

## All Things New! (Revelation 21—22)

Human history begins in a garden and ends in a city that is like a garden paradise. In the apostle John's day, Rome was the admired city, yet God compared it to a harlot. "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (**Luke 16:15**). The eternal city of God is compared to a beautiful bride (**Rev. 21:9**), because it is the eternal home for God's beloved people.

God's statement recorded in **Revelation 21:5-6** aptly summarize these final two chapters: "Behold, I make all things new...It is done." What began in Genesis is brought to completion in Revelation, as the following summary shows:

<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
Heavens and earth created, <b>1:1</b>	New heavens and earth, <b>21:1</b>
Sun created, <b>1:16</b>	No need of the sun, <b>21:23</b>
The night established <b>1:5</b>	No night there, <b>22:5</b>
The seas created, <b>1:10</b>	No more seas, <b>21:1</b>
The curse announced, <b>3:14-17</b>	No more curse, <b>22:3</b>
Death enters history, <b>3:19</b>	No more death, <b>21:4</b>
Man driven from the tree, <b>3:24</b>	Man restored to paradise, <b>22:14</b>
Sorrow and pain begin, <b>3:17</b>	No more tears or pain, <b>21:4</b>

### A. The Citizens Of The City (21:1-8)

John gives us a threefold description of the citizens of the city.

- 1) **They are God's people (vv. 1-5).** The first heaven and earth were prepared for the first man and woman and their descendants. God had readied everything for them when He placed them in the garden. Unfortunately, our first parents sinned, ushering death and decay into God's beautiful world. Creation is in bondage and travail (**Rom. 8:18-23**), and even the heavens "are not clean in His sight" (**Job 15:15**).
  - a. God has promised his people a new heaven and earth (**Isa. 65:17; 66:22**). The old creation must make way for the new creation if God is to be glorified. Jesus called this event "the regeneration" of the earth (**Matt. 19:28**), and Peter explained it as a cleansing and renewing by fire (**2 Peter 3:10-13**).
  - b. "No more sea" does not mean "no more water." It simply indicates that the new earth will have a different arrangement as far as water is concerned. Three-fourths of our globe consists of water, but this won't be the case in the eternal state. In John's day, the sea meant danger, storms, and separation

(John himself was on an island at the time!); so perhaps John was giving us more than a geography lesson.

- c. Even despite Scripture's description, it is difficult to imagine what the eternal city will be like. John characterizes it as a *holy city* (see **Rev. 21:27**), a *prepared city* (see **John 14:1-6**), and a *beautiful city*, as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day. He amplified these characteristics in **Revelation 21—22**.
- d. But the most important thing about the city is that God dwells there with His people. The Bride gives an interesting record of the dwelling places of God. First, God walked with man in the garden of Eden. Then He dwelt with Israel in the tabernacle and later the temple. When Israel sinned, God had to depart from those dwellings. Later, Jesus Christ came to earth and “tabernacled” among us (**John 1:14**). Today, God does not live in manmade temples (**Acts 7:48-50**), but in the bodies of His people (**1 Cor. 6:19-20**) and in the church (**Eph. 2:21-22**).
- e. In both the tabernacle and the temple, the veil stood between men and God. That veil was torn in two when Jesus died, thus opening a “new and living way” for God's people (**Heb. 10:19ff.**). Even though God dwells in believers today by His Spirit, we still have not begun to understand God or fellowship with Him as we would like, but one day, we shall dwell in God's presence and enjoy Him forever.

The eternal city is so wonderful that the best way John found to describe it was by contrast—“no more.” The believers who first read this inspired book must have rejoiced to know that, in heaven, there would be no more pain, tears, sorrow, or death, for many of their number had been tortured and slain. In every age, the hope of heaven has encouraged God's people in times of suffering.

**2) The citizens of heaven are a satisfied people (v. 6).** People who live in modern cities do not think much about water, but this was a major concern in John's day. No doubt John himself, working in the Roman mines, had known the meaning of thirst. Tortured saints throughout the ages would certainly identify with this wonderful promise from the Lord. Free and abundant living water for all!

