

## Heaven's Holy City - Part 3

Revelation 21:9—22:5

My, what a joy it is to hear the saints express the doxologies of their heart through song. Can you imagine what it will be like in glory?

Will you take your Bibles and join me by turning to Revelation chapter 21? We come to the third and final discourse that I have for you on heaven's holy city. And, once again, to get the flow, I would like to read beginning in verse nine the Lord's description here through the apostle John. Revelation chapter 21 verse nine through chapter 22 and verse five.

And, again, bear in mind, dear friends, that this is a description of our heavenly home where we will spend eternity.

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall

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bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.<sup>1</sup>

It is such a joy to be able to contemplate heaven and to discover what the Lord has revealed to us about our eternal home.

I am frequently asked by some of you and certainly listeners in other parts of the world how long do I think it will be before the Lord returns. And, of course, my answer is I really don't know, but I do believe that because of the signs that we read about in the Word of God as we have studied in detail before, I believe that it could be very, very soon.

You will recall the disciples asked Jesus about the sign of his coming and of the end of the age. And he answered, "You will be hearing of wars and nations will rise against nations and kingdom against kingdom and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes." He went on to add that, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased most people's love will grow cold," referring to their love for God and righteousness.

But there are also many prophetic signs relating to the nation of Israel, God's covenant people who are continuing to return to their land, to their Promised Land just as the Lord said they would do before he returns. And in an effort to prepare your hearts for our final study here of the heavenly city—as well as to answer some of your questions—I want to encourage you once again that because of some of these signs he could be coming very soon. And we certainly need to live in the light of that.

Let me remind you that God made three promises that really summarized his future plans to Israel. He promised that there would be restoration, unification and purification. He promised restoration which would be in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12. He promised unification which would be fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel seven. And he promised purification that would be the fulfillment of the new

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 21:9—22:5.

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covenant that we read, for example, in Jeremiah chapter 31. And we see all of these in both the Old and the New Testaments.

In fact, we can see all three of these in three consecutive verses in Ezekiel's prophecy of the valley of dry bones where those bones, the bones of Israel will come to life. In verse 21 he says, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land."<sup>2</sup> There is the restoration, dear friends. We are seeing it happen. In fact, people are coming from all over the world into Israel. Their immigration is up 17 percent this year.

And in verse 22 the Lord goes on through his prophet and says, "And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms."<sup>3</sup> There, beloved, is the unification. We have seen that happen partially. There is no longer the northern kingdom of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah. It is now one nation. But what hasn't happened yet is the king, the king that will be over them. But he is coming.

And then verse 23 we read—and this is all future. "And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God."<sup>4</sup> That is the purification that awaits.

Now today most of the Jewish people are spiritually dead. They are hostile to the gospel. And yet Scripture is abundantly clear that a remnant according to the election of his grace are being preserved. God has promised in Romans 11:26 that one day all Israel will be saved. God has not abandoned his chosen people. The converted rabbi Paul understood this and we read, for example, in Romans nine of Israel's election. We read in Romans 10 about Israel's defection and we read in Romans 11 about Israel's salvation. In fact, the whole purpose of God's election of Israel is to put on a grand demonstration of his mercy to the whole world. And, of course, that infuriates Satan who constantly tries to thwart the purposes of God. Therefore we see him leading an increasingly large rebellion against God's covenant people. And certainly anti-Semitism is on the rise.

Ultimately this will lead, as we have studied, to the battle of Gog and Magog as we read in Ezekiel chapter 38, 39 when that Russian and Arab alliance will come down upon Israel and be defeated by God himself, that the nations will know that he is the Lord God. And then we know, according to prophecy, that God will raise up the antichrist and the false prophet with a political and military and economic system, even a religious system and they will try to eradicate Israel during the time of the tribulation. And then in the final moments of Israel's greatest peril at the battle of Armageddon, the warrior king, the

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<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 37:21.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 37:22.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 37:23.

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Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend and he will rescue his people and deliver them.

