
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

Revelation 21:9-27: “The Lord God Almighty is the Temple!”

General idea: God is Awesome! The angel who held the judgment bowls took John up in spirit on a tour of Heaven and showed him the wonder of wonders. It was vastly overwhelming and he had no words to express to us what he saw. He was shown the bride of the Lamb, and then taken to a great high mountain so he could see the vastness of the great city of Jerusalem descending from God. John saw God's glory everywhere. The wonders that were seen sparkled like fine gold and twelve precious gemstones like clear jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysalides, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. He saw its gates and walls, its foundations and all whose names are written into these structures that cannot be described. The angel measured everything for John, seeking to help him grasp all of this splendor so he can take it back as hope to his people and to us who would come later. The gates that never close were made up from one pearl, and the streets were paved with transparent gold. Yet, there was no temple as he expected; instead, it was God Himself, The Almighty, the Lamb, who was the Temple. He was so radiant by His glory that no natural or artificial light was needed—no sun or moon or lamp. Thus, the nations of earth and its leaders would come together and walk in His Light. Because of this, there was no evil, no shame, no doubt, and no dishonesty—only His true followers who see and claim Christ as LORD!

Vs. 9-27, Contexts: This passage is the other bookend to chapter four that shows us God's heaven, holiness, glory, throne, power, and His purpose for all eternity! Ancient speakers would often give exaggerated, glorious praise to their city or their capital, such as Rome or Athens or Jerusalem. Here, John is using such wording to describe God's place—heaven—that can't be exaggerated (Isa. 60; Rev. 15:1).

God's purpose is also being revealed for His Church and a hope for us of things to come. All things are under Christ; His Rule is supreme in a glorified creation! He is the Deliverer and will deliver us! The climax of our eternal dwelling, New Jerusalem, unfolds before John in its lavish detail and splendor, the abode for the faithful, Heaven for all eternity, wonders surpassing wonders. This is a reflection of the Garden of Eden, our partnership and unstained relationship with God the Creator and Sustainer, and the central figure, Christ the Lamb as LORD—His radiant glory and the blessings He bestows upon us now as hope, and as reality when we are called home (Psalm 48; Ezek, chaps 40-48; Amos 9:13-15; Rom. 2:7, 5:2, 8:18-29, 11:36, 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:10-11; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:15-20, 27; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14; Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:1-10; 2 Pet. 1:19; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 11:15; and Tobit 13:9-18).

Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Bride*. There is a promise of deliverance and reward for being faithful as Christ takes the Church as His bride, and the dowry, which He paid on the cross. A bride would spare no expense to present herself in the best way possible; hence, we understand the way John uses the language here. This is not only an expression of God's intimacy and agency with us, but also a contrast between the horror of evil and the joys of goodness. In Him, we are cleansed, saved, and redeemed. We belong to Him; thus, our church—His Church—must be sanctified to Him (Isa. 25:6-9; Matt. 22:2, 26-29; 24:21-27; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Eph. 5:26; Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 5:15-24; 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 John 3:3; Rev. 7:17; 19:1-10).
- *Carried me away in the Spirit*. This means "spiritual exaltation," possibly as in *charismatic* worship. However, John did not solicit this vision; God gave it to him. The Holy Spirit provided John the visions and took him to places he could actually see. Thus, he is recording authentic images he saw in reality; this was no dream (1 Chron. 25:1-6; Psalm 48:2; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12-14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 24; Acts 10:10; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:1-3; 21:10).
- *Mountain*. This meant God meets man, and refers to a special meeting place between God and man exemplified by the burning bush and Moses. This also means the visibility and immenseness of God. (Ex. 15:17; 19:1-25; Psalm 48:1; 68:15-16; Ezek. 28:14; 40:2; Joel. 2:1; Micah 4:1; Matt. 4:8; Rev. 14:1).
- *Glory of God*. This means God is Awesome! This is God's majesty, beauty, eminence, power, and authority that figuratively and literally radiates from the universe. This is who God is and how He appears to man (Ex. 16:10; 24:16-17; 40:34; Isa. 6:3; 40:3; 60:1-22; Habakkuk 2:14; Zech. 2:5; John 1:14; Rev. 4:1-12; 15:8).
- *Cubits....* Cubits refer to about 18 inches, the length of an average forearm in that time.
- *Twelve*. Twelve times twelve is also a depiction of perfection and alludes to the twelve tribes of Israel; twelve also refers to God's people. This has nothing to do with the Zodiac (Ezek. 48:31-35; Acts 1:15-26; Eph. 2:20).
- *Precious jewel* indicates an image of the breastplate of Aaron's priestly wardrobe that reflects God's majesty and beauty. This is meant to show us the beauty and magnificence of heaven because it reflects the glory of God. This imagery can only give us a grasp of an eternal, astounding concept because our minds are not capable of understanding; thus, we associate Him with what we can know and comprehend with what precious and valuable substances that were known then. God is far more valuable and precious than any of these; He is beyond our comprehension. This imagery is not meant to express human wealth or extravagant living; this is about the glory of God and how He cares for and protects us. Even if we could pick up the

jewels and put them in our pockets, there is nothing we can buy that has not already been given to us (Ex. 28:15-21; Rev. 4:3).

