

The Glory and Majesty of the New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9 – 22:5

Introduction

1) Our world has changed a lot over the past 500 years. Most of us cannot really imagine just how different things were then, though there are some interesting reminders that give us a clue! Here are some facts about the 1500s:

- Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June, hence the popularity of “June Weddings!” However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of going first and enjoying the nice clean water, then came all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children - - last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it - - hence the saying, “Don’t throw the baby out with the bath water.”
- Most houses had thatched roofs - - thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals (mice, rats and bugs included!) lived in the roof.

When it rained it became slippery, and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off or out the roof - - hence the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs."

- However, there was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.
- The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying, "dirt poor."
- Most people had very little meat, but sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man "could bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."
- Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up - - hence, the custom of holding a "wake."

- England is an old country and not very large. They started out running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a “bone-house” and reuse the grave. When re-opening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the “graveyard shift”) to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be “saved by the bell” or was considered a “dead ringer.”
(source unknown)

2) Yes, things have changed quite a bit in 500 years. But, these changes pale in comparison to the way things are now, and the way things will be in the new heaven, the new earth and the New Jerusalem. In 21:1-8 John gave us a glimpse of the glory of eternal life. Now in 21:9 – 22:5 the apostle is given a magnificent vision of heaven’s capital, the New Jerusalem. As we examine these verses we will see that the New Jerusalem is described as 1) a perfect city (21:9-21), 2) a perfect temple (21:22-27) and 3) a perfect garden (22:1-5). I often refer to Revelation 21-22 “as Eden regained and more.” What we are about to study will support my rather ambitious claim.

I. The New Jerusalem will be like a perfect city 21:9-21

- Heaven will be heaven because of Jesus. We will enjoy Him intimately and forever! We will also experience the many ways He showers us with blessings of grace and goodness. In eternity our Lord relates to us in various ways as an evidence of His love. In verses 9-21 He provides a perfect city, but a very unique city. This city is also a bride (21:2) and she is also the holy of holies. As a bride the city is a sacred spouse. As the holy of holies the city is sacred space.

1) It is the beautiful bride of the Lamb 21:9-14

“One of the angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven plagues” (chs. 15-16; 17:1) comes and speaks to John telling him to “Come” that he might show him “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (v.9). For the 4th time John is “carried away in the Spirit” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3), this time “to a great high mountain.” This stands in great contrast to his vision of Babylon in 17:3 where he was taken into the wilderness to see the prostitute. Here he will see the glory of the Lamb’s bride, “the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (21:10-11). The New Jerusalem is a great city, a holy city, a heavenly city, the Lamb’s city. John says she has “the glory of God” which he details in verses 11-14. His

description is accurate but also inadequate given the limitations of human language. “Having the glory of heaven,” John tells us its radiance is like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” Duvall says, “It is a translucent stone, perhaps opal or even a diamond, specifically associated with the light and glory of God (21:11)” [298]. The city “had a great, high wall,” a symbol of security and stability. It has “twelve gates,” a sign of great access since there are three in each direction of the compass (v. 13). At the twelve gates are “twelve angels,” divine honor guards who protect the gates even though “its gates will never be shut by day” (v. 25). Each of the gates contains all “the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel” (v. 12). God is faithful in his covenantal promises to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). Verse 14 further describes the wall by noting the wall has twelve foundations on which are written “the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” This recalls Ephesians 2:20 where Paul writes that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” Swindoll rightly notes concerning the twelve tribes and twelve apostles, “Thus, the city will be the dwelling place of the united people of God – Old and New Testament believers – whose salvation rests on the completed work of Jesus Christ” (283).

2) It is the holy of holies where God is glorified

21:15-21

The angel of verse 9 now measures the city with “a measuring rod of gold” (v. 15). Verses 15-17 reveal it is laid out like a cube. The recalls and reflects the holy of holies (1 Kings 6:20; 2 Chron. 3:8-9). This is “the place of divine presence. A city foursquare would be the place where God has taken up residence with his people” (Mounce, 392). Osborne wisely states, “The number is obviously symbolic... It signifies not only perfection but a city large enough to hold all the saints down through the ages, the saints from “every tribe, language, people and nation” (5:9; 7:9; cf. 21:4, 26)” [753].

Verses 18-21 describes both the incredible magnificence and inestimable value of this city. The wall is built of jasper and the city is described as being of “pure gold, clear as glass” (v. 18). The foundations of the wall were adorned with every kind of jewel” detailed in verses 19-20. There are 12 total which “correspond roughly to the gems on the breastplate of the high priest...” (Duvall, 289). “The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl” (v. 21). Their value simply cannot be calculated. And the great street of the city that no doubt leads to the throne of God? It is “pure gold, transparent as glass” (v. 21). Mounce points out,

“Like the priest of the Old Testament (1 Kgs 6:30) who ministered in the temple, the servants of God walk upon gold” (395).

