



THE BOOK OF REVELATION

9: THE NEW JERUSALEM

Chapters 21 & 22



The story began with two people, Adam and Eve, in a Garden and with the command: *'Be fruitful and increase in number...'* (Gn.1v28). This same command to multiply was then taken up and radically reinterpreted by the Last Adam: *'Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...'* (Mt.28v18-19). And so the story ends – but of course it never really ends, with a City and with: *'...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb'* (Rev.7v9).

Once again there is the supreme contrast between 'Babylon' and 'Jerusalem' and indeed Revelation has been described as 'A Tale of Two Cities'.

'THEN I SAW...'- SEVENTHINGS THAT ARE SEEN

1. A new Heaven (21v1)
2. A new Earth (21v1)
3. The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the heavenly Bride (21v2,9ff)
4. The true Temple (21v22)
5. The River of the Water of Life (22v1f; 21v6)
6. The Tree of Life (22v2f)
7. The Face of God (22v4)

'I DID NOT SEE...'- SEVENTHINGS THAT ARE NOT SEEN

'The old order of things...'

1. The Sea (21v1)
2. Death (21v4)
3. Mourning (21v4)
4. Crying (21v4)
5. Pain (21v4)
6. Any Curse (22v3)
7. Any Night (22v5)

SEVENTHINGS THAT ARE SEEN

1 & 2: A new Heaven and A new Earth (21v1)

'See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.' (Isa.65v17). *'As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord...'* (Isa.66v22). *'But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.'* (2 Ptr.3v13).

The origin of this beautiful and holy Bride / City is in Heaven but its location is firmly on earth (21v3). This is no escape from earth but a restoration of the earth, as the original curse of the Fall is lifted from it. And it is not

simply restoring the earth back to how it was but releasing it into what it was always meant to become! As the earth was affected by the Fall, so it shares in the final redemption (Gn.3v17; Rom.8v19-22).

The idea of the final restoration of the earth is a common element in apocalyptic writings (e.g.1 Enoch 45v4-5; 72v1; 91v16; 2 Esdras 7v75).

3: The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the heavenly Bride (21v2,9ff)

John is happy to mix his metaphors, in that the 'Bride' has already been introduced to us as the people of God (19v7). But what is a city but the sum of its inhabitants and Paul had already shared the revelation that the people of God were being built into a '*dwelling place*' for God (Eph.2v19-22)? And Jerusalem was always the place where the people of God were intended to dwell (cf Zech.8v7-8), because it was the place where, as God Himself had said, '*My eyes and my heart will always be there.*' (1 Kngs 9v3).

The word in Greek for '*dwell*' is also closely related to the Hebrew word for God's glory – *Shekinah*, which takes us neatly to John 1v14: '*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...*'

The city is more glorious than can be imagined (21v9-21; cf 1 Kngs 10v21) and stands in stark contrast to what had passed for beauty and wealth in Babylon. Of course these dimensions are not meant to be taken literally but they tell us five great truths.

- God and the Lamb, (who begins increasingly to be mentioned) have created a Place – a People fit for His '*dwelling place*' (cf 2 Cor.3v18).
- The Place – the People are made glorious by the presence of the Lord amongst them (cf 2 Chron.7v1-4).
- It is utterly secure, as the dimensions of the walls testify (Rev.21v12-20; Isa.26v1; Zech.2v3-5; Ezek.48v30-34).
- It is open to all, for although there are gates (as any city would have), they are permanently open (Rev.21v24-25; Isa.26v2; 60v11). And pearls are probably not the most effective of gates, anyway (Rev.21v21)! John does not envisage that the wicked will still be in existence at this time. His statement as to those who are '*outside*', is simply a restatement of the truth that sin and sinners will be totally absent (21v27; 22v15). Similarly he does not imagine '*nations*' and '*kings*' somehow living side by side with the redeemed but not themselves being redeemed (21v24-26). Echoing Isaiah's words in ch.60, John is seeing a vision of the new and true Jerusalem as it was always meant to be. A magnet that draws all people to worship God (cf Ps.122v1-4; Micah 4v1-5).
- Its foundation is the faithfulness of God, the covenant keeping God, who called a people to Himself, represented by the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles (21v12,14). And remember the Woman clothed with the sun and standing on the moon; the Old and New Covenants as one.

The measurements are all multiples of 12 (Rev.21v16-17; Ezek. Ch.40-41; cf Rev.11v1; Zech.2v1-5) and the city itself is a perfect cube. By the time of Jesus, the rabbis had allocated varying degrees of holiness to the land of Israel. The nearer one got to Jerusalem, the holier it became and there was no more holy place on earth than the Temple and in particular the Holy of Holies. This was a gold lined small room in the very heart of the Sanctuary into which the High Priest and the High Priest alone, could enter once every year on the Day of Atonement, to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. On the Day of Atonement, as the High priest entered the Holy of Holies, it was as if he were entering Heaven itself. This truth is explored in much detail in the Letter to the Hebrews. Significantly, this Holy of Holies was a cube (1 Kngs 6v20). But now God is out of the box and everywhere is diffused with His holiness!

4: The true Temple (21v22)

Once again John draws on Isaiah and of course Ezekiel, when he presents to us the revelation of his 'Temple'. But in contrast to Ezekiel's detailed and lengthy description (ch.40-47), John's is contained in a single verse: '*...the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*' (Rev.21v22). It is the glory of God which will give the new Jerusalem its light (cf Ezek.43) and where, paralleling Rev.21v23, '*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*', we have, '*...the land was radiant with his glory.*' (Ezek.43v2).

