

Newsletter February 2019

In last month's Newsletter we saw that the Heavens and the earth had fled away from the face of Him who sat upon the great white throne; whereupon, He had passed eternal judgment upon the reprobate lost. It was determined that the One who sat upon that throne was the glorified Christ, the Son of God. All about Him and his throne was the nothingness of outer darkness and somewhere within the extreme depths of that darkness was a place called Hell, consisting of a lake of eternal fire and brimstone. The lake had previously engulfed the Antichrist, the False Prophet, Satan, and all of his demonic angels. Finally, the reprobate lost were judged by Christ and added to that terrible population. Very soon thereafter, death and Hades, which had been depopulated, were also thrown into the lake of fire, after which the entrance to Hell was closed and sealed forever. Hell was never thereafter to be seen or heard of again – and with its passing the deadly curse of Adam's sin was no more.

In this month's newsletter we begin a study of Revelation Chapter 21, which describes the eternal ages following the last judgment at the conclusion of the Millennial Age on earth. The subject of this chapter, which continues into the first part of Chapter 22 is so ethereal – so otherworldly – that we find it extremely difficult to grasp with our mortal minds. At two places in these chapters, we find that what John was seeing, hearing, and recording seemed so extraordinary to his mind that God had to remind him that all of it was really true and faithful (cf. Re. 21:5; 22:6). As we proceed in this study, a certain amount of hyperbolic license would seem to be justified in an attempt to plumb its depths, but here in this commentary we shall make every effort to keep any exegesis of the text to an absolute minimum in order to stay true to the text as it is written.

The old heavens and the old earth had one long sad history of man's unrighteousness and of God's necessary judgment of them for their continued failure to comply with his will. All of this had passed away with the destruction of the old creation. The Apostle Peter had previously described this catastrophic event as follows, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2Pe.10-12). Even any remembrance of the old creation will have no place in the new eternal era, which God will suddenly usher in out of the empty dense darkness that will have remained after the old earth and the heavens, including the sun and the moon, had been dissolved. Regarding this new creation, Peter had said, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwell righteousness" (2Pe.3:13).

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Re.21:1).

In this verse we find that John saw the new heavens and a new earth, of which Peter had spoken, suddenly appear. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah had also seen this day from afar off as the Word of God had come to him saying, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind" (Is.65:17). Only God's Word will span the empty gap between the old and the new creation. As Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt.24:35). There was no sea (*thalassa* in the Greek) on the New Earth. There is no other way to interpret this text but to say that the New Earth will have no oceans, seas, or other massive bodies of water. The new earth will therefore consist of one continuous land mass, although there possibly could be numerous lakes and small spring-fed rivers existing within it. It's transcendence beyond the great beauty of the Eden of old will be very evident.

Immediately after the appearance of the new earth, John saw a Holy City, a New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven. This New Jerusalem, although having the same name, will be quite different than the old earthy Jerusalem. John noted that the appearance of this city was extremely beautiful in appearance, much as a bride is greatly adorned on her wedding day for her awaiting husband. This city is the abode of the Church dressed within its glorious ramparts, and her husband is Jesus Christ, the Son of God (cf. verses 9-11 below).

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither

sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”
(Re.21:3,4).

The great voice out of Heaven is that of God the Father speaking from his throne within the New Jerusalem (cf. verse 5 below). The word “tabernacle” is *skēnē* in the Greek, signifying a tent or place of habitation. Under the old covenant with the nation of Israel, God’s glory was first established within the tenuous wilderness tabernacle – a tent. Later on, God’s glory was established in the more substantial Temple, a beautiful structure, which portrayed the majesty of Christ, yet was later destroyed by Babylon because of Israel’s sin. In this new creation, God will reestablish his habitation among mankind within the person of Christ Jesus Himself and all of redeemed mankind shall become his people. He shall live among them as *Emanuel* (i.e. God with us), and will establish within redeemed mankind not only his glory, but his eternal presence – that can never be taken away.

The former things that were part of the old sin-filled creation will have passed away; death will have been cast into the lake of fire and is no more. Neither can there be any more pain, sorrow, or crying, which sin had wrought through the condemnation of Adam’s race – for the curse of sin is no more. God will wipe away all tears from the eyes of his redeemed, as all remembrance of prior trials and sufferings are completely wiped clean.

“And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”
(Re. 21:5,6).

