

GRACIOUS LIVING IN THE NEW JERUSALEM

Summary and Historical Background

These two chapters complete the written revelation from God. It is significant that Revelation 21-22 begins with a perfect paradise, which is where Genesis 2 ended. All of the events of Scripture between these chapters, beginning with Genesis 3 and concluding with Revelation 20, are a series of steps in God's plan to redeem mankind and reclaim the earth for Himself.

Chronologically, the Eternal Kingdom will begin after Christ delivers the Millennial Kingdom to His Father (1 Cor. 15:24), but before this happens, the present heaven and earth will be destroyed by fire to remove all contamination caused by sin (20:11; 2 Pet 3:10-12; Rom. 8:21-22). Also, all of the unsaved sinners, living and dead of all ages will be judged and confined to the eternal Lake of Fire (20:11-15). Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth, which will be eternal. The New Jerusalem, which Christ promised in John 14:1-3, will come down from heaven and the Eternal Kingdom will begin. This city will be the dwelling place of the saints of God from all ages. The true believers will live in this beautiful city forever. It will never grow old, but will always be new and attractive. John is careful to reveal significant characteristics of this glorious city so that dedicated believers will be attracted to the magnificent wonders of this eternal city and lose all interest in the temporary enticements of this world (21:9-22:5).

God's grace and mercy are evident as John concludes this letter (22:6-21). It is a final statement about God's eternal Word. For the most part, Revelation reveals events that come after the present age of the churches (Rev. 4-22), yet in these verses John appeals to people living in this age to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior so they can enjoy the perfect paradise of God (22:17) and escape the torments of the Lake of Fire (22:15; cf. 21:8).

I. Description of the Eternal Kingdom – 21:1-8

A. Its Components – 21:1-2

1. A New Heaven and Earth – 21:1

21:1 – John received his eighth vision after the seventh bowl was poured out on Antichrist. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and earth had passed away. Heaven in this verse refers to the sun, moon, planets and other objects in the space of this universe (2 Pet 3:10-12). The first heaven and earth were contaminated by the sin of Satan and then Adam. Their sin had serious consequences for all creatures on earth (cf. Gen. 3:14ff; Rom. 8:22).

The universe as known by man today will not be the universe of eternity; it will incur major changes. There is a debate among Bible believers regarding the way that God will make these changes. Will the elements no longer exist or will they be melted and reformed. If the first is true, then the new heaven and new earth will brought into existence out of nothing by the Word of God as it was in the beginning (cf. Gen. 1:1ff). If the second is true, then the old universe will be purged of sin by fire and God will refashion it into the paradise that is described in these last two chapters. Both sides have valid points, so no one should be dogmatic, but should be gracious as they weigh the arguments of both views.

The arguments for a complete removal of the present universe and a re-creation of it are these:

- (a) The language of Christ indicates that the heaven and earth are going to pass away (Mt. 24:35).
- (b) Peter says the heavens will pass away, the elements will melt and earth and its works will be burned up (2 Pet 3:10).

- (c) John says the present heaven and earth will flee from the presence of Christ and no place will be found for them (Rev. 20:11).
- (d) The Old and New Testaments speak of a new heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13).

The arguments for melting the elements of the present universe by fire to remove the effects of sin and then taking these same elements to form the new heaven and earth are as follows:

- (a) The verb, “making,” suggests the progressive work of God in carrying out this task (Rev. 21:5).
- (b) The word “new” most often stresses the idea of newness of quality, not newness of time. It suggests the idea of something new (good) arising from the old (bad). This same word is used by Paul to speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. God does not annihilate the old sinful man, but the Holy Spirit regenerates and indwells him so that the new man replaces the old man (2 Cor. 5:17).
- (c) The first heaven and earth were created ex nihilo (out of nothing). If God completely eliminates the first heavens and the first earth, it will take another divine fiat to create the new heavens and new earth, which is possible, but it is not stated in Scripture. It is an argument from silence.
- (d) Peter says the old heavens and earth will be on fire and the elements will melt by fervent heat (2 Pet 3:10-12), but what does that mean? The “elements” will melt, but will they disappear? It is known that heat and fire cannot destroy matter, but it can cause it to change forms. If this is so, God could take the old elements that are melted and form them into something new.