II. The New Jerusalem will be like a perfect temple 21:22-27

The city imagery now flows into temple imagery as the internal characteristics and blessings of the holy city Jerusalem are described. This is a temple city, and one that is marked by the undiluted perfections of deity!

1) It is characterized by God’s presence 21:22

John looks and to his amazement he sees no temple in the city. Now, this is not a contradiction with other verses in Revelation where there was a temple (7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17). This is the eternal state and the New Jerusalem. And, there is a temple! It is “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.” The Lord and the Lamb are its temple. Symbol gives way to blessed reality! The temple represented God’s presence, but believers now have God’s presence. And, we will have it forever. We will have Him forever.

2) It is characterized by God’s protection 21:23-26

- This temple city is permeated by the Lord’s presence and glory.

Therefore there is “no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” The “Light of the World” will be the light who illuminates this temple city (John 8:12)!

- Verse 24 informs us that, “By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” The multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nature of eternity is on beautiful display in the glorious light of our God. And these nations and governments present in eternity will be at perfect peace with one another because they all have the same Father, worship the same Lord and are indwelt by the same Spirit. In this temple city the “gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night,” no darkness, evil or terror. Indeed, the redeemed from all the people groups of the world “will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations” (v. 26). Keener notes for us, “This is the most positive vision of the future possible: Whereas Gentiles once trampled the temple city (11:2), now they honor it, coming to worship God (15:4; cf. Ps. 102:15; Zech. 14:16-19)... they offer their glory to God in light of God’s greater glory (21:23), forsaking idolatry” (*NIVAC*, 498).

3) It is characterized by God’s purity 21:27

Verse 27 begins with a double negative in Greek. We could say “But no nothing unclean will ever enter it.” Nothing “unclean,” no one who is “detestable,” no one who is “false” (deceitful) will enter this temple city. No, “only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life,” made pure and

holy by the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb will be allowed in.

Our God is a holy God and only the holy live with Him forever.

III. The New Jerusalem will be like a perfect garden 22:1-5

The temple city is also a garden city, that which reminds us of Eden. In imagery drawn both from Genesis 1-2 and Ezekiel 47:1-12 we see the image of a garden bracketing the entire Bible (Duvall, 298). Four wonderful blessings belong to all who will live forever in this Eden regained and more.

1) We will be nourished by God 22:1-2

“The river of the water of life” (Gen. 2:10; Ezk. 47:1-2), a river “bright as crystal,” a glorious and life-giving water, flows “from the throne of God and the Lamb” (v. 1). There is no death in this garden city, only eternal life. The Lord and the Lamb upon the throne guarantee it. This crystal clear river flows “through the middle of the street (the street of gold, 21:21) of the city.” And, on both sides of the river is “the tree of life”, the heavenly counterpart to the earthly tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:4; 3:22-24). It too is a picture of eternal life, but also abundant life “with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.” In fact “The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (v. 2). This is another symbolic reminder that there is no pain, sorrow or death in this heavenly

city (21:4). We are perfectly cared for and nourished as Adam and Eve were in the garden before the fall.

2) We will worship our God 22:3

The curse is vanquished forever! “No longer will there be anything accursed” (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:14-24). Incredible, the curse is replaced by “the throne of God and of the Lamb who will be in it,” in this beautiful garden city. Genesis 3 is reversed, undone forever. All that we lost in the fall we get back and more. What is the only rightful response to all of God’s goodness and grace? “His servants will worship Him.” The *HCSB* has “serve Him.” The Greek word *latreuo* carries the idea of service thru worship or worship thru service. Osborne notes that the word “has the double meaning of both “service” and “worship”” (773). Nothing about heaven will be boring or dull. We will honor our God in delightful and joyful service that is spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1). “Service of worship will be eternal and complete, for it is worship of God and the Lamb” (Osborne, 774).

3) We will see our God 22:4

Verse four contains an incredible two-fold promise for the child of God. It seems too good to be true but it is! First, we will see our God and experience perfect fellowship. Second, his name will be on our foreheads

and we will enjoy a perfect relationship. I love the comments of Scott Duvall on this verse, “Now, in the new holy of holies, the entire priestly community will experience the greatest blessing of all: they will see the face of God. Moses was not allowed to see God’s face, but saw only his back (Exod. 33:20, 23; cf. John 1:18; 1 John 4:12), but God’s people have always longed to see the Lord (e.g., Pss. 11:7; 17:15; 27:4; Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2; Heb. 12:14). The old priestly blessing/prayer for the Lord to “make his face shine on you” and “turn his face toward you” (Num. 6:25-26) finds its ultimate fulfillment here. God’s people will also bear his “name,” meaning they will belong to him, imitate his character, and live safely in his presence (cf. 2:17; 3:12; 7:3; 14:1).” (301).

