

A New City

Bible Background • REVELATION 21:9–27

Printed Text • REVELATION 21:9–21 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 10:1–11

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the possibility of living in a new place, IMAGINE the richness and serenity of living in the New Jerusalem, and CELEBRATE God's provision of a new city for believers throughout eternity.

In Focus

When Katheryn entered her new home, she had to fight back the tears. Everything was so beautiful. As she walked from room to room, she marveled at the softly colored walls, the hanging plants, and the lovely marble floors. Barry had painted all of the rooms in her favorite colors. The kitchen was large and airy, and she could tell that the windows had been replaced. Small containers of herbs planted in brightly-colored ceramic bowls lined the large kitchen window.

Katheryn and Barry had only been married seven days and were just returning from their honeymoon. She knew he had picked out a house for them, but she was unprepared for how wonderful her new home was. Barry's job had transferred him to California right after they had started dating, but he had flown home faithfully twice each month.

While Katheryn knew that she would miss her family and friends back in New Jersey, there was no doubt in her mind that her Barry loved her and wanted to make her happy in their new life together.

Some of Katheryn's friends had teased her about waiting so long to get married. "You'll be an old maid before you know it," they teased.

Katheryn understood now that she had done the right thing by waiting. It may have taken her longer to get married than her friends, but God had provided her with a godly man.

Christians, the bride of Christ, can look forward to a wonderful home prepared by our Lord. How does thinking about the Christian's heavenly home affect your daily outlook?

Keep In Mind

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:14, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Bride (Revelation 21:9) *numphe* (Gk.) — A betrothed or newly married young woman

B. Apostles (v. 14) *apostolos* (Gk.) — God's messengers who encountered Christ, planted churches, and ministered to the new church

Say It Correctly

Chalcedony. kal-SHE-duh-nee.

Sardonyx. sar-DAW-nix

Sardius. SAR-dee-us.

Chrysolyte. KRIS-uh-lite.

Beryl. BER-el.

Chrysoprasus. KRIS-oh-pra-sus.

Jacinth. JAY-sinth.

Amethyst. AH-muh-thist.

KJV

Revelation 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

NLT

Revelation 21:9 Then one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come with me! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

10 So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.

11 It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone—like jasper as clear as crystal.

12 The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates.

13 There were three gates on each side—east, north, south, and west.

14 The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The angel who talked to me held in his hand a gold measuring stick to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.
16 When he measured it, he found it was a square, as wide as it was long. In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles.
17 Then he measured the walls and found them to be 216 feet thick (according to the human standard used by the angel).
18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass.
19 The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve precious stones: the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,
20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.
21 The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass.

The People, Places, and Times

New Jerusalem. The Israelites of old, along with all of God’s people down through the ages, longed for the coming time when we will live in complete, eternal peace. The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1–2) was predicted even before the exile ended (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). Devout Jews prayed regularly for the restoration of Jerusalem. Eventually, the idea of “New Jerusalem” came to symbolize hope for the Jewish nation. This new city would be a place built by God, where the righteous would dwell with Him in perfect peace forever. When speaking of a city, we are speaking of not only the physical infrastructure, but also the people who dwell in that city. In this sense, the new Holy City of Jerusalem is symbolic of the church as the redeemed Bride of Christ.

Background

After John’s vision of the new heaven and the new Earth, the believer’s final and eternal habitation, the angel, shows him a more specific picture: the church, here described as “the bride” (Revelation 21:9) and “the holy Jerusalem” (v. 10). The “new Jerusalem... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2) is now shown to be a realm of perfect life, beauty, bounty, and wholeness. This passage explains in graphic detail the implications of that glorious statement, “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them” (v. 3). The rich imagery used here and elsewhere in the Scriptures seeks to portray in shimmering detail how great the believer’s inheritance is: being with God Himself in all His glory! One might imagine the apostle Paul had this passage in mind when he said, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

At-A-Glance

1. Beautiful Bride (Revelation 21:9–11)
2. Beautiful Foundations (vv. 12–17)
3. Beautiful Walls (vv. 18–21)

In Depth

1. Beautiful Bride (Revelation 21:9–11)

The apostle John describes the church as the bride. What do we learn about the church's glorious identity from this term? If the church is Jesus' bride (for He indeed is the "husband" of v. 2), then she is bound and betrothed to Him in a holy and unbreakable covenant. This suggests that her duty is to love and respond to her husband, but more importantly it communicates the overwhelming love and commitment of Jesus Christ to His bride. If human beings consider themselves bound by the vows they take on their wedding day, how much more will Jesus consider Himself bound to His people, since in Him all God's promises are "yea" (2 Corinthians 1:20), and since He has sealed the covenant of marriage between God and His people with His own blood?

