

## “The New Jerusalem (Chaps. 21:1-22:6)”

### INTRODUCTION

To end with chapter 20 would have been too abrupt, even though it does describe the end of the world. To end here would leave us peer into a gaping blackness of silence. What happens to those whose names are written in the book of life? (20:15).

Yet, how can God show John in words and pictures what lies beyond human imagination? He does so by transposing images from a dozen books of Scripture and weaving them together into a triumphant climax to his Biblical Word.

### NOTES ON 21:1-22:6

1. The “**Holy City**” described in this section is described as “the new heaven and earth,” the new Jerusalem, a bride and the “dwelling” of God. It combines elements of the ancient city of Jerusalem, the temple, and the Garden of Eden. It summarizes all biblical images which ascribe God’s presence to a determined place.
2. John relates that there is “**no longer any sea.**” The sea has represented evil in Revelation - a watery chaos which brought forth the “beast,” or the Antichrist for example. The “waters” also were an integral part of the first creation in Genesis 1. The absence of waters here signify the end of evil’s existence and influence, and the new creation that has the absence of chaos.
3. Another important aspect of the city is the **presence of God**. In 21:3, a voice from God’s throne says, “now the dwelling with God is with men.” The word “dwelling” literally means “tent.” It is the word used to describe the tabernacle in which God’s presence, the pillar of cloud and fire, dwelt (cf. Exodus 40:34-35). Jewish rabbies came to call the presence of God the “Shekinah” (from the Hebrew shakan, “to dwell.”).
4. It is interesting that “**the cowardly**” head the list of those who do not inherit the life to come. Jesus often associated “fear” with unbelief (cf. Mark6:45-52).
5. The number **twelve** is strongly connected to the appearance of the Holy City (12 gates, 12 foundations, 12,000 stadia, 144 cubits - 12x12). Some call this “the number of the people of God.” Indeed, John overtly mentions the connection with the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles who founded the church. The number twelve figures into every measurement of the city, which is a perfect cube measuring 12,000 stadia on each side with a wall 144 cubits thick. The Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary of Israel’s temple in Jerusalem, was a perfect cube (cf. 1 Kings 6:20).
6. The city is made out of **priceless materials** (precious jewels, gates of pearl, walls of jasper, city of pure gold, streets of gold). The symbolism is not meant to give the impression of wealth and luxury (as with the Great Prostitute, Babylon of chapter 17) but to the point to the glory and holiness of God and the effulgence of God’s light.
7. **The tree of life**, featured in the Garden of Eden story in Genesis 2:9 and 3:22, makes a reappearance in the Holy City (22:2). But at the same time it is also the many trees with many kinds of fruit foretold in Ezekiel 47:12.
8. Two important elements are missing from the city: the **Temple** and the sources of

earthly light, **the Sun and the Moon** (cf. 21:22, 23; 22:5). The reason is the same for the absence of both: God and the Lamb's constant presence and glory in the city take away the need to have a place to worship and to have light.

9. An extraordinarily powerful promise is in 22:4: that the people of God will “**see his face.**” Criminals were banished from the presence of the king in the Old Testament world, but his intimates were allowed to see his face. Moses could not survive seeing God's face (Exodus 33:20,23), but Jesus promised that the pure in heart will someday (Matthew 5:8 and I John 3:2).

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you think that John's vision of the Holy City in 21:1-22:6 is a description which should be taken literally as what the city really will look like, or is it a symbolic representation of something we cannot fathom or comprehend in words?
2. What does the promise of 21:4 mean to you?
3. What is implied by the facts that the city never shuts its gates, doesn't need light, and has no temple. Why would a city and a people need these things?
4. According to 22:3, what will the chief occupation of God's people in the Kingdom be? What are the implications of this for our lives today?

#### **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. Study the symbolism of “cities” and “gardens” by looking up both words in a what are the good and bad aspects of cities and gardens in the Bible?
2. Look up references on “seeing God's face” in Psalm 11:7; 27:4; 42:2; Isaiah 52:8; 60:1-2; and Matthew 5:8. Why is it promise of seeing God's face important?