But, of course, before all of this happens I believe, as do many other people, that the Church is going to be snatched away in the rapture. But here is where it gets exciting if you can stick with me a moment in understanding the flow of all of this. As I said earlier, the constellation of all of these prophetic signs are coming together very rapidly. We see Israel's restoration. We see the unification and now we see the world's hatred of Israel mounting every day which is going to set into motion her eventual purification.

In a recent article in the *Jerusalem Post* Michael Freund wrote this, quote, "Something is stirring in the Middle East. The winds of war are blowing, picking up speed with each passing day. And the threat to Israel is growing steadily more alarming." He went on to say, "From Beirut and Damascus in the north to Tehran in the east and back to Gaza in the south, the arc of hate surrounding the Jewish state is speaking opening and brazenly of conflict and destruction." He then went on to analyze how anti Israel, anti Judaism forces are fueling the world's hatred against Israel. And he closed his article by saying, quote, "The way the winds are currently blowing, the storm might very well be just around the corner," end quote.

And what is even more appalling, dear friends, is to see the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in ostensibly Christian churches.

In an editorial entitled "Malevolent Momentum," found in a very excellent magazine I would encourage you to get, *Israel: My Glory*, which is a ministry of the Friend of Israel Gospel Ministry, we read this, quote, "On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Simone Wiesenthal Center ran a report titled 'Presbyterian Church USA Ready to Declare War Against Israel.'" They said, and I quote, "It appears the PCUSA's theological anti-Israel invectives have been incremental. A 2008 PCUSA report did the following. One, call for the US to withhold financial and military aid to Israel; two, apologize to Palestinians for even conceding that Israel has a right to exist; three, declared that Israel if defined as a Jewish state must be inherently racist; four, embrace the Kairos Palestine document produced by Palestinian Christians that calls for boycotts and sanctions against Israel and endorses a full Palestinian, quote, right of return to Israel which would lead to the demise of the democratic Jewish state. And, finally, it denied any connection between biblical covenants and the Jewish people. Israel's history, it claimed, begins with the Holocaust. It is a nation mistakenly created by western powers at the expense of the Palestinian people to solve the Jewish problem," end quote.

Now, you men who have been with me at S I T over the last probably four years understand the depth of what I just read as we have gone through some of this errant theology in great detail.

The Wiesenthal Center sees the Presbyterian Church's document according to this article as nothing short of a declaration of war against Israel and its friends, an action, by the way, that is encouraged by the World Council of Churches.

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Well, this should be no surprise, beloved. The apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 4:1 that, “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”<sup>5</sup>

Added to this is the Obama administration’s increasing separation from Israel combined with the mounting evidence that our president by his own admission is, in fact, a Muslim which explains his irrational sympathy for the Muslim agenda in the United States and around the world.

My point with all of this is to simply say the world is becoming galvanized in its hatred of Israel and this is exactly what the Lord has promised as well as its hatred for biblical Christianity because the world is being prepared for the rule of the antichrist. Yet may I remind you that against the blackness of Satan’s final push to establish his kingdom upon the earth, we see the holy light of the kingdom of God that is finally going to overcome. It will begin with the snatching away of the saints, then Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week where God pours out his wrath upon the world and ultimately upon unbelieving Israel, a time when he will reconcile many of them unto himself. And then, at the end of that he is going to renovate the earth, return it back to Edenic splendor and rule for 1000 years and then he will dissolve the heavens and the earth. He will purge the earth and the heavens completely from any hint of sin, create a new heaven and a new earth. Then, according to Revelation chapter 21 and verse two the holy city new Jerusalem will come “down out of heaven from God made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”<sup>6</sup> Therein is our hope, dear friends.

And in verse seven of chapter 21 we read, “He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.”<sup>7</sup> Who are the overcomers, by the way? Well, according to 1 John 5:5 it is he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. So this is our inheritance. This is our hope. Because we are children of God, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus.

Now here in Revelation chapter 21 verses nine through chapter 22 and verse five the Lord has given us this detailed description of our eternal home. And, as you know, those of you who have been with this study, I have divided this into three categories that I believe help us understand the Lord’s portrayal. We have seen the splendor of its appearance, the symmetry of its architecture and today we will look more at the stateliness of its accommodation.

