

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #98
9/10/2008

The Eternal Heaven: Part 8
“The Lamb’s Bride, the New Jerusalem: Part 2”
Revelation 21:12-21

John goes on to tell us about the **“city”** he sees. In many aspects it will contain features which correspond to the ideal city of both the Old Testament and of John’s day. For the purpose of communicating His eternal truths to the minds of earth-bound men, God uses a description which both John and the readers could easily grasp. **As we have noted previously, what God tells us is literal but the realism expressed by the literalism goes beyond what we know and experience in this temporal-material-spatial universe.** We have acknowledged that, to describe eternal realities in a way which we can understand, God must use words designed to describe matters in our temporal-material-spatial world. Thus, knowing that eternal things are of a totally new dimension, we recognize that what God tells us of eternity is about things beyond our understanding unless He so communicates with us on our level.

Therefore, in order to present a picture of the eternal heaven to John, God chose to picture it in earthly terms. All of us living in this temporal-material-spatial world, have such little ability, if any at all, to comprehend things of eternity, God chooses to picture heaven in these earthly terms. He presents it as Jerusalem would be if everything were perfect. Again, it is not symbolism, as some denigrate God’s Word by making it “simply symbolic,” but literalism that contains a realism which reaches far beyond what the words actually convey. As one reads this passage it is ok to see the earthly Jerusalem while knowing that what he reads is really a picture of something much more.

The city **“... had a wall great and high.”** **“Why a wall”** some ask? Starting with some of the things we know about the function of **“walls”** around a **“city”** in the world that existed when the Bible was written, we shall go on to attempt to grasp the deeper meanings. Therefore, we conclude that God is communicating some other function of **“walls”** to us, that while building upon what we know to be the function of walls around a city in our world, He is surely communicating deeper truths.

When we think of **“walls”** around a city on this earth we usually think of the protection of the citizens of that **“city”** from any danger. However, we know that there are no threats from enemies in heaven, and no need of protection, since Satan and his followers have all been consigned to the **“lake of fire and brimstone.”** Nevertheless, the presence of a wall around the city would express the security which God provides to His own. In His presence and under His protection, they can never be in any danger from anyone or anything.

“Walls” also provided a definition and boundary to the **“city”** where the citizens resided. This is possibly one message God wants us to under-

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stand when He uses this description. Heaven, portrayed as the **“new, holy city of Jerusalem,”** is a real place with identifiable specifications, though they may be beyond our comprehension.

“Walls” also signified peace and blessings. This is especially communicated in Isaiah 60:18 where we read: ***“Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.”***

This **“wall”** has **“twelve gates,”** representing the twelve tribes of Israel. We are told that written on the gates **“are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.”** The number **“twelve”** is very prominent in God’s description of His **“new, holy city of Jerusalem:”** 1) **“Twelve gates”** verse 12; 2) **“Twelve angels”** verse 12; 3) **“Twelve tribes of Israel”** verse 12; 4) **“Twelve foundations”** verse 14; 5) **“Twelve pearls”** verse 21; 6) **“Twelve thousand furlongs”** verse 16; 7) **“Twelve times twelve cubits or 144”** verse 17; and 8) **“Twelve kinds of fruit”** verse 22:2. Without question, the numeral **“twelve”** has some significance in God’s revelation and instructions. When God gave Moses His instructions about the altar and sacrifices in Numbers seven, He used the number **“twelve”** several times such as is found in the following instructions to Moses: ***“This was the dedication of the altar, in the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve chargers of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold: All the oxen for the burnt offering were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the lambs of the first year twelve, with their meat offering: and the kids of the goats for sin offering twelve”*** (Numbers 7:84,87).