In the Old Testament, God's presence dwelt in Jerusalem and the people were blessed by His holiness and His favor. In the new heavens and the new earth, God will dwell in the midst of His people as never before. Christ, the great Mediator, will usher them into God's presence with robes of righteousness, and they will be thoroughly acceptable in His sight. How great is the love of the Father, and how secure is the identity of the saints!

What are the implications of the New Jerusalem, which is the bride and the church, descending out of heaven?

2. Beautiful Foundations (vv. 12–17)

The heavenly city that John saw is a picture of perfection. It has perfect dimensions, beautifully adorned with precious gems and gold. The heavenly city is protected with high, fortified walls. The 12 gates to the city are covered by 12 angels in order to ensure the city remains pure and unspoiled. The 12 gates echo the 12 gates in Ezekiel's new city, which represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the complete inclusion of God's people (Ezekiel 48:30–35).

However, one of the most interesting facts about the city is that it is built on 12 foundations, each one bearing the name of one of the 12 apostles, the first bearers of the Gospel. This is because only through the Gospel can one become a citizen of this heavenly city.

Why does the City of God need walls? To defend from attack? To exclude people from God's presence?

3. Beautiful Walls (vv. 18–21)

Twice in this small section of verses, John describes parts of the city both as being made of gold, and being clear as glass. As there is no such thing as transparent gold, we must assume John is using figurative language to try to describe just how amazing and wonderful this sight is. Here again, the number twelve is prominent, although John does not explicitly say what the number is to represent this time.

John describes the city's walls and gates, naming the beautiful precious stones that adorn them. The specific stones John names adorning the city's walls are meant to remind his audience of the twelve stones on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17–20). They are presented in a different order, and some names have changed, but the colors of the stones are consistent.

What is the purpose of sections of Scripture like this if they are figurative and not literal descriptions of heaven?

Search the Scriptures

1. How is John shown to be carried away to his vision of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10)?
2. What is the significance of the tribes of Israel and of the apostles to the New Jerusalem?

Discuss the Meaning

It is easy to get lost in the details of this passage, and to wonder to what extent the prophecy will be fulfilled literally or figuratively. It is important to remember, though, that the point and goal of all Scripture is to reveal God to His people. What does this passage teach us about God? What kind of Person is He to make a city like this?

Liberating Lesson

Many of us seek to provide a good life for our families and loved ones. During times of economic and political uncertainty, that goal can seem far out of reach. We must understand that prosperity and peace are not the same thing. True stability and peace are found by relying on God for guidance. The Word of God is a solid foundation that will allow us to find peace and build a good life both now and for eternity.

Application for Activation

The heavenly city had twelve gates that were always open. This image serves as a reminder of God's desire for everyone to come into His presence and have a relationship with Him. As we strive to build our lives on a solid foundation, let us not forget to reach out to someone else and let him or her know that God is welcoming them to also come into His presence with open arms.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Revelation 21:9–21

9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Here John is approached by one of the seven angels who had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues. We are first introduced to these angels when one of the four beasts in heaven gave them the seven golden vials full of the seven last plagues, which are also called the wrath of God (Revelation 15:1). A vial is a bowl; this term is translated from the Greek word *phiale* (fee-AL-ay).

After those plagues, John told us of the fall of Babylon the great (Revelation 17–18), the triumph of the heavenly army led by Christ (Revelation 19), the binding, incarceration, and final judgment of Satan (Revelation 20) and then the passing away (the transformation) of the first heaven and earth, which were replaced by a new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1). After this renewal, John beholds the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (v. 2).

The angel who approaches John now is possibly the same angel who showed John the great harlot (Revelation 17:1). Commentators contrast the two sights: the great harlot sat on many waters—an indication of adultery or affections for many—while the holy city sat in one place, was able to be measured, and had undivided affection for her bridegroom. John saw the holy city in its entire splendor and likened it to a bride adorned for her husband (see v. 2). The angel came to John and bade him to follow so he could get a closer look.