Well, let me remind you the splendor of its appearance. Remember the angel guide now comes to John, shows him this magnificent cube of a city, one that is 1500 miles in every direction, 2,250,000 square miles. You could liken this to the distance between the Pacific coast in California to the Mississippi River, from the tip of Maine to the tip of Florida. Imagine that size of a city. And emanating from within the city is the effulgence

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 21:2.

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 21:7.

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of the glory of God. The shekinah glory of God is refracting in every imaginable direction with every imaginable color. That is the splendor of its appearance.

But he also described the symmetry of its architecture. You will recall that the symmetry reflects the perfect order of God and his perfect purpose in all things. Great and high walled with 12 gates, three on the east, three on the north, the south and the west with an inscription of the 12 tribes of Israel on the top of each gate and an inscription of the 12 apostles on the bottom. And there we learn that the symmetry of the gates reflect the magnificent purposes of God in redemption where he memorializes all of his redeemed in both the old covenant as well as the new covenant.

And we are told that the dazzling light of the divine presence, again, is going to be refracted in every direction through the translucent walls of the city and the multi colored foundation stones. And the magnificent gates are of pearl which represent the redeemed of God who will be forever reminded of the one who was injured on our behalf.

So we have seen the splendor of its appearance, the symmetry of its architecture. Now let's go inside and look more at the stateliness of its accommodations. Verse 21, in the middle of the verse. It says, "And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."<sup>8</sup>

The fact that there is going to be streets in heaven indicates there will be a need to travel. Why else have a street? There is going to be places to go. There is going to be things to do. There will be activity. There will be movement. There will be fellowship.

Now think about it, especially in ancient days, and in a number of countries around the world still today, streets are always the focal point of the community where people come together to fellowship. Frankly, something that we know very little about in our commuter society where we are isolated from other people in our cars with our cell phones attached to our ears.

If you go to other countries, especially I have seen this in Russia, I have seen this in different countries in Europe, I have seen it in Africa, the city streets are the place where people come together. That is the focal point. Some even in our congregation have recently expressed frustration, feeling isolated, feeling somewhat alone and perhaps disconnected, maybe out of fellowship with some of the others, a very tragic thing that we want to deal with as best we can, sometimes feeling unloved.

And as I was thinking about this passage, think about it, think how seldom our paths intersect. No wonder we don't know each other, much less fellowship with each other. We tend to fellowship with people who live on our street. Do you understand what I am saying? We tend to fellowship with people where our lives intersect.

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<sup>8</sup> Revelation 21:21.

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You know, we don't live in communities today. We live in suburbs. We live in cars. We live in buildings.

But, you know, our heavenly streets someday are going to eliminate all of this. No one is going to feel lonely or isolated or alienated. Our paths are always going to constantly cross. And as we read here the streets are going to be transparent. So if you think about it we will be able to see people in every direction up and down and there is no place to hide. What a magnificent thought.

No doubt there will be parks and other kinds of attractions that these streets will lead to. You know, the Bible doesn't tell us this, but I am convinced that there is going to be a lot of porch swings in heaven. Wouldn't that be nice? I have been to places in little towns in the south. I remember where my grandparents lived where people would walk down the street or even drive down the street. They would see somebody on the porch swing. Before you know it, there would be a few cars and there would be a whole bunch of people on the porch. We know nothing of that today, do we?

Well, since the size of the city is going to be 2 million 250 thousand square miles there is going to be a lot of streets. And, of course, they will go horizontally and vertically because, as you know, we will be able to move in any direction. By the way, let me put some of your minds at ease. There will be no more fear of heights.

But here we learn that the streets are pure gold like transparent glass. Now obviously the apostle John is trying to describe to us what he is seeing here. This has to be a different gold than anything that we would know, but certainly it must be transparent because we see all through the description the necessity for everything to be translucent so that the glory of God can emanate from within unrestricted throughout the city and throughout heaven. And, of course, transparency is always the product of purity. So the whole city will be a prism of dazzling colors.

Notice verse 22. John says, "And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple."<sup>9</sup> Now this would have been a real different experience for John who could only understand worship in a temple. So this is quite different than what he has seen and, I would also add, this is a description of something that is very different than what we have seen that exists currently in heaven because in a number of passages we see that there currently is a temple in heaven.

