

Revelation 21:9-27 “The Bride – the City”  
Ezekiel 40  
Psalm 87

January 26, 2020

Read Ezekiel 40:1-4,

(Then he describes the rooms and furnishings of the temple)

Read 43:1-9,

(then he describes the altar, the gates, the prince, the priests, and the division of the land)

Read 48:30-35

The book of Ezekiel concludes with *nine chapters* describing a vision of the holy city.

In chapter 40, the vision starts in the land of Israel  
“on a very high mountain.”

As the vision progresses, it becomes clear that this very high mountain  
is not particularly near Jerusalem!  
And yet the new temple is on this very high mountain!

Ezekiel is seeing a vision of the *New Jerusalem* – the heavenly Jerusalem –  
the holy city that John also sees in his vision.

Ezekiel’s vision is particularly geared for the exiles in Babylon.

Remember how it started?

“In the twenty-fifth year of our exile... in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down”

Jeremiah had said that the exile would last for 70 years.

Ezekiel was among those who had been exiled to Babylon – and who spent their whole lives  
*in Babylon*.

This means that all the adults who heard Ezekiel  
were going to die in exile.

Maybe some of the children would be able to return when they were old!  
But it’s going to be a long time.

That’s also why John writes to you!

You live in Babylon.

You live in a world where things *aren’t* the way they should be!!

And it’s going to be a while before Jesus makes everything right.

But just like in Ezekiel’s vision – so also in John’s!

While you live in exile –  
while you live in this world in which things are *not the way they should be!* –  
you need to see a vision – not just of what *should be* –  
but what *will be!!*

And through the eyes of faith we begin to see the heavenly city!  
Because, by faith, we see Jesus!

That's why we sing Psalm 87.

Psalm 87 starts with the holy mountain – the holy city – the gates of Zion.  
But then it says that Rahab and Babylon – and Philistia and Tyre, with Cush –  
were all born in Zion.

God will bring the Gentiles to himself!  
He will bring the nations to faith in the Lord Jesus!

Sing Psalm 87A (TPH)  
Read Revelation 21:9-27

I'd like for us to start with verses 16-17.

These distances are striking.

The wall is impressive.  
144 cubits would be around 200 feet tall.  
The tallest city walls of the ancient world were around 50 feet tall –  
so 200 feet is remarkable.

But of course, the importance of the number is not how tall it is – but it's the number 144  
(12 x 12) – a number that we have encountered before several times in Revelation!

But still – all that is *nothing* compared to the size of the city itself.  
12,000 stadia is almost 1,400 *miles*.

This city is 1,400 miles long – 1,400 miles wide – and 1,400 miles high.

In other words, the city is about half the size of the United States.

*And* it extends 1,400 miles up into space.  
(by the way, "outer space" starts at 62 miles! –  
This city extends beyond the orbit of today's weather satellites!)  
If you get five miles up you start running out of oxygen!  
(Mt. Everest is just over five miles high)

This is over a *thousand* miles high!

(Obviously, if this is a literal city, then the new creation will have *very* different physical laws

from the current one!!)

But, of course, we have learned by now that this is a vision!  
And we shouldn't take a vision too literally!  
But we *should* take it seriously!  
And we should see the picture for what it is!

I said that this city is about half the size of the United States.  
But instead, let's use John's world.

In John's world, a city this size would extend roughly from Rome in the west,  
to Babylon in the east –  
centered roughly on Asia Minor (the location of the seven churches!).

In other words, the holy city is not far from the size of the known world of his time!

What is John saying?  
What is John seeing?!

He is seeing the glory of the kingdom as it extends throughout all the earth!  
And he wants *you* to see that the holy city will one day fill the whole earth!

So let's look a little more carefully at what John is seeing here.  
Look back at verse 9:

### **1. The Wall and the Gates of the Holy City (v9-14)**

#### **a. The Mountain and the City (v9-11)**

*<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues*

The angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues have played a key role here.

The seven bowls were said to be the *last* of God's judgments –  
“for with them the wrath of God is finished.” (15:1)

So it is fitting that the angels who poured out those bowls  
are also the angels – the messengers –  
who show us the two paths – and the two destinations.