4) We will reign with our God 22:5

Verse five tells us that, “In the New Jerusalem God is ever present, and his glory makes unnecessary all other sources of light” (Mounce, 400). “Night will be no more” (21:25). “There will be no light of lamp or sun” (23:23). Why? Because “the Lord God will be their light.” We will see His face and “He will cause His face to shine upon us” (Num. 6:25-26). But the blessings do not stop! We will reign with Him forever and ever (cf. 2:26-27; 3:21; also 2 Tim. 2:12). MacArthur summarizes well what those who follow the Lamb have to look forward to: “The eternal capital city of

heaven, the New Jerusalem, will be a place of indescribable, unimaginable beauty. From the center of it the brilliant glory of God will shine forth through the gold and precious stones to illuminate the new heaven and the new earth. But the most glorious reality of all will be that sinful rebels will be made righteous, enjoy intimate fellowship with God and the Lamb, serve Them, and reign with Them forever in sheer joy and incessant praise.” (vol. 2, 288).

Conclusion

Few doctrines generate more questions than the doctrine of heaven. For some of those questions the Bible provides a clear answer. Others we can only speculate about or plead ignorance. Below are some of the more common questions with brief answers. Though the Bible does not tell us everything we would like to know, it tells us more than enough to let us know eternity with our God is going to be wonderful!

Questions About Heaven

1. Will babies go to heaven? Yes. Anyone who has not reached an age of moral responsibility or accountability will be the gracious recipient of God’s mercy and salvation. This truth would also apply to those who because of some mental handicap are also incapable of moral discernment of right and wrong. God’s grace, I believe the Bible affirms, will extend to all such

persons. (For more on this see the article by Al Mohler and me at

<http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2004/08/Why-I-Believe-Children-Who-Die-Go-to-Heaven.pdf> .

2. Will we know each other in heaven? Yes. We will maintain our personal identity in heaven. Men will be transformed, glorified men and women will be transformed, glorified women. It is even possible that we will possess our individual names in heaven. In other words, all of you will be you and all of me will be me. Personality and individuality do exist beyond the grave (see 1 Cor. 13:12).
3. Do those in heaven have any knowledge of what is happening on earth right now? The Bible is not clear. Some believe Hebrews 12:1, 1 Samuel 28:16-18, and Luke 15:7 & 10 teach that persons in heaven have a knowledge of what is taking place on earth. Certainly God and the angels have knowledge of what is taking place on earth. As for believers who are now in heaven, there is no conclusive answer. We simply don't know.
4. Will we be aware of loved ones who are not in heaven? I do not know. The Bible teaches in Revelation 21:4 that there will be no tears, nor sorrow, nor pain in heaven. It is possible we will see them as God sees them. It is also possible He wipes away our memories of them.

5. Will there be marriage in heaven? No. Jesus said in Matthew 22:30, “for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

6. Will there be sex in heaven? That is a most interesting question and has received various answers by theologians. The Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian, Peter Kreeft, argues that there will be sex in heaven because humans are sexual beings and they will maintain their sexual identity throughout eternity. With respect to the issues of sexual intercourse, he says, “I think there will probably be millions of more adequate ways to express love than the clumsy ecstasy of fitting two bodies together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Even the most satisfying earthly intercourse between spouses cannot perfectly express all their love. If the possibility of intercourse in heaven is not actualized, it is only for the same reason earthly lovers do not eat candy during intercourse: there is something much better to do.” (*Is There Sex in Heaven?* p. 131). He concludes by arguing, “this spiritual intercourse with God is the ecstasy hinted at in all earthly intercourse, physical or spiritual” (p. 132).

7. Will Jesus be the only person of the trinity we shall see in heaven? No. The Bible makes clear in Revelation 21 & 22 that we shall see God in all of His fullness. In other words, we will see that there is only one God, yet this one

God exists as three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2).

8. Will Jesus still have the scars in His hands, feet and side in heaven? Yes. We will see that these are the only man-made things in heaven!
9. Can you eat all that you want in heaven and not get fat? Yes. In heaven, with a glorified body, everything will be processed perfectly and everything will be enjoyed supremely.
10. Will angels escort us to heaven? Based upon Luke 16:22, there is reason to believe that when a believer dies, an angel will escort him or her into the very presence of God.
11. Will we go to heaven as it eternally exists or to an intermediate state of blessedness when we die? The Bible teaches that we go immediately into the presence of God into an intermediate state, sometimes called Paradise in the Bible. Therefore, we are with God though we are not in our final resting place.
12. Do people who commit suicide go to heaven? If a person has trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior they will go to heaven. Suicide is a sin, but it is not an unpardonable sin.
13. Will animals go to heaven? The Bible is not clear as to whether or not animals go to heaven, though we have every reason to believe that there will be animals

in the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. Romans 8:19-23 speak of the whole creation groaning and waiting for its redemption. Certainly animals would fall into this category, and they also are a part of God's good creation.