So why the change? Well, the answer is: Currently Satan and his minions inhabit the heavens and the earth. We know that Satan is the prince and the power of the air. We know that he is the God of this world. In fact, in Revelation 12:10 we read that he accuses the brethren before our God both day and night. So the whole universe remains polluted by the toxin of sin, by the toxin of Satan and his minions. It is all polluted except

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<sup>9</sup> Revelation 21:22.

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the temple where God resides in heaven, where he sits upon his throne to this day as we read, for example, in Revelation 7:15.

But when this polluted universe is destroyed and replaced with a new heaven and a new earth, every vestige of Satan and of sin will be gone forever and the whole universe will become the temple of God. Then what for millennia was a symbol of the presence of God in the tabernacle as well as the temple will finally become a reality. So in heaven there will be no church. There will be no cathedral, no temple. Because all of heaven will be an inner sanctuary of God where we will dwell with his presence forever.

For this reason John says in verse 22, “The Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.”<sup>10</sup> Now think about it. Because we will all exist in the presence of God, we will be in a constant state of worship and perfect communion enjoying the infinite delight that he has for us, experiencing the eternal satisfaction and exhilaration of his blessings.

You know, this is what worship is intended to be. This is what it is all about. We will finally enjoy direct and unmediated communion with God himself. There will be a fulfillment at that time of chapter 21 and in verse three where it says, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.”<sup>11</sup>

But notice in verse 23 John goes on and says, “And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.”<sup>12</sup> You see, the sun and the moon would offer nothing to the illumination of the shekinah.

Now think about this phrase, “...and its lamp is the Lamb.”<sup>13</sup> In a spiritual and physical sense, the full shekinah will be to the new Jerusalem what, in a spiritual and physical sense the churches were to the world in that day. Do you remember in chapter one and verse 12 and verse 20 of Revelation we read that the churches were represented by seven golden lamp stands. Do you remember that study? And these were just portable oil lamps. They were emblems of each of the seven churches in their respective cities, each local assembly having the responsibility to emanate the glorious light of the gospel of Christ. In fact, the apostle Paul tells us in Philippians two and verse 15 that the Church is to appear as light to the world holding fast the word of life.

But these seven golden lamp stands also symbolize the witness of God's people to the Gentile world that we might bear witness of the light of the glory of his grace. And a witness reflected in the very seven branched golden lamp stands that we saw in the tabernacle of the Old Testament, the one that stood outside and the one that stood inside the veil.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21:3.

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 21:23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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And you will recall in Revelation one and 13 that John says, “In the middle of the lamp stands I saw one like the son of man.” Now who is that? What is he seeing there? Well, that is a title of the Messiah. We read about that in Daniel 7:13 which, by the way, is the same text that Jesus had applied to himself some 60 years earlier in Mark 13:26.

And so the point here is in the holy city there won't be just the lamp stand of the Church, the entire lamp will be the Lamb. That is the point. It is a glorious thought. And it says that it is one like a son of man which indicates that we John saw was a human form.

So the ascended Lord of the Church this very day stands in the midst of the lamp stands that still exist, the churches, in human form, a magnificent picture of the one who dwells within us as the body of Christ, the one that will be the illuminating source of the holy city one day. One day all of these symbols are going to become reality. The sanctuary of heaven, as we read here, will have “no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.”<sup>14</sup>

Now can you imagine what John saw? Can you imagine what we are going to see? One old commentator, the theology J A Seist described it in this way. He said, quote, “That shining is not from any material combustion, not from any consumption of fuel that needs to be replaced as one supply burns out, for it is the uncreated light of him who is light dispensed by and through the Lamb as the everlasting lamp to the home and hearts and understandings of his glorified saints,” end quote.

Think about it. Jesus came as the light of the world. This, of course, fulfilled Isaiah's prophesy in Isaiah 9:2 where we read, “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light and to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.” But what we see, beloved, in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the redeemed will not be able to just see the light temporarily, but they will actually bask in it for eternity.

This is what the Lord said to his prophet in Isaiah chapter 60 beginning in verse 19.