As wonderful as is the passing away of all former things, God the Father and Creator declares from his throne that He will now make all things new. “New” here does not merely imply a chronological replica of the old creation, but a fresh and untarnished creation far better than the old ever was. The new Heaven and a New earth will be unblemished by the history of the old earth, which has passed away. This is such an amazing concept that God the Father directs John to write this down as being “true and faithful,” for He who has spoken it is the Alpha and Omega the beginning and end of all Truth. Although it may be difficult for us mortals to understand the new creation, there can be no question about God’s intent or ability to do exactly as He says in this revelation to John.

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Re.21:7,8).

He that overcomes shall inherit all things within the new creation, for they will be adopted as God’s sons. No natural man can “overcome” all of the terrible things existing within their fallen nature by their own strength, for as sin-filled descendants of Adam they have none. Those that overcome will do so through their belief and trust in Christ alone, who continues to work within them to regenerate their minds through his Holy Spirit. This comes about through the express will of God, as his chosen ones receive a spiritual rebirth, thus making of them new creatures who are alive in Christ. Those things that the redeemed must overcome are listed here as fearfulness and obstinate unbelief. Unbelievers, although they may openly profess to deny God’s existence, continue to fear Him and do not trust his Word. For that reason, they continue to move away as far as is possible from his presence in their lives. Many ultimately become “murderers, while others become whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars.” In their fearful denial, the unbelieving embrace these abominable activities that totally debase them, driving them away from any hope of God’s loving providence, and rendering them unfit for Heaven. Therefore, their destiny must be the lake of fire, which is the second and final death of the reprobate.

“And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Re.21:9-11);

Again, we read that one of the seven angels who had administered one of the seven last plagues approached John and beckoned him to come with him to see “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” John was swept away in his spirit to a “great and high mountain.” From there, he saw the Holy Jerusalem as it was descending down out of Heaven from God. The word “descending” is *katabaino* in the Greek, which was also translated “coming down” in verse 2. The Holy City seems to be yet above the earth at some great distance, requiring John to be taken to a high

mountain to observe all of it in its massive size. No where are we expressly told that this amazing city comes to rest, but there is a very strong implication that it came to rest upon this high mountain in order for John to study it in greater detail. For its foundation to be fully placed upon it, the mountain must have had a great flat plateau of at least two and one-quarter million square miles located at its topmost elevation (cf. Re.21:16).

“And had a wall great and high, *and* had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Re.21:12-14).

John also saw a great high wall surrounding the city, which had a total of twelve gates, each attended by an angel. Each of the gates was assigned to permit entry to a specific tribe of Israel, for they had their names inscribed upon each of them. The gates were arranged in four groups of three, one group on each of the four sides of the city. The four directions (east, north, south, and west) are seen to apply to the earlier assigned positions of the encampments of the twelve tribes of Israel around the tabernacle, when they were on their wilderness march. Here, each tribe will find its own entrance to the great city in that corresponding order.

The great wall about the city was built upon twelve foundations, and written upon each was the name of one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. A question arises here concerning Matthias and Saul called Paul. Matthias had not been personally called by Jesus, as were all of the other apostles. He had been chosen by the eleven apostles, through the casting of lots, to replace Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Christ. Matthias was counted among the apostles on the day of Pentecost, so as to represent all the tribes of Israel. Jesus would later personally call the Apostle Paul to specifically represent Him before the Gentiles. This New Jerusalem will be the eternal abode of the Church, largely made up of Gentiles. Therefore, Paul cannot be counted with the eleven apostles that Jesus had earlier called to establish the firm Jewish foundation for his Church; rather, Paul was called later to build up the Gentile walls resting upon that firm finished foundation. Thus, the apostles represented by the gates are “Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite,” (cf. Mt. 10:2-4) and, replacing Judas Iscariot – the apostle Matthias.

“And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred *and* forty *and* four cubits, *according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel”* (Re.21:15-17).