In this verse, the angel invites John to come, proposing to show him the bride, the Lamb's wife. The Greek word *numphe* (noom-FAY) is translated "bride." It means a betrothed or newly married young woman. It signifies the close relationship between Christ and the church, also called the Lamb's wife. But as we shall find in the next verse, the name "bride" also refers to the holy Jerusalem, the City of God. Marriage imagery is used in the Old Testament to show a similar relationship between God and Israel; the word "bride" is one of the most important words used to refer to the Church. It normally signifies the relationship between Christ and the Church; here, however, we will see that "bride" is the Holy City of the New Jerusalem.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

In the spirit, John had been taken to the wilderness to see the great harlot (see Revelation 17:3), but now he is taken to "a great and high mountain" to have an unobstructed view of the great city, namely the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. This is similar to how Ezekiel is brought up to a "very high mountain" (Ezekiel 40:2) in his vision of a restored Jerusalem and Temple.

Both the body of believers and the city are referred to as the bride, the Lamb's wife. The fact is, in a sense, they are significantly alike. The holy Jerusalem is a city out of heaven; it is not heaven, but it possesses the features of heaven. It is the dwelling place of the resurrected bodies of the church (the redeemed bride), God, and Christ (Revelation 21:3; 22:3). The church is a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9); a human prefiguration of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the church makes up the City of God here on Earth (Hebrews 12:22). Therefore, the prepared bride (the Holy City) is a structure laid out as a city to provide a permanent dwelling place for the redeemed bride (the church), another structure in the image of God. One is in the form of a city, while the other is in human form, and both bear the presence of God.

Jesus promised to prepare a place for His followers in His Father's house (John 14:2–3; cf. Hebrews 11:10, 16). This city is undoubtedly the promised prepared place for the redeemed bride. Our bodies are our temporary habitations for our spirits and souls. The apostle Paul calls them "earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our earthly homes are also temporary, but we have a final dwelling place. This is the Holy City, a wonderful place Jesus has prepared for us in heaven.

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

Firstly, John's attention was drawn to the light of the city, whereby there was no darkness. The city housed the glory of God so much so that its illumination was like a most precious stone. In an attempt to put the preciousness into words, he writes that it is like a jasper stone. This is likely meant in terms of cost or rarity rather than color. Jasper stones come in many colors—red, yellow, and brown—but the author noted that the city's brightness was crystal clear.

12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

Next to its brightness, John is struck by the details of the city's walls. He notes its height and thickness, and the security provided thereby. He counts and makes note of the number of gates, each guarded by an angel, and that each gate is inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes. The gates' angel guardians are reminiscent of the cherubim set to guard the way into the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). There they guarded Adam and Eve from the Tree of Life, and here likewise, we will see the Tree of Life is also inside the city (Revelation 22:2, 14). One commentator surmised that the same arrangement used in the wilderness might have been used in the great city (Numbers 2). However, with the similarities between the prophet's mountaintop location, the enumeration of gates, walls, and their remarkable materials, it is more likely that John is calling on imagery from Ezekiel's vision of the restored city, which also had 12 gates named for the 12 tribes. Ezekiel even records which tribes' gates are on which wall of the city (Ezekiel 48:30–34).

The number 12 can signify human government; it is a perfect number, symbolizing God's power and authority. The number 12 is found 187 times in the Bible. The most prominent use is for the 12 tribes of Israel. Many other references to the number 12 are meant to directly or indirectly connect to the tribes, including the 12 apostles (Matthew 10:1), 12 memorial stones (Exodus 28:21), and 12 unleavened loaves in the Tabernacle (Leviticus 24:5–6).

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The word "apostles" in this verse derives from the Greek word *apostolos* (ah-POH-stowloce), which means "sent forth," referring to one who is sent forth with a message. An apostle can be specifically defined as one who: (1) has had an encounter with the resurrected Christ, (2) plants churches, and (3) and operates in the ministry with signs, wonders, and miracles. These twelve apostles are the twelve disciples (replacing Judas with either Matthias or Paul). Paul himself uses the image of an apostle as the foundation of the church in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:10). There, however, Paul also asserts that Jesus Christ is the true foundation of the righteous (v. 11).

Paul explains that while the infrastructure and discipleship of New Covenant believers was built up by the apostles, the one true Rock is Christ. John is describing a vision of the Church itself rather than of Christian doctrine as a whole. Therefore, it is appropriate to say the Church's foundation was laid by

the apostles. Since we speak of a building having a single foundation, it can be odd to hear of a place with 12 foundations. In ancient times, a foundation might be built up to the appropriate, level height by using several layers of carved stone. Each layer within the overall foundation could also be called a foundation.