**3) These heavenly citizens are an overcoming people (vv. 7- 8).** “He that overcometh” is a key phrase in this book. As John pointed out in his first epistle, all true believers are overcomers (**1 John 5:4-5**), so this promise is not just for the “spiritually elite.” Because we are children of God, we shall inherit all things.

- a. In contrast to the overcomers, **Revelation 21:8** describes the people who *were overcome* by sin and would not trust the Lord. What is their destiny?

The lake of fire! The world considers Christians as “losers,” but it is the unbelievers who are the losers!

- b. The fearful are the cowardly, the people who did not have the courage to stand up for Christ (see **Matt. 10:32-33**). The word *abominable* means “polluted,” and refers to those who indulged in sin and were thus polluted in mind, spirit, and body (**2 Cor. 7:1**). The other characteristics mentioned in **Revelation 21:8** need no special explanation, except to note that all of them would be true of “the beast’s” followers (note **Rev. 17:4, 6; 18:3, 9; 19:2**).

## B. The Character Of The City (21:9—22:5)

The eternal city is not only the home of the bride; it is the bride! A city is not buildings; it is people. The city John saw was holy and heavenly; in fact, it descended to earth from heaven, where it was prepared. John’s description staggers the imagination, even accepting the fact that a great deal of symbolism is involved. Heaven is a real place of glory and beauty, the perfect home for the Lamb’s bride.

We have already noted that “the glory of God” has appeared in different places throughout history. God’s glory dwelt in the tabernacle and then the temple. Today, His glory dwells in believers and in His church. For all eternity, the glory of God will be seen in His Holy City. It is only light the city will need.

- a. The city’s description follows the pattern of cities with which John’s readers were familiar: foundations, walls, and gates. The foundation speaks of *permanence*, in contrast to the tents in which “pilgrims and strangers” lived (**Heb. 11:8-10**). The walls and gates speak of *protection*. God’s people will never have to fear any enemies. Angels at the gates will act as sentries!
- b. In this city, saints of the old covenant and new covenant will be united. The twelve gates are identified with the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve foundations with the twelve apostles (see **Eph. 2:20**). Including the tribe of Levi, there were actually thirteen tribes, and, including Paul, there were thirteen apostles. When John listed the tribes in **Revelation 7**, both Dan and Ephraim were omitted, perhaps indicating that we should not press these matters too literally. John is simply assuring us that all of God’s believing people will be included in the city (**Heb. 11:39-40**).
- c. John had measured the earthly Jerusalem (**Rev. 11**), but now he is invited to measure the heavenly city. *Foursquare* means “equal on all sides,” so the city might be a cube or a pyramid. More importantly, the fact that it is equal on all sides indicates the perfection of God’s eternal city: Nothing is out of order or balance.

- d. The measurements are staggering! If we take a cubit as eighteen inches, then the city walls are 216 feet high! If a furlong is taken as 600 feet (measures differed in ancient days), the city would be about 1,500 miles square! There will be plenty of room for everyone!
- e. The city's construction cannot but fascinate us. The walls are jasper, which is a clear crystal, but the city itself will be made of pure gold, as clear as crystal. The light of God's glory will shine throughout the city, resembling a huge Holy of Holies.
- f. Building foundations are usually underground, but these foundations will not only be visible but also beautifully garnished with precious stones. Each separate foundation will have its own jewel, and the blending of the colors will be magnificent as God's light shines through. Our God is a God of beauty, and He will lavish His beauty on the city He is preparing for His people.
- g. Perhaps Peter had the Holy City in mind when he wrote about the "manifold grace of God" (**1 Peter 4:10**), for the word translated "manifold" means "many colored, variegated."
- h. In ancient times, the pearl was considered a "royal gem," produced by a mollusk covering an irritating grain of sand within its shell. But the pearl gates of the heavenly city will never be closed (**Rev. 21:25**) because there will be no danger of anything entering that would disturb or defile her citizens.
- i. John noted that some items were missing from the city, but their absence only magnified its glory. There will be no temple, since the entire city will be indwelt by God's presence. Indeed, "secular" and "sacred" will be indistinguishable in heaven. The sun and moon will be absent since the Lord is the light of the city, and there will never be any night (see **Isa. 60:19**).
- j. The mention of nations in **Revelation 21:24 and 26** suggests that there will be people (plural) on the new earth. Since in the eternal state there will be only glorified beings, we must not think that the earth will be populated with various nations such as exist today. These verses reflect the ancient practice of kings and nations bringing their wealth and glory to the city of the greatest king. In the heavenly city, everyone will honor the "King of kings."
- k. In **Revelation 22:1-5**, we move inside the city to discover that it is like a beautiful garden, reminiscent of the garden of Eden. There were four rivers in Eden (**Gen. 2:10-14**), but there is only one river in the heavenly city. Ezekiel saw a purifying river flowing from the temple, certainly a millennial scene (**Ezek. 47**), but this river will flow directly from God's throne, the very source of all purity. Man was prohibited from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil, and prevented from eating of the tree of life (**Gen. 2:15-17; 3:22-24**). But in the eternal home, man will have access to the tree of life. The river and the tree symbolize abundant life in the glorious city.