- *Twelve gates...foundations*. This is also a depiction of God's protection, glory, and inclusiveness. Ancient cities had walls and gates to protect its inhabitants from attack. It was security. Here, God is our security and nothing can harm us; we are protected in Him forever. This also harkens to the Promised Land, as there are no more wanderings. The twelve refers to the completeness, continuity, and community of God's people in Christ (Ezek. 48:31-35; Rev. 7:4-8).
- *City walls*. This refers to protection from enemies. All the important cities had walls in the ancient world. It is not literal because God's city has no confines (Isa. 60:18; Zech. 2:4-5).
- *Names of the twelve apostles*. This may signify that the city is a reflection of God as corresponding to the Church's purpose to glorify God. This can also be an honor statement, or both (Eph. 2:20; Heb. 10:11).
- *Measuring rod*. This referred to a surveyor's tool, usually made from the cane plant, a type of bamboo that grew beside the Jordan River, and grew to a consistent 20 feet, hence why it was used in this way. Here, it is gold, referring to the eminence and awe of God and His promises to us (Ezek. 40:2-4; 43:10-11; Zech. 2:1-2).
- *Measure the city*. This term refers to God's omniscience (He is all knowing)—that He cares and is active and involved in our lives, both personally and collectively as a Church. This also refers to God's power and ability, and that all things are under His control; thus, it also meant hope and staying power so we and John's people can have endurance for the future. This meant a lot to a persecuted people (Isa. 54:2-3; Ezek. 41:7; 48:35).
- *Laid out like a square/furlongs* means "symmetry," and that God's presence is always with us! God's intimate dwelling place is absolute perfection; our Heaven is too! These dimensions are obviously not literal; rather it is a depiction of perfection, total excellence. The Temple's inner sanctum—the holy of holies—was a perfect cube, which was a mere reflection thereof (1 Kings 6:20; Ezek. chaps 40-41; 48:16, 32-34; Rev. 22:4).
- *Each gate made of a single pearl*. Here is a much-heard expression, the "pearly Gates," which means "absolutely pure."
- *The city of pure gold... as glass*. The Jewish mindset then believed that saying how vast and magnificent was the Temple was a way of praising God. This also refers to how the glory of God reflects through and through, and how people praise God. (Psalm 48:12-13; Ezek. 40:3-42:20; Zech 2:1-5).

- *Precious stone* also alludes to the twelve tribes, represented by the twelve jewels on Aaron's breastplate; here it means God's people. This is very astounding and elaborate in human terms, perhaps referring to His Throne; our heaven to be is more precious and elaborate than we could ever imagine. The twelve signifies the twelve tribes and God's people. This also referred to righteousness and holiness displaying God's glory (Ex. 28:17-21; Josh. 4:2-3; Isa. 54:11-12; Rev. 17:4).
- *Street of the city was of pure gold.* The language suggests that being well planned out is the theme of the great Roman cities. This also means holy and that nothing can mock God. This is also a character statement suggesting that godly character comes from endurance, as a path in our walk with God, and our way of life for the here and now too. It is interesting to note that if all impurities were removed from gold, it would be translucent (Prov. 4:18; Isa. 35:8; 54:11-12; Acts 14:22; Rev. 11:8; a similar description is found in Tobit 13).
- *Temple.* The Temple of God represented God's presence on Earth and hope for His people. This is not where He lives, as He is omnipresent and thus cannot be confined; rather, it is His representative and a place where people God's chosen people, can go for worship. The restoration of the Temple after the exile was extremely important and many confuse that with the Temple that needs to be restored now before Christ comes back. However, because He is our Temple, this is not the case now. Now we are in God's home; there is no need for a temple as we are His temple now; when we die, we'll be in the real thing (Zech. 14:21; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Heb. 10:11; Rev. 4:1-5:14).
- *Sun or moon.* This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 60:19-20 that so much of this passage draws from. Possibly means in context, the light of the world (Gen. 1:3; John 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:6).
- *Glory.* God's is unchanged, always perfect. His light lights the world and universe. The city itself reflects God's splendor and glory, and it both spiritually and physically illuminates, along with *Temple*, the wording signifying where the presence of God does dwell. This also denotes how the Church is supposed to be—glorifying God (Lev 26:11-13; Isa. 60:1-22; 66:12; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 14:16-19; Hag. 2:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; Rev. 3:9; 4:6-8).
- *The Nations* refers to the cultural diversity of those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. God is inclusive; He loves all people (Isa. 60:3-12; Luke 13:29; Eph. 2:20).
- *Bring their splendor.* Refers to tribute—possibly praise and worship to God (Isa. 66:12; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 14:16-19).

