THE NEW JERUSALEM

Revelation 21:9-22:5

Key Verse: 22:3

“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.”

Last lesson in 21:1-8 was introduction to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, revealing the very heart of Revelation, the dwelling of God being with men. Today’s passage is a detailed description of the New Jerusalem, the general atmosphere, the exterior and interior design and the life in the eternal kingdom of God.

**First, the general atmosphere (9-11).** John wrote in verses 9 and 10 say, “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Again, the city is called a bride because its occupants are the eternal bride of Christ, now enlarged beyond the church to encompass all the redeemed of all ages. Now John is traveling to the New Jerusalem with the angel as a tour guide.

Verse 11 says, “It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” This one verse is the general description of the New Jerusalem. In KJV, “Having the glory of God. Her light was like…” The first thing that strikes John as he is taken to this great high mountain and looks up and sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is that it has the glory of God. This is the most distinguishing characteristic of the capital city of eternity. It has the glory of God in it. It shone with the glory of God. And blazing out of the middle is the light. God is the light of heaven, the light of the city. It comes out of the city, and most probably fills all of the new heavens and the new earth.

God’s glory is who he is. His glory is simply his attributes. But when God manifests his invisible spiritual attributes, he manifests them as light. We see that throughout the Scripture. God has revealed his glory in light. He revealed his glory to Moses and to the people of Israel in the sky (Ex. 13:21) and on the face of Moses (Ex. 34:35). He revealed his glory in the tabernacle when a cloud of light came down into the tabernacle so the priests could not even minister (Ex. 40:34). He revealed His glory in the temple when the temple was built in the holy land; it was filled with the glory of God, the fire coming down (2 Chr. 7:3). And the sad fact is that in each case where God revealed his glory, he was rejected through disobedience, pride, and rebellion.

But he continually brought his glory back. His glory returned to an apostate Israel in human form in our Lord Jesus Christ, and his glory was seen as the glory of the Only Begotten of God ([Jn. 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%201.14)). And the world hated him and rejected the glory again. They rejected it every time it came, they rejected it again in Christ. The transfiguration of Jesus revealed the essence of his nature in light (Mt. 17:2; Lk. 9:29). Someday, Jesus will return on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory, and it will be like lighting (Mt. 24:27-30). Finally, in the new heaven and the new earth, in the capital city which is the new Jerusalem, the holy city, his glory revealed as light will be full and limitless and unconfined.

John wrote in 21:23, “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” He also wrote in 22:4, “They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.” Isaiah saw this and wrote in Isaiah 60:19, “The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.”

Now John makes effort to describe this light for us. In verse 11 it says, “its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” Its brilliance refers back to the light of God’s glory. The word is in Greek *phōstēr*. It means “something in which light is concentrated and from which light radiates.” It would be like a light bulb. John sees this city like a light bulb where light is just pouring out of it. Only it comes not through some thin film of plain glass, but through what appears to him like a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. That is to say that the whole city looks like one big stone, a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It is a gem, it is flawless. Modern jasper is opaque. But here jasper is clear s crystal. It is like a diamond, not with light shining on it, but with light shining from it, coming from the inside and refracting its rainbow colors all over the new heavens and the new earth.

The city is like one massive perfect diamond gem, flashing the reflection of God’s glory in infinite light. It is massive, because it is 2,200 kilometers cubed. The city is like one massive crystal-clear diamond gem, with the glory of God shining out from the center of it and splattering its rainbow colors all over the new heavens and the new earth. How beautiful and glorious it would be! This is the remarkable general appearance of the city.

**Second, the exterior design (21:12-21).** Now the angel lingers long enough for John to get a closer look at this blazing diamond. We move from the general appearance to a second category here, the exterior design. Verse 12 says, “It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.” This description indicates that the city is not amorphous, nebulous, floating place; it is a place with dimensions. It has an outer wall. It has limits. We can go in it and come out of it because it has gates. We can think that angels are there to welcome us in and to welcome us out like guards. They are there to symbolize holiness, and to fulfill their duty of attending to the glory of God and serving the glorified saints. After all, angels are the servants of the saints according to [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Heb%201.14).

Verse 12 continues, “On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.” That celebrates for all eternity God’s unique covenant relationship with Israel. And verse 13 says, “There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.”

It shows perfect symmetry, perfect balance. We can think that everything is in perfect order. That reflects a God who demands symmetry, balance and order. That’s the way the mind of God operates. The mind of God is incredibly balanced and ordered; very different than the chaotic kind of art and music that is characteristic of our culture. And it reminds us of the way God organized the tribes around the tabernacle: put the tabernacle in the middle and had three tribes at each side (Numbers 2, the arrangement of the tribal camps).