- I. “No more curse” takes us back to **Genesis 3:14-19** where the curse began. Interestingly, even the Old Testament closes with the statement, “lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (**Mal. 4:6**). But the New Testament announces, “And there shall be no more curse!” Satan will be consigned to hell; all of creation will be made new; and the curse of sin will be gone forever.

What will we do in heaven for all eternity? Certainly, we shall praise the Lord, but we shall also serve Him. “His servants shall serve him” (**Rev. 22:3**) is a great encouragement to us, for in heaven our service will be perfect. As we seek to serve the Lord here on earth, we are constantly handicapped by sin and weakness, but all hinderances will be gone when we get to glory. Perfect service in a perfect environment!

What will this service be? We are not told, nor do we need to know now. It is sufficient that we know what God wants us to do *today*. Our faithfulness in life prepares us for higher service in heaven. In fact, some students think that we shall have access to the vast universe and perhaps be sent on special missions to other places. But it is useless to speculate, because God has not seen fit to fill in the details.

Not only shall we be servants in heaven, but we shall also be kings. We shall reign forever and ever! This speaks of sharing Christ’s authority in glory. As believers, we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies today (**Eph. 2:1-10**), but in the eternal state, we shall reign as kings over the new heavens and earth. What an honor! What grace!

Certainly, many interesting questions could be asked about our future abode in heaven, but most must go unanswered until we reach our glorious home. In fact, John closed the book by reminding us that we have responsibilities today *because* we are going to heaven.

### C. The Challenge Of The City (22:6-21)

Heaven is more than a destination; it is a *motivation*. Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now. The vision of the heavenly city motivated the patriarchs as they walked with God and served Him (**Heb. 11:10, 13-16**). Knowing that He was returning to the Father in heaven also encouraged Jesus Christ as He faced the cross (**Heb. 12:2**). The assurance of heaven must not lull us into complacency or carelessness, but spur us to fulfill our spiritual duties.

- 1) **We must keep God’s Word (vv. 6-11, 18-19)**. Because what John wrote is the Word of God, his words are faithful and true. The same God who spoke through the prophets also spoke through the apostle John. As the “capstone” of God’s revelation,

John's book cannot be divorced from the rest of the Bible. If we deny that John wrote the truth, then we must also deny the prophets.

- a. What does it mean to "keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (**Rev. 22:7**)? Basically, it means to guard, to watch over, to preserve intact. We must not add to the Word of God or take anything from it (see **Deut. 4:2**; **Prov. 30:5-6**). And this responsibility is especially great in light of Christ's return. The word *shortly* in **Revelation 22:6** means "quickly come to pass."
- b. The warnings in **Revelation 22:18-19** do not suggest that people who tamper with the Bible will be brought back to earth to suffer the tribulation's plagues, or that they will lose their salvation. Nobody fully understands the Bible or can explain everything in it, and those of us who teach the Word sometimes have to change our interpretations as we grow in knowledge. God sees the heart, and He can separate ignorance from impudence and immaturity from rebellion.
  - I. It was customary in ancient days for writers to put this kind of warning at the close of their books, because the people who copied them for public distribution might be tempted to tamper with the material. However, John's warning was not addressed to a writer, but to the hearer, the believer in the congregation where this book was read aloud. By analogy, however, it would apply to anyone reading and studying the book today.
  - II. For a second time, John was overwhelmed by what he saw and heard, and he fell down to worship the angel who was speaking to him (see **Rev. 19:10**). The angel gave John three words of counsel: Do not worship angels, worship God, and do not seal up the revelation.
  - III. Once again, the Holy Spirit is reminding us of the living unity of God's Word. We have seen in our study how John, led by the Spirit, reached back into the Old Testament and used many of the images found there, including Daniel's prophecy. Scripture is its own best interpreter.