There will be no sea in the new earth. The “sea” has connotations of sin (Isa. 57:20-21; Rev. 13:1). It is not evil in itself, but symbolizes evil. The only water mentioned in connection with the new earth is the river of life, which is found in the new city (cf. 22:1). The present earth is covered with water on 70% of its surface, but before the flood in Noah’s day a mist watered the earth (Gen. 2:6). Possibly the new earth will return to some conditions like those of the Garden of Eden.

2. A New Jerusalem – 21:2

21:2 – John saw the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. This is the ninth and final vision that he saw after the seventh bowl was poured out. This is the city for which Abraham hoped. He had faith in God that someday his journey from Ur of the Chaldeans would take him this place (Heb. 11:10-16). This city is prepared like a bride in its beauty and it is called the wife of the Lamb (21:2, 9). This city is the place that Christ is preparing for His own people (John 14:1-3). The city is the gathering of redeemed people. The term “bride” in this context does not single out the church saints from other believers, but after the Millennial Kingdom the “bride” will include all saints. A greater description of this city will begin in a few verses (21:9-22:5).

B. Its Characteristics – 21:3-8

1. A New Relationship – 21:3

21:3 – John hears a loud voice from the throne in heaven telling him to notice the significance that the tabernacle of God is among men. This means that God, the Father, will be dwelling among believers in the Eternal Kingdom. This will be as it was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, but when sin entered the world, a great chasm came between God and the people that He created. God separated Himself from them because they were sinful and He was holy. His holiness would not be able to tolerate their sin in His presence; He could no longer dwell among them or they would be destroyed. He would speak to them in dreams and visions, but He would not dwell with them. No one could come into His presence, except Moses, and even that was restricted.

When He instructed Moses to build a tabernacle in the wilderness, a new dimension of His relationship with sinners took place. God dwelt in the midst of the Israelites in that tent (Lev. 26:11-12). He was close to them, but His holiness demanded that the Israelites keep their distance from Him. Only the high priest

could come into the most holy place of the tent where He dwelt and that was permitted only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The high priest had to have the blood of a proper sacrificial animal to cover his sins before he could come into the presence of God. In the Gospels, God made further provisions to bridge the gap between Himself and sinners by sending His Son to dwell in the midst of His people (John 1:14). To dwell in the presence of sinners, Jesus could not dwell with sinners in the garments of His divine glory or they would perish; He had to take on the robe of human flesh. The supreme purpose for Jesus to dwell among sinners was to die for their sins so they could be made holy, which was done on the cross. Those who receive His blood to wash away their sins are made holy. As a result, He and His Father sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in those that were made holy (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19; Rev 7:14-15). Now God the Spirit dwells in all believers. He could not do this until Jesus shed His blood for the sins of mankind. The blood of animals could only cover their sins, but Jesus' blood washes their sins away. However, believers still sin, so every trace of sin must be removed from their lives before God the Father will dwell with believers, not only believers from Israel, but believers from all nations (the word for "people" in this verse is plural). However those who reject the blood of Jesus Christ will remain unholy and will never be able to enjoy the presence of God.

2. A New Environment – 21:4-5

21:4-5 – There will be no tears in the Eternal Kingdom of God. Literally, every tear (singular) will be wiped away. There will be no death, no sorrow, no crying and no pain in the Eternal Kingdom. John resorted to the use of negatives to show the stark difference between the harsh conditions of this world from the blessed conditions of the Eternal Kingdom. All suffering and death are the result of sin, but when all sin is removed, God will provide a glorious new way of life. God promised, "I make all things new." Life will not be the same in the Eternal Kingdom. It will be a life filled with love, joy, peace and every blessing that people crave to have in this life (cf Gal 5:22-23). John was so overwhelmed by God's revelation to him that he had to be reminded to record this good news: His words are faithful and true.

