

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 50 - Chapter 21 Concluded

Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 21, and look at verses 9 through 14 as I speak to you. Here we find a physical description of the New Jerusalem that has descended from Heaven onto the new earth. Before we get involved with that description, I want to remind you about where we left off last time when I said that the final chapters of Ezekiel are NOT describing the New Jerusalem, but rather they are describing the Jerusalem of the current earth where Christ will reign for 1000 years; an era we call the Millennium or the Millennial Kingdom.

Dealing with these final 2 chapters of Revelation is both a delight and a mind-bending puzzle. Yet the Lord told us something quite emphatic through John to begin this amazing Book of Revelation that we need to hold onto as we consider its words:

^{CJB} Revelation 1:1 - 3 ¹ *This is the revelation which God gave to Yeshua the Messiah, so that he could show his servants what must happen very soon. He communicated it by sending his angel to his servant Yochanan, ² who bore witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah, as much as he saw. ³ Blessed are the reader and hearers of the words of this prophecy, provided they obey the things written in it! For the time is near!*

"Blessed are the readers and hearers of the words of this prophecy". It goes without saying that the readers and the hearers must take an intellectually honest approach to reading and hearing the words of this prophecy otherwise that which is intended to impart God's truth can be turned into gibberish. And despite the rising mantra within the secular world and even in some parts of the Church that faith in anything is a good faith, God's blessing only ever comes from believing what is true and holy, and not from believing that which sounds good but isn't.

Therefore it behooves us to make our best efforts to untangle the Book of Revelation using all the tools at our disposal and constructing our understanding of it from the bottom up and not the top down. To construct an understanding from the top down means to begin with a doctrine and then to reshape the words of John's Apocalypse to validate that doctrine; my hope is to avoid that.

I have mentioned during the several stages of our study of Revelation over the past year that the deep mysteries of this prophecy only come to light as we pass through various phases of human history when the prophesied events and circumstances of John's book happen; or at least conditions in the world that in earlier times made imagining how these events and circumstances were even possible, have emerged. Each passing century, then, allows something more to be gleaned from this awesome book. Perhaps no other event in human history since John wrote his Apocalypse has so dramatically reshaped the world, and has opened to the door for many of the heretofore unimaginable phenomena predicted, than the

return of Israel as a Jewish state. So the other thing we must always factor in when studying Revelation is how the Old Testament Prophets and their books are front and center throughout because it is their divine oracles that provide the context for understanding John's visions.

I begin today's lesson by telling you these things because when we finally complete our study in a few weeks, we will not have been able to decipher everything or answer every question, because more human history must yet unfold before we can. Even so there are things we can know provided we don't approach this book taking that top down approach. This is also why I've discussed with you the important differences between the two most popular, but opposing, theological worldviews of Revelation; one called Premillennialism and the other Amillennialism. Premillennialism takes the worldview that wherever rational and possible, the book should be taken in its most plain and literal sense. The Amillennialist worldview is that Revelation is purely symbolic, start to finish, and therefore must be taken and taught allegorically. My view is that not only should we take this book the way the earliest Church Fathers did (a Premillennial position), but we must also do our best to apprehend the meaning as the writer of Revelation intended it to mean. And the Jewish John had a very definite message he intended for his readers, and it came from a Jewish cultural mindset that revered and believed the ancient Hebrew prophets who foretold of the end of the world and even what comes thereafter.

When we follow that path it allows us to establish some broad but major mile makers that pour rather spontaneously out of the text, which then serves to enlighten what has much too often become needless confusion about the End Times. So, in light of Revelation chapter 21 speaking of the New Jerusalem appearing upon a new earth, let me set a few mile markers for you as a framework to better grasp what lies ahead for humanity.

The first mile marker is that at the end of the Battle of Armageddon, the Millennial reign of Christ begins. Also called the Millennial Kingdom, this 1000 year era takes place on the present earth as we know it (Revelation chapter 19 tells the elaborate story). The second mile marker is that because of the Armageddon conflict, Jerusalem will have been mostly destroyed and so a rebuilt Jerusalem will become the city from which Yeshua rules over the world's governments. The rebuilt city will have some substantial geographic differences to it in contrast with the current Jerusalem because the Mt. of Olives will have split into two halves, moved apart, and water will be flowing through the gap.

