# The Eternal State: New Jerusalem

Readings: Rev. 21. 1 - 22. 5 [also Heb. 12. 26-29; 2 Pet. 3. 11-13]

Brief introduction, 21. 1-8, followed by a more detailed description, 21. 9-22. 5. No disharmony between the grace of God and His wrath - (the angel who poured out a plague)

How inspirational has been the vision of this city! ‘The eternal glories gleam afar to nerve our faint endeavour . . . ‘

Well-chosen **symbols**; the rest of the Bible holds the keys to them. *What it will be like to dwell above, and with the Lord of glory reign?*

Eternity with the Lord! Wouldn’t it be good to spend just a little time thinking about it in the here and now?

Second major vision of the final section of Revelation, that begins at 19. 11.

20. 11 The old heaven and earth flee away from the face of Him who sat upon the great white throne . . . no hiding place from the final judgement. The only hiding place in life or death is the forgiveness of sins to be found in Jesus Christ.

21.1 *new heaven* ***and a new earth*** ... the first heaven and earth were passed away (at the great white throne). Why the link? Emphasizing those who are excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem.

**I make all things new** . . . implies the *renovation* of the old heavens and the old earth, (most radically) by fire. Cp. 2 Pet. 3. 11-13.

God does not share with Greek philosophy a dislike of the material! He will always have a *material* expression of His purposes.

v.5 a comment . . . he that overcometh shall inherit all things. The city will be his to *enter*, but to also ***inherit*** *(!)* these glorious things about to be described.

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of a solemn responsibility to build for God: 1 Cor. 3. 11f.: ‘*Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid. . . tried with fire . . . the day shall declare it’.*

But do we suppose that all our building for God will perish with this life? Not a bit of it! What a light this chapter shines on life and its ***eternal significance***!

What joy to see what *your handiwork* has contributed (following the Saviour’s approval) and is built into the very fabric of the heavenly city!

And then to see the very light of the glory of the Saviour diffused through every redeemed personality that comprises the vast population of that blest place!

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

The city is the **eternal home** of **the bride**, the wife of the Lamb, v. 9. We should note that cities frequently denote ***the people*** who dwell there, e.g. ‘the whole of London’.

Its **origin**: out of heaven, from God v. 10. The city is not the product of earth, it is altogether heavenly. It originated in God, and emanated from Him: John 17. 6: *'Thine they were and thou gavest them me'.*

Its **function:** comes to facilitate the approach of men to God - it is the dwelling place of God and Christ:

*'the tabernacle of God is with men and He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people****s*** *(plural, no longer only the privileged nation of Israel)',* RV, ESVmg.

An eternal tabernacle *formed of His redeemed people*. Each stone (NB. *not* the drab uniformity of brick!) with a unique and individual message to tell of the glory of God and the wonder of His redeeming ways.

Its **character:** millennial, or eternal? Some interpreters relate the fuller description in our passage to the *millennial* age, but the city is clearly eternal - Rev 22. 5 'they shall reign for ever and ever'. To switch back to millennial conditions would upset the thought flow of this vision of the eternal consummation of God’s purposes.

**Symbolism**

To try to take this description entirely literally would be impossibly difficult. Often spiritual lessons are taught by *material illustrations, and metaphor.* Faced with such a description, the imagination could run riot, but in almost all instances the rest of scripture will serve as a control to guide us to the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit.

For example, mere written letters on human brows never made anyone experimentally holy. Rather in chapter 22 verse 4 the Name of God points to character, and the face expresses character; this implies that the saints will perfectly express the character of God to whom they are *inwardly conformed.*

Thus when God would convey to His people a foretaste of a redeemed and ordered society subsisting in total holiness and harmony - what figure does he use?

The figure of a city of **transparent gold**, a **crystal gem** through which the light of God diffracts to illuminate the new heavens and the new earth.

**Gold** – this most valuable biblical metal points to the surpassing worth of the developed character of its populace, 1 Pet. 1. 6, 7.

Job 23:10 - 'when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold'.

The city’s **light** v.11

resembles that of God the Father (4 .3)

*clear as crystal* - cp. ‘sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ’, Phil. 1. 10. No clouds, opacity, or adulteration of any sort.

**Wall** – denotes perfect **security, sanctity** -- but not total exclusion, for there are gates . . .

**Gates** - symbolize *controlled access and approach*: Three on each cardinal point of the compass point to divinely provided *equality of opportunity of approach*. Through them the nations of the eternal earth make their approach to the Tree of Life and bring their honour to God and Christ.

