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# THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

## LESSON 15 – New Heaven and Earth

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### LESSON OBJECTIVE

The goal of this lesson is to understand the interpretation of chapters 21-22:5 of the Revelation, with particular emphasis on understanding the New Heaven and Earth.

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### NOTES ON REVELATION 21

**21:1** “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”

John sees a new heaven and new earth. By heaven, John means space (and the sky), not the heaven where God the Father is manifest. The first heaven and first earth, despite the partial lift of the curse during the Millennium, were nevertheless tainted with sin ever since the Fall in Genesis 3. One of the major differences between the Millennium and the period after that (often called the “Eternal State”) is that after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment, ALL sin is eliminated. Everyone that remains is a saved person with a resurrected body (they are impeccable or sinless). But since the first heaven and first earth are themselves tainted (Romans 8:22), they must be made new and without sin (2 Peter 3:9-10). The reason for the elimination of the sea is symbolic of the fact that sin and rebellion against God have been totally eliminated. Recall that there are beasts in the sea (Daniel 7 and Revelation 13:1). No more sea means no more beasts. In the Eternal State there will be absolutely no sin.

**21:2** “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

John sees the New Jerusalem descend from heaven, which by implication means that although the City is sourced in heaven, it is not heaven. That the City is sourced in heaven tells us it is probably like heaven in certain ways, but the statement some make about spending eternity in heaven is not correct; the saved of the Church Age spend eternity with Jesus in the New Jerusalem, seemingly with access to the new earth. It needs to be noted that this is not the first passage in the Bible to speak of the New Jerusalem. Indeed, Abraham looked forward to the New Jerusalem and the writer to the Hebrews discusses the nature of the City (Hebrews 11:8-10, 12:14-29). Paul also referred to the City (Galatians 4:26), and Jesus referred to it in John 14:2-3. Following the imagery of a Jewish wedding, we are to understand the Church Age as the betrothal period between Jesus and his Church at which time he prepares a place for his Bride, the Rapture as His coming at night to take his Bride, the Tribulation as the consummation, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19) as the beginning of a wedding feast that spans the entire Millennium. Here, we are introduced to the place that Jesus prepared for us. In Hebrews 12:22-23, we are told who lives in the New Jerusalem (the Church or Bride, saved Israel, and possibly all Old Testament saints, and angels). Notice that the City descends, but we are never told that it settles on the earth. I will argue later that the City remains suspended in the air (altitude unknown). The New Jerusalem is holy, without sin. The City is not the Bride of Jesus; we should not confuse concepts here. The City is adorned “as” a bride. A lady usually looks her absolute best on her wedding day when she is “prepared as a bride

adorned for her husband.” John is using a simile to convey to us that the City (that Jesus prepared) is of stunning beauty in the same way as a bride on her wedding day.

**21:3** “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be their God.*”

There is a rich truth here in this verse. It has always been God’s desire to dwell with his people. He walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. He later pitched his tent with Israel in the wilderness (the Tabernacle), then the tent was made more permanent in the form of the Temple, and then he dwelled with His people while he walked the earth (Jesus), and now he dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16), and here God dwells with his people again. The word “dwell” here is worthy of some special attention. According to Strong’s, the Greek word *skenoō* means to “pitch one’s tent.” It is the verb form of the noun for tent. It is used in John 1:14 and several times in the Revelation (7:15, 12:12, 13:6). Just as God pitched his tent in the wilderness with his people, He is again pitching his tent with his people (in the New Jerusalem).

**21:4** “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

That God will wipe away the tears of those in the City means there is nothing to be sad about anymore. Because sin is gone, all of its terrible consequences are eliminated, including death, sorrow, crying and pain (injury, sickness, etc.). The former things, that is, the old heaven and old earth and all that were a part of that cursed system, are gone.

**21:5** “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

Jesus sits on the throne and he has made all things new; he has created the new heaven and new earth and the City. He tells John to write, because the words (about the City) are true and faithful. Recall Jesus’ name in Revelation 19:11; by virtue of who he is, his words are faithful and true.

**21:6** “And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

Jesus says, “It is done.” I think Jesus looks at what he has accomplished, right up to the creation of the new heaven and new earth and the suspension of the City (more to come on this) above it and expresses his total satisfaction. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This same name occurs in Revelation 1:8, 11, and 22:13. Jesus is not just the book ends; what he is expressing is that he is the “a” and the “z” and everything in between. Jesus is the all in all, the beginning and the end and all that occurred between the two. And he offers to satisfy the thirst of man with the free gift of eternal life.