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. 17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

Thirdly, John's attention was captured by the actions of the angel. The angel wasn't just taking John on a tour, but was measuring the city as they walked about it. Some commentators believe that the angel measured territory to ensure against enemy encroachment. Others believe that the angel measured the city simply as an exhibition of its beauty and proportion. The latter being supported by John's note of its largeness and perfect equal-ness. This measuring reed also recalls Ezekiel's Temple vision (Ezekiel 40:3). There, however, it was a simple normal measuring rod; here even such a common tool is made of gold.

The number 12 is again prominent: the city is a cube measuring 12,000 furlongs on each side, with walls that are 144 (which is 12 squared) cubits. A furlong (660 feet) is used to translate the Greek word stadion (607 feet), so this measurement for the city would total over 7 million feet or 1,380 miles. While the holy city in Ezekiel's Temple vision was roughly 12 furlongs to a side, this heavenly city is 1,000 times that size!

The cubic dimensions of the city are reminiscent of a key part of previous Temple architecture: the Holy of Holies. The Tabernacle's Holy of Holies was 10 cubits long, wide, and high. Solomon's Temple and Herod's Temple both enlarged this measurement to 20 cubits. This is also its size in Ezekiel's vision. Not only is this city larger by far, the note that all three of its dimensions are equal means this entire city is the Holy of Holies. Traditionally, only the high priest was allowed into this innermost sanctum of the Temple, and that only on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement. This spot was so holy because it was where heaven met earth. God declares it to be "the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet" (Ezekiel 43:7; cf. Revelation 22:3), the place where His presence is especially revealed to His righteous followers. As we can see from the Tabernacle's and the Temple's measurements, God has been expanding His presence among humanity since the beginning. Now on the Church Age, we are truly made one with Christ. The entire city, which is the Church, experiences the presence of God. None of the faithful are excluded from this most holy place. None have to travel to a specific spot to know Him. The entire city is filled with God's presence (cf. Revelation 21:3, 22).

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. 19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; 20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

Not only is John taken away by the splendor of the city wall's height and depth but he was struck by its décor. Previously, he wrote that light coming from the city was like jasper and then he noted that the wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold. The juxtaposition of the images of pure gold and clear glass show how overwhelming John's vision is. There are not words to adequately describe the glory of this heavenly city.

John takes the time to precisely name the stones of each foundational layer. The colors of each stone—reds, yellows, greens, and blues—are all arranged to mimic a rainbow. These specific stones are also reminiscent of the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17– 20). All the stones listed in the Septuagint translation of Exodus are listed here, though in a different order, except for three. John's list in Revelation lists those three as chalcedony (which is commonly red), chrysoprasus (which at the time referred to a yellowish-green gem), and jacinth (which at the time referred to a blueish stone). These still match up in color with Exodus' listings of carbuncle (red), ligure (yellowish-green), and agate (blue).

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

The city's wall and foundations were made from precious stones, and its streets are of pure gold—materials that could be hewn and fashioned as one saw fit. The city gates, however, are made of pearl, an item that does not need to be polished or cut. Even though pearls we know on earth are small—the largest one recorded is only two feet long and one foot wide—these pearls are big enough to carve out an entire city gate. This is where the image of heaven's "pearly gates" comes from. It is all one piece, complete, symbolizing the Church's purity.

Lastly, John remarks on the city's streets, which are "pure gold." The gold reminds us of how rich and extravagant all of heaven is. The purity, like the wholeness of the gates of pearl, reminds us of how Christ's Bride, the Church, the Holy City has been cleaned of all fault and blemish by the grace of God. This pure gold, however, is also transparent like glass, reminding John's audience of the brightness of God. Nothing in the Holy City will obscure God's brilliant glory.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

You Shall Be Comforted in Jerusalem
(Isaiah 66:6–14)

TUESDAY

God's Glory Revealed in Jerusalem
(Isaiah 66:18–22)

WEDNESDAY

City of the Living God
(Hebrews 12:18–29)

THURSDAY

Jerusalem, Joy of All the Earth
(Psalm 48)

FRIDAY

The Faithful City, the Holy Mountain
(Zechariah 8:1–8)

SATURDAY

God, Who Dwells in Unapproachable Light
(1 Timothy 6:11–16)

SUNDAY

The Holy City
(Revelation 21:9–21)