

Study 23: Revelation Chapter 21

Introduction

“...The judgement should challenge us, as believers, to live our lives for Jesus Christ as worthily and selflessly as we can, for we would hate to disappoint him when the true worth of our Christian living is revealed on that day...”

Body of the Study

Introduction

All Things are New

The New Jerusalem

The Outside of the City

The Interior of the City

Homework and preparation for next week:

Re-read chapter 21

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 22 in preparation for the next study

What do you find appealing about the description of our final habitation?

Since the twelve apostles are the foundation, what is the city?

What verses in the chapter suggest that the great city is nothing other than the church, in its final and complete manifestation?

Notes for study 23: Revelation Chapter 21

“...The judgement should challenge us, as believers, to live our lives for Jesus Christ as worthily and selflessly as we can, for we would hate to disappoint him when the true worth of our Christian living is revealed on that day¹...”

Introduction

Revelation gives us an insight into the things beyond this life. We have seen the war between God and Satan that has been (and still is) going on. The war ends, and the ultimate victory belongs to God and His people.

Chapter 21 tells us about the victory party – what happens after the war has been won! - the peace that follows afterwards, and the long awaited reconciliation of the people of God with Him.

All Things are New

The previous chapter ended with the total destruction of the earth, and this chapter begins with the replacement of the “old things” with the “new heavens and new earth”. *“...Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea...”* (21:1 NIV). This is what Peter described *“...But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up... Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells...”* (2 Pet 3:7, 10, 13 NKJV).

The sea--the source of the satanic beast (13:1) and the place of the dead (20:13)--will be gone. Again, John's emphasis is not geographic but moral and spiritual. The sea serves as an archetype with connotations of evil (cf. comment on 13:1). Thus, no trace of evil in any form will be present in the new creation. (NIVBC)

The present earth (our dwelling place) is replaced with the dwelling place of God *“...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband...”* (21:2 NIV). The city is adorned as a bride prepared for her husband, which identifies the holy city as the church. Whilst Jerusalem was the holy city for the Jews, and to a lesser extent is the holy city for Christians (because it was the place where Jesus taught and was sacrificed), it will be replaced by a new city. This new city has come down out of heaven, which shows its divine origin.

The marriage ceremony of Christ and the church was forecast in 19:7, and now the time has come for it to be fulfilled. *“...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”...*” (21:3-4 NIV). The message came from God – from the throne – although we are not told whether it was from the Father, or the Lamb. After the marriage, the bride and the groom move in and live together (unlike the “modern” sexually immoral arrangements, where people live together before they are married. The consequences of such arrangements is dealt with in 21:8). The relationship between God and His people was forecast long ago (Lev 26:11-12; Heb 8:8-13), and anticipated the establishment of the church under the new covenant. In Revelation, we see the fulfilment of that

¹ Bewes, p. 146

relationship. It will be complete, and will surpass the temporal relationship of earth. Hailey notes²:

The old heaven and earth have passed away; and with their going went also everything that marred life on earth as God would have had it: the fruit of sin, death, and its consequences. The bliss of being with God is described by five negatives: no tears, no death, no mourning, no crying, and no pain; for “the first things are passed away.” These are no more, because sin which caused them is no more; sin and death is swallowed up in victory.

The former pain and suffering has gone, and all has been made new “...*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."...*” (21:5 NIV). Whilst we cannot comprehend the magnitude and the majesty of heaven, we can be assured that it originates from God, and all things will be good and new. Its majesty will be somewhat described later in the chapter. “...*He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life..."*” (21:6 NIV). When the judgement of the world under the seventh bowl of wrath was completed, God announced “It is done”. Here He makes the same proclamation regarding the end of the world – in fact they are the same event, viewed from a different perspective. Jehovah claimed to be the Alpha and the Omega (1:8), and Jesus makes the same claim (22:13). Jesus had promised to give living water to the woman at the well (Jn 4:10-14). Hailey notes³:

As God through Jesus had provided the life-sustaining spiritual water in this present dispensation (John 4:10; 7:37), and as the Shepherd had guided those coming out of the great tribulation unto the fountains of water of life (7:17), so now fresh assurance is given that there would be abundance of the water of life in this relationship, for a great river of it shall flow from the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1). Nothing will be lacking in the complete fullness and realization of all spiritual desires of the glorified soul in heaven.

