



Part 44 – The Bride of the Lamb

Revelation 21:9-27

What John sees in this portion of the vision strains the capacity of human language. He sees a city so massive it is hard to imagine. The wall of the city has 12 foundations, each named for an apostle of the Lord Jesus. In its construction are incorporated 12 semi-precious stones which correspond to the breastplate worn by the High Priest, a stone for each of the tribes of Israel. There are 12 gates into the city, each made from a single massive pearl. “The street of the city” is made of gold that John describes as transparent. At the center of it all is the presence of God. There is no need for a temple for the entire city is the Lord’s dwelling place. There is no need for sun or moon for the Lord himself will be its light. The cubic configuration of this city is meant to remind us of the Holy of Holies in the temple (also a cube), the very dwelling place of God with his people.

If the symbolism is still too hard for us to decipher, the angel speaking to John makes it clear. After telling him that he is going to show him “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (a clear reference to the church), the angel shows John “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (vv. 9-10). God’s people, his church, are the place of his holy dwelling (21:3). The details of this depiction of the Bride/City give us insight into the nature of the church. The Bible is not shy about mixing metaphors, particularly in prophetic and apocalyptic writings. “Because of the fluid character of the imagery, it is wisest not to distinguish rigidly between the inhabitants of the city (the saints) and the city itself (the saints together with the glorified creation).”¹ What is true of the Lamb’s bride is also true of their eternal habitation.

“John is clearly told that the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is in fact a beautiful picture of the people of God...The city symbolizes the saints, the people of God. We don’t simply live in the new Jerusalem. We are the new Jerusalem. The city is the church, the Bride of Christ, adorned in the beauty and loveliness that she has received by grace from God.”²

This passage parallels what we read beginning in chapter 17:

- One of the seven angels with the seven bowls speaks to John (17:1).
- The angel announces that he will show him the judgment of the great prostitute (17:1).
- The angel then takes him away where he was shown a blasphemous woman on a beast (17:3ff).
- An angel announces the destruction of the city/woman Babylon (18:1ff).
- The vision is confirmed by the angel: “These are the true words of God” (19:9).
- John begins to worship the angel but is rebuked (19:10).

Compare the unfolding vision above with what John sees in chapter 21:

- One of the seven angels with the seven bowls speaks to John (vs. 9).
- The angel announces that he will show him “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (vs. 9).
- The angel then takes him away where he is shown “the holy city Jerusalem” (vs. 10).
- The city is depicted in all its beauty, glory, and holiness (vv. 11-27).
- The vision is confirmed by the angel: “These words are trustworthy and true” (22:6).
- John begins to worship the angel but is rebuked (22:8-9).

The similarity is striking. And what John seems to be doing is establishing a contrast between the wicked prostitute Babylon and his holy Bride/City.

Four times in Revelation, John is said to be “in the Spirit.” That is, he is given a view of reality which directly corresponds to what is seen by the Spirit of God. The first time in Chapter 1, John is shown the risen and reigning Christ. Next, in Chapter 4, he is taken into the very throne room of the Almighty. Then in Chapter 17, he is shown a vision of Babylon, the anti-Church. Finally, in Chapter 21, he is shown the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb.

¹ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000) p. 189

² Sam Storms, *Our God Reigns* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2024) p. 503

What John's vision of the Bride / City tells us about the church...

1. The Church is Glorious

Vv. 9-10 – Here the angel shows John the meaning of his vision of the new Jerusalem. The holy city is actually the Bride of the Lamb, the church. Certainly, this metaphor is rich and, to an extent, highlights a correspondence between a people and a place: the Bride/City. Douglas Kelly observes:

“The blessed angel shows John in verse 9, the bride, the Lamb’s wife. In the next verse, she is identified as ‘the holy city Jerusalem’ that came down out of heaven from God. That clearly identifies ‘the new Jerusalem’ as the bride of Christ, which is the Christian church, and the focus of this passage. Everything in world history is getting ready for what God is already doing in his church. That will bring human history and all civilization to its consummation.”³

Notice how the Bride of the Lamb, new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. Think of this as a contrast with the Tower of Babel in which mankind sought to raise himself up to God (Genesis 11). But here, when the Lord presents his glorified Bride, she is depicted as descending from the presence of God.

“Throughout the Holy Scriptures we learn that the only way of salvation is for God to come down with his blessing. Our God is always a God who comes down, as he did the Incarnation of Jesus, and in the descent of the Holy Spirit... This is what grace is all about!”⁴

Vs. 11 – John describes the color he sees as being like crystalline Jasper (Jasper is an opaque crystalline stone which ranges in color from red, yellow, green, and brown). John is attempting to describe the brilliant color(s) emanating from the Bride/City. Glory is the shining forth of God’s perfections. God’s glory is always associated with his presence in the tabernacle and temple. Later, God will show his glory through the church. But it is in the new creation that the Lord shares his glory with his people in a way that is new and fully revealed. The Bride/City John sees is described as “having the glory of God.”