But gates in scripture are also associated with **government,** **administration**, and **justice,** cp. Ruth 4. Even now you and are developing a capacity (or not) to serve in the *administration* of the new heavens and the new earth. Why would the Lord God give *you* a big job in the new heavens and the new earth? Got any spiritual track record thus far (by God’s grace, of course)? See Luke 19. 11f.

**Gates of** **pearl** - right of access to God is something of surpassing value, purchased at unspeakable **cost.** *The pearl is a thing of beauty produced by suffering and death.*We might think of the pearl of great price for which the merchant man sold all that he had in order to purchase it, Matt. 13. 45, 46. The sufferings of Christ *for* His people. And then the sufferings of Christ *in* His people. We must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God, Acts. 14. 22. But what resultant value!

**Names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel** – those names reflected the *struggles of the* *mothers* who gave them birth! . . . pointing to the formative experiences of earth sanctified and carried on to perfection in the glorified state.   
Lesson: Our present struggles have *eternal* significance in God’s design – far more than we realize; our life-time is truly ‘training for reigning’.

**Foundations** of the wall

This reminds us of the well-founded city that Abraham viewed from afar: Heb. 11. 10 . . . *he looked for a city which hath [the] foundations, whose architect and builder is God* . . . v. 16 *But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

G**arnished with exquisite precious stones**.

In nature gems are formed from base elements by untold heat and pressure, deep down in the earth's crust.

Believers are ‘**living stones’,** 1 Pet. 2, and both faith and its trials are precious in God’s sight, necessary processes designed by the heavenly Builder with eternal beauty and function in view. This variety of exquisite gems figure *differing types of sinners,* now transformed and beautified by grace, often by way of great adversity and suffering. We might be reminded of the 12 different jewels on the breast plate of Israel’s high priest. Each of the sons of Israel equally represented before God.

Lessons:

1. Whilst the world speaks of uniformity and stereotypes, **individuality** is a precious and glorious thing. God never intends us to become clones of one another.
2. Ultimate conformity to Christ will *not* displace individuality. ‘*As we have borne the image of the earthy we will also bear the image of the heavenly’*, 1 Cor. 15.
3. Sometimes the question is asked ‘Will we know one another in heaven?’ Of course we will! But one might also ask a related question: ‘Will you know yourself in heaven?’

A **cube** - measured with the angel's rod => perfection from every angle and that according to the divine standard. The holiest of all in Temple of Solomon was cube of side 20 cubits, 1 Kgs. 6. 20. It can be shown that the Holiest of all in the tabernacle in the wilderness was also cubical. I infer from this that the New Jerusalem is the eternal Holiest of all, but now accessible to *all* of God’s redeemed, both Israel and the church. Moreover, there is no division between sacred and common, for *everyone* and *everywhere* is holy. We could do with learning that as God’s people even now!

## Seven things that have no place

No **temple** - for the presence of God is no longer localized to one spot, but pervades the entirety of the city. It is a city-temple. Already this is a distinguishing feature of the present dispensation of the Spirit (John 4). All of a Christian’s life is sacred.

This is the first of 7 negative features; the others are:

* + no external light, such as sun or moon, v. 23
  + no lamp, v. 23
  + no night (how wonderful – expand on this shortly)
  + the gates shall not be shut, 21. 25
  + nothing unclean shall enter
  + no curse, 22. 3

‘**No night there’**. Night in the Bible carries connotations of evil. Men love darkness rather than light for their deeds are evil. ‘*We are not of the night, nor of darkness’*, 1 Thess. 5. 5. Night can be a difficult time, when we are shut in with our thoughts, fears, and regrets. How different this eternal city!

In the land of fadeless day,  
 Lies “the city foursquare,”  
 It shall never pass away,  
 And there is “no night there.”

*God shall “wipe away all tears”  
 There’s no death, no pain, nor fears;  
 And they count not time by years,  
 For there is “no night there.”*

The Lamp thereof is the Lamb, v. 23. He is the One through whom the light of the knowledge of God shines to make the city radiant (cp. 2 Cor. 4. 6).

The **river** bespeaks the limitless fullness of the Spirit's life-giving and refreshing power freely available to all. The river proceeds from the **throne.** In Ezekiel 47. 1 the river flows **via the altar** (surely significant, Hint: Calvary!). Here the origin of life in the fullness of the Spirit is seen in the very *throne* of God. Here is a fundamental truth: then (as now) the secret of true blessedness lies in glad submission to the *rule* of the living God.

The **tree of life** - is Christ, I believe. The exquisite fruit delights all who draw near and whose leaves are for the eternal health of all.

Note the closing appeal: Rev. 22. 17.