Although John had seen the city as it descended, he was not immediately aware of its size. The angel that had brought him to the mountain measured the city with a golden reed as John observed. The city measured foursquare, thus indicating a square. The length and the breadth of it were each about 1500 miles (twelve thousand furlongs), thus encompassing an area of two and one quarter million square miles. Astonishingly, the height of the city was also about 1500 miles! Although present cities on earth have many so-called “skyscrapers,” none even come close to approaching this height; for, they would crumble and fall under their own weight. We cannot be certain about gravity within this new creation. Moreover, we find that this Holy city was constructed within Heaven itself, and was then sent down intact to the new earth. Overall, the city’s size approximates a cube, which has nearly the volume of the earth’s present-day moon. In fact, if the moon were a hollow sphere, the city, viewed as a cube, would fit almost perfectly within it – its eight corners touching the inside of the sphere.

A great wall, measuring about 215 feet, (144 cubits) in height, as measured by the angel, was built upward upon the foundation, and it extended all around the lower perimeter of the massive city.

“And the building of the wall of it was *of* jasper: and the city *was* pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city *were* garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation *was* jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst” (Re.21:18-20).

While the walls of earthly cities were built to protect against enemy invasion, the purpose of this wall is quite different, for no enemies exist. Instead, it defines and adorns the boundaries of this wondrous Holy city with its

great beauty. The wall was made of jasper (Greek, *iaspis*) which is a precious rare gem of indefinite color – perhaps brightly multicolored, yet often appearing as a clear diamond as the colors blend together. The city itself “was pure gold, like unto clear glass;” that is, it was made of some transparent substance that was golden in color. Due to its great height, the city’s structure could be seen standing high above the jasper walls.

John then records the striking colors of the twelve foundations, which are visible under the walls that rest upon them. As we read earlier, these foundations represent the twelve apostles of our Lord. The Gospel of Truth is indeed beautiful to contemplate, and here we observe it represented in all its splendor as the firm foundation upon which the New Jerusalem stands. Every color of the rainbow that surrounds God’s throne is replicated here.

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

Each of the gates to the city were made of one large pearl. Symbolically, a pearl represents the intense suffering that had produced it. Here it represents the intense suffering of Christ, who had made entrance into heaven possible. There is but one street within the city; nevertheless, it apparently branches out so as to connect to the twelve gates. It is likely that the branches could appear as spokes in a wheel leading to a “hub” at the center of the city, where the throne room of God stands. As is the rest of the city, this street is also made of a transparent substance having a rich golden color.

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Re.21:22,23).

There is no Temple located within the Holy city, for it had required an animal sacrifice as a symbolic act of atonement for the continuing sin of mortal mankind. The need for animal sacrifice passed away with the singular, ultimate, and final sacrifice of Jesus’ own body upon the cross. The earthly Temple was soon thereafter forever destroyed by God through the human agencies of Roman armies in AD 70. For many centuries all but a small remnant of Jews had stubbornly rejected the finality of that destruction – until Christ had returned in the Millennium to redeem a far greater remnant. Within this new creation, sin will no longer exist, nor will there be any remembrance of it – or of the old Temple – for “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” Mankind’s fellowship with God here will be very personal and direct. Inasmuch as God has established his permanent habitation with them, fellowship with Him need no longer be attained through shadowy symbols, rituals, and ceremonies, but face-to-face in the reality of his personal presence (cf. Re.22:4). So bright will be that presence, that there will be “no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine” upon the New Jerusalem. The intense glory of God’s continuing presence, along with that of Christ, the Lamb, will abundantly provide all of the light needed within that great city.

“And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Re.21:24-27).

There will be Gentile nations that had not participated in the final rebellion of Satan at the end of the Millennial Age. They will be redeemed and reestablished upon the New Earth, which will be continuously illuminated by the great light radiating from the New Jerusalem. The gates of the New Jerusalem will always be open, for there will be no night or enemy requiring them to be closed. The kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor into the city. Believing Jews who were redeemed after the Rapture of the Church, and thus are not a part of the Church, will also be established upon the New Earth. These have doors of pearl especially prepared for them through which they can enter to worship God and Christ, the Lamb. Although the gates to the city are always open, nothing or no one will ever enter into the city that could defile it. There will be none roaming about who engages in abominable activities or speaks lies, because all those who remain within this new eternal era are sanctified saints whose names will have been found written down in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Next month, when we take up our final study of the Revelation, this discussion of the New Jerusalem will continue with an examination of two additional and wondrous properties of the Holy Jerusalem. As the text of the Revelation comes to a close, we find Jesus’ final words of assurance that He will soon come quickly to redeem his beloved people, who shall also inherit Heaven’s Glory. © Arthur J. Smith February 2019