No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. Your sun will set no more, Neither will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be finished.<sup>15</sup>

What a motivating thought.

Verse 24 he goes on. He says, “And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.”<sup>16</sup> Now, this could be a bit confusing. You say “nations” what is that all about? Well, the term in the original language is **ETHNOS** (eth'-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 60:19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Revelation 21:24.

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nos) and it can be translated, as it is many times, Gentiles. But it basically means the people.

You see, obviously there is not going to be any national identity in heaven. There will be no social strata. And this text helps us understand that. You see, the nations or the people will all walk by the light of the Lamb equally. It says even the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it meaning that all of the saints are going to be equal in heaven. And this may, perhaps, be a reference to the ruling believers in the millennial kingdom who will be alive at the end and who will then be translated at that time and enter into the new creation.

But the point with all of this is to say that there will be no distinctions here. There will be no wealthy and poor. There will be no educated and uneducated, no ruling class, no working class, no king and subjects, no celebrities, no VIPs. Can you imagine that? Every saint is a sinner saved by grace and all of our earthly glory, however small or great, all of it is going to be surrendered and forever merged into the greater glory of God.

And notice it says that “the nations shall walk by its light.” The word “walk” is a term in the original language that means to progress or to make due use of opportunities. It is the idea of regulating one’s life or conducting one’s self in a certain way.

And, as you think about it, in heaven we are going to do this perfectly, something that we don’t do perfectly today. In our fallen condition we do not make wise use of our opportunities to reflect the glory of God. We do not regulate our life and our conduct in a way that gives him glory all the time. We are rather pathetic at that. We have to work at perfect communion. But in heaven all of that is going to work perfectly.

Today we are selfish and proud and preoccupied. Ask yourself: What was your priority this week? How often did you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and live that out in a way that could be measured? And the Second Commandment: How often did you love your neighbor as much as you loved yourself?

I rest my case.

In heaven all of that will work perfectly because we will walk by his light.

But notice. “The kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.”<sup>17</sup>

Think of it. Even the most earthly noble will be perfectly humble. They are going to bring their glory into it. And “bring” is in the present tense which means that they will habitually and certainly regulate their lives and their conduct according to the light of God’s glory. Everyone will make proper use of every opportunity to enter into perfect fellowship. It is going to naturally happen. We are going to naturally have communion with God and communion with others.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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And then in verse 25 he says, “And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed.”<sup>18</sup>

Now think of this from the ancient perspective which is a bit different than our perspective today. Ancient gates of the city were designed for two purposes, for security as well as for defense. In fact, they would design the gates so that you had different turns and different places on top of the gates where your armies could attack people that were trying to get in through the gates.

Well, the point here is in heaven there will be no need for security in the holy city, no need for any security because no one is going to try to take something from you. No one is trying to kill you or to elevate themselves above you. There will be no jealousy, no envy, no covetousness, no malice, no anger, no enemies. Satan is forever incarcerated. So it says that the gates will never be closed.

And in verse 26 we read, “And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.”<sup>19</sup> Again, the idea here is that all of our rewards, all of our honors are going to be diffused into the one glory of our great God. We saw this pictured earlier in Revelation chapter four verse 10 when the 24 elders which represent the glorified Church will cast their crowns before the throne of God. That is what will happen. And in verse 27 he goes on and he says, “And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”<sup>20</sup>

I would remind you that seven times in the New Testament there is a description of believers having their names being written in the book of life. And this refers to a divine registry of those who God has chosen to reconcile unto himself by his uninfluenced choice. And here we are reminded, again, of the depths of God’s grace. Here we are reminded again of the inscrutable mystery of sovereign election whereby God chose those whom he would save in eternity past and then caused them to voluntarily repent and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can’t explain that one, but that is what the Bible teaches.

Then notice what else the angel guide shows John in verse one of chapter 22. “And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”<sup>21</sup>

Now, as we think about this, we have already learned that there will be no sea. So, therefore, it will not be a water based reality. There will be no hydrological cycle in heaven. And so this cannot refer to a literal river of water like we would understand it. It

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<sup>18</sup> Revelation 21:25.