Then verse 14 says, “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” So now you get down to the foundation stones. There are twelve of those, so we can assume there are three of those under those three gates on each of the sides. Most probably at the tops of the gates there are the names of twelve tribes of Israel and at the bottoms of the gate on the foundation stones there are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The names are visible, not hidden. As it celebrates God’s unique covenant relationship with Israel, so it celebrates God’s wonderful covenant relationship with his church, for the apostles of the church are the foundation of the church according to [Ephesians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Eph%202.20). So it shows God’s grace on the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints. All the names are precious. What a beautiful harmony among the people of God and in the history of God! It is like Jews and Gentiles being one in the city. We can also imagine the uniqueness and preciousness for each name.

Now it is written in verses 15-17, “The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.” The word “measuring”, “measure” or measurement is written 5 times. The significance of measuring is that it belongs to God. In other words, God is measuring out what is his. It is God’s possession. This is the city of God.

Abraham was looking forward to this city. Hebrews 11:10 says, “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” God designed and built the city. And Hebrews 11:16 talks about Abraham and Sarah and other men and women of faith. It says, “Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” They were longing for a heavenly city. And Hebrews 12:22 says, “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” This is the city of the living God. And Hebrews 13:14 says, “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” Certainly, this city is an enduring lasting city different from the cities in this world, particularly the great city Babylon.

The city was cubic with 2200 km in length and width and height. It is surely big enough to contain all the redeemed of all generations, and surely not too crowded or too vacuous. And we can imagine that people will travel not only horizontally but vertically, and so streets will not just be going in four directions, they’ll be going up and down as well. The thickness of the wall is 65 meters. Interestingly it is written, “by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.” The angel was using the same measurement we are using. John wants us to be realistic about this city. This city is real and tangible.

Verse 18 says, “The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.” In verse 11, we saw that the brilliance of the city was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. Here the wall was made of jasper. So it was a diamond wall. We have gotten 2200 km walled on all sides with diamond.

The material of the wall was jasper. Then it says, “the city of pure gold as pure as glass.” Have you ever seen pure gold like clear glass? Gold is extremely opaque. It’s not clear, and it’s not like glass. This is translucent gold. Then why is it so? For the city has one great purpose in the new heaven and the new earth. That is to radiate the glory of God; and you can’t have anything blocking it. So the brilliant flashing color of gold, but transparent, lends to the firing of that glory of God through every component. Nothing can stop or block the radiance of God. It shines out through everything.

And verses 19-20, say “The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.” Probably their names have changed through the centuries. Eight of these are found in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:17-20; 38:10-13). The four others are not even included in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. Yet, there might well be a connection between the glory that was displayed and the breastplate of the high priest representing the glory of God.

First of all, again, the first foundation stone was jasper, radiant, white, crystal-clear diamond with its flashing colors. And then the second was sapphire, a brilliant blue. The third was chalcedony. Chalcedon is an old name for Turkey, and this was some kind of an agate stone, the best we can tell, sky blue with translucent stripes of color. And then the fourth was emerald, a blazing bright green. The fifth was sardonyx, a red and white stone. The sixth was sardius, a rather common red stone that was from the quartz family. The seventh was chrysolite, a transparent, sort of lucid gold tone or yellow tone stone. The eighth is beryl, a sea green. The ninth is topaz, transparent yellow green. The tenth is chrysoprase, another shade of green. The eleventh is jacinth, a brilliant shining violet color. And the twelfth is amethyst, which is purple. Now what we have is just a blazing panoply (an impressive collection or exhibition) of these brilliant colors that the light of God’s glory is shining through, as they make up the foundation of the heavenly city. The general picture then is one of just unbelievable beauty, indescribable beauty, a spectrum of color blazing everywhere. The light of the gold, the diamond, transparent city shining through the diamond walls, pushing its light through all of these colored jewels, forms a scene of dazzling, wondrous, incredible beauty.

And verse 21 says, “The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.” We know that pearls are related to oysters. All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster. It is the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. We can infer that because of Christ’s wounds on the cross at Calvary we are made his precious children from wicked sinners to have access to God’s home and live in the holy city, going through the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem.