CJB Zechariah 14:3-4 ³ Then ADONAI will go out and fight against those nations, fighting as on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies to the east of Yerushalayim; and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, to make a huge valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

CJB Zechariah 14:8 ⁸ On that day, fresh water will flow out from Yerushalayim, half toward the eastern sea and half toward the western sea, both summer and winter.

This rebuilt Jerusalem of the Millennial Kingdom is NOT the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven that we see in Revelation 21. However it is the Jerusalem that Ezekiel describes in the final 8 chapters of his book of prophecy.

CJB Ezekiel 40:1 - 4 ¹ *In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month- this was the fourteenth year after the city [of Yerushalayim] was struck- it was on that very day that the hand of ADONAI was on me, and he took me there.* ² *In visions God brought me into the land of Isra'el and put me down on a very high mountain; on it, toward the south, it seemed that a city was being built.* ³ *That is where he took me, and there in front of me was a man whose appearance was like bronze. He had a flax cord and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway.*

⁴ *The man said to me, "Human being, look with your eyes, hear with your ears, and pay attention to all the things I am showing you; because the reason you were brought here is so that I could show them to you. Tell everything you see to the house of Isra'el."*

A third mile marker: the Millennial Jerusalem will have a glorious, literal, fully operational Temple as also described in Ezekiel, complete with a Priesthood of Levites.

CJB Ezekiel 41:1 *He brought me to the sanctuary and measured at ten-and-a-half feet the thickness of the walls on either side of its entrance, which was [also] the thickness of [the walls surrounding] the "tent" [that is, the sanctuary together with the Especially Holy Place].*

CJB Ezekiel 43:18-21 ¹⁸ *He said to me, "Human being, Adonai ELOHIM says, 'These are the regulations for the altar when the time comes to construct it, offer burnt offerings on it and splash the blood against it: ¹⁹ you are to give to the cohanim, who are L'vi'im descended from Tzadok and who approach to serve me,' says Adonai ELOHIM, 'a young bull as a sin offering. ²⁰ You are to take its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar, on the four corners of the ledge and on the molding all the way around; this is how you will purify it and make atonement for it. ²¹ You are also to take the bull which is the sin offering and have it burned up at the designated place [on the grounds] of the house, outside the sanctuary.*

The fourth mile marker: it is at the end of the 1000 years that Satan will be released from his captivity in the Abyss. He will lead a worldwide rebellion against Christ, but just as with Sodom and Gomorrah, God will miraculously send fire down from Heaven and the rebellion will be immediately put down and all the rebels destroyed. At this same time Satan will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, to remain captive there for all eternity (this is covered in Revelation chapter 20). The fifth mile marker: after destroying all the evil rulers and principalities that exist, Christ hands rulership of the earth that He has held for a 1000 years back over to The Father.

CJB 1 Corinthians 15:20-25 ²⁰ *But the fact is that the Messiah has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a man, also the resurrection of the dead has come through a man. ²² For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming; ²⁴ then the culmination, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father, after having put an end to every rulership, yes, to every authority and*

power. ²⁵ *For he has to rule until he puts all his enemies under his feet.*

The sixth mile marker: now God disassembles the earth and the entire Universe back to its elemental level, and remakes it into a new creation (Revelation chapter 21:1). The seventh mile marker: the New Jerusalem descends from Heaven onto the new earth. And as Revelation 21:22 says, this New Jerusalem will be missing something that all prior iterations of Jerusalem had; it will have NO TEMPLE. I mention this because perhaps the most popular position taken in modern times among Bible scholars (interestingly even among some Premillennialists) is that the Temple Ezekiel describes will be the Temple that exists within the New Jerusalem on the new earth. Yet John plainly says that the New Jerusalem will have NO TEMPLE. Both things cannot be true at the same time. So when we conflate Ezekiel's Temple with the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21, things can get rather confusing and out of sequence. We don't have to do that because as I have demonstrated to you Holy Scripture, when taken honestly, plainly, and as handed down to us, gives us a much clearer picture. It's only that humans have muddied the waters with our manmade traditions and doctrines.

