

# Revelation 21 (vv.9-21)

## Revelation 21.9-22.5: Millennium or Eternal State?

- Brethren have long disputed whether v.9 of Revelation 21 reverts to a description of conditions during the millennium or continues to describe conditions in the eternal state.
- Those in favour of the *millennium* include JN Darby, William Kelly, FW Grant, HA Ironside and Albert Leckie.
- Those in favour of the *eternal state* include WR Newell, Robert Govett, Jim Allen, Mark Hitchcock, John Walvoord, RL Thomas, John Riddle and Alan Summers (see Precious Seed article).
- What is certainly not in dispute is that the occupants of the city are in their eternal state, possessing their eternal inheritance and already enjoying eternal relationship with God.

Those who believe the section (21.9-22.5) reverts to the millennium use the following arguments:

- The deviation in chronological order (moving back to the millennium from the eternal state) is so the Bible closes on the theme of the millennial reign of Christ. It began with a man and his wife in a garden with the tree of life and river that flowed out to the four corners of the earth. Now, it ends with the tree of life (22.14), and a river clear as crystal from the throne (22.1). Christ and His church are reigning over the earth. **But it would be surprising to end Revelation with a “description of an era (the millennium) that ends in the rebellion of mankind and Satan,” (Alan Summers). What better way to close divine revelation than to see Christ on the throne and God ruling over the new creation eternally? The eternal state shows that God is victorious over Satan, having reformed the earth into a new, pristine condition – with all the redeemed dwelling intimately and eternally in the presence of God.**
- In 21.1-8, the emphasis is on God – this is the Day of God and He is all in all. From 21.9 the emphasis changes to “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” (21.22). These are dispensational titles which are better suited to the millennium. **But the “Lamb” seems to be an eternal name of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 1.19). The title “Almighty” will also take new significance with every enemy, even death, having been defeated.**
- In 21.9-22.5 mention is made of nations, kings and tribes. In the eternal state there is “men” (21.3). Nations were a result of God’s governmental judgment in the book of Genesis. In the eternal state there will be no nations. **But this is an assumption which Scripture does not explicitly state. In fact, it seems from Isaiah 66.22 that Israel will retain her national status eternally. Additionally, the word “people” in 21.3 is plural. This suggests eternal distinctions between people groups in a verse which no one disputes describes the eternal state.**
- In 21.9-22.5 there are all the features of a time scene. There are measurements, geographic locations and divisions of time (22.2). These are altogether absent from 21.1-8 because there are no measurements, geographic locations or time in eternity. **But this is another assumption without scriptural support. In 21.2, the city is seen “coming down” from God, which implies the passing of time. The city has foundations and settles on the earth which demands a geographical location. We may be conscious of the passing of time in the eternal state, although it will not be measured in 24-hour days for there will be no rising and setting sun.**
- In 22.2, the leaves of the tree of life are for the “healing of the nations”. This must be the millennium because no healing will be required in the eternal state. **But the word “healing” is *therapeia* which denotes care and attention with the aim of bringing health or relief. Thus this tree, whilst real, is symbolic of the fulness of eternal life and health that is enjoyed by every nation in the eternal state.**

Those who believe the section continues to describe the eternal state use the following arguments:

- Revelation is a **chronological** book. It began with the church age (1-3), then describes the tribulation (4-18) followed by the return of Christ (19) and the kingdom (20). The eternal state is mentioned last (21-22). Alan Summers says, *“While there are recapitulations in Revelation (sections where John re-covers material in more detail), there are no other flashbacks from one age to another.”*
- The descent of the “the holy city, new Jerusalem” is described **twice** (21.2, 10). It is extremely unlikely these are different cities, or even the same city descending at different times. Rather, it is better to see the second account (21.9-22.5) as a *recapitulation* – giving a more detailed and extended description of the same city and same event. This is the *same* descent of the city, and it takes place in the *eternal state* (21.2). The same device occurs in Genesis. Genesis 1.26-29 gives a brief synopsis of the creation of man and in Genesis 2 the narrative returns to describe the creation of man in greater detail.
- In 22.3, it is expressly said “there shall be no more **curse**.” Everyone in this scene is redeemed, their names written in the Lamb’s book of life. Kings and nations have free access to the city and the immediate presence of God. This cannot be the millennium as, though the effects of the curse are suspended, it is still evident (cf. Isaiah 65.20). Furthermore, those who are born during the millennium are born in an unredeemed state.

- The vast **dimensions** of the new Jerusalem (approximately 1,500 square miles, cf. 21.16) can be more easily accommodated in the context of a new heaven and new earth unconstrained by the limitations of the old creation.