**21:7** “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

Recall that the overcomers or victors are all New Testament saints (1 John 5:4-5), not just some Christians. The new heaven and new earth and the City are the inheritance of the New Testament saints. This does not mean that there is no inheritance for Old Testament

saints; it is simply that here the focus is on Jesus' Bride. Here Jesus claims to be God (don't miss it, because some people deny that he ever makes the statement). The New Testament saints are the children of God (again, this is not excluding Old Testament saints).

**21:8** "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

In contrast to the overcomers, those that are not overcomers (not saved), have no part in the new heaven and new earth. They will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire separated from God (the second death; recall, death always indicates separation). The overcomers spend eternity dwelling with God.

**21:9** "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife."

This is one of the seven angels that first appeared in Revelation 15 in connection with the seven plagues or Vial Judgments. The angel speaks with John and asks him to come see the Lamb's wife or bride. This refers to Jesus' Bride, just as it did in Revelation 19 at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Recall, the Bride was all New Testament saints.

**21:10** "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,"

John is whisked away "in the spirit" as has happened before (Revelation 1:10, 4:2, 17:3). He was supposed to see the Bride, but instead he is shown the New Jerusalem. Remember the City is the place (the bridal chamber) that Jesus prepared for his bride. Since the wedding and feast have already occurred, we can expect the Bride to be in the place prepared for her. It is the Bride (the New Testament saints) John sees dwelling in the New Jerusalem that has descended out of heaven from God. The City is called the Bride because the Bride is there.

**21:11** "Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;"

The City has the glory of God. Representative of that glory, the City is a light source (recall 1 John 1:5). The jasper stone is clear, like a diamond; it seems to represent purity and holiness. This is not the first reference in the book to a jasper stone (see Revelation 4:3); God the Father in the throne room was described as having the appearance of a jasper stone. It is no surprise that John describes the City as having the glory of God, since its very appearance reminds him of his vision of God in chapter 4.

**21:12** "And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:"

The City has a great and high wall. In the ancient world, the strength and security of a city was measured by the size of its wall. This is God's City, and its wall is "great and high." It also has twelve gates and at each gate an angel. Apparently, each of the twelve gates has the name of the one of the twelve tribes of Israel on it. This suggests, of course, that this City is inhabited by saved Israel.

**21:13** “On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.”

From this description, we are to understand that each of the four sides of the City has three gates. This also suggests, as will be later confirmed, a cubicle shape.

**21:14** “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

The wall of the City has twelve foundations, that is, twelve giant foundation stones, and on each stone is the name of one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. From this description, we see that the City is also inhabited by the New Testament saints, for the twelve apostles were the foundation of the building of the Church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20). One may ask who the twelve apostles are. Although he was an apostle, Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3) and is never explicitly referred to as one of the Twelve. It seems indisputable that Judas Iscariot is not among the Twelve. Recall that in Acts 1:26 Matthias was selected to take Judas Iscariot's place so that there would again be Twelve (not eleven). Many take the position that Matthias was not legitimate because the eleven gambled (casted lots) to select him. First, it should be noted that Luke gives no negative commentary on Matthias' selection. Second, later in Acts (see 6:2), Luke (superintended by God) refers to the apostles as the Twelve. If God considers Matthias among the Twelve, that should settle it. The Twelve are the apostles to Israel, and the Thirteenth is Paul, apostle to the Gentiles. Specifically, the Twelve are: Simon Peter, James (son of Zebedee), John (son of Zebedee), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the Canaanite), Matthias. (Mark 3:14-19) We might get the idea that some of the Twelve departed from the faith after Jesus was crucified, because we see little mention of them in the Scriptures after the crucifixion. I take it that since they are getting their names etched in stone in the New Jerusalem, they accomplished their tasks faithfully. We tend to focus on the apostles that wrote the New Testament, but we should not mistakenly assume that the others did not faithfully pursue the tasks Jesus gave to them.

**21:15** “And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.”

Earlier in the book, John used a reed to measure the Temple for destruction (see chapter 11). Here, the angel is not measuring with a regular reed nor for the purpose of destruction. Instead, it is to give us a sense of the glory of God seen in this City. The City cannot be measured with an ordinary reed; it requires a golden reed, because it is a glorious place. The angel will measure the City, its gates and wall.

**21:16** “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.”

The city is cube-shaped. It measures 12,000 furlongs on each side. A furlong is 680 feet; there are 8 furlongs to a mile. Accordingly, the City's measurements are 1,500 miles on each side. Some commentators take the City to be on the new earth (though the text never says that). If the new earth has dimensions like the present one, then to assume the City is on the earth is most unusual. It would cover approximately half of the United States and be 1,500 miles tall (the space shuttle orbits at about 125 miles). We will see below that it is more likely that the City is suspended above the earth.