Let's re-read a portion of Revelation chapter 21:

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 21:15 - end

As we try to make sense of what we have just read, keep in mind that the nature of the new earth and new Universe is very different from the earth and Universe we exist in today. So we have a real challenge of setting aside our commonly held notions of how the earth and the cosmos operates, because that is not how the new earth and cosmos operates. This section of Scripture is describing what we could loosely call the Eternal Era. That is, we find the earth and Universe have transformed into their "forever" state. We are given some hints and even some direct statements about what this Re-Creation will be like. However the only means John has to communicate these details to us is by using the terms of the physical world he lived in, in the late 1st century.

To emphasize the importance that we as his readers grasp that the new earth and heavens aren't like the old, verse 17 says: "He measured the wall at 216 feet by **human standards of measurement....**" Like some of you, I am a Science Fiction fan (have been since I was a child). What I especially enjoy is the attempt by the Sci Fi novel writers to draw word pictures of alien worlds and other dimensions and advanced technologies that do not exist. Yet these writers have nothing more to illustrate and communicate their creations than our common human experiences, vocabulary, and the physical tangible every day things that we are all familiar with. Modern Sci Fi films can take this a step farther with the amazing Hi-tech computer animations they employ that makes those manmade images seem real and thus can stir our imaginations in ways that only words on a page can't.

One of my favorite Sci Fi films is titled Interstellar, because near the end of it an astronaut is dragged into a Black Hole and it takes him into another dimension. Inside this dimension gravity and light are controlled by advanced but unknown beings in ways that to us seem impossible if not beyond our ability to comprehend. Using fabulous computer animations the film's creators came up with a fascinating model of what this dimension might look like, if our

eyes were even able to see such a thing. In other words, the writers and animators created a world that doesn't exist, in a dimension that might exist but is unknown to humans, but still they were confined to using "human standards of measurement" as well as human standards of communicating concepts that were anything but human or standard. This challenge is quite similar to what John faced as he attempts to convert the futuristic things he sees "in the spirit" in his divine visions, into mere pen and ink, using only what he had available: the ancient terms and illustrations that the readers of his day could grasp.

Therefore when it comes to trying to describe the realities presented to us in chapters 21 and 22 about the new earth and heavens, I dislike using words like figurative or symbolic, or physical or literal or spiritual, as we try to make sense of what is before us even though I have little other choice. That is because as we read John's words, the physical seems to have taken on characteristics of the spiritual, and the Heavenly has acquired some kind of earthly nature to it. The dynamics of this new earth and Universe that God will create are so dramatically and fundamentally different and at odds with all we know and can observe that the vocabulary doesn't exist to accurately portray it. It is almost as though Heaven and earth have melded together into a single entity. So let's see what we can reasonably glean from these extraordinary verses.

First: the size and shape of the New Jerusalem is clearly important because an angel comes with an instruction that John is to measure the city. In the Bible, to measure something means to ascertain the truth. So to measure a person, for example, is to determine the truth of who that person really is. John is measuring the New Jerusalem so that the truth of its underlying nature can be established. And yet the city does have definite dimensions. On the other hand as I shall soon show you, the typical English translations of these measurements of the city tends to mask some hidden meaning. The first thing to notice is the enormity of the city; 1500 miles is the usual translation. But the second thing to notice is that while the words say that the city is laid out as a square, in fact it is dimensionally a cube because we're told that the length, width AND height are all the same measurement. Is there significance in the fact that New Jerusalem is a cube? I believe there is. Solomon's Temple built the Holy of Holies as a cube with 20 cubits being its length, width and height. In Solomon's Temple this back room of the inner sanctuary acted as a barrier so that when God was present, mankind could not come near and defile Him. The Holy of Holies was accessed by man only once per year, and that by the High Priest. Even then the High Priest's task was mainly to ritually cleanse the Holy of Holies from defilement because although protected by those thick walls, the interior of that chamber could not 100% escape uncleanness. Even in the cleansing of the Holy of Holies, no matter how ritually clean the High Priest was, he could not wash away the iniquity that was housed inside his own body that sprang from Adam; so perfect cleanness of the Holy of Holies on earth was utterly impossible.