The promise is assured “...*He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son...*” (21:7 NIV). The message to each of the seven churches was to *He who overcomes* which is John’s favourite euphemism for martyrdom. But the message is wider than just the martyrs of the first and second centuries. It is a message for each and every one of us. If we are faithful to Jesus through our life, then the inheritance is ours. Hailey notes⁴:

Now fulfilled are those “exceeding great promises” by which the Christian has been sustained in life: that he “shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:29), “shall inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14), and shall “inherit a blessing” (I Peter 3:9). Now he has heard the King say, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). ... Here is assurance of an eternal relationship with God, like that of a son receiving an inheritance which has been guaranteed to him (Eph. 1:14).

In contrast to those who receive the inheritance, there are many who will not. “...*But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*...” (21:8 NIV). We have a choice – to be on the side of God and reject the world and its influences, or to go with the world and reject God. It’s our choice, but there are consequences, and we must choose wisely.

Before John shows us the city, however, he must first confront us with a choice. This choice must be made because there are two cities: the city of God and the city of

² Hailey, p. 407

³ Hailey. P. 408

⁴ Hailey. P. 409

Babylon, each with its inhabitants and its destiny. Those who drink from salvation's springs supplied by God himself are true followers of Christ. The "cowardly" are those who fear persecution arising from faith in Christ. Not having steadfast endurance, they are devoid of faith (Mt 8:26; Mk 4:40; cf. Mt 13:20-21). Thus they are linked by John to the "unbelieving" and "vile." They are called "murderers" because they are guilty of the death of the saints (17:6; 18:24). The "sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars" are those associated with idolatrous practices (cf. 9:21; 18:23; 21:27; 22:15; contrast 14:5). By their own choice, Babylon is their eternal home. (NIVBC)

The New Jerusalem

The city of God – the new Jerusalem was introduced in 21:2 (and also in 3:12 – promised to those of the city of Philadelphia). Now it is described for us. "...*One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."*..." (21:9 NIV). The city is in fact, the bride of Christ – the church – or, as we shall see, God's people from both sides of the cross. "...*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...*" (21:10 NIV). John is taken to a mountain where he sees the vision of the city. In a previous vision of the city of Babylon the Great (17:3-6) he was carried away into the wilderness. Hailey notes⁵:

As the harlot was symbolized by a great city, the bride is symbolized by a holy city. It was from "a very high mountain" that Ezekiel was shown "as it were the frame of a city," the spiritual Jerusalem, the church, which was to come (Ezek. 40:2). John now sees that city, the church, in its final glory at home with God and the Lamb.

The Outside of the City

John first describes the external appearance of the city "...*It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal...*" (21:11 NIV). John is describing the indescribable, and uses terms related to precious stones and metals. Like the rest of the images from the book of Revelation, the description should not be taken literally. The description is designed to impress the reader. "...*It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel...*" (21:12 NIV). The walls of the city were not to keep the enemy out, for all of the enemies have been destroyed. It provides a symbol of the complete security of God's people who dwell in His city. The gates are identified with the twelve tribes of Israel, and through the gates, they enter the city. "... *There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west...*" (21:13 NIV). The city is portrayed as symmetrical "the city foursquare". Whilst the first part of the description refers to the 12 tribes of the Old Covenant, the latter description describes the foundations under the New Covenant. "...*The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...*" (21:14 NIV). Paul said that the church was "...*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...*" (Eph 2:20). Literally, there were 13 apostles (14 if you include Judas Iscariot, but he is of course, excluded). Judas was replaced by Matthias, and James was replaced by Paul. So it is a technicality whether Paul or Matthias is included in the number – however both are included, since the number 12 symbolises the complete compliment.

