

REVELATION – SERMON 86

THE PLANS OF NEW JERUSALEM

Revelation 21:9-21

INTRODUCTION

- The great cities of the world embody the glory of this present world system under Satan's dominion
- Such cities are extolled by humanity, and are given superlative labels:
 - ✓ Rome – the Eternal City
 - ✓ New York – the City that Never Sleeps
 - ✓ Paris – the City of Lights
 - ✓ Athens – the Glorious City
- They are monuments to the ingenuity and ability of man to create such magnificent wonders
- But cities are invariably hotbeds of evil, where all manner of sin and depravity can be found, even as a French philosopher once wrote, “Cities are the abyss of the human species”
- The first city in the Bible was built by Cain, named Enoch (Genesis 4:17), and the next city named is Babel, built by Nimrod (Genesis 10:10)
- Even Jerusalem, that “holy city” (Matthew 4:5), where God chose to put his name (1 Kings 11:36), became so thoroughly evil, that Christ wept over it (Luke 19:41), lamented over their killing of the prophets, and their rejection of him (Matthew 23:37), and “spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (Revelation 11:8)
- Poet and Hymnist, William Cowper, wrote a poem, *God Made the Country, and Man Made the Town*, in which he reviled city life, which, though attended by man-made luxury and pleasure, is disconnected from the God-made creation
- Cities are not evil *per se*, they are made evil by man, whose heart is evil, and whose evil is amplified in the city environment
- Cities give licence to man's corrupt lusts that might otherwise be restrained, and bring depraved people together

- The book of Revelation has been characterised as “A Tale of Two Cities”, which cities are depicted as two women, a harlot and a bride
- This present evil world system under Satan’s rule is portrayed as the city of Babylon, the mother of harlots
- On the other side is the city of God, the Lamb’s wife, the new Jerusalem
- This is a city unlike any other that has the world has ever seen
- It is *perfect* in every way – in its Maker, in its construction, in its beauty, in its morality, and in its inhabitants
- It is presently in heaven, being prepared by the Lord Jesus for his people (John 14:2-3), and will in the future be established upon the new earth as its capital, the seat of God’s throne, and the Lamb’s throne, and the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed
- The creation of the new heaven and earth was described generally in 21:1-8, but in 21:9-22:5 particular details are given regarding the chief part of the new creation – the holy city (compare Genesis 1 and 2)

I. THE DWELLING OF THE ALMIGHTY (9-11)

A. The angelic guide

1. This angel previously poured out his vial of God’s wrath upon the ungodly
2. He may be the same angel who showed John the judgment of the great whore Babylon (17:1)
3. He carries John “in the spirit” (cf. 4:2; 17:3) to a “great and high mountain”

B. The city’s designation

1. The bride, the Lamb’s wife
 - a. The use of these two terms (*numphen* and *gunaika*) is in stark contrast to the whore (*porne*) of Babylon (17:1)
 - b. The city is so named because it is the prepared dwelling place of the Lamb’s bride (19:7-9)

- c. There are seven references to the Lamb (vv. 9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3) in this section of Revelation, showing that “The Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land”

2. The great city

- a. It is great (*megalen*), surpassing the greatness of all the other cities of the world combined
- b. In its size, beauty, holiness and glory
- c. It is great because it is the “the city of the great King” (Psalm 48:2)

3. The holy Jerusalem

- a. The eternal abode of the thrice-holy God, his holy people, and his holy angels
- b. Nothing unholy will ever be permitted to enter there (21:27; 22:15)

C. The city's glory

1. It descends out of heaven from God

- a. Man once attempted to build his way from earth to heaven, and failed (Genesis 11:4)
- b. Man continues to attempt to elevate his soul to acceptance with God in heaven by his good works, and still fails
- c. The only possible way for man to dwell with God is for God by grace to bring heaven down to us, which is the essence of the gospel (Philippians 2:5-9)

2. It has the glory of God

- a. This is the *shekinah*, the visible manifestation of God's presence
- b. This glory was, at different times in history, manifested to man in limited ways, but each time man ultimately rejected it and God withdrew it
- c. In this holy city, however, his glory will be fully manifest to his people, never to be withdrawn again

3. It has light ineffable

- a. God is light, and dwells in unapproachable light (1 John 1:5; Psalm 104:2; 1 Timothy 6:16)
- b. This is the light of God's glory which, as the sun, will lighten the entire city (Isaiah 60:19-20; Revelation 21:23; 22:5)

II. THE DESIGN OF ITS ARCHITECTURE (12-14)

A. A city of "twelves"

1. There are twelve gates, angels, tribes (v.12), foundations, apostles (v.14), precious stones (v.19) and pearls (v.21), as well as 12,000 furlongs (v.16) and 144 cubits (v.17)
2. The number twelve is second only to the number seven in importance in Scripture
3. It denotes God's governmental perfection over his people
4. It is frequently found in relation to Israel, the tabernacle, temple, as well as the church, which is founded upon twelve apostles

B. It is a walled city

1. It is great and high – 48,000 furlongs (9,600 km) around, and 144 cubits (66 metres) high (vv.16,17)
2. Historically, cities required fortified walls for protection from enemies
3. But in this case, there are no enemies left and there is no need for defence, hence the gates remain continually open (v.25)
4. The wall shows the *strength* of the city
5. The wall will be a memorial of God's past protection of his people, and the eternal security they have in him
6. "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (Isaiah 60:18; 26:1)

C. Twelve gates

1. They are attended by twelve angels
 - a. Cherubims barred man from paradise after the fall (Genesis 3:24)
 - b. In the new creation, angels will allow the redeemed free passage into paradise