3. A New Inheritance – 21:6-8

21:6 – God announces to John in this vision that His work of regeneration is done. He will renew the whole creation. How will this be possible? He is the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8; 22:13), which are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. To explain what He means by these letters, He goes on to say that He is the beginning and the end. He is the beginning of all things (He created them) and He is the ending of all things (He will complete them). He will make all things new. He can do this for sinners, too! He created them and He can complete them by making them a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). He invites those who are thirsty (for truth) to partake of the water of life freely (Isa. 55:1; John 4:14; 6:35; 7:37). The sovereign God has chosen to give thirsty sinners a choice: they can choose to receive salvation from Him or choose to remain slaves to sin. He made them and He will renew them through the death and resurrection of His Son (Rom 6:4-8; 8:1; Eph 4:22-24).

21:7 – Those who are born of God by faith in Jesus Christ alone overcome the world (1 Jn 5:4-5). It is not done by his works of righteousness, but by the righteous works done by Jesus Christ on their behalf. Christ's righteousness is imputed to their account when they receive Him as their Savior and that makes them overcomers. Those who overcome the sins of the world, the flesh and the devil will inherit the blessings of a new life; they will be joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom 8:17). They will have a new relationship with God. He will be their Father and they will be His son (or daughter).

21:8 – Those not born of God will experience the second death, the penalty for their sins. God also is the beginning and ending of the life of every unrepentant sinner. He gave life to all sinners, so He is their beginning. When they reject His offer of eternal life, He will be their ending. He graciously provided them a way of escape from their sins, but if they reject His way of escape, He will send them to the Lake of Fire. This is an eternal place of torment for those who reject His Son as their Savior. Those that go to the

Lake of Fire are the fearful (cowardly), unbelieving, abominable, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars. They are *fearful* of receiving Christ, seeking the acceptance of His enemies (Mk 8:35-38). They are *unbelieving*, not accepting the truth that Jesus paid the penalty for all their sins. They are *abominable*, following the teachings of false prophets that work for Satan. They are *murderers*, killing innocent people through lust for power and pleasure (abortions). They are *fornicators*, embracing immoral lifestyles that are contrary to nature (Rom 1:24-32). They are *sorcerers*, who depend on drugs to perform their magic and arts. They are *idolaters*, who will worship the creature rather than the Creator (Antichrist). They are *liars*, who distort the truth to their own advantage. Lying may not seem to be such a serious sin, but liars also are included in two other lists (21:27; 22:15). The removal of unregenerate people is mandatory to keep the New Jerusalem from becoming like the old Jerusalem.

II. Description of the Eternal City – 21:9-22:5

A. Its Characteristics – 21:9-11

1. The Angel – 21:9

21:9 – Angels are ministering spirits to those who are heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). An angel, who poured out one of the bowls of wrath, offered to show John the Bride, the Lamb's wife. Earlier an angel, which poured out one of the bowls of wrath, showed John the judgment of the great harlot (17:1). Since the words used in both cases are almost identical, it may have been the same angel that came to John. Whatever, what is said of the Bride of Christ is a significant contrast to that which was said about the great harlot.

2. The Bride – 21:10

21:9-10 – John is carried away by this angel to a high mountain in a prophetic vision to see the holy city, the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven (cf 4:2; 17:3). The Bride, the wife of the Lamb, is considered by some to be the Church (Eph 5:27). The Bride is the Church now and during the Millennial Kingdom, but after the Millennial Kingdom, the Bride is extended to include these believers as well: Old Testament believers and all those that become believers during the Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom. The Bride is the New Jerusalem, a literal city coming down from Heaven (21:2). Though it is not stated as such, perhaps all believers will be taken to Heaven before God destroys the old heaven and earth. Possibly they will enter the New Jerusalem at that time. After God makes the new heaven and earth, the believers will descend from Heaven in the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the eternal home of all believers. It is the city that Abraham anticipated when he left Ur of the Chaldeans (Heb 11:10, 16).