Think of the size of those gates with the height of 2,200 km. Think of the supernatural pearls from which they are made. What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl! Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ. Those pearls hung eternally at the access routes to glory will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree to invite sinners forgiven and made holy to forever share His home. Heaven is entered through suffering by a wounded Redeemer. And we’ll always be reminded of it as we pass the pearls.

And we cannot forget that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of twelve apostles of the Lamb are written on tops of the gates and on the bottoms of the gates on the foundation stones of the city walls respectively. The names represent all the redeemed of all ages who belong to the bride of the Lamb, precious bride, cleansed and beautified by the blood of the Lamb slain for our sins. What a grace! And verse 22b says, “The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.” So we will walk on the golden street and go through the pearly gates, remembering the wonderful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. So what a meaningful exterior design of the city full of the shining glory of God and the grace of the Lamb!

**Third, the interior design (21:22-22:3).** Verse 22 says, “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” Certainly, temple refers to the very presence of God. So verse 22 literally means that the presence of God fills the whole city, even the whole new heaven and new earth. We literally will live in His presence. We will live in the temple of God and Christ. They are the temple by presence, and we are in the presence of God and of the Lamb forever. Worship will be life. We remember chapter 4 in which the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders day and night never stop worshiping God, Saying respectively, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (4:8) and “you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (4:11). Never a moment when we’re not in perfect, holy communion with the perfect, holy Almighty God and the Lamb. Never a moment when we are not engaged in rapturous, joyous worship and service to him. Never a moment when those things are not reality.

Then verse 23 says, “The city does no need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb its lamp.” We thought of this in the general appearance of the city in part 1. And verse 24 says, “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it.” Nations is the word ethnē in Greek, and all it means is the peoples. It can be translated nations. Most often it is translated in the New Testament by the word “Gentiles.” It’s the same word. It can be translated peoples. In a broad sense, all the peoples from every tongue and tribe and nation in the world will all be walking in its light. In fact, what John is really saying here is this is not going to be limited to one group. This is going to be the eternal capital where everybody is welcome. There will be no more divisions as we know. All of the nations shall walk by its light. All ethnic groups will be moving in and about that city. No race, no culture, no one left out.

And then it says, “And the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.” It may well indicate that there will be no social structure, no upper and lower class. All the kings of the earth who come to that place – and that would be those mighty men, noble men, those leaders, those great men – give their glory to that city. That is their glory is gone. Everybody is at the same level. All human glory dissolves into the glory of God. All races dissolve into the people of God. And the character of that city is universal in the fact that everybody there belongs to God, and there is no social strata. The kings give up their glory.

Verse 25 says, “On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.” The point here is that there’s never any night. And so, people never need to close the gate. The city gates were always shut at night because they were there for protection. Not in the New Jerusalem. No night. By the way, nobody will ever sleep there because we will have entered into eternal rest and be continually refreshed through worshiping and having fellowship with God always. Heaven is eternal rest, and that’s what it’ll be. As we studied, [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Rev%2014.13) says, “…they will rest from our labors,” while the ungodly in hell “have no rest,” in 14:11. What a contrast! And so, we will have protection, security, safety, rest without ever needing sleep.

Verse 26 says, “The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.” That is to say all people, no matter who they are or what country or nation they’ve come from, will bring all their glory, all that is good about them, and it’ll dissolve, as it were, in the eternal worship of God in Christ. The glory and the honor of all the nations dissolves in the glory of God.

Now, this tells us something about what this whole matter of rewards means, when we receive our eternal glory, when we receive our eternal honor. I believe that we receive it, and yet it is diffused into the glory of God, because after all, whatever good we did, whatever we achieved for the cause of Christ, the Spirit of God did in us. So, all of the redeemed who enter into the eternal city and receive their eternal reward will give that back to God, and God will be all in all, and the eternal worship of God and the eternal worship of Jesus Christ will be everything. And so, it’s a shining city. It has the glory of God, and it has all the glory of all the people who have ever received from God honor and glory diffused into that glory of God.

Verse 27 says, “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Again it is clarified about who can enter and who cannot. In this pure and holy city nothing impure will enter. This city is the city of glory and light and truth. Nor will anyone who is shameful and deceitful ever enter into it. But only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life can enter it. Only those who have a life and love relationship with the Lamb, who was slain and purchased them with his blood.

In 22:1 and 2, it says, “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.” It’s the water of life, and it’s as clear as crystal. It’s ever flowing and it’s ever cascading. For it comes down from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And it’s tumbling, like a waterfall, across this crystal city, splashing across the transparent gold. And you know how crystal clear moving water refracts light at every change of flow. This just adds to the blaze of glory.