Previously, John was told to measure the temple (11:1) which was considered to be determining whether the church (and its members) measured up to God's standard. But this time, it is the

⁵ Hailey, p. 411

angel who does the measuring, and it isn't the temple, it is the heavenly city that is measured. "...The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls..." (21:15 NIV). The city was measured, and had perfect dimensions. "...The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long..." (21:16 NIV). The 12,000 stadia (12,000 furlongs NKJV) is about 2,200 km. The city is a perfect cube, however the perfect dimensions are lost in the translation of the number. Twelve is the number for organised religion, and here we have organised religion in every direction – the perfect combination of organised religion. But it is not just 12 in every direction, but 1,000 times that amount! On a physical level, the dimensions are impressive and are difficult to comprehend. A city that stretches from Melbourne to Rockhampton (sorry – if you aren't from Australia – you'll have to look it up on a map, and insert your own references!), but then reaches that far into the sky – in fact well into space! It must be stressed that this is not a literal city – it is designed to impress, and to take our thoughts and images well into our imagination. We are supposed to be awe-inspired by the description.

A wall surrounded the city. Traditionally, the walls around cities were used to keep enemies out, however this cannot be the purpose here. "...He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using..." (21:17 NIV). The measurement is about 70m, which gives the impression of the wall being impregnable. The people inside the city are totally secure. "...The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass..." (21:18 NIV). The names of the precious stones have changed over time, and "jasper" is thought to be "diamond". The city itself is made of pure gold – but gold like we have never seen – it is transparent! The image portrays the heavenly city as precious. "...The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass..." (21:19-21 NIV).

The foundation stones are made of twelve precious stones. Here the imagery may reflect three possible sources: (1) the high priest's breastplate (Ex 28:17-20), (2) the jewels on the dress of the king of Tyre (Eze 28:13), or (3) the signs of the zodiac. The second one, though referring to only nine stones, suggests the splendor of ancient royalty and might be appropriate as a symbol for the glorious kingdom reign in the Holy City. Yet there is something inappropriate about taking this pagan king as symbolic of the future kingdom. Others prefer the first option--that of the high priest's breastplate. But while the twelve stones are perhaps the same, the order of their mention is different. This leaves the third option. According to Philo and Josephus, Israel associated these same stones with the signs of the zodiac, and their tribal standards each bore a sign of the zodiac. If we begin with Judah, the tribe of Christ (7:5), the sign is Aries, the Ram, which has the amethyst as its stone. The last sign is Pisces, the fishes, which has jasper as its stone. So the first zodiacal sign agrees with the twelfth foundation and the last zodiacal sign with the first foundation. In fact, the whole list agrees with John's, though in reverse order. This may be a significant device to show John's disapproval of pagan cults.

The gates are twelve great pearls. Though pearls are not mentioned in the OT, some rabbinic texts refer to gates for Jerusalem hewn out of jewels about forty-five feet square. As for the one main street of the Holy City, it is like the fabric of the city itself, of pure gold, clear as glass. (NIVBC).

The Roman Empire, and its power was awe-inspiring (c/f 13:4), and by direct contrast, God presents us with a city that is more awe-inspiring by multiples! There is nothing in the universe to compare with it.

The Interior of the City

The emphasis is not on the “physical” aspects of the interior, but rather on life within the city. “...*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple...*” (21:22 NIV). Under the Old Covenant, the priests worshipped God, and the High Priest alone went into the most holy place, and only once a year (Heb 9:1-8). This was replaced under the New Covenant, where Jesus went into Heaven itself, now to appear before the judgement seat of God on our behalf (Heb 9:11-15), and all Christians are priests (1 Pet 2:9). In the New Jerusalem, all Christians will be in the presence of God, as permanent citizens. We were taken into the throne room (Rev chaps 4&5) and we saw the thousands of thousands who worshipped God. Now we see the same picture from a different perspective.

“...*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp...*” (21:23 NIV). Hailey’s comments on this verse are worth noting⁶:

From the beginning, God’s residence among His people has been developed step by step, each concept of His presence being progressively greater. His glory, which the Jews call “the Shekinah,” filled the tabernacle and temple. His glory is in the church by His Spirit (vs 11), and now that glory is full and complete as He and the Lamb fill the new temple. And as there is no need for a temple, so there is no need for any created light...

