saw "twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders" (4:4) and "four living creatures" (4:6). We might have expected to see them here in the new creation, too, worshipping God. But we don't. What's happened to them? It seems most likely that the elders are angels who represent God's people. And the living creatures may, as we saw in session 3, represent all creation—including humans—in the presence of God the Creator, or perhaps they represent God's people, those who have new life in Christ. But now God's people are in God's presence in God's perfect paradise. What these elders and living creatures represented has now been fulfilled! So we see them no more.

Face to face

After they had sinned, Adam and Eve hid themselves from God's presence (Genesis 3:8). His holiness now threatened them. But in New Jerusalem, God's servants will "see his face" (22:4)—again, probably referring to both God and the Lamb.

- Firstly, we'll see the glorified human face of Jesus Christ. How wonderful that will be! Remember, Jesus, the Son of God, is *also* a human being. He became a human being at His incarnation, and He'll remain a human being for ever.
- Secondly, we'll know the Triune God intimately, without mediation, without hindrance. Paul writes, "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In this present life, we don't—and cannot—see God "as he is". But in the new creation, we will. We'll know Him in the same *kind* of way that He knows us. In this present life, we see God indirectly, as if in a mirror or (to use an illustration from our modern world) in a photograph.^[4] But in the new creation, we'll see Him "face to face", in person! We'll experience ever-increasing insight and understanding of who God is and of what He is like.^[5] And His "face" also refers to His *attitude* toward us. His face will "shine upon" us (a phrase from Numbers 6:25); He will look upon us with love, pleasure and delight!

John continues: "his name will be on their foreheads" (22:4). Again "his" likely refers to both God and the Lamb. We've already met the imagery of bearing His name:

- To the one who conquers, Jesus promises "I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, . . . and my own new name" (3:12).
- In 7:2-8 we saw 144,000 servants of God, sealed "on their foreheads" with "the seal of the living God". We saw these 144,000 again in 14:1, with the Lamb's name and His Father's name written on their foreheads.
- Finally, Jesus bears a name "that no one knows but himself" (19:12)—a name that may, in fact, be His "own new name" (3:12).

Bearing "his name . . . on their foreheads" symbolises that we belong to God and to the Lamb, with all the blessings that brings. But the key background may be the name borne by the high priest in Old Testament times. He wore "a plate of pure gold" engraved "Holy to the LORD" on his forehead (Exodus 28:36-38). He did this because He was consecrated—set apart—to serve God as high priest. Now *all* God's people have the

privilege of serving God as priests—thus picking up our priestly service mentioned in 22:3. And, as we said earlier, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only under the strictest conditions. But in New Jerusalem, *all* God's people will not only enter, but actually *live* in the Most Holy Place, and serve Him there as priests.

Life in the city

What do we humans really long for? Our answers to that question tell us a lot about life in our eternal home.

We long to love and be loved. New Jerusalem is a *community*—the community of God's people, gathered "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9). God's people will be a family bound together in warm and intimate fellowship. So much of our joy and fulfilment is bound up in our relationships. How much more will this be true in the world to come!

We long for a place to call home. Though the new creation will be more wonderful than anything we can now imagine, we'll feel at home there. In fact, more at home there than we've ever felt on this Earth. Remember, this Earth won't be destroyed, but *transformed*. So the New Earth will, somehow, be *familiar* to us. We shall say, like C.S. Lewis's Unicorn in 'The Last Battle': "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life . . ." ^[6] We humans have never forgotten paradise. We're homesick. We long to return to Eden. And return to Eden we shall!

We long for ways to engage our talents and creativity, our intellect and imagination. Well, our life in glory won't disappoint! There'll be purposeful work to do. But our work will no longer be painful toil. It will be pleasurable and satisfying. Each one of us will have a special role that no-one else can fulfil. As there are diversities of gifts here in the Church, so there will be there in New Jerusalem.