It seems that the New Jerusalem was built in Heaven in the shape of a cube to reflect the characteristics of the Holy of Holies. And the concept is that all of New Jerusalem is as holy and undefiled by sin as was the Holy of Holies. But even more important is that the lack of a Temple in the New Jerusalem indicates that all barriers between God and man have been removed. Redeemed and re-created man, living on a redeemed and re-created earth, is as free from sin and uncleanness as the angels. Even more, since the Evil One and sin itself have

been done away with, there is no possibility for mankind to sin and do evil, thus bringing on uncleanness. So just as God was safe in Heaven from having His holiness defiled because of the barrier of being not only apart from planet earth but also of existing in another dimension..... the spiritual dimension.... so upon the new earth God will also be safe from defilement such that it reminds us of when He and Adam and Eve walked among the Garden of Eden together, with no barriers.

CJB Genesis 3:8-10 ⁸ *They heard the voice of ADONAI, God, walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, so the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of ADONAI, God, among the trees in the garden.* ⁹ *ADONAI, God, called to the man, "Where are you?"* ¹⁰ *He answered, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself."*

The measurements of the city are informative when taken in their original language terms. Naturally since this book was written in Greek and in a Roman world, the measurements are actually given to us in those terms. The Greek measurements are that the size of the city was 12,000 stadia. Notice the symbolic use of the number 12. 12,000 stadia, 12 gates named for the 12 tribes of Israel, and 12 foundation stones named for the 12 Apostles. The height of the wall in Greek terms is 144 cubits: 12 times 12. So the measurements of the city itself..... although it is a real and not merely a figurative city..... are meant to symbolize and memorialize the representative number attached to God's people Israel. And that number is always 12.

Next there are some descriptions of the materials used to construct the city. They are the richest, most valuable items in use at the time of John. Materials like gold and diamond mesmerized people with their dazzling shininess. So the idea is to show that the New Jerusalem is staggering in its glory and splendor; nothing like it has ever existed. The mention of each city gate made from a single pearl is to emphasize their extreme value. In the 1st century, pearls were as valuable as gold. Large pearls were **more** valuable than gold, by weight.

The 12 foundation stones are now described. Each is a precious gem. Even though we've been told that the city's 12 foundation stones are named for the 12 Disciples, another connection couldn't be more obvious: it is to the High Priest's breastplate that was organized in a square and had on it 12 gemstones, each representing one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Verse 22 is a stunner: it is here that we learn there will be no Temple in the New Jerusalem. Why? According to the last half of the verse, it is because God is the Temple. How can God be "the Temple"? I would argue that this is a figure of speech because otherwise it doesn't make much sense. Let's understand what a Temple is: it is the place where a god is housed. In ancient cultures in some cases it was a way to keep that god contained and available to you like a genie in a bottle. In other cases it was a way of protecting that god from being stolen from you or from another god coming to take his power or place. A Temple was, therefore, designed as a god's residence. And since the god lived there it was also the place where that god's priests performed their ritual service to the god and where special worship of that god took place.

Therefore, I think the intent of saying that God is the Temple is to say that He no longer needs protecting nor (in perhaps just as important a sense) do His worshippers need to be protected from His presence. Nor is worship of Him confined to one place (one building, actually) on the entire planet. Further the lack of a Temple precludes the need for a formal Priesthood. We must remember that the rules for ritual and behavior of the priests and what is to go on at the Temple is contained in the Torah. But as of the new earth, the Torah is abolished and (generally speaking) all those rules of behavior and ritual along with it. So whatever amounts to worshipping God, and making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Eternal Era, it is different than in the Millennial Kingdom era and all earlier times since the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai.

Verse 23 starts to get really interesting! Here we're told that there will be no need for a sun or the moon to shine on it (the city), because God's glory will be its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. Further that the nations will walk by that same light, but also all the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into the New Jerusalem. Further along we're told that the city's gates will be permanently open, day and night, because there will be no night there. There's several implications to these statements that we need to consider.