“The radiance that John once saw emanating from the throne of God, whose glory appeared like jasper and sardius (4:3), now permeates the city. The Lord’s glory indwells his people and floods his new community with the beauty of his holiness.”⁵

Vs. 23 – There is no need for sun or moon for the Lord himself will be our light. The One who commanded light into existence is himself the light. How encouraging that Jesus calls his church “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

Vv. 24-26 – Twice we are told that the nations will bring their glory into the Bride/City. This may seem odd considering that in Revelation (and indeed, in so much of Scripture) the nations are depicted as agents of the beast, forces arrayed against the church. The nations were seduced by the great harlot (14:8; 18:3) and deceived by her enticements (18:23). They are deceived by the dragon to make war against God and his church (19:15; 20:8). But this does not alter the fact that the Lord is the king of the nations (15:3). When the word “nation” is used in the fourfold “people, tribe, nation, and language” (a phrase used seven times), it is used to describe the worldwide company of those redeemed by the Lamb. And as they are depicted as bringing their glory and honor to the Bride/City the nations are to be understood as representing “redeemed humanity in all its cultural divisions. The distinctiveness of different cultures and peoples is not simply wiped out, but redeemed, in harmony with the picture of 1 Corinthians 12 of the unity and diversity in the body of Christ.”⁶

- The perfection of redeemed humanity in the new creation is foreshadowed in this age as men and women from every people, tribe, nation, and tongue hear and believe the gospel. The original vision for the temple was expressed in Solomon’s prayer of dedication that people from the nations would come and pray and seek the Lord there (1 Kings 8:41). The prophet Isaiah prophesied that the nations would flow to that eternal Mount Zion (Isaiah 2:2). These promises are being fulfilled in the worldwide presence of the church and will be fulfilled ultimately in the new creation where all the nations will bring their glory to the Lord.
- The fundamental character of the Bride/City is glory. What John sees stretches the limits of human language. How generous is God that he would share with his church what is most precious – his glory. Remember that God had said, “My glory I give to no other” (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). And yet, “this glory, which is an essential aspect of the very essence of God, according to verse 11, comes down and shines out

³ Douglas Kelly, *Revelation* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012) p. 406

⁴ Ibid, 410

⁵ Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) p. 309

⁶ Poythress, 191

through the Lord's redeemed church."⁷ Rather than dissecting the various component parts of John's vision we would be wise first to simply behold in awe and wonder the glory and beauty of God's presence with his redeemed saints.

2. The Church is Secure

Vv. 12-13 – The “city” is secured by “a high wall.” The walls are equipped with 12 gates, each guarded by an angel. On those 12 gates are written “the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.” Ancient cities were often kept secure by fortified walls and gates. The city of John's vision has no need of similar protection. “But the imagery remains, to remind us of the full security and architectural wisdom of the whole (Ezekiel 40).”⁸

Vs. 14 – “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations...” On those foundations are written the names of “the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” This is a way of communicating the spiritual soundness of the church, the line of which goes all the way back to God's covenant with Abraham (notice how the 12 gates are named for the tribes of Israel). Her walls, as it were, are positioned atop the Lord's apostles of whom each of the 12 foundations are named. We must not miss the significance of the apostles as direct representatives of the Lord Jesus upon whom he builds his church (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 3:11).

- Notice how in **verse 25** the gates to the city are never shut. We've heard of communities where “no one locks their doors.” Perhaps you have lived in one of those places where crime is so low that people give little attention to security measures. The Bride/City is like that but magnified to the extreme. Nothing can threaten the saints in glory. And while our bodies and minds are subject to various temptations and opponents in this life, even now the Lord has secured our hearts, as it were, in a way that can never be breached by the enemy. Our future is secured, our inheritance kept in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3-7).
- The mention of there being “no night there,” may not refer to literal night. After all, in the first creation, day and night are both good. So, there may be in the new creation the sort of passage from dawn to twilight to nighttime that we have known in the first creation. The point John is making is that night, as it was commonly associated with wickedness, will no longer be known.⁹ There will be no sin; no deeds of darkness. The saints in glory will face no threats that are so commonly associated with the darkness.

3. The Church is Precious

As we will see below, the various semi-precious and precious stones described as adorning the Bride/City help to illustrate holiness. However, we would miss something in this facet of John's vision if we ignored the rather obvious point of the great value of the various materials John sees.

Vs. 21 – “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates were made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.” – It is interesting to note the similarities in which John's vision depicts the adornment of wicked Babylon with the adornment of new Jerusalem. Both are wearing things of great value. But for Babylon, her gold and jewels are the spoils of her immorality and corruption. But Christ adorns his Bride with precious stones and gold because he loves her.