Some argue that this section refers to the city in the Millennial Kingdom rather than the city in the Eternal Kingdom, but this line of reasoning does not fit well with the context and chronology of this section. The New Jerusalem will not be on the earth during the Millennial Kingdom. Conditions on the earth and in the New Jerusalem are too different for this to be true. However, some argue that it could exist as a huge satellite to orbit around the earth during the Millennial Kingdom. If so, it would exist as the home of resurrected saints during the Millennial Kingdom. This might explain the need for a high wall and angels at the gates (21:12). If the city is orbiting around the earth, conditions in the city could well be different than those on the earth. Hence there will be no temple in it (21:22), while there is one on earth (Ezk 40-48); the glory of God will illumine the city so there will be no night there, while the nations on earth will walk in the light of it (21:23-25); the nations will bring their glory and honor into it (21:26), but guarding angels and high walls will keep the unclean out of it (21:27); the leaves of the tree of life will be used for the healing of the nations (22:2); and there will be no curse in the city, because the throne of God and of the Lamb are in it (22:3). These verses give some evidence that the eternal city could be present, but not on earth, during the Millennial Kingdom. But the context of this chapter speaks of the Bride when she

comes down from Heaven after the Millennial Kingdom and after God made the new heavens and new earth. Also, the New Jerusalem is the center of the universe, so it seems the earth revolves around it.

3. The Glory – 21:11

21:11 – The chief characteristic of this eternal city is the glory of God. Every aspect of this city speaks about the glories and virtues of God. This city is constructed out of beautiful stones that reflect the beauty of God. The dazzling light of the city was like that of a jasper stone, so bright and clear that it will have no need for the sun or moon to bring light into it; the glory of God will illumine the entire city and the nations of earth will walk in its light (21:23; Isa 6:3; 1 Jn 1:5). The clear jasper stone could symbolize the flawless character of God.

B. Its Architecture -21:12-14

1. The Wall – 21:12-13

21:12-13 – The city has a very high wall surrounding it. This is a literal wall surrounding a literal city. Many ancient “well-walled” cities are now in ruins, but the walls of the New Jerusalem will never be destroyed. It has twelve gates with an angel at each gate to keep out anything that would defile it (cf 21:27). The gates of the New Jerusalem may correspond to the gates of the millennial city (Ezk 48:31-34). The gates of the city will be named after the twelve tribes of Israel. This shows the prominent place that Israel will have in this city. There are three gates on each of the four sides of the wall providing easy access for its citizens.

2. The Foundations – 21:14

21:14 – There are twelve foundations in the wall of the city and each one is named after an apostle. This shows the prominent place of the Church in the city (cf Eph 2:20). The foundations of the wall consist of precious stones (cf 21:19-20). The New Jerusalem will be the residence of all saints, but special recognition is given to Israel in the gates and to the Church in the foundations.

C. Its Dimensions – 21:15-17

21:15-17 – The angel that talked to John measured the city with a golden reed and it was 12,000 furlongs long, wide and high: between 14,000 to 1,500 miles on each side. Since it is foursquare, it is in the shape of a cube. The dimensions of this city remind one of the vastness of God’s love for His people (Eph 3:18). The walls are 144 cubits or 216 feet, but the text does not indicate if this is its height or width. Comparing the height of the city, the height of the walls is minuscule: 216 feet to 1500 miles. If 216 feet is the width of the walls, then it fits better with the height of the city.

D. Its Materials – 21:18-21

1. The Wall – 21:18a

21:18a – The wall is of jasper, clear as crystal, like the appearance of God (cf 4:3).

