

The Holy City – Rev 21:9-27

Revelation 21:9–27. Augustine was a 5th century theologian who wrote a book titled **The City of God**. Or, *On The City of God Against The Pagans*. That’s the full title. Rome had just fallen to the Visigoths in 410BC. The people were shaken to the core. And Augustine stepped in with a book to redirect their hope and narrow their focus. Urging them to take it *off* the temporal and put it *on* the eternal. Off the city of man and onto the City of God.

And that, is the very point of Rev 21. Take your eyes *off* of things below, and put them *on* things above. Off the present, and *on* to the future. Namely, the holy city. New Jerusalem. Because make no mistake, *this* city, *this* life, will be shaken. Now *and* later. This city and this life will pass away. And where you put your hope makes all the difference. All the difference in whether *you’re* shaken. Full of fear or full of confidence. Full of dread or full of joy.

V9-14 – [9] *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues* [the last in a series of judgments on the earth during The Great Tribulation; chapter 16] *and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”* [The church. We talked about it last week. “I will show you the church.”] [10] *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, [11] having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* (ESV) Remember, New Jerusalem is both the church and a city. One metaphor with two meanings: the people of God and the place of God

And already, John can’t help but comment on its beauty; *our* beauty. V11 – *having the glory of God, [it’s radiant] like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* Rare indeed, because jasper is normally opaque; cloudy. Anything *but* radiant and clear. Driving home the uniqueness of New Jerusalem, in all its glory. And that’s just the beginning.

V12 – *It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—[13] on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. [14] And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

The 12 tribes and 12 apostles are intended to remind us and assure us that the holy city will be perfectly complete. The first of *five* characteristics in this passage.

It’s perfectly complete (v9-14)

Something *old* Jerusalem *never* was. Nor current Jerusalem. And I’m not talking about its infrastructure. Or borders. I’m talking about its people. It was *never* comprised of all God’s people. There were always people scattered abroad, and always *unbelievers*.

But it always represented the heart and the *hope* of God’s people. The heart and hope of God’s *kingdom*. Like a capital city in *our* day. Washington, DC. Paris, France. London, England. They represent the heart and hope of their respective nations.

So calling our future dwelling place *New Jerusalem*, is to say that it’s our *new* heart and hope. And the fulfillment of it. Where the *people* of God and *place* of God come together

for all eternity. And not just *some* of God’s people, but *all* of us; from all time. A city perfectly complete . . .

• With New *and* Old Testament believers.

That’s the idea of 12 tribes and 12 Apostles. V12b – *on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed.* All around. (Ez 48:30-34) Representing God’s people of old. Predominantly Jews, who feared God and kept his commandments. They were his. Old Covenant believers. Saved by grace through faith just like us. Only their faith was in God’s spoken word and *promised* Messiah, while ours is in God’s *living* word and *revealed* Messiah; Jesus.

The point being, Old Testament believers will be a part of the holy city, represented by the 12 patriarchs of ancient Israel.

But that’s not all. It will also be comprised of *New* Testament believers. Those who are God’s people under the *New* Covenant. From *every* tribe, tongue, and nation. Because v14 says – *the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* The 12 apostles of Jesus. Rock solid men, who God used to build and support the church all over the world.

And here, they represent it. They *represent* those who stand on their shoulders. They *represent* those of faith in Jesus. Indicating that the holy city is comprised of both Old *and* New Testament believers. Perfectly complete.

Second . . .

It’s perfectly massive (v15-16)

V15 – *And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.* [A rod of gold probably indicating perfect accuracy.] [16] *The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal.*

In other words, he sees a *cube* in his vision. A cube that measures 1380 *miles* per side! That’s 12,000 *stadia*. 1380 miles. And it’s as *high* as it is long and wide!

Just to give you a **visual** of that, such a city would pretty much cover the western 2/3 of the United States; from Nebraska to California. And if the ceilings of every level are 1 mile high, there would be 2.6 billion square miles of living space. That’s 13x the earth’s surface. 46x the total *land* surface of the earth.

Which means, if there are 3 billion of us let’s say, that’s almost 1 square mile of living space for each person. And that’s just the city. The rest of the earth, along with the heavens and the depths, are presumably wide open. So for those of you who love to own and work the land, or explore the farthest reaches, the universe is your oyster.

But I don’t think the intent of these measurements is to give us exact dimensions. I think they’re meant to convey vastness; and completeness; and perfection. I think they’re meant to say that our future dwelling place is going to perfectly *accommodate* us, and perfectly *satisfy* us, and perfectly *overwhelm* us for all eternity. And that’s not even the half of it.

Because third . . .

It's perfectly secure (v12, 17, 25)

Secure, because v12 says – *It had a great, high wall*. Great and high meaning insurmountable. Plus, it's guarded by 12 angels. *It had a great, high wall [v12], with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels*. Presumably to guard the wall. Making it unapproachable. Insurmountable and unapproachable.

And v17 says – *He also measured its wall* [the angel did], *144 cubits*. 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. A dimension of perfection. Just like the city dimensions.