Our childhood years were our 'formative' years. They shaped, to a large extent, the kind of person we are now. Our present life on Earth, too, is like a childhood. These are our 'formative years'—a time of training and maturing that's preparing us for our life in the new creation. Our present lives are just the beginning of the story. As C.S. Lewis said at the conclusion of his Narnia series: "But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."^[7]

“I Am Coming Soon!” (22:6-21)



Image from Dreanstime

"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, . . ." (Revelation 1:7).

The glorious vision of New Jerusalem fades from view. John is again told, **“These words are trustworthy and true”** (22:6, repeating 21:5; see also 19:9). These **“words”** refer to the whole of Revelation. In this world, awash with lies and deception, the words of God are our anchor, our only sure guide. No wonder our Lord gives such a stark warning to those who tamper with this Book of Revelation (22:18-19).

The angel—who’s most likely to be speaking here—continues: **“the Lord, . . . has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place”** (22:6, echoing 1:1). Then Jesus Himself says, **“behold, I am coming soon”** (22:7). This word **“soon”** appears four times in this final chapter (see also 22:12,20). And we read that **“the time is near”** (22:10). All that we read in Revelation is relevant to us *now*, living in this present age—the age between Christ’s resurrection and His Second Coming. As Peter writes, **“The end of all things is at hand”** (1 Peter 4:7). Jesus will come like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:36-44). His return will catch this careless world unawares. We don’t know when He’ll return—there’s a long history of failed predictions! But we’re to be ready for Him. We’re to stay awake.

We read **“Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book”** (22:7). This recalls what we read at the beginning, in 1:3. This promise of blessing opens and closes the book. If we take heed to what’s written in it, we’ll be blessed.

Again John, overwhelmed with all he’s seen and heard, falls down to worship the angel who’s speaking to him (22:8, and see 19:10). Again he’s rebuked. The angel says, **“You must not do that! I am a fellow servant . . .**

Worship God.” (22:9, see 19:10). Again we’re brought back to the theme of worship. The basic message of Revelation can be summed up in just two words: *worship God*.

In 22:11, the angel says something rather puzzling: **“Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy”**. Why would Jesus command the wicked to continue in their wickedness? We know, of course, that those who continue in wickedness till their dying moment will remain wicked for all eternity. But I don’t think that’s what the angel is saying here. Paul writes, **“evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived”** (2 Timothy 3:13). There’s a downward spiral in the lives of evil people—evil acts reinforce evil character. Perhaps the angel is warning evildoers. Perhaps he’s telling them, in effect: **“Go on being evil, go on being filthy—if that’s what you *really* want! You’ve been warned where that’s going to lead—to God’s judgment and the second death. So think very carefully. Repent now, while there’s still time. Soon—perhaps even this very day—it will be too late!”**^{[8][9]}

Jesus announces that He’s coming soon, and bringing His **“recompense”** with Him **“to repay everyone for what he has done”** (22:12). He’s speaking, of course, about the last judgment, recorded in 20:11-15.

In 1:8, God declares Himself to be **“the Alpha and the Omega”**. In 21:6, He expands this to **“the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end”**. Now Jesus declares that He is **“the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”** (22:13, see also 1:17). In saying this, of course, Jesus is declaring His perfect equality with God.

Then we read, **“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates”** (22:14). This recalls 7:14: **“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”**. When someone is born again, they’re cleansed from sin through **“the blood of the Lamb”**—through Jesus’s atoning death. So what does it mean for the believers *themselves* to wash their robes? In his first letter, John writes this: **“if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John

1:7–9). To ‘wash our robes’ means living a holy life—confessing our sins, and walking “in the light, as he is in the light”, and consequently being cleansed “from all sin” by “the blood of Jesus”.

But banished from the city “are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises falsehood” (22:15). That list of evildoers reflects what we read in 21:8. Their fate is to remain outside the city—outside God’s presence, outside His blessing, outside the warmth of human friendship, outside everything that gave meaning to life. This is indeed the “second death” (21:8).