**21:17** “And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred *and forty and four* cubits, *according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.*”

The wall, which is the indicator of the strength of the City, is 144 cubits thick (about 216 feet thick). The angel is giving John the measurements; we can rest assured the measurements are accurate and to be taken literally.

**21:18** “And the building of the wall of it was *of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.*”

The wall has the appearance of jasper. It appears like it is made of a clear gem. Within the walls, John sees what he describes both as “pure gold” and “like unto clear glass.” In John’s day, clear glass was rare; unlike the murky glass of John’s day, this is clear, pure, holy, and perfect. And at the same time, it is “pure gold.” I believe John’s point is that the material the City is made of is translucent with a gold tint to it.

**21:19** “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 jasper walls sit on top of jeweled foundations.

**21:20** “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.”

It is no coincidence that there are exactly twelve different types of gems making up the foundation. Visually, John is seeing a very colorful foundation. But the symbolism goes back to Exodus 28:15-21, for there were twelve stones on the breastplate of the High Priest and they bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Here, also, they are symbolic of the presence of the twelve tribes of Israel within the City dwelling in peace and security and with God.

**21:21** “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.*”

From this verse we get the idea of “pearly gates.” Pearls are formed within oysters; it starts with a contaminant in the shell that is later transformed to a thing of beauty. If there is a symbolic significance to the pearls at the entrance (gates) to the City, it may be rooted in the notion of the transformation from contaminate to beauty that Jesus did for us. Note that each entire gate is a single pearl. The street is “pure gold” and at the same time “transparent glass.” As I suggested in the note to verse 18, I believe the imagery here is translucent streets with a golden tint to them. Finally, people often talk about the “streets” of gold in heaven, but John only says “street” (note the singular). There may only be one street leading to Jesus.

**21:22** “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

There is no temple in the City. The Temple always represented the dwelling place of God with His people. Since God and Jesus dwell in the City, it has no need for a Temple, for God the Father and God the Son (who is filled with God the Holy Spirit) are “the temple of it.” That is, there is no need for a place where God’s presence is manifested (in smoke and light) when God’s actual presence is in the City. Because God the Father is spirit and

only God the Son is visibly seen, I believe it is God the Son that will be visibly present in the City. Of course, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are both omnipresent and therefore inhabit the City as well. In some sense, then, the entire City and all of creation are now the Temple. This was always God's plan. Back in Genesis, God dwelled in the Garden of Eden (it was His garden) just as He will dwell in this City. The Bible (and God's plan for the universe) has finally come full circle. What was interrupted when Adam sinned (God's dwelling with His people and the entire creation being His temple) is now reestablished. God is good.

**21:23** "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof."

Note that John does not say that there is no sun or moon, only that the City does not need either, because the "glory of God" has lightened the City, that is, Jesus (the Lamb) is the light of the City. We should understand this to indicate that physical light is present all the time because of Jesus' residence in the City.

**21:24** "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it."

There is much theology packed in this short verse. First, since John refers to the nations, there are apparently nations on the new earth during the Eternal State. They are composed only of saved people, and the nations (all of them) walk in the light of the City. Remember, the City is lighted by Jesus' presence, but not only the City -- the entire planet. This is further support for the proposition that the City is suspended above the earth (probably many miles above the earth). Moreover, the nations have kings (we can assume Jesus has appointed them at some point), and those kings "bring their glory and honor into" the City. Thus, we know that there are people in the City and people on the earth, and those on the earth are all saved, live in constituted nations ruled by kings, and the kings (and by implication the people they rule over) have access to the City but do not live there. The big question, of course, is who are the people on the earth? One approach to answer this question is deduction. Since the City is inhabited by the Bride (New Testament saints) and saved Israel (this is confirmed both by the description of the City in this chapter and from Hebrews 12), the only saints left are those saved in the Tribulation and the Millennium. Approaching the question from the vantage point of the greater context of the Revelation, the primary focus has been on the Tribulation, whose events culminate in the Millennium. Understand in the overall context of the book, John's reference to those "which are saved" most likely refers to those which are saved during the Tribulation and Millennium. They will come to the City and bring their glory and honor into it. Some commentators suggest that Old Testament saints prior to Abraham are also on the earth (e.g., Noah); this is not a view I hold to.