And this too is perfectly massive. *144 cubits* being 216 feet. Which *could* be the height of the wall, but given the dimensions of the city itself, measured in hundreds of *miles*, I think it's the *width* of the wall. Especially since the height is described in v12 as *high*.

Whatever the case, the city is perfectly secure. Surrounded by a wall that's insurmountable, unapproachable, and impenetrable.

Plus, it's not even threatened. V25 – *It's gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there*. It's unthreatened. Like putting Fort Knox in the middle of a baby nursery. Sure it's insurmountable, unapproachable, and impenetrable; but in the middle of a nursery it's so unthreatened its doors need never close.

All of which means we need not worry in the holy city. About anything. It's going to be perfectly secure.

Fourth . . .

It's perfectly beautiful (v11, 18-21)

Almost indescribably beautiful. Starting with John's effort in v11 as we saw, and continuing in v18 – *The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. [19] The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, [20] the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. [21] And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass*.

When Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you," he didn't mean a shack (Jn 14:2). And this is the point where you realize John is trying to convey something that's out of this world. Something that defies explanation.

Like hiking Glacier Mountain National Park, returning with no pictures, and telling all your friends, "You should have seen it! It was awesome!" Only to receive blank stares in reply. Because no matter what you say, it wouldn't do it justice.

Same here I think. Even though God pulled out all the stops and gave John an amazing vision to describe. Including stones from the Garden of Eden (Is 54:11-12) and gold so pure it's clear. It's hard to describe and hard to imagine.

So what's the point? Resign ourselves to staring blankly? Of course not. It's meant to increase our anticipation of being there; our eagerness to see it for ourselves and take it all

in. And second, it's meant to stir our imagination and fire our hope. Replace our fear with great joy. Because there's going to come a day, when our *breath* is taken away, every single day, for all eternity. It's that beautiful. Perfectly beautiful.

And fifth . . .

It's perfectly full (v22-27)

V22 – *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. [23] And 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. [24] By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, [25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. [27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life*.

V27 is *not* to say, that there's a chance of sin or sinful people coming in. *That* will be put to rest once and for all at the end of the Millennium. Before the new earth and new Jerusalem even appear. Rather, v27 is another exhortation to repent and believe right now. Otherwise, you'll spend the rest of eternity on the outside looking in.

But for those who *are* in, the holy city is perfectly . . .

• Full of people

Just like we found in the first point. All believers, from all time. No vacancies and no overcrowding. No no-shows and no surprises. Every room full, and nobody lost.

Second, it's going to be perfectly . . .

• Full of worship

There's no designated *place* of worship in the holy city, it's *full* of worship. Everywhere and always. I think that's the idea of v22 – *I saw no temple in the city* [no designated *place* for God to reside and us to worship], *for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb*. Meaning God is everywhere, and therefore worship is too.

We won't have to *go* to him to worship, he'll *be* there. We'll worship *as* we're going; *as* we're living. We won't have to *think* of him, we'll never stop. He'll never be out of sight out of mind again. As naturally as we breathe, we'll worship. And *just* like we breathe, we won't stop. In which case the holy city will be *full* of worship. Every person, in every part, at every moment.

Third, it's going to be perfectly . . .

• Full of glory

John saw *the holy city Jerusalem* [v11] *coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God*. And v23 says – *the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light*. The glory of God is the outward manifestation of his inward holiness. The visible appearance of his invisible greatness.

Think of a bonfire. When it burns, it gives off both heat and light. One, invisible and felt; the other, visible and bright. So you might say that light is the glory of heat. Or light is the visible manifestation of heat.

Same for the glory of God. Light is to heat as glory is to God. The visible manifestation of his invisible attributes.

And in the New Jerusalem, his glory will shine. Uninhibited. Unrestricted. Never more evident and never more strong.

Plus, v24 says – *By its light* [the light of Jerusalem, that is; from the glory of God] *will the nations walk* [conduct their lives], *and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it* [their worship; the visible manifestation of their invisible love; and invisible devotion, and reverence, and awe], [25] *and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.* [26] *They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.* The praise and worship of those who fill it.

It’s all intertwined. Glory, worship, light, everything. Fulfilling prophecies like **Is 60:11** – *Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. (Habakkuk 2:14) For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* Filled. Full. Perfectly full. Of God’s glory, our glory, all glory.

And last, closely associated with it, the holy city is going to be . . .

- **Full of light**

Because where God is, glory is; and where glory is, light is. Aka righteousness and brightness. So much so, there will be no need for the sun or moon. V23 again. *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.* Both will be visibly present, and both will shine.

Once again, just like Isaiah prophesied. (**Is 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.*

The City of God will be perfectly *full* of his light. No more night, no more sun, no more sin, and no more no more fear. Just worship, glory, people, and God. Perfectly full in every way.

Summary

I hope that fires you up like it does me. And I hope you *feel* it as much as you “see” it. Filled with such an overwhelming sense of awe, and anticipation, and gratitude that you live and long for it. The City of God.

Prayer – Lord, it’s hard to imagine all this, but we sure do love it. We sure are thankful. So help us, we pray. Etch these truths on our heart and keep them ever before us. Remind us when times are bad *and* good. So that we keep the faith, and don’t miss out.

You Are Loved