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus had foretold that '*...a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth*' (Jn.4v21,23).

5: The River of the Water of Life (22v1f; 21v6)

A river figures very significantly in Ezekiel's vision of the Temple (47v1-12) and there is an inescapable and logical connection between water and life. Jesus spoke of '*life in all its fullness*', whilst the Psalmist described the righteous as being like a tree planted by '*streams of water*' (Jn.10v10; Ps.1v3). (And see e.g. Isa.12v3; 44v3; 55v1; Jn.4v14; 7v37-39). Everything here speaks of well-being, of plenty, abundance and ease of life.

6: The Tree of Life (22v2f)

The Tree of course makes its first appearance in the Garden of Eden (Gn.2v9,16-17; 3v1-24). In Eden fulfilled we would expect to see it again for humankind is reconciled to God and is no longer exiled. Jesus had promised to the '*overcomer*' in Ephesus that they would eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God and those who have been made holy have the '*right*' to the Tree of Life (Rev.2v7; 22v14; Lk.23v43).

John says that this Tree bears twelve crops of fruit i.e. it is fruitful all year round and that this fruit is for the '*healing of the nations*'. But of what will the nations need to be healed, for the very next verse says that there is '*no curse*' and in 21v4, that the '*old order*' had gone? So '*healing*' here must refer to the contrast between the new and the old order, and the new Jerusalem is the place where not only past hurts but even the memory of past hurts is '*healed*'. It is the place of renewal and rest and restoration and of wholeness (cf Ps.23v3) and a constant reminder of the great '*healing*' of the Cross (Gal.3v13; Deut.21v23).

7: The Face of God (22v4)

What had been lost at the Fall; vouchsafed to a few, such as Moses; glimpsed as a poor reflection; was in fact impossible in our sinful state (Gn.3v10,24; Ex.33v11; 1 Cor.13v12; Ex.33v18-20), is now freely accessible to all. For that is what Jesus had promised (Mt.5v8) and was what John had realised – '*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*' (1 Jn.3v2). In John 14 Jesus had spoken about '*many rooms*' in His Father's house, now we see that '*many rooms*' is a whole city. He had said that He would come to take the believer to be with Him, which is revealed as seeing the very face of God! It is complete and utter one-ness (Jn.17v23-24).

SEVENTHINGS THAT ARE NOT SEEN

The Sea (21v1)

Traditionally the sea was always a place of disorder, of confusion, even of chaos. It was the abode of the monsters of the deep and a metaphor for the restless, troubled and ungodly nations (Ps.89v9-10; Isa.51v9; Isa.57v20-21).

The sea was also the place from which the Beast had arisen, called up by the Dragon (Rev.13v1).

But perhaps through this very physical illustration, John is telling us that humankind is separated no longer; not just from God but from itself, even as the seas keep nations literally apart (cf Eph.2v14-18). As all the people have been gathered together into one great City, so all the land is gathered together into one.

Death, Mourning, Crying, Pain (21v4)

All the heritage of the Fall is taken away once and for all. The promise of old is now fulfilled (Isa.25v7-8) and Easter has fully and finally come! *'The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor.15v26,54-56). This is the truth for all of redeemed humankind but singled out are those who have suffered for their love of Jesus (Rev.7v15-17).

The *'Second Death'* which Death and Hades and the wicked suffer (20v13-14; 21v8) and which the overcomer and the martyr will not endure (Rev.2v11; 20v6), refers to eternal death. The rabbis taught that the *'first death'* was physical death and the second was the utter and eternal banishment of the wicked from the presence of God.

Any Curse (22v3)

The most obvious reference is to the judgement that fell on humankind at the Fall, which is why the mention of the removal of any curse comes straight after the mention of the Tree of Life (Gn.3v14-19,23-24). However *'curse'* is wider than the specifics mentioned in Genesis. It is anything and everything that is the result of sin and rebellion against God. In Deuteronomy 27 and 28 the Lord set aside Mount Ebal as the place for proclaiming the consequences for disobedience – *'cursed is the man...'* and Mount Gerizim as the place to proclaim the blessings that flowed from obedience. It is not a good place to be someone who is *'cursed'* by God!

Any Night (22v5)

In any country where there is little or no light available apart from daylight, night-time becomes the place of threat, of uncertainty and of danger. It is the time when demons and wild animals might be abroad – *'the terror of night...the pestilence that stalks in the darkness'* (Ps.91v5-6).

But the emphasis is not so much on the night as on what the night signifies - the absence of light. But now the One who is the Light of the world (Jn.8v12) is shining in all His glory, so how can there be any darkness remaining (Rev.21v23; Isa.60v19-20)? The first thing that God ever said to His creation was, *'let there be light!'* and now there is!

A Tale of Two Cities

One was superficially all powerful, rich and beautiful but its glory was just for a moment. The true city, the City of God, beautifully adorned by none other than God Himself and so rich that the streets really are paved with gold (Rev.21v21) is gracefully and effortlessly revealed from Heaven. It is the true and only home for the child of God, the bride of the Lamb.

As Billy Graham once wrote: *'My home is in Heaven. I'm just travelling through this world.'*