The water of life refers to pure, holy, eternal life flowing down through the city from the throne of God and of the Lamb. That’s one throne. And so, the fountainhead or the source of this is the throne of God from which it tumbles. It is the indication of the constant flow of everlasting life from God’s throne in all the people in glory. This is what a Psalmist had in mind n i46:4, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God…” God even gave the psalmist a view for the river of the water of life.

Verse 2 continues, “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.” We thought of the river of the water of life, and the true of life. The New Jerusalem is full of life. According to Genesis 2:9, there was the tree of life in the garden of Eden. Proverb 3:18 says that wisdom is the tree of life. So the tree of life may point to the highest life, the best life, the most fulfillment to life.

“Bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month” shows that this life is going to have variety. We know that time has no part of eternity, but it does remind us that there are cycles. It’s just another one of those anthropomorphic expressions to say something to us in terminology that we can understand. There will be a regular cycle of joyous provision, filled with variety, changing all the time.

Verse 2 continues, “And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” The word “healing” is in Greek therapeian. It means therapeutic. It doesn’t imply illness. A better way to translate it would be this, “And the leaves of the tree were life giving, health giving, therapeutic. They just enriched life.” The leaves can be like vitamins. There’s going to be provided in heaven infinite variety, and there are going to be all kinds of things available in heaven, demonstrated by the expression of the leaves of that tree that are just going to energize life and just make it rich and full and exciting. And so, the leaves sort of signify the full enjoyment of life in the New Jerusalem. We don’t really need any food. We won’t need to be healed of anything. But there’s going to be endless variety and a constant infusing of great, exhilarating joy.

**Fourth, life in the New Jerusalem (22:3-5).** Here now we can think of the privileges of saints, what life is going to be like there in New Jerusalem.

Verse 3 says, “No longer will there be any curse.” Absolutely no curse at all. As we thought of in 21:4, there are not going to be any tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain. All these fit into the cursed world due to sin. They are all eternally gone. No longer any curse.

Verse 3 continues, “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.” The throne of God and the Lamb is there, and a sovereign God sits on his throne, and a sovereign Lamb with Him. His servants will serve Him. That’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to serve Him. We’re going to do whatever He wants us to do. We’re going to do whatever He tells us to do. That’s what we’ll do forever and ever and ever.

It was the Queen of Sheba who had reason to say of Solomon’s glory, “How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!” (1 Kings 10:8) Then how much more the blessing is for the servants who stand continually before God and see his glory and the glory of the Lamb! Actually the comparison is inadequate. We can say infinitely better. Isaiah 40:13 says, “Who has understood the mind of the LORD?” Who can understand the infinite creative mind of the eternal God? It is going to be incredible to serve him in ways which are absolutely beyond our ability to comprehend.

It is written in Revelation 7:15, “Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.” That’s why there doesn’t have to be a temple or a tabernacle, because He’s going to spread it over all of them. And so, the whole of the new heaven and the new earth becomes His tabernacle or His temple, and we serve him in that. We’re not going to be lying around. We’re going to be serving Him night and day. That simply means all the time, because there is no night there. When we serve Him, what happens? He serves us. Jesus said in Luke 12:37, “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them?” Wow!

And then John takes us further into the activities of heaven: in verse 4, “They will see his face.” They shall see His face. How eagerly we long to see the face of a loved one! We shall see his face. God said to Moses in Exodus 33: 20, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” That changes. Now we can look at the blazing glory of God in all its fullness and not die. For we’re holy. We are covered with His holiness. To see God’s face as sinners would be to be consumed with His holy animosity to sin. But in heaven we’ll see him in all his glory.

And verse 4 continues, “…his name will be on their foreheads.” They will be his personal possession, his treasured possession. That’s eternal security. We will belong to Him forever.

Verse 5 says, “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.” The description of the holy city ends with its glory with a repeat of real magnificence. This is the essence of it. And there is one more feature of what we do – “they will reign forever.” Not just serving but reigning. What a tremendous truth to reign for ever and ever with God and the Lamb! It’s unbelievable that we could attain to such glory. What a life in the holy city in the new heaven and the new earth.

The gold, the jewels, the diamonds, the pearls are all incidental to the glory shining. The glory is everything. This is astounding truth really. To be eternally embraced in the arms of the glory of God – unbelievable. We praise God. In the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we serve all the more in this world in the hope of serving him always eternally in the eternal heavenly kingdom ever shining in the glory of God. Amen!