

Revelation

Part Fifty-Eight
A Precious Wall
(Revelation 21:15-21)

With Study Questions

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(*Revelation 21:15-21*)

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. ¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. ¹⁸ The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:15-21).

Introduction

I recall watching a pretty horrible movie about traveling through space, time and wormholes (or some such thing). When the star of the movie arrived at the intended destination, she was awestruck with beauty of what she saw. As a scientist, she made an effort to describe it, but failed miserably. She handled her dilemma by announcing that instead of sending her on this mission, they should have sent a poet.

Precious Stones

This is a bit how I feel, reading a passage such as this. With all the gold, pearls and precious gems, one gets the impression that John is given the most beautiful images available to mankind. But they aren't merely beautiful images. They, like so much of Revelation, beckon us back to the Old Testament.

Speaking to an Old Covenant church which had lost its beauty and vitality, God makes an astonishing promise regarding their growth and resurgence. This resurgence would be realized in the New Covenant church and the Great Commission. Then the full consummation at the end of history.

Sing, O barren, You *who* have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You *who* have not labored with child! For more *are* the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman," says the LORD. ² "Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes ³ For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations, And make the desolate cities inhabited (Isaiah 54:1-3).

But it is not merely that the church would be geographically massive. It includes a precious and preserving beauty.

O you afflicted one, Tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted, Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, And lay your foundations with sapphires. ¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies, Your gates of crystal, And all your walls of precious stones. ¹³ All your children *shall be* taught by the Lord, And great *shall be* the peace of your children. ¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established; You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; And from terror, for it shall not come near you. ¹⁵ Indeed they shall surely assemble, *but* not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake (Isaiah 54:11-15).

Precious stones are expressing God-given beauty, purity, strength, sturdiness. The various stones may have reference to some specific moral or spiritual meaning, but that doesn't seem certain or easy to ascertain.

The redemptive nature of what these stones represent can also be found in their being used in the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28:17). It is also worth noting that the very first stone, "**jasper**" is used

when John is first caught up into heaven's open door, to describe the **"One who sat on the throne."**

And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald (Revelation 4:3).

H. B. Swete said of this presentation of deity that it **"rigorously shuns anthropomorphic details."**¹ All this to say that John is shown, what amounts to be an otherworldly beauty, strength, holiness and power. This is the destiny of those who belong to Christ—who belong to the One who took scroll from the **"right hand of Him who sat on the throne... [and] redeemed us to God by [His] blood"** (Revelation 5:7, 9).

Perhaps this was a taste of what Paul saw when he was **"caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words"** (2 Corinthians 12:2). Such an experience can tempt a person to think more highly of himself than he ought. For Paul, the answer to this self-exaltation was a thorn in the flesh. One of the most dangerous stops in our spiritual journeys is the discovery of the wonders of the glory of God and how we become proud and impatient that others have not yet arrived.

It is funny how we often make an effort at humility when there really should just be a recognition that humility is our only reasonable option.

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall (Revelation 21:15).

Measure the City

To measure something meant to be acquainted and protected. God would have Jerusalem measured in His promise to be her protector and bring His glory into her midst (Zechariah 2:1-5).

The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal (Revelation 21:16).

¹ Swete, H. B. (Ed.). (1906). [The apocalypse of St. John](#) (2d. ed., p. 66). New York: The Macmillan Company.

A Flying Cube?

The city itself, if we seek to take this literally, is a bit odd. It appears to be a giant cube flying through space. In modern measurements it would be 1,500 miles high, wide and deep. I must say, I find the idea of spending eternity in a big box unappealing.

We have spoken in the past of the significance of the number twelve and the number one thousand. We also should recognize the significance of a cube. The Holy of Holies was a cube (1 Kings 6:20). So we should think less about flying through space in a large cube and more about it speaks of the presence of God.

Let us also bear in mind that the majority of our current text does not speak of the city as much as of the wall of the city. All the gems of which we read are not speaking of the city but of the **“construction of its wall” (Revelation 21:18)**. And the wall seems oddly small to surround such a tall city.

Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel (Revelation 21:17).

A Precious Wall

We have a wall of just over two hundred feet surrounding a city that's 1,500 miles high. All to say that these images are designed to convey a message. Here the message revolves around a beautiful, powerful, pure, strong, sturdy wall of protection.

There has been a great deal of fuss about walls in recent years. Walls can be viewed as horribly confining to a people who can't get out. They can be emblematic of the rejection of those seeking asylum. In history and in the Bible, walls marked out the boundaries of a city and were often a source of protection.

In anticipation of the light of Christ, Isaiah records that...

Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise (Isaiah 60:18).

Our very salvation is expressed a glorious and magnificent wall. Isaiah also expresses the growing nature of God's city.

Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. ³For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities (Isaiah 54:2, 3).

Perhaps one of the most appropriate passages in the Old Testament which speak to these walls is found in the second chapter of Zechariah. It is a passage which Calvin expresses that there is "that God intended here to bear witness respecting the propagation of His church...after the coming of Christ."²

Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. ²So I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what *is* its width and what *is* its length." ³And there *was* the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, ⁴who said to him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying: 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited *as* towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. ⁵For I,' says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst'" (Zechariah 2:1-5).

Christians are part of an advancing kingdom that has no literal, physical walls. It is a kingdom which breaks the gates (not literal either) of darkness and advances throughout history and into eternity (literally). But this is not to say we have no wall at all. The Lord is a wall, a wall of fire with God's glory in her midst.

For those who trust in Christ, God Himself is their wall. As Matthew Henry stated,

² Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [*Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*](#) (Vol. 5, p. 60). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

...he will be a wall of fire round them, which cannot be broken through, nor scaled, nor undermined, nor the foundations of it sapped, nor can it be attempted, or approached, without danger to the assailants. God will not only make a wall of fire about her, but he will himself be such a wall.³

The odd and counter-intuitive thing here is that our human nature resists the idea of being walled in. There is a feeling of constraint, of being limited or closed in. But it is the wall of God's salvation that forms a true freedom.

A study was done years ago, really an observation. Children were observed on a playground with no fence. They tended to stay near the middle of the yard. It was almost as if they recognized the inherent danger of the boundaries with no protection. A fence was then installed, and the children now felt the freedom to explore, to utilize all that the playground had to offer.

God's wall of salvation is similar. Outside the wall is death and darkness. Inside the wall is the true beauty of the entire created order. This something the Scriptures call life. And it is found in Christ.

³ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1570). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. What do beautiful and precious stones speak of in Scripture (pages 2-4)?
2. Why is the city measured (page 4)?
3. Is heaven a flying cube? Explain (page 5).
4. Are walls good or bad? In what respect is God a wall (pages 6, 7)?