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 21:26.

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 21:27.

<sup>21</sup> Revelation 22:1.

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has to either be a water-like substance unlike anything that we have ever known or perhaps a metaphor of eternal life as it is used elsewhere in Scripture.

For example, it is used as a metaphor of eternal life and blessing in Isaiah 12:3 where God promised his people concerning their future blessing, saying, “You will joyously draw water From the springs of salvation.”<sup>22</sup> And Jesus said in John 4:14, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”<sup>23</sup> And in Revelation seven and verse 17 one of the 24 elders has earlier promised, quote, “the water of life,” end quote to the innumerable heavenly multitude.

Well, which is it? I am not sure. I will tell you what I think. I believe this is a radically different kind of water with supernatural properties unlike anything that we could imagine. But it also serves as a symbol of the never-ending blessings of eternal life. But whatever it is, we see that it is cascading here from the throne of God and the Lamb. It is life giving and clear as crystal. And one day we are going to taste of its blessing.

Let's face it. This is just one more of a million surprises that the Lord has in store for us. I like surprises. One thing I know for certain. We will absolutely love this river. And you say, “Pastor, how could you know that for certain?” Because the Bible told us so as the song says. The psalmist says in Psalm 46:4, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.”<sup>24</sup>

Notice what he says in verse two. “...in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”<sup>25</sup> Now, it is hard to say what is your favorite passage on heaven, but this has to be somewhere in that mix for me. It seems a bit confusing, but the original language will help demystify it a bit for you. Grammatically what you must do is disregard the period after the word “street” and continue the sentence. So the sentence should read, “In the middle of its street and on either side of the river, was the tree of life.” In fact, the phrase, “and on either side” can be translated, “on one side and on the other.” I will explain that in a moment.

But I want you to also notice it says, “A tree of life.” There is no definite article in the Greek here. It is not the tree of life as if there is just one, but a tree of life which indicates that there will be many.

Now the best interpretation, I believe, sees this as a very symmetrical arrangement whereby there is a river flowing down the middle of a wide street with many trees on each side of the river in the middle of the space between the street and each of the river banks. You all know what a boulevard is where there are streets and in the middle there is typically some type of landscape or grass or whatever. Think of it that way, only here the

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<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 12:3.

<sup>23</sup> John 4:14.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 46:4.

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 22:2.

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middle section between the streets is composed of a river with trees on each side of its banks.

This is reminiscent of the trees that will grow even during the millennium. Ezekiel's prophecy tells us in chapter 47 verse 12, "By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."<sup>26</sup>

Now, you ask, "What kind of tree would possibly grow in a place where there is no soil?" Well, I have an answer for that. I don't have any idea. Another surprise. I do know that in Genesis 2:9 there was a tree of life that was emblematic of blessing in the garden. And in chapter three and verse 22 we learn that that tree of life symbolized immortality. In Proverbs chapter three and verse 18 we learn that godly wisdom and the fear of the Lord, "is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast."<sup>27</sup> And in Proverbs 11 verse 30 we read, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life."<sup>28</sup> So there it is a metaphor for rich blessing that comes from godliness.

But isn't it interesting? Now here in heaven we see this tree of life reemerge as a symbol of eternal blessing, the highest symbol of eternal blessing. And think about it. By implication we will one day enjoy what Adam and Eve enjoyed prior to sin entering in to the world. The new creation will provide all of the necessary conditions for us to experience the unspeakable joy and privileges of being in the presence of God.

Would you notice, also, that this tree bears "twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month."<sup>29</sup> Now this is a curious statement. Since there will be no sun or moon in heaven, there will be no seasons. There will be no calendar. And since the new creation will be forever removed from the limitations of time and space, how can we possibly understand what is being said here? Well, I think the answer is rather simple. The word "month" is merely an anthropomorphic expression that is used to communicate to us in terms that we somehow can grasp that there in heaven will be an endless cycle of provision as well as infinite selection of things for us to eat.

Now, again, think about it. Most fellowship centers around what? Around eating. Even if we are in the street we are eating as we are fellowshiping. Now, this, of course, will be eating for sheer pleasure, not for survival. Some of us are very familiar with that concept. But in heaven that is what we will do. We will have this to eat.