Under the rule of the Beast, the kings of the earth had prospered, but the people had suffered and been trampled under foot. Now the tide had turned. “...*The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it...*” (21:24 NIV). Civil and political kingdoms have come to an end and been abolished, and those who had challenged God’s people had been thrown into the lake of fire. But now, the Lamb and those that worship Him surpass the glory of those kingdoms.

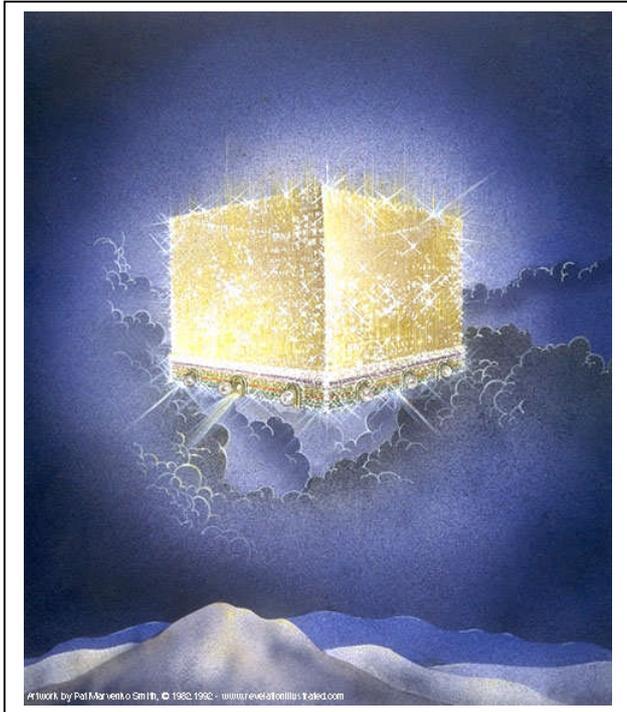
The gates of the cities were traditionally shut and locked at night to keep the enemies at bay. However, since all the enemies of God have been destroyed, “...*On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there...*” (21:25 NIV).

The city will be pure, and will remain pure. “...*The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.*”²⁷ *Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life...*” (21:26-27 NIV). Hailey notes⁷:

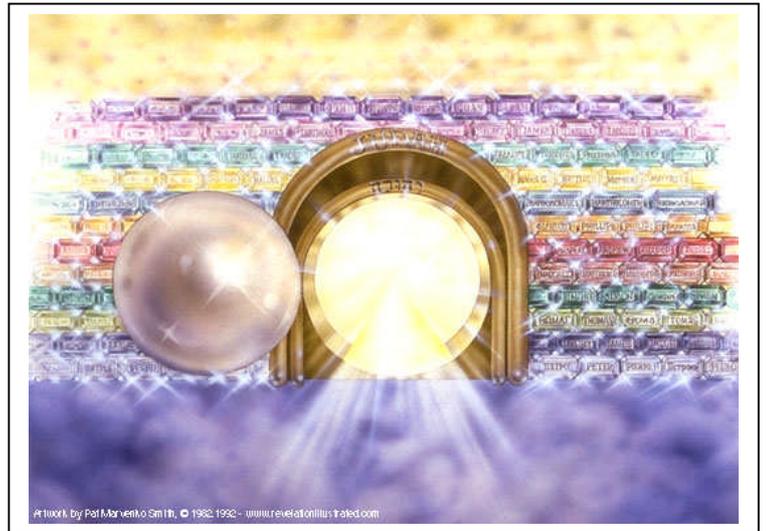
Neither shall there enter anyone who makes or does an abomination and a lie, specifically an idolater. All that is contrary to the holiness that God demands and all who live after such a standard shall be outside. Only those that are written in the Lamb’s book of life shall enter into the city.

⁶ Hailey, p. 417

⁷ Hailey, p. 419



Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ... And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its breadth. ... Its length, breadth, and height are equal. ...



...Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb ... And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones...And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl...



And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.