## The New Jerusalem Externally [21.9-21]

### The Splendour of the City [vv.9-11]

**v.9.** The parallels between these two verses (vv.9-10) and 17.1 are obvious. First, **one of the seven angels** which had the **seven vials** comes to speak to John again. In 17.1, one of these angels introduced the impending judgment of the harlot city of Babylon. This angel (whether the same or different) comes to show him the bride, the Lamb's wife. Second, in 17.1 John was carried into a wilderness, but here he is taken to **a great and high mountain** – a suitable place to view the greatness of this holy city. Third, in 17.1 John is shown a *harlot* linked to an ancient city; here he sees a *bride* linked to the new city (Jim Allen). There is clearly a parallel between new Babylon and new Jerusalem. Babylon is a false religious system, symbolised as a *harlot* and centred in a real city (17.18). The church is the true people of God, symbolised as a *pure bride* centred in the new Jerusalem (21.9-10). The **bride, the Lamb's wife** is a figure of the church (cf. 19.7). In v.2, the bride figure was used as a simile to describe the eternal resplendence of new Jerusalem. Here, the church itself, is in view. As a bride, she symbolises a people precious to Christ. Dwelling in a city, she is at the centre of divine administration – what she is *for* Christ.

**v.10.** Because the angel shows John **that great city, the holy Jerusalem** when he had promised to show John the bride, the Lamb's wife (v.9), some have equated the two, believing the city is merely symbolic of the church. The arguments against this have been expanded in the notes on v.2. Fanning helpfully says, *"The surprising correlation that the angel makes in vv.9-10 [between the bride and the city] shows that what these symbols represent is both a people and a place. Despite the figurative language used in both phrases and throughout the following description, we are not forced to choose between these two symbols. The two ideas of people living in intimacy with the God who loved them and chose them to be his forever (the bride) and living in vibrant community with one another, enjoying God's abundant provision and security (the city, a place), easily cohere. Both figures bring something important to our understanding of the future reality they point to. This does not require an either-or choice."* Thus, the city represents the inhabitants (saints) of the city, **and** their dwelling place. The city draws its character from its chief resident, the church, though others also have an interest in this city (Hebrews 12.22-24).

The angel **carried John away in the spirit** (cf. 1.10; 4.2; 17.3). He was *spiritually* transported (through a vision) to a great and high mountain. This is not the only high mountain where remarkable visions have been given. Moses saw the promised land from Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34.1-4) and Ezekiel saw the millennial temple from another unnamed high mountain (Ezekiel 40.1-2). From the vantage point of this mountain, John sees the **holy Jerusalem** or "the holy city, Jerusalem" [NET] **descending out of heaven from God**. This is the exact way of describing the city in v.2 except for the omission of "new" [*kainos*]. This is clearly referring to the same city and the same moment of descent. John is not seeing another descent of the city – it only descends to the new earth once. John is being given a closer look at this city (Allen).

**v.11.** John turns to symbols and similes to describe the splendour of the city. This does not deny the city is a real place but rather enhances the description to help us better understand its beauty in language with which we are familiar. The city **has** (possesses) **the glory of God**. This is a reference to the personal, dwelling presence of God (Shekinah glory) which was seen, though hidden, in the tabernacle (Exodus 40.34) and temple (2 Chronicles 5.14). The resplendent presence of God is a source of brilliant **light** [*phōstēr*] radiating through and from the city. The NET reads, "its brilliance is like a precious jewel, like a stone of crystal-clear jasper." The **jasper stone** was used to describe the appearance of God in the throne room of heaven (4.3) and is symbolic of the holiness of God. The word "jasper" comes from a Hebrew root meaning 'to be bright' and describes a **clear as crystal** stone like a sparkling diamond. Henry Morris says of the jasper, "it was a fine translucent stone, capable of different colors, primarily radiant white but also with flashing fiery red and purple tints."

### The Security of the City [vv.12-14]

**v.12.** The security of the city is evident in a **wall great and high**. Symbolically, the city enjoys perfect and eternal security, protection and separation from every evil (though it does not exist in the eternal state). A high, well-maintained wall would also signify the prosperity of the city to an ancient reader (cf. Nehemiah 1.3). The wall has twelve **gates**. Gates speak of access and administration, for it was here the elders of the city met to make judicial decisions. The number **twelve** is prominent throughout these verses (cf. v.14, 17, 21; 22.1), which, in combination with the gates, speaks of perfect administrative order. This city will be the eternal administrative centre of the new heaven and new earth. The gates are actually 'gate towers' [*pylōn*] referring to their impressive construction and stature (cf. Luke 16.20). On duty **at** the gates are **twelve angels** acting as guardians of the city's separation, but also ready servants to discharge any administrative directions from the inhabitants of the city. The gates are inscribed with the **names** of the **twelve tribes of**