2. The City – 21:18b

21:18b – The city in general is made of pure gold with no impurities, so it is clear like glass. The purity of the materials is symbolic of the purity of God in His holiness. This city is unrivaled to any city on earth where true treasures will exist in abundance forever. The treasures of earth will seem like nothing in comparison to the quality and beauty of the treasures in the New Jerusalem. That is why Jesus told His followers not

to lay up treasures on earth. The treasures that the believer will have in the New Jerusalem are worthy of every sacrifice that he makes with the treasures that he has in this life (cf Mt 6:19-20). A wise person will spend his treasures, whether great or small, to spread the Good News of salvation. This will show one's love to God for His great gift and it will show one's love to his neighbor so he can receive this gift and become a citizen in this stunning city of beauty.

3. The Foundations – 21:19-20

21:19-20 – The foundations of the wall consist of precious stones that beautify the city. John could see all the foundation stones, so they are not planted deep in the earth. It is more likely that the city is hung in space so all of its beauty is visible to the eye. It is not certain the significance of each stone, but the stunning colors of the stones will add to the splendor of the crystal clear jasper walls of the New Jerusalem.

4. The Gates – 21:21a

21:21a – The twelve gates are made of twelve pearls; one pearl for each gate.

5. The Street – 21:21b

21:21b – The street is made of pure gold like the city, clear like glass. This street may go to all parts of the city or it may be the main street that connects the gates to the throne of God.

E. Its Nature – 21:22-22:5

1. The Subjects of Worship – 21:22

21:22 – In the New Jerusalem, God the Father and the Lamb (His Son) will replace the Temple. There will be no need for a temple. The saints will be able to worship God the Father and His Son face to face. That means there will be no need for ordinances to remind the worshipper of the Lord (cf 1 Cor 11:16ff). Worship will be different for both the saved and unsaved in the Millennial Kingdom. They will have ordinances and sacrifices for the people to keep at the Temple in the Millennial Kingdom (Zech 14:16-21). They will be required to worship the Lord with sacrifices at the Feast of Tabernacles every year.

2. The Source of the Light – 21:23-26

21:23-26 – The New Jerusalem will have no need of the sun or moon for light because the glory of the Lord will give it light (21:11) and the Lamb will be its light in a physical as well as in a spiritual sense (cf Jn 1:7-9; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35; 1 Jn 1:5-7). Nations (Gentiles) will worship God by bringing their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem. In addition, the gates shall never be shut since there is no night in the eternal city and angels stand guard at each gate (21:12).

3. The Selection of Citizens – 21:27

21:27 – All impurity will be banned from the city. Only believers that have their names in the Lamb's book of life will be allowed to enter it (cf 20:15). They have been cleansed from all sin by the shed blood of the Lamb of God (1:5; 7:14; cf Jn 1:29; 1 Jn 1:7). They have the name of the New Jerusalem written on them (3:12). These are the citizens of that blessed city (cf Phil 3:20; Col 1:13).

4. The Source of Life – 22:1-5

a. The River – 22:1

22:1 – A pure river of life shall come from the throne of God and of the Lamb, who rule together in the Eternal Kingdom. The river of life is symbolic of the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son (Jn 14:16; 16:7). Water is the symbol of the Spirit who is the source of spiritual life (Jn 3:5; 4:13-14; 7:37-39). The river is crystal clear to portray the pure work of the Holy Spirit. He produces the divine life in the believer (Rom 8:11). He satisfies the deep spiritual desires of a person so that he will never thirst again (cf Jn 4:14; 6:35).

b. The Tree – 22:2

22:2 – The tree of life is the same as the one that was in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:22, 24). It is for the healing or health of the nations. It represents the bountiful provisions (both physical and spiritual) that are available for those in the Eternal Kingdom. It may also be a blessing for the health of the nations in the Millennial Kingdom.

c. The Throne – 22:3

22:3 – The curse placed upon the earth will be removed. Death is gone. Life has replaced it. The throne of God and of the Lamb insures the protection and prosperity of His people. God's servants will serve Him eternally.

d. The Light 22:4-5

22:4-5 – The saints will see God's face, because His name is written on their foreheads (3:12). They belong to Him. Night will not exist in the New Jerusalem. There will be no need for the light of a lamp or of the sun, because the glory of God will give light to the city (cf 21:23). The sin that brought darkness into the lives of all people and separated them from God will be removed forever from those who put their faith in Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. These conditions will last forever because they will reign with Christ forever.