And in verse two he goes on and says, "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."<sup>30</sup> Healing is an interesting term. It is the **ΤΗΡΑΠΕΙΑ** (ther-ap-i'-ah) in the

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<sup>26</sup> Ezekiel 47:12.

<sup>27</sup> Proverbs 3:18.

<sup>28</sup> Proverbs 11:30.

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 22:2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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original language. We get our word therapy from that. It means health giving. It means even to do service.

Now, since there will be no sickness in heaven, the idea here seems to be that these leaves are going to be therapeutic. They are going to do service for us. We don't fully understand what he means here. Again, another surprise.

I thought to myself, I wonder if we will eat them. I don't know. I wonder if we will smell them. You know, for the first time we will be able to smell everything perfectly and everything will be perfectly aromatic and fragrant. Maybe just the smelling of it. Are we going to rub them ourselves? We have no idea. Maybe it is all of the above. Again, the Lord has wonderful surprises for us, doesn't he?

But I believe, dear friends, as we summarize the essence of what the Lord is revealing to us in these passages, he is telling us this. He is telling us, "I am going to provide for you an infinite array of unimaginable pleasures. You will never be bored. You are never going to be tired. You are never going to be unfulfilled. You are never going to feel lonely or restless or alienated or frustrated or unsatisfied or dissatisfied. But you will remain in a perpetual state of exhilarating joy."

That is what I get out of that text. Now, all of the details we are not sure. But one day we will know.

And then he closes this amazing section pertaining to the stateliness of the city's accommodations with this summary in verse three. "And there shall no longer be any curse."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, now the ravages of sin are all gone. He goes on and says, "And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him."<sup>32</sup>

We can only imagine the thrilling of things he will ask us to do for him. Perhaps he will ask us to explore other galaxies. Maybe there are other creatures he would have us enjoy. I am sure there will be breathtaking adventures for us to experience. Maybe there will be angelic orchestras for us to conduct. Maybe there will be... in fact, I am sure of this. . . there will bound to be countless testimonies that we are going to hear, all of which gives praise to our glorious God.

But greatest of all is in verse four. "And they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads."<sup>33</sup> You will recall in chapter three and verse 12 he promised to give us a new name by which we will know him throughout eternity. And verse five he closes. "And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Revelation 22:3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Revelation 22:4.

<sup>34</sup> Revelation 22:5.

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Dear Christian, please hear me. May I challenge you to make heaven the focus of your attention this week? Make heaven the focus of attention this week. Make that your priority and do one other thing. Tell one person who knows nothing of these things how excited you are about heaven. Tell them something that you have learned about heaven. Tell them how the Lord has stirred your heart. Point them to these discourses or others or books, but tell another person about heaven. And in so doing you will tell them about Christ.

May I leave you with this poetic phrase from my heart?

What God would ever condescend to reach my low estate?  
What mercy great would e'er transcend the depths of rebel hate?

What blood was shed upon a tree my pardon by it won?  
What foreign love would grant to me adoption as a son?

Oh, saving grace, so rich and free, 'tis Jesus he is the one.  
'Twas grace that caused my eyes to see, the resurrected Son.

And now the rapture joy I wait, my Savior to behold.  
And gaze upon a city that has captured saints of old.

Bejeweled, a prism to reflect the glory of our God,  
His holy place without defect, the Lamb's pure bride adorned.

Where gates of pearl fore'er remind of sacred wounds that formed.  
The perfect gem of souls refined by flesh so bruised and torn.

Oh, soul, rejoice the time is near, the night is almost gone.  
My Savior God will soon appear and finally take me home.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these eternal truths. May we never forget them, may we live consistently with them and may we shout them from the roof tops. And, Lord, for those that are lost in their sin and walking in darkness who know nothing of what it means to walk with Christ, who know nothing of saving grace, who really know nothing of the glories of your Word and the promises of heaven, oh God, would you be merciful to them today and convict them of their sin and may they come running to the foot of the cross confessing and repenting and be saved this very day. I ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.*

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**Transcript Explanation:** Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

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