“The mention of pearls as gates completes the contrast of the Bride/City with the threefold depiction of ‘Babylon’ as ‘glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls’ (17:4).¹⁰ Among first century Romans, pearls were often considered to be of greater value than gold. The old “pearly gates” image does not really capture the substance of John's vision which depicts giant pearls through which the people enter the city.

The gold street depicted in the city would have been in contrast to the dirt roads that people were most accustomed to in John's day. Imagine a people/place so precious that pure gold is used to pave the roads. In all of this, John's vision is holding forth the Bride of the Lamb as being profoundly valuable. The church is precious to the Lord and he adorns her as such.

- It's worth commenting at this point on the references to light and darkness in **verses 22-25**. The light referred to as originating with the Father and mediated through the Son (vs. 23) may well be referencing the fact that God has caused the light of the knowledge of him to shine upon the church. Again, we see the pattern of God's revelation through Christ (“its lamp is the Lamb”). “These have been the perfectly

⁷ Kelly, p. 406

⁸ Poythress, 190

⁹ Ian Paul, *Revelation TNTC* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018) p. 356

¹⁰ Ian Paul, *Revelation, TNTC* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018) p. 352

complementary roles of Father and Son in Revelation throughout the cosmic conflict of redemptive history, and they will continue to be so in eternity (Matt. 11:27; John 1:4-9, 14, 18; 8:12; 17:6).¹¹ So beloved is the church by God that he will not deprive her of himself but continues to shine, as it were, upon her now and forever.

4. The Church is Holy

In the Scriptures, to be holy is to be set apart for the Lord. It is to be unadulterated with sin or any kind of uncleanness. God has both *declared* his people to be holy (set apart unto him) and *called* them to live holy lives: “Be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). The church is God’s holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). That is what God has declared of his church. He has set his people apart from the world. But God is also making his people holy. We are to strive toward holiness in our lives such that the pagans will see our good deeds “and glorify God on the day of his visitation” (1 Peter 2:12). John’s vision of the Bride/City is one of a holy entity; a people and a place utterly transformed in the light of God’s presence.

Vs. 15 – The process of measuring (Ezekiel 40-41) serves to prove the singular uniqueness of the Bride/City.

Vv. 16-17 – The dimensions of the Bride/City have great symbolic meaning. It is constructed as a massive cube. This is the same configuration of the Holy of Holies in the temple. Indeed, the design of the Holy of Holies is the only one other cubic dimension given in the whole Bible (1 Kings 6:20). The significance of this could not be any more obvious. There is no temple in the new creation because the Lord will dwell with his people in unmediated holiness, making the Bride/City itself his everlasting temple.

Notice once again the use of 12 and 1,000, two numbers symbolizing completeness. In fact, if you consider that the wall’s thickness of 144 cubits is 12 squared, then John’s vision consists of 12 twelves. There are 12 edges on a cube. Each of the 6 walls of the cube are 1,200 stadia which makes it absolutely massive. That is half the width of the continental U.S.! The overwhelming size is indicative of God’s gratuitous generosity and abundance. In the age to come, the Bride of the Lamb will not only lack nothing but will positively abound in everything that is good.

- A more fully theological explanation for what John is seeing in this vision is found in Ephesians 2:19-22: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Vv. 18-21 – These are the same stones that were arrayed on the breastplate of the high priest In Exodus we read that the stones were arranged in four rows of three. The first row: sardius, topaz, carbuncle. The second row: emerald, sapphire, diamond. The third: jacinth, agate, amethyst. The fourth: beryl, onyx, again jasper. There are difficulties in translating Hebrew into Greek so a few of the stones differ in name in our English Bibles but that may just be a translation issue. The point is that the 12 stones that adorn the Bride/City are clearly meant to bring to mind the ministry of the High Priest.

It is a picture of holiness. The priest was meant to be ceremonially holy as he performed his duties before the Lord. His garments reflected this holiness as well as his role of mediating between God and the people. When he entered the Holy of Holies wearing the breastplate with twelve stones, he was symbolically bringing the people into the presence of the Lord.

Vs. 22 – It is striking that there will be no temple in the new creation. From the days of Moses to the finished work of Christ, God had dwelt among his people through the tabernacle and then the temple. Christ became our living temple through whom our sins were atoned for and we knew God’s presence. In the new creation, God’s people will have no need for the mediation of priests or temple “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” God will dwell directly with his people (21:3).

Vs. 27 – Lest there be any notions of universal salvation for every nation, John reminds us of the exacting nature of God’s salvation. Nothing unclean will enter the city. Nothing other than what God has redeemed will have a share in the Bride/City. “It seems not simply that the holiness of God and the Lamb demands holiness, but that, through the sacrifice of the Lamb, God effects it.”¹²

¹¹ Johnson, 318

¹² Ian Paul, 357