Biblical scholars are mostly silent on the subject, perhaps because nowhere is an explanation found from God. However, we know that, in the Hebrew mind, certain numbers have special significance such as **“seven”** representing perfection and completeness because it is the sum of the addition of **“three,”** which represents the trinitarian God, and **“four,”** which is commonly used for the earth. It may well be that **“twelve”** is used in such a special way by God because it is the sum of **“three”** being multiplied by **“four.”** If so, it would represent perfection and completeness in a very special way for this **“new, holy city of Jerusalem”** is certainly the most perfect city ever to exist with not one detail missing.

The **“twelve angels”** would not be assigned for protection, but to minister to and welcome those entering through the gates which **“...shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there”** (Revelation 21:25).

The arrangement of the **“gates”** reminds us of the way God instructed the various tribes of Israel to be positioned around the tabernacle in the wilderness according to the positioning found in the second chapter of Num-

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bers. More specifically, the description of these **“twelve gates”** relates to the picture God gave Ezekiel regarding Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom as is found in Ezekiel 48:31-34: **“And the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes of Israel: three gates northward; one gate of Reuben, one gate of Judah, one gate of Levi. And at the east side four thousand and five hundred: and three gates; and one gate of Joseph, one gate of Benjamin, one gate of Dan. And at the south side four thousand and five hundred measures: and three gates; one gate of Simeon, one gate of Issachar, one gate of Zebulun. At the west side four thousand and five hundred, with their three gates; one gate of Gad, one gate of Asher, one gate of Naphtali.”**

Then, tying the Old Testament to the New Testament, God told John: **“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”** (Revelation 21:14). The church today is **“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”** (Ephesians 2:20). Masterfully, while using the Old Testament picture of Jerusalem, the tabernacle, and the temple, God inserts the picture of the New Testament church, thus including both Old Testament and New Testament saints in His picture of heaven. It is surely true that, to those Christ chose as His apostles, He entrusted the responsibility of laying the foundation of what we know as His church, the visible spiritual body of Christ in this world today. Remember what Jesus said to Peter: **“... I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”** (Matthew 16:18-19).

His statement in Revelation 21:15 is simply an expression to indicate God’s ownership of and control over what is His: **“And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.”** A similar expression and application can be found in other places in God’s Word such as in Ezekiel 40:3 and Revelation 11:1.

The measurements of the **“city”** are awesome: **“And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal”** (Revelation 21:16). In earthly measurements, such a **“city”** would extend more than 1,400 miles in each direction, including the height of the **“wall,”** enclosing over two million square miles, providing plenty of room for all of the glorified saints.

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The next verse, **“And he measured the wall thereof, and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel”** (Revelation 21:17) likely gives us the width of this massive **“wall,”** which would be about 216 feet in our terminology.

Again, using descriptions of earthly materials, but surely meaning more than what we see and handle here, verse eighteen tells us of the materials which God uses to construct both the **“city”** and this massive **“wall”** which surrounds this marvelous, eternal entity: **“And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.”** **“Jasper”** is what we know as diamonds and the **“gold”** is different from what is in this world for it will be as **“clear as glass,”** transparent so that it is more like a window than a **“wall”** that limits one’s vision. Amazing to us is this description, but easy for God, the Creator!

Continuing to use the most valuable and fabulous materials known to man, God continues to describe His eternal city: **“And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass”** (Revelation 21:19-21). While the identification of some of these precious stones has changed over the centuries, the significance of their use has not. God is telling us that He will use the very finest materials to construct not only the **“wall,”** but also the **“city.”** Even as we read God’s list of materials, expressed in earthly terms, we realize that God has used marvelous, eternal materials which can only be represented in their preciousness by picturing them in terms we can comprehend.

One last comment — it is quite possible that God’s selection of **“pearls”** with which He constructs the **“gates”** speaks of the pain and suffering which His children must go through on this earth. While we, who still live in this world, know that this **“world is not our home,”** we are glad to be like our Lord **“Who endured the suffering that was set before Him, died on our cross in our place.”** With Paul we can joyfully say, we **“... now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church”** (Colossians 1:24) and with Peter **“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye”** (1 Peter 4:12-14).