Does **Revelation 22:11** suggest that God does not want men to repent and change their ways? No, because that would be contrary to the message of Revelation and of the gospel itself. The angel's words must be understood in light of the repeated statement, "Behold, I come quickly" (**Rev. 22:7, 12**), as well as his statement, "For the time is at hand" (**Rev. 22:10**). Jesus Christ's coming will occur so quickly that men will not have time to change their characters.

**Revelation 22:11**, therefore, is a solemn warning that decision determines character, and character determines destiny. Suffering believers might ask, "Is it worth it to live a godly life?" John's reply is, "Yes! Jesus is returning, and He will reward you!" Next comes John's second admonition.

- 2) **We have the responsibility of serving the Lord (vv. 12-14).** “My reward is with me” implies that God is mindful of our sufferings and our service, and nothing will ever be done in vain if done for Him. At the judgment seat of Christ, believers will be judged according to their works, and rewards will be given to those who have been faithful.

Throughout church history, there have been those who have (to use Dwight L. Moody’s words) become “so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good.” They quit their jobs, sold their property, and sat and waited for Jesus to return. All of them have been embarrassed, of course, because it is unbiblical to set a date for His coming. It is also unbiblical to become careless and lazy just because we believe Jesus is coming soon.

- a. No wonder John added, “Blessed are they that do his commandments” (**Rev. 22:14**). If we really believe that Jesus is coming soon, we will watch and be faithful (**Luke 12:35 ff.**).
  - b. **Revelation 22:13** is a great encouragement to anyone who seeks to serve the Lord. Whatever God starts, He will finish, for He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last (see **Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13**).
- 3) **We must keep our lives clean (vv. 15-16).** The contrast here is between those who do God’s commandments and enter the city, and those who reject His word and are excluded from the city (see **Rev. 21:8, 27**). It is not likely that those who “do His commandments” are a special or an elite group of saints. The phrase is similar to “them that overcome” and characterizes all the people of God. Obedience to God’s Word is a mark of true salvation.

Our Lord’s titles in **Revelation 22:16** are most interesting. The “root” is buried in the ground where no one can see it, but the “star” is in the heavens where everyone can see it. In “the root and offspring of David” we have Jesus’ Jewish, national name, but in “the bright and morning star” we have His universal name. One speaks of humility, the other of majesty and glory.

As “the root...David,” Jesus Christ brought David into existence. As “the offspring of David,” Jesus came into this world, born a Jew from David’s line. Both the deity and the humanity of Jesus are evident here. For a parallel, see **Matthew 22:41-46**.

The “morning star” announces dawn’s soon arrival. Jesus Christ will come for His church as “the Morning Star.” But when He returns to judge, it will be as “the Sun of righteousness” in burning fury (**Mal. 4:1-3**). Because God’s people look for their Lord’s return, they keep their lives clean and dedicated to Him (**1 John 2:28-33**).

**4) We must keep expecting Jesus Christ to return (vv. 17, 20-21).** Three times in this closing chapter John wrote, “I [Christ] come quickly” (**Rev. 22:7, 12, 20**). But He has “delayed” His return for nearly 2,000 years! Yes, He has, and Peter tells us why: God wants to give this sinful world opportunity to repent and be saved (**2 Peter 3:1ff.**). In the meantime, the Spirit of God, through the church (the bride), calls for Jesus to come, for the bride wants to meet her Bridegroom and enter into her home. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (**Rev. 22:20**).

But believers ought also to invite lost sinners to trust Christ and drink the water of life. Indeed, when the church lives in expectancy of Christ’s return, such an attitude provoked ministry and evangelism as well as purity of heart. We want to tell others of the grace of God. A true understanding of Bible prophecy should both motivate us to obey God’s Word and to share God’s invitation with a lost world.

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

Are you ready?