In chapter 17, verse 1, it was one of these angels who said,  
“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute...”  
Now, another of these angels says,  
“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

Once again we see the contrast between these two women –  
The Bride and the Prostitute.

In the book of Proverbs the first nine chapters are all about *the two ways* –

and, for that matter, the *two women* – Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly.  
(for truly, Folly is *no Lady!*)  
And in Proverbs 1-9, Wisdom is the Bride – and Folly is the Harlot.

In Proverbs 9, each woman takes her seat at the “highest places of the town” –  
in other words – in a temple (since the “high places” are places of worship).

But in Proverbs 1-9, it would be easy to think  
that we are being told that *we* should marry wisdom  
(and, in one sense, yes, we are!) –  
but here in Revelation 21, we discover that she is not *our* wife –  
she is the wife of the Lamb!

But then again, remember how Proverbs 1-9 is organized:  
a Father speaking to his Son –  
calling his Son to walk in the way of wisdom –  
calling his Son to marry Wisdom.

Who is the Son in Proverbs 1-9?  
Sure, it applies to all of us –  
but all of us wound up in Folly’s house.  
We were the simple – who wandered too near to her door.  
We were the simple – fools just waiting to happen!

Little did we know that the dead were there –  
until we were enticed by her charms!

But the wages of sin is death.  
And we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But there needs to be a *Son* – a faithful Son who heed the Father’s voice,  
and do all that the Father commands!

And thanks be to God, because he sent his own Son into the world!  
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.  
The one who was with God in the beginning  
has now joined himself to our humanity,  
in order that he might join us to himself!

This is what John sees when he sees the Bride – the wife of the Lamb!

*and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*<sup>10</sup> *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,*

In chapter 17, John was carried away in the Spirit into a wilderness –  
where he saw a woman – Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes.

Now John is carried away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain –  
where he sees the Bride – the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

Babylon needs to be understood as the harlot –  
who promises pleasure, prosperity, and power – if we pursue her  
(but in the end her paths lead to death!).

In the same way, the holy city – the heavenly Jerusalem –  
needs to be understood as Lady Wisdom –  
the one who gives true pleasure, prosperity, and power –  
because she is the Bride of the Lamb.

<sup>11</sup> *having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

Do you realize what this means?!

“having the glory of God...”

God does not *share* his glory with another.  
In other words – God does not take a piece of his glory  
and give it to someone else!  
If the holy city *has the glory of God* –  
it can only be because God has united her to himself!

God has promised you something beyond imagination!  
Himself!

In the incarnation of the Word,  
God joined himself to our humanity,  
in order that he might join *us* to himself!

#### **b. The Gates Are Named for the Twelve Tribes (v12-13)**

<sup>12</sup> *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—* <sup>13</sup> *on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.*

I need to point out a grammatical feature here.  
Verses 10-14 are all one sentence in Greek.

The central clause is: “he showed me the holy city” –  
and then there are five participles that follow:

“coming down out of heaven from God...” (v10)

“having the glory of God... (v11)  
“having a great high wall...” (v12)  
“having gates...” (also v12 – though it gets lost in translation).  
and then verse 14 says, “the wall having twelve foundations”.

In English it would be an awful run-on sentence –  
but the point that John wants you to see  
is that all these things – the wall, the gates, the foundations –  
are part of what it means for this city to have the glory of God!

For God himself to be *with her*.

The city has a wall.  
A walled city was important in the ancient world,  
because a walled city was protected.  
And this city has a “great, high wall.”

And there are twelve gates in this wall.  
It is protected – but it is also accessible.

Notice that there are twelve angels at the gates  
(reminding us of the cherub with a flaming sword  
who guarded the Garden of Eden after the fall).

But also notice that the gates have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on them.  
Three on the east – three on the north – three on the south – and three on the west.  
In other words, the gates to the holy city take the same form as Israel in the wilderness.  
The book of Numbers describes the people of God  
as they camped in the wilderness.  
Three tribes on the north, three on the south, three on the east, three on the west.

Now the twelve tribes are arranged in the same pattern again –  
but this time as the *gates* into the holy city!