**21:25** "And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there."

The gates to the City are always open. In the ancient world, the gates closed at night for security. There is no night here (because God's constant presence constantly lights the world) and no concern about security. In the Bible, darkness is sometimes associated with sin (e.g., John 3:16-21); it is no surprise, then, that since there is no sin in the new creation, there is no night either.

**21:26** "And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it."

I take it that the peoples that inhabit the new earth come to the City to worship Jesus.

**21:27** “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

Sin cannot enter the City. Only saved people can enter the City. This means that there is no sin at all in the Eternal State (recall, in the Millennium, there was still sin, although very little of it until the rebellion at the end). A relevant question would be why there is no longer any sin? Man has been fully redeemed and no longer has the capacity to sin; at this time, in both body and spirit, people are wholly without sin like Jesus. (Romans 8:30; 1 John 3:1-10)

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## NOTES ON REVELATION 22

**22:1** “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

John sees a “pure” (clean, clear as crystal) river. The water in it is not ordinary water, but the “water of life.” Jesus promised the “water of life” to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-14). That the water of life runs right through the City is indicative of the fact that the City’s inhabitants enjoy eternal life. Those people that were sent to the Lake of Fire at the end of chapter 21 (the Great White Throne Judgment) have an eternal existence (life with a lower case “l”). The people in the City have LIFE in big letters, because it is sourced in God, for the waters flow out of the very throne of God and Jesus. Recall that a river flowed out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10). As I suggested in Lesson One, God’s plan has always been to dwell with His people, and what we see happening here in the City is a place very much like the Garden of Eden (because God dwelled in the Garden and will dwell in the City). The river is one of the many commonalities. Just as this river (which is life) is sourced in God (not in some underground water supply), so also did the river in Eden come straight from God. Man lost access to that river in the Fall, but the access is reestablished here.

**22:2** “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was *there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

It appears that the river runs along the street. On each side of the river is the tree of life. John uses the singular, even though it would seem that there must be at least two trees in view for them to be on both sides of the river. Probably, the trees are lined up on both sides of the river, but described in the singular on purpose. We only read about one tree of life in the Garden (Genesis 2:9). We are to understand the connection between the City and the Garden. The tree (or trees) bear twelve different kinds of fruit year around (every month). It may be that all twelve are on the tree at all time, or that a different fruit is there each month (now we understand why there are twelve months in the year). Although the twelve fruits emphasize God’s fulfilling of the promise of eternal life to saved Israel, the leaves are for the “healing of the nations,” emphasizing His fulfillment of the promise of eternal life to Gentiles as well. This tree (which I take as a real tree) represents God’s faithfulness and grace to the whole world.

**22:3** “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:”

God announced a curse on the old earth in Genesis 3:14-19 because of Adam’s sin. That curse was partially lifted during the Millennium as the world returned to pre-flood conditions. But now, in the Eternal State, the curse is completely gone. Both sin and its effects

on creation are obliterated; all of creation is holy. The throne of God is in the City and the people of God dwell with Him and serve Him.

**22:4** “And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads.”

The people in the City shall see the face of God; this should be understood to mean that Jesus physically dwells in the City, and the inhabitants see him. They are his, which is represented by their having his name (badge of ownership) on their foreheads. This may be symbolic, but the point should not be missed. At this point in the future, we are in every sense God’s children (not only positionally, but also we are without sin and in His presence).

**22:5** “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

John reiterates a point made earlier, that there is no night there (in the City and most likely on the entire new earth). No one needs an artificial light source (candle) or even the sun because God is a light source. The City’s inhabitants shall reign with Jesus for ever. This reign is over the people that inhabit the new earth. If my interpretation is correct that the new earth is inhabited by the saints that come out of the Tribulation and Millennium, then this verse is consistent with chapter 21. That is to say, in the Millennium, the nations are populated by the Tribulation Saints, who will have children. All of these people are under the reign of Jesus and the Old Testament and Church Age saints. What is in view here is that the same group of saints now occupies the City and rules the same people, who now have incorruptible resurrection bodies, living on the new earth, perhaps in the same nations or land boundaries as in the Millennium. One final note about there being no need for an artificial light source; recall in Genesis 1 that God first made light (spoke it into existence), but the stars came later (though they were not necessary at that time). Again, the Bible has come full circle to the Garden, and whether or not the stars are still there, they are not necessary, because God lights the world (and probably this means we could not see the stars even if they are still there).

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## COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, Tyndale House Publishers (1983)

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## RECOMMENDATION

It is highly recommended that each person taking this course read chapter 21 for this lesson and chapter 22 for next week in Henry M. Morris’ commentary.