- *Gates will never be shut.* This is also a depiction of God's protection because gates were closed at night. There is no night or darkness either figuratively or literally. Instead of attackers, these gates receive the faithful, tributes, and blessings (Isa. 60:11, 19-20; Ezek. 46:1; Matt. 25:31-46).
- *No night* is associated not just with physical darkness, but with such darkness as sin, demons, thieves, sorcery, and wickedness that God shuts out and away from Him and His faithful, for He is Holy (Rev. 18:11-19).
- *Nothing impure/defileth/unclean.* There will be no abominations before God or His people. This refers back to that only those who purified themselves and sacrificed could enter God's Temple, and only the High Priest—once a year—could enter the inner sanctum. Now, the real one is open to all who are His, as the whole city is His and in Him (Zech. 14:21; Joel 3:17; Matt. 7:2-5; Rom. 14:14; Heb. 10:29)!
- *What is shameful* refers to sin and the punishment of no entrance into Heaven. This is His divine judgment, and possibly refers to Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 32:22; Isa. 65:17; 66:15-22; Mal. 4:1; 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; 2 Pet. 2:6; 3:7-13).

Thoughts and Applications:

Consider that these precious gemstones were the best of the best; there was nothing more valuable for an ancient person to conceive of or to pursue further. This combination of jewels, for the Hebrews, was reserved only for Aaron and then the high priests that followed. This splendor was beyond monetary worth; it represented a relationship and a duty that is now available for us all. God's glory, referring to our intimacy with God, is what is most precious—not the stones that merely represent His preciousness!

Reflect on the magnificent beauty of what is described. It is heaven or is it the Church? Literalists see it as heaven, and the non-literalists see it as the role of the Church; fights are waged over it. But, biblical imagery often has more than one point to convey and this is an example of that. It is both, in my humble opinion; it is heaven as best as mere human words can present it for us, and it is what God asks us to be, to show His splendor for His glory as we lead and manage His church. So, the real issue at stake here is this: do we reflect His glory and holiness or do we stay in the night and darkness? Be the light bearer! This is what our Lord and Savior, who has created heaven for us, asks us to be in the meantime.

The Two Prevailing Views: (Chapters twenty-one and twenty-two deal with the literal versus the non-literal interpretation of Scripture)

The Literalist View: They see this passage as a very literal description of New Jerusalem which is Heaven being illustrated—the eternal home for Christians.

This is about our inheritance and hope, what is to come, about living in the glory of God for eternity. Some see this a wooden, literal description of heaven, and others as a best-as-can-be representation of it. *Measure the city* is seen as the proof text to this as referring to heaven.

The Non-Literalist View: They see this passage as obviously not literal, but rather symbolic as God dwells among us. They say much of this passage draws from Isaiah 60, and it was not meant to be literal then, thus probably is not meant to be literal for us now, either. How can a person breathe on a high mountain? Or, these dimensions of the city would be too small and/or impractical due to its architectural inconstancies to our understanding of natural laws and physics. This New Jerusalem is not a description of Heaven, but rather the role and purpose of the Church to be the light bearers of Christ. Since the Holy of Holies is the tabernacle of God as He met with humanity, now the Church is what God uses as the means of dispensing His sacraments and modeling His holiness that He calls us to model to others. The Church is God's representation of His earthly presence as denoted by the statement the *names of the twelve apostles* (Eph. 2:2-21; Heb. 10:11).

The point in these views? Perhaps both views are what John had in mind and what the Spirit has for us. A description of heaven is something that words can't convey, but we need this hope and wonder. If we try the best we can, we still may not be able to grasp its reality; however, we can grasp its hope to help us through our daily grind of life. Thus, John lays out heaven so we can see its wonders and perfection. Furthermore, this is also what the Church needs to do in the meantime—represent God on earth. Oh, how we fail so greatly with that!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What is the most precious and valuable item to you, and why? What is vastly overwhelming for you? Stress, pain...? What about seeing or experiencing a wondrous event?

2. What do you think heaven will be like? Do you like the literal or the non-literal view? Why? How is this passage about the expression of God's intimacy?
3. How do righteousness and holiness display God's glory? How do you reflect the majesty and beauty of God? How should you?
4. How would you feel if you were to get an incredible glimpse of the hope and wonder of Christ Himself or of Heaven? Imagine Christ Himself living in a special room in the cathedral in Washington DC, but only one person—once a year—could go see Him?
5. How is God far more valuable and precious than what we see as valuable—such as money or power? Why do some Christians think that God is expressing His blessings to us through human wealth and/or extravagant living?
6. How does your church reflect the glory and holiness of Christ? Or, does your church stay in the night of darkness?
7. What does it mean to you and your church to come together to walk in His Light? How can you do this better?
8. How is God your security? How can the fact that nothing can harm you outside of His will, and that He protects you forever empower your faith more?
9. Christ is the light bearer (John 8:12); what does it mean for you to be the light bearer for Christ? What about your church? Why does the Church fail so significantly with that?
10. How does godly character result from endurance? What does our Lord and Savior, who has created heaven for us, ask us to do and be in the meantime?
11. How would you explain your walk with God as a path? What would that path be like? How can you make that path better? How can your walk with God be your way of life for the here and now too?
12. Reflect on the magnificent beauty of what is described in this passage. Now, consider and pray about ways you and your church can display His splendor for His glory as you lead and manage His church. When and how will you do this?

Be the light bearer!