This connects back to Ezekiel’s vision of the holy city in Ezekiel 40-48.  
Ezekiel had seen a vision of the day when God would dwell with his people.  
Now John sees a clearer picture of that day.

And then:

**c. The Foundations Are Named for the Twelve Apostles (v14)**

*<sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

Does this seem backwards to you?

Shouldn't the tribes of Israel be the foundations?

And the apostles be the gates?

After all, usually the foundation is built first – and then the gates!

But here, the *foundation* for the wall of the city is the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The reason is simple:

the apostolic teaching is the foundation of the church.

(Paul says, “I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it” – 1 Cor 3:10)

The foundation for the heavenly Jerusalem is laid in the preaching of the apostles.

But the *gates* are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Most of us may be Gentiles –

but we have entered a particularly Jewish story!

We have been grafted in to Israel.

We now call Abraham *our father* –

not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

That's why we want you to understand your family history!

God's purpose in the whole story of redemption

is to show you what he is doing in Jesus

to bring about a new creation!

But also, with twelve gates and twelve foundation stones, that makes 24 –

just like the twenty-four elders (combining the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes) –

uniting the whole of the people of God through all of history!

## 2. Measuring the City (v15-21)

In verse 15, then...

### a. Length, Width, and Height: Is This a Cube? a Pyramid? a Mountain? (v15-17)

<sup>15</sup> *And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.* <sup>16</sup> *The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia.<sup>[d]</sup> Its length and width and height are equal.* <sup>17</sup> *He also measured its wall, 144 cubits<sup>[e]</sup> by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.*

Commentators have debated for millennia what is the shape of the city.

It is 12,000 stadia long – 12,000 stadia wide – and 12,000 stadia high.

Some think this means that it is a cube.

After all, the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the temple was a cube.

Since the holy city is where God dwells with his people,

it would be fitting if it were a cube.

But others think that it is a pyramid – more of a mountain-shape.

After all, the *original* place where God met Israel was at Mt. Sinai.

And the whole of the tabernacle was designed to look like a mountain on its side.

At Mt. Sinai, all Israel gathered at the foot of the mountain

(just like at the tabernacle, all Israel gathered at the entrance of the tent).

At Mt. Sinai, Moses, Aaron, and the 70 elders went part way up the mountain

(just like at the tabernacle, the priests ministered in the holy place).

At Mt. Sinai, only Moses was allowed to go all the way up and meet with God

(just like at the tabernacle,

only the high priest was allowed to enter the holy of holies)

But whether you go with pyramid or cube, the point is the same!

It's plainly calling you to see this as the fulfillment of the temple!

And the priestly beauty of the city in verses 18-21 reinforces this:

**b. The Priestly Beauty of the City (v18-21)**

*<sup>18</sup> The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> 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.*

The twelve gates are twelve pearls.

Each gate made of a single pearl.

Can you imagine the oyster that makes a pearl big enough to be a city gate!!!

Again, John says things like this to remind us that *this is a vision!*

What's the point?!

Well, ordinary cities are made of stone – or wood.

This city is made of gold and precious stones and pearls.

The twelve foundations of the wall are adorned each with a jewel –

which reminds us of the high priest's breastplate – which had twelve stones –  
each with the names of the tribes of Israel

When the high priest entered the holy of holies –

he brought all Israel with him.

Now John sees a city as massive as the known world



that is entirely priestly.  
The whole thing is like the Most Holy Place –  
filled with gold – and adorned with every kind of jewel.

But if you really want to understand what John is seeing –  
you have go further back – all the way to Genesis 2!

In Eden there was a garden.

And from the garden there flowed a river that divided into four  
(the 4 corners of the earth).

One river flowed through Havilah – where there is gold, bdellium, and onyx.

Why does Genesis 2 make this seemingly random comment about precious stones?!

The picture in Genesis 2 is of a world filled with raw materials.  
A world that was waiting for man to shape and fashion it –  
so that the Garden might become a City.

But in our rebellion, we sought to use the creation for our *own* glory.

Paul tells us that the creation itself *groans*  
as it longs for the revelation of the sons of God.