**the children of Israel** which suggests Israel has a prominent role to play in the administration of the new earth. The pattern follows from Ezekiel 48.30-35, where each of the twelve gates of the earthly, millennial Jerusalem is named after a single tribe. Osborne says, "In Ezekiel each gate provides an exit for each tribe to go out to its assigned territory in the promised land, but here these gates provide an entrance to all humanity, the people who have inherited the city." As per God's original intention, Israel will eternally be a channel of divine blessing to the peoples of the new earth in their position at the head of the nations (cf. Genesis 12.3). The very names of these twelve tribes, and the sons of Jacob from which they sprang, will be an eternal witness to God's amazing grace.

**v.13.** The city is laid out as a square (cf. v.16), hence there are **three gates** on the **east** side, three on the **north** side, three on the **south** side and three on the **west** side. This is reminiscent of the way in which the tribes camped around the tabernacle (Numbers 2), and the allotment of the tribal lands around the millennial temple (Ezekiel 48). Though Abraham and OT saints will have their place *in* this city, it is possible that subsequent generations of Israelites (born and saved during the millennium) will be stationed around the city in the new earth.

**v.14.** The **wall of the city had twelve foundations** speaking again of security (as the walls), as well as stability. Abraham looked for a city "which hath foundations" (Hebrews 11.10) because he longed for a *permanent* abode for the righteous in contrast to their *temporary* dwelling in tents as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land. That this city has foundations is strong evidence it will rest eternally on the new earth. **In** the foundations were written the **names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb**. Jim Allen says, "The names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates and the names of the twelve apostles inscribed on the foundations suggest that the OT saints and the bride will have their home in this great city. The language of Hebrews 12.22-24 is suggestive of this in that the city population includes the church of the firstborn and the spirits of just men made perfect." There are three kinds of apostles: *apostles of Christ Jesus* (like Paul and Silas); *apostles of the Lamb* (like Peter and Matthias) and *apostles of the churches* (in a secondary sense, like Titus cf. 2 Corinthians 8.23). Apostles of the Lamb were men who were witnesses of Christ on earth, especially His resurrection (cf. Acts 1.21-22). They had a unique experience and ministry, being both Jews and foundational members of the church. The Twelve therefore symbolise the church and their place in the city (cf. Ephesians 2.20).

#### **The Size of the City [vv.15-17]**

**v.15.** He that **talked with me** (the angel of v.9) is a phrase signifying a new segment of the description as well as a device to introduce the fact that the angel has something in his hand. He had a **golden reed** [*kalamos*] with which to **measure the city**. Earlier in Revelation (11.1), John was given a reed to measure the tribulation temple on earth in Jerusalem. On that occasion, no measurements were given as it was a symbolic act of divine assessment. Now the angel uses a golden reed (in keeping with the glory of God) to measure the heavenly **city**, with its **gates** and **wall**. Here, exact measurements *are* recorded in keeping with a real, literal city. The reed was from a plant that grew in the Jordan valley, sometimes to the height of 15-20 feet. The hollow stalks were used for measuring because they were long, straight, and lightweight. Ezekiel used a reed to measure the millennial temple (Ezekiel 42.16-19).

**v.16.** The **city lieth foursquare** [*tetragōnos*, four-cornered], or "is laid out as a square," [NET]. However, the city seems to be *more* than merely a square as it has the same dimensions for length, width and height – it is a cube. In the ancient world, this was the shape used to denote perfection, and the holy of holies in both the tabernacle and temple were also cubes (1 Kings 6.20). The millennial temple of Ezekiel was also laid out like a square, 500 reeds in length and width (Ezekiel 42.15-20). It is possible the dimensions describe another shape such as a pyramid. This would allow the throne of God to be at the apex, and the pure river of water of life (22.1) to flow down through the city to the earth, however, the pyramid is not a shape used in scripture and is the favourite structure of paganism such as the ziggurat of Babel. But then, ancient Babylon and Nineveh were also cities that apparently were laid out in the shape of a square!

The measurement of the city was **twelve thousand furlongs** [*stadion*]. The *stadion* was a measure of distance of about 192 metres. Depending on the exact length of a stadion (estimates vary), this would make the city the equivalent of between 1,400 and 1,500 miles! Though this could be the combined measurement of the four sides, the words immediately following – **the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal** – give the impression that this is the dimension in each direction. If not, the account gives no dimension for the height. The city is therefore in excess of 2 million square miles – 10 times the size of Germany and 40 times the size of England. David Jeremiah calculates, "If the city was divided into floors which were a mile high each, there would be 1,500 floors. And every floor the size of a continent. And that's just the capital city."