III. Description of the Eternal Judge – 22:6-21

Three things are revealed about the eternal Judge that should be considered very seriously.

A. His Coming Is Imminent – 22:7, 12, 20

His coming could happen suddenly at any time. That is the meaning of "come quickly." When He comes, He will bless those that have kept the sayings of this prophecy (22:7). He will reward the believers according to their works (22:12). It seems these rewards will be an eternal blessing for the believers. Now that is no small reward. Jesus repeats His imminent coming one more time (22:20), so this is an important truth for everyone to know.

B. His judgments Are Irreversible – 22:10, 11

Whether His judgments bless or curse a person, they cannot be changed. Since these prophecies are not sealed, anyone who is interested can know what they must do to avoid His judgments and receive His rewards. When He comes, or when a person dies, no changes in that person's life is possible; His judgment of each person at that time will continue throughout eternity. There is no purgatory which can change a person and improve his situation. He that is unjust will remain unjust. He that is filthy (with sins) will continue to be filthy. He that is righteous will be righteous. He that is holy will still be holy. A person is made righteous when he asks Jesus to be His Savior; he receives Jesus' righteousness as a gift so he can be a citizen of the New Jerusalem. Jesus also makes a person holy when He is received as Savior.

C. His Authority Is Invincible – 22:13-19; cf Mt 28:18**1. His Authority Is Eternal – 22:13**

How can it be said that Christ's authority is eternal? He is eternal. He is the beginning of all things and He will continue to be when all things come to their end (22:13). Since He is eternal, His authority is over all things that He created from the beginning to the end. He is the final authority. His authority is eternal. As a result His authority is invincible

2. His Authority to Bless – 22:14-15

Christ blesses those that **"wash their robes"** so they can have the right to the tree of life. Some Greek texts of 22:14 say He blesses those that **"do His commandments"** so they can have the right to the tree of life. So which one agrees with the rest of Scripture? "Wash their robes" is clearly stated in an earlier passage in Revelation where people from all nations "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Sins cannot be removed by good works (Eph 2:8-9), but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7). Access to the tree of life is not granted to those who do good works. Jesus said He does not accept those people, even if they have done powerful works in His name (Mt 7:21-23). However, if "doing His commandments" refers to the fruit of a saved person, then it would be doctrinally correct, but that does not readily come to mind. The obvious interpretation would lead a person to believe salvation is given to those who keep the commandments. This was the problem that the rich young ruler had (Mt 19:16-24) However, it is clear that Christ's authority that blesses the believers will keep the unbelievers from entering the gates of His city (22:14-15).

3. His Authority as King – 22:16-17

He sent His angel to give this message to John for the churches, so they may know how to be prepared for His coming as their King. He is the King that God promised would come from David's family. He is the morning star that will appear in the darkened sky before the dawn of a new day (22:16). Yes, He will come for His Church in the dark hour before the Tribulation to bring His Bride to her Father's house for marriage. After He receives the scroll from His Father and begins to open it, seven years of Tribulation will immerse the earth in distress and darkness. Then He will return with His Bride and with great authority He will destroy His enemies that still remain on the earth. At last a new day or era will begin when He rules the earth for a thousand years. As a result of this good news the Spirit and the Bride urge those that hear this message to come. And those who receive this good news will tell others to come. And those whose souls are thirsty for truth are invited to come and drink of the water of life freely (22:17).

4. The Authority of His Words – 22:18-19

The authority of the words in this prophecy come from the Father to His Son and carries a severe warning. Anyone that adds to these words will have the plagues of this prophecy added to him. And anyone that takes away from the words of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the book of life and from the holy city and from the blessings promised in this prophecy.