Here John shows us that it is the Lamb of God – our Lord Jesus Christ –  
who is the Last Adam who builds us into a holy city!

It's the same point that Peter makes in 1 Peter 2:5 –

“you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood.”

Because *you* are the precious stones on the walls of this city.

Jesus is taking *you* and building you together into a holy dwelling place!

John now sees the fulfillment of all of God's promises!

And that is why he highlights the *holiness* of the city in verses 22-27:

### **3. The Holiness of the City (v22-27)**

#### **a. The Temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (v22)**

<sup>22</sup> *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

In the OT, the Holy of Holies was carefully guarded  
in order to protect the people of God!

Because the holiness of God could destroy the unholy –  
and our problem is that we are not holy!

But in the heavenly city, there will be no temple – for its temple is the Lord God – and the Lamb.

There will be no need for any sort of barrier to “screen” us from God himself!  
God himself will dwell with his people.

Likewise:

**b. The Lamp is the Lamb (v23)**

<sup>23</sup> *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.*

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.”

And in the new creation Jesus will be the lamp –

the glory of God will be the light.

The Psalmist said that “in your light we see light.”

He is the true light that illumines the city of God.

Verses 24-26 have struck many as curious:

**c. The Glory of the of the Nations Will Be Brought In (v24-26)**

<sup>24</sup> *By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.*

This almost makes it sound like there are “nations” out there – and the “holy city” over here.

But John is referring to what the prophets had said.

Isaiah had spoken of how the glory and honor of the nations would flow into Jerusalem

(Isaiah 60:3, 5, 11)

thus beautifying God’s beautiful house.

But remember what we have seen about the gold and jewels!

What are the jewels?

What are the precious stones that are being built into this glorious city?!

*You* are the living stones.

Therefore, *what is the glory of the nations* that the kings of the earth will bring in?

You.

After all, if we are talking about a new heavens and a new earth,

what can take with you from this world into the new creation?

Can you take your money?

Can you take your stuff?

What is it that you can take with you?

What did John tell us in chapter 19?

“fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

Good works will not save you.  
But think about all that we have seen!

Jesus died for your sins.  
If you repent and believe in him,  
then your sins are forgiven.  
And then will *never* be held against you!

But what happens to your righteous deeds?

Your righteous deeds go with you!

That's what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10 –

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Paul is very clear: there is no way to *work* your way to God!

But he is equally clear that good works are the path that the Christian must walk!

And as the nations come to faith in Jesus – you see the increasing glory of the Holy City –  
as the good works of believers

continue to show forth the goodness and the holiness of God!

Which is also why John adds verse 27:

**d. But Nothing Unclean (v27)**

<sup>27</sup> *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.*

This reminds us of what we heard last time in verse 8 –

those who persist in rebellion against the Lamb will never enter his city,

but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

John says this to warn you!

The unclean will never enter the holy city.

Only those who are cleansed in the blood of the Lamb will enter.

Those who do what is detestable and false will never enter.

Only those who are clad in white – those who are devoted to good works.

Did you know that the Bible *never* uses the phrase “good works” in a negative way?

Jesus says, “Let your light shine before others,  
so that they may see your good works

and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt 5:16)  
Luke says that Dorcas “was full of good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36)  
We’ve already heard Paul say that the one who is saved by grace  
is “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10).  
And he also says to Titus that he is to be “a model of good works” (Titus 2:7)  
and that “our people [should] learn to devote themselves to good works...” (3:14)  
Hebrews 10:24 says “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”

Anyone who downplays the importance of good works in the Christian life  
is not paying attention to what the apostles actually teach!

What are good works?

Good works include *everything* that God commands!

You can summarize it very simply as:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength –  
and love your neighbor as yourself.

And when you fail at love – *repent* and believe the gospel!

If you think of it that way, it makes perfect sense  
why John says that the one who does what is detestable or false  
will not enter the holy city.

Those who do what is detestable or false say by their thoughts, words and deeds  
“I don’t want to love God or neighbor!  
And I refuse to repent and believe the gospel!

They don’t want to be with God!  
And so God will give them what they want.