**v.17.** The angel proceeded to **measure the wall** as well as the city. The measurement of **one hundred and forty and four cubits** equates to 216 feet (65m). Very likely this is not the *height* of the wall, or it would be very small in comparison to the 7,000,000 feet (i.e. 1,500 mile) height of the city. Instead, the measurement may relate to the *thickness* of the wall in

keeping with Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40.5; 42.20). As if to emphasise that the city's dimensions are literal and not mystical, John makes it clear that the measurement the angel has taken is according to **human units of measurement**.

### The Stones of the City [vv.18-21]

**v.18.** The word **building** [*endōmēsis*] properly means 'building material' or 'to build in'. It is probably not that the wall is solid **jasper**, but that jasper was built *into* or *overlaid* the walls. Thus, the sparkling brilliance of the city (v.11) is also radiated from the walls. The **city** itself (likely the buildings and streets, cf. 21.21) was made from **pure gold, like unto clear glass**. This gold is so pure that it is transparent, allowing the glory of God to radiate through the city. Solomon *overlaid* the inner sanctuary, and the inside of the temple with pure gold (1 Kings 6.20-22), but this city is actually *constructed* of pure gold. **v.19.** The **foundations of the wall** were **garnished** (adorned) **with all manner** (every kind) of **precious stones**. The foundations obviously extend above ground level to be visible to John. It seems as if the varied stones do not just *decorate* the foundations, but that each of the foundations *consist* of one of the twelve stones. Undoubtedly, the whole forms a dazzling array of colour. Although some of these stones are difficult to identify precisely, their various hues and colours

1. Jasper (*iaspis*). The clear crystal of the city itself seems to merge into this brilliant foundation stone. The sparkling glitter of the diamond has been mentioned in verse 11 and verse 18 and seems to be characteristic of the city. The colour is crystal – sparkling.
2. Sapphire (*sapphiros*). The colour of this stone is agreed to be a beautiful blue.
3. Chalcedony (*chalkēdon*). The only reference in Scripture. It seems to have been an agate stone from Calcedon, in Turkey. Its colour seems to have been a shade between blue and green – thus blue-green.
4. Emerald (*smaragdos*). A radiant green.
5. Sardonyx (*sardonux*). A variety of onyx with red layers mingled with white – a shade of brownish-red.
6. Sardius (*sardios*). Possibly the same stone as mentioned in 4:3. A brilliant red quartz.
7. Chrysolyte (*chrusolithos*). Would seem to have been a gold colour.
8. Beryl (*bērullos*). Very likely modern beryl; though most accounts call it sea green.
9. Topaz (*topazion*). Reported as a brilliant and deep yellow, though not the modern stone called by this name.
10. Chrysoprasus (*chrusoprasus*). The only reference in Scripture. It seems to have been a very distinct shade of green.
11. Jacinth (*uakinthos*). Believed to be an aquamarine or a turquoise colour.
12. Amethyst (*amethystos*). Possibly the same purple colour as is known today.

reflect the manifold glories of Christ shining in and through the saints. "Precious stones do not have inherent light and neither do the saints have glory in themselves—their beauty will result from His glory reflecting in them," (Anstey). *Eight* of the twelve stones correspond to those in the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28.17-20). There is some evidence that the other four are equivalent stones under other names (the NIV equates the names). If so, the twelve precious stones here point to the priestly character of the church as represented by the apostles (v.14).

**v.21.** The **twelve gates** (v.12) are revealed to be **twelve pearls** with "each one of the gates made from just one pearl!" [NET]. The pearl was a highly precious commodity (Matthew 13.45-46). The Romans ranked the pearl highest among precious stones because its beauty derives entirely from nature, improvement by human workmanship being an impossibility. The pearl is therefore a fitting picture of the unique preciousness of the redeemed to the heart of Christ. But John Phillips explains a further special significance of the pearl: "All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster – the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. How like God it is to make the gates of the new Jerusalem of pearl. The saints as they come and go will be forever reminded, as they pass the gates of glory, that access to God's home is only because of Calvary. Think of the size of those gates! Think of the supernatural pearls from which they are made! What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl! Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ." **The street** [*plateia*] **of the city** is singular referring either to the city's thoroughfare or city square, or could refer to all the interconnected streets of the city under one generic singular. The street **was pure gold like transparent** (translucent) **glass**. The word "transparent" is literally 'through' [*dia*] and 'brightness' [*augē*]. Everything in this city is transparent to allow God's glory to blaze through in all its brilliance.