14. Why do even Christians sometimes fear death and going to heaven? Because death is unnatural and was never intended by God for us. If Adam and Eve had never sinned, they would have never died. Therefore, there is a sense in which the fear of death is understandable, even for those who know they are going to be with God. Yet the Bible is also clear that through Christ we can overcome that fear. To be absent from this body is to be immediately present with Him (2 Cor. 5:8).

15. Will we know everything in heaven? Of course not. Often people confuse heaven and deity. We will still be human in heaven and therefore finite. As a result, our knowledge will be finite. One of the joys of heaven will be that we will go on forever and ever learning more and more and more about the greatness and the glory of our God.

16. Will we all be equal in heaven? No. The Bible teaches that there are both degrees of punishment in hell and degrees of reward in heaven. However, there will be no jealousy in heaven. Every vessel will be completely filled concerning its capacity. No one will have more than they are capable of

holding and no one will have less than they are capable of holding. Everyone will be satisfied perfectly with who they are and what they have. Thomas Watson says, “Though every vessel of mercy shall be full completely in heaven, yet one may hold more than another.”

17. Will we have emotions in heaven? Yes. Just as we now exist as whole persons with mind, will and emotion, so in heaven, mind, will and emotion will function perfectly as we enjoy fully all that these various components of the human personality provide.

18. Will we be free to sin in heaven? No. We will be free not to sin in heaven. Just as God is completely free in His will and sinless, so we in our glorified state will be completely free and sinless. We will be free to be our true selves as God created us to be and that involves both full freedom and the absence of sin.

19. What will we possess in heaven? Nothing and everything! There is no private property in heaven, no ownership. Yet we will also possess in its fullness, goodness, truth, beauty, love, life, and most of all, God. It is these things that make heaven heaven.

20. Will we wear clothes in heaven? Probably! However, the Bible seems to indicate the possibility that our clothing will be a natural outgrowth of our

glorified humanity. In heaven, light is the supreme entity and it reigns in all of its fullness. Remember, Adam and Eve were naked in the garden before the fall and they were not ashamed.

21. How big is heaven? Heaven is big enough so that billions and billions of saved people are never crowded yet small enough so that no one ever gets lost or feels alone.

22. Is heaven serious or funny? Yes. In heaven there will be joy and happiness, seriousness and solemnity. All of these things will indeed comprise our experiences in heaven.

23. Will we be bored in heaven? Absolutely not. In heaven we are with God who is infinite. We will never come to the end of knowing Him, loving Him, exploring Him and growing in our knowledge of Him. In heaven, even though it is eternity, each day will be a new day as we learn more and more about the magnificence and glory of our great God.

24. Will we age in heaven? No. But we will be fully complete, mature, perfect and whole.

25. Will there be ethnic segregation in heaven? No. In heaven our oneness in Christ and the realization of our family relationship will come to perfect fruition.

26. Will injuries, deformities and other physical disabilities disappear in heaven?

Yes. Amputees will have their limbs restored; the paralyzed will be healed, the blind will see, and the mentally disabled will be given full intelligence and cognitive ability.

27. Will we be able to do the supernatural and miraculous in heaven? Probably.

We will have a glorified body like Jesus. We will be like Adam and Eve before the Fall, but better.

28. Will there be government in heaven? Yes. It will be a theocracy (God-ruled)!

Revelation 21:24 says, “The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.” Thus, God’s sovereign rule will be perfectly realized and manifested in heaven among angels and humans.

29. Will there be music and singing in heaven? Yes, and with great variety I am sure.

30. What language will we speak in heaven? We will speak every language with perfect clarity and complete understanding.

31. What will heaven look like? Beautiful and glorious! It will transcend human description.

32. Will we work in heaven? Yes, and it will be the most satisfying and fulfilling labor we have ever known. We will never get tired or tire of the work.

33. Will we play sports in heaven? Why not? Zechariah 8:5 says, “The streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in them.”

34. Will we be – or be *like* – angels in heaven? No and yes. *No*, because we are humans and the object of God’s redeeming love. Further, we will judge angels according to 1 Corinthians 6:3, having authority over them. But *yes*, we are like the angels in that in heaven we will not marry and procreate.

35. What will we look like in heaven? Perfect! We will have a transformed, glorified body in heaven that is incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44)! In fact, it will be a body like the body of the resurrected and glorified Jesus (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3).

BONUS QUESTION: How does one go to heaven? By repenting of sin and placing one’s faith and trust completely and only in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Trust in Christ and only Christ, and your eternal home will be heaven.