Jesus tells John “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches”; then He declares “I am the root and the descendant of David” (22:16). This recalls 5:5—Jesus is “the Root of David”. God made a covenant with David. The key promise He made in this covenant was that He would build David a “house”, meaning a royal dynasty (2 Samuel 7:11–13). After David’s death, God would raise up his “offspring” and establish the throne of his kingdom “for ever”. Ultimately, that offspring is Jesus. He’s the promised descendant of David—“the Root of David”—the Messiah who would save God’s people, defeat the enemies of God and His people, and rule the world with righteousness and justice for ever.

And Jesus is “the bright morning star” (22:16). This alludes to what Balaam prophesied: “I see him, but not now; . . . a star shall come out of Jacob, . . .” (Numbers 24:17). It seems to symbolise His glory and His royal sovereignty. Recall, too, that our Lord promises to give us—if we overcome—“the morning star” (2:28). He gives us a share in His glory and royal authority!

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’. And let the one who hears say, ‘Come’” (22:17). Is this a prayer for our Lord to come? Or is it an invitation to the reader to come? The next invitation is clearly to the reader: “And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (22:17, echoing John 7:37). Most likely, then, the *whole* verse is a call to the reader. The Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ, and those who read or hear this book, blend their voices to urge the thirsty to come—to come to Jesus, receive His salvation, drink of the water of life, and eat of the tree of life. There is yet time! So come!

For the third time, Jesus, the one “who testifies to these things”, announces His return: “Surely I am coming soon”. John responds, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (22:20). That’s the cry of *all* God’s faithful people through the ages. Come, Lord Jesus!

Finally, John closes, as he would close any letter, with a benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” (22:21). Remember that Revelation is a *pastoral letter* from our “Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4). Our Shepherd writes to exhort, comfort, encourage and warn His flock.

Thus ends what one writer describes as “the most influential text in all human history”.^[10] All the great themes of the Bible converge and find their fulfilment in Revelation. Now, finally, all the promises of God have been fulfilled. God’s people have been gathered from every tribe and language and people and nation and brought home—home to God’s garden-city, home to live together in God’s presence. They serve as priests to Christ and to God; they reign with Christ. All the enemies of God and of His people have been defeated and thrown into the lake of fire. *And all this has been achieved by the Lamb who was slain*. All God’s promises “find their Yes in him” (2 Corinthians 1:20). *To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen!*

Footnote

[1] See *Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10* by Al Wolters. Published in the Westminster Theological Journal in 1987, volume 49, pages 405–413.

[2] See *What Happens When You Die? Glorified and Free on the New Earth* by John Piper. Available online at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-happens-when-you-die-glorified-and-free-on-the-new-earth>, accessed on 20 June 2025.

[3] See *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, by Various Writers, edited by Charles John Ellicott, volume III, page 632. Published by Cassell Pether & Galpin, London, Paris & New York, undated. Available online at https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_commentary-on-the-nt_ellicott.html, last accessed 7th April 2026.

[4] See *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Revised Edition (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)* by Gordon D. Fee, page 718. Published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Cambridge, United Kingdom, in 2014.

[5] See *Our God Reigns: an Amillennial Commentary on Revelation*, by Sam Storms pages 520–521. Published by Mentor, an imprint of Christian Focus Publications Ltd., Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, in 2024.

[6] Quoted from *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis, page 155. Published by Penguin Books in association with The Bodley Head, Harmondsworth, United Kingdom, in 1964.

[7] Quoted from *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis, page 165. Published by Penguin Books in association with The Bodley Head, Harmondsworth, United Kingdom, in 1964.

[8] See *Revelation: the Spirit Speaks to the Churches (Preaching the Word)*, by James M. Hamilton Jr., pages 413–415. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, in 2012.

[9] See *Our God Reigns: an Amillennial Commentary on Revelation*, by Sam Storms pages 531–533. Published by Mentor, an imprint of Christian Focus Publications Ltd., Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, in 2024.

[10] Quoted from *Revelation (Tyndale New Testament Commentary)*, by Ian Paul, page 370. Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, and Inter-Varsity Press, London, England, in 2018.