- c. In eternity, the angels will continue to minister to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14)
2. The gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel
- a. This follows the plan for Jerusalem in the Millennium given in Ezekiel 48:31-34
 - b. As the tribes' names were graven on the gemstones of the high priest's breastplate, so God will write their names permanently on the gates of the new Jerusalem (Exodus 39:14)
 - c. It shows that God has never, nor ever will cast away his covenant people, and that they maintain their distinctive place in the eternal state
 - d. Jehovah promises, "O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me" (Isaiah 44:21)

D. Twelve foundations

1. These twelve foundation stones may be prominently fixed and interspersed between the twelve gates of the city
2. As the walls and gates represent *protection*, so the foundations speak of *permanence*
3. Jesus is presently building his church "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:20-21)
4. They are apostles "of the Lamb" – their names are forever glorified there, but their glory is a derived one, granted them by the Lamb, whose city it is, and whose transcendent glory fills it
5. As there is now, so in eternity, there remains a clear distinction between the tribes of Israel, and the apostles of the church, refuting the error of *Supersessionism*, or *Replacement Theology*, which teaches that the church has replaced Israel

III. THE DIMENSIONS OF ITS ARRANGEMENT (15-17)

A. The task of measuring

1. Ezekiel recorded the measurements of the Millennial temple (Ezekiel 40:3), and John measured the dimensions of the Tribulation temple (Revelation 11:1)

2. The reed measuring rod, of about 3 metres long, is made of gold
 - a. In that city, even the tools are made of gold
 - b. “The measuring reed is represented as being golden to remind us and to assure us that all of God’s measurements and weights and decisions are without stain of sin, without deceit, and without misrepresentation.” (Walter L Wilson)

B. The size of the city

1. The city is square, each side measuring 12,000 furlongs (Greek: *stadion*), which is about 2400 km
 - a. That is about 75% of Australia’s land area
2. The height of the city is the same as the length and breadth
 - a. Some have suggested a pyramid shaped city, but this shape has always been associated with paganism
 - b. It is more likely a cube shape, following the pattern holy of holies in the tabernacle and the temple, as the New Jerusalem will be the fulfilment of those former houses of God (1 Kings 6:20)
 - c. It has been suggested that there will be a network of horizontal and vertical streets, which glorified saints will be capable of travelling at great speed, without the physical limitations of these present bodies
3. It has been calculated that the city would have the capacity to house every human who has ever lived (approx. 106.5 billion), allowing each person twenty hectares area, and 150 stories height
4. The 144 cubit (66 metre) high wall will be dwarfed by the immense height of the city itself
5. Some have rejected a literal interpretation, saying that a city of such proportions could not possibly exist
6. They teach that it is all symbolic of heaven’s capacity to house all the redeemed
7. Yet the seeming impossibility of a thing to our imagination is not reason enough to deny its literal interpretation
8. If God is able to create a new heaven and earth, he can certainly make a city of this magnitude

9. The latter part of v.17 clarifies that though the angel was measuring, he was using human units of measurement, familiar to the people of John's day, which again points to a literal interpretation

IV. THE DAZZLE OF ITS ADORNMENT (18-21)

A. Describing the indescribable

1. Neither human language can describe, nor mortal minds can comprehend, the glorious beauty of the holy city
2. Within these limitations, God has given us a description of the city
3. The metals and gems that are listed may not necessarily be the same in appearance as those of this present creation

B. A city of pure gold

1. The harlot Babylon is "decked with gold" (17:4), not the pure gold of heaven, but the gilded gold of this world "that perisheth" (1 Peter 1:7)
2. The gold of the new Jerusalem is so pure that it is transparent, like nothing this world can produce
3. Even the street is made of gold
4. Pure gold represents salvation by the grace of God (Revelation 3:18)

C. The foundations garnished with precious stones

1. Jasper – Clear like a diamond
2. Sapphire – Clear blue
3. Chalcedony – Blue with stripes
4. Emerald – Deep green
5. Sardonyx – White with layers of red
6. Sardius – Fiery red
7. Chrysolite – Golden yellow
8. Beryl – Sea green
9. Topaz – Yellow-green

10. Chrysopasus – Blue-green

11. Jacinth – Violet

12. Amethyst – Purple

D. Gates of pearls

1. Each gate is comprised of a single, immense pearl
2. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a “pearl of great price” for which we happily give up all else for (Matthew 13:45-46)
3. The pearl is distinct from the gold and gems in that it is formed by a living organism
4. As the pearl is formed in the oyster by an irritation or wound, it pictures the sufferings of Christ on behalf of sinners
5. The pearly gates will be an eternal reminder to the redeemed of the great price that was paid in order for them to be admitted there

CONCLUSION

1. It is difficult for us to comprehend the glory of the world to come, for “now we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12)
2. While the world may call Rome, “the Eternal City”, we know that soon it will be destroyed, never to rise again
3. The only true eternal city is the heavenly Jerusalem
4. It is the only city “which hath foundations” (Hebrews 11:10)
5. The foundations of this world are nothing but shifting sand, that will eventually crumble and destroy those who built their lives on them (Matthew 7:24-27)
6. Are you looking for, and living for the city with foundations, by placing your faith in the only steadfast foundation, Jesus Christ, the Rock?
7. These inconceivable glories are prepared by God only “for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9)
8. But be warned, “if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” (1 Corinthians 16:22)
9. Do you love God? Do you evidence that love by obedience to his word? (1 John 5:2)