The first implication is that in the New Universe the new earth will no longer be lit by a sun or a moon. Technically, the words say that it is the city of Jerusalem where this is the case. So could it be that the New Jerusalem will have entirely different parameters for governing its existence than the rest of planet earth? The wording of this verse is ambiguous. That said, New Jerusalem is the center of the biblical universe at this point, and so possibly it is just a manner of speaking that what goes for the city is representative of how it is for the remainder of planet earth.

Assuming this means that the entire planet will have no sun or moon to provide light and not just in Jerusalem, then this is a further indicator that the underlying governing dynamics of the earth and universe have changed. This will no longer be a universe of opposites; the existence of day does not mean night must also be present. In fact we're directly told in verse 25 that nighttime will not exist. Further verse 24 says that the nations will walk by this same light that illuminates New Jerusalem. This brings up another interesting point: the earth will still be divided upon into nations. And the presence of kings says that these nations will have their own governments. However the New Jerusalem will be the central point of the world's governments.

Why will there still be nations? Probably as much as anything for practical reasons. Even the angels had a hierarchy in Heaven, and there were different groups of angels established for different purposes. Even though humans will exist in some type of different, glorious body that never dies we will apparently retain the essence of what makes us human: individuality. We will not look as though we all popped out of the same mold. There will be uniqueness among individuals. Angels certainly were not beings that shared one mind, nor only one spiritual form, and so it seems eternal humans won't either. There will be millions, maybe billions, of people on earth and since God is a God of order, then for the human population to progress and thrive orderliness in the form of government will be needed.

So why won't everyone just live in New Jerusalem? I don't know. I've seen it suggested that

only ethnic Israelites will be permitted to live in Jerusalem. I find that unlikely because the number of ethnic Israelite Believers will only be a tiny fraction of the gentiles whose population out numbers them perhaps 500 to 1. I can tell you that many Bible commentators at this point throw up their hands and say that all this talk of New Jerusalem, nations outside of Jerusalem, kings, no sun and no moon, etc., must be figurative and symbolic of something because none of what is being said can be taken seriously as literal. But figurative and symbolic of what? There is no consensus among Bible academics or anything approximating it because it is only guesswork.

While this is purely my own speculation, might it be that God will indeed allow some specially elect group to live in the New Jerusalem as a kind of eternal reward? And all others, still Believers and still part of God's Eternal Kingdom, would be relegated to live outside of the city in what is called "the nations"? If so, what would be the criteria? Interestingly, we do have a statement from Christ that eternal humans are going to be organized into groups of lesser and greater. In speaking of the obligation of obedience to God's commandments by His followers in this present life as it affects our eternal life Yeshua says:

CJB Matthew 5:19 ¹⁹ *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Food for thought.

The final verse of this chapter is another one that is difficult to assess. It says that nothing impure may enter the city, nor may anyone who does shameful things or lies. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life may enter the New Jerusalem. If we assume that these rules apply all during the Eternal Era, then I don't see the relevance. According to everything we've read to this point nobody in existence on the new earth can be there without first being written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And that matter was decided back at the time of the Great White Throne judgment. And since death and evil have been done away with, then it is impossible that there could exist on the new earth even one person who lies or does shameful things. So what can this final verse mean?

I think this verse ought to be its own separate paragraph. It starts a new thought. This remark is meant as a hard-hitting warning to John's listeners and readers that all of these wonderful and amazing things that John has learned about in his divine visions that will constitute eternal life in the re-created earth and heavens of the future are only available to those who CURRENTLY... during this present life on this present earth.... do not live shameful lives and are not liars. However the sense of the meaning of shameful lives and liars is best looked at in the Greek if we are to understand their impact. The Greek **bdelugma** more means a detestable or abominable thing; something or someone exceptionally sinful and unclean before God. The Greek **pseudos** more speaks of deceit than of telling a lie. And no doubt this particular word was chosen because a) deceit is the primary essence of evil, and b) Satan's overriding and underlying attribute is that he is a Deceiver. Neither the Deceiver nor the blatant and unrepentant sinner will be in the Lamb's Book of Life, and therefore he will never experience the glory and perfection of the new earth, new Universe, and New Jerusalem.

We'll begin the final chapter of Revelation next time.