

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Revelation 21:9-23

Topic

John watches New Jerusalem descend from
Heaven to its place over the new Earth
in the renewed heavens

Title

"Goin' Up to the City in the Sky"

It has a distinctive name: The Nightingale of Kuala Lumpur.

It is a red burgundy one-of-a-kind gown that is worth \$30 million. Malaysian designer Faiyzali Abdullah incorporated chiffon and silk, Swarovski (swaa raav skee) crystals, and 751 diamonds weighing over 1100 carats. A 70-carat teardrop diamond further adorns it.

Egyptian designer Hany El Bahairy created the world's most expensive wedding gown, \$15 million. Several hundred diamonds and precious stones cover the dress. Ivory tulle and silk organza are the fabrics from which it is sewn. The diamonds and stones form intricate patterns from head to toe, glittering over the bride.

You're probably more frugal. brides.com can help. They have a list of dresses under \$100.00 that they say "will make you feel like a million bucks."

The world has yet to see the most beautiful bride in the most breathtaking setting.

We get a glimpse of her in our verses: "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (21:9-11).

It reads as if this were the moment in an earthly wedding when the bride appears and those gathered see her for the first time.

In case you don't know, the church is the bride.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Glorified Will Highlight New Jerusalem,** and **#2 Jesus' Glory Lights New Jerusalem.**

#1 - You Glorified Will Highlight New Jerusalem (v9-21)

Fancy villas, high-rise apartments, lakes, parks, and sprawling road networks. These cities in China have it all. Just one element is missing: **People.** About fifty such 'Ghost Cities' lay desolate across the country.

New Jerusalem would be no more than a Ghost City without its inhabitants. Believers in their resurrection bodies are the highlight of the city. Its true beauty is us made beautiful by Jesus.

Rev 21:9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

It is not uncommon for a person to retire then enjoy a second or third career. The seven angels who poured out the seven last plagues had a short 'bowling' career. One of them retired to become a tour guide.

Pray about how you might serve the Lord in your retirement.

“Lamb” is the preferred description of Jesus in the Revelation. He is “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” by His sacrifice on the Cross. He is the only one worthy of taking the scroll from His Father and bring the current dispensation to its end.

What Jesus called “My church” (Matthew 16:18) was a mystery until He and the New Testament apostles revealed it. The church was born on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection when Jesus sent God the Holy Spirit to empower and give boldness to believers to preach the Gospel until He comes to resurrect the dead in Christ and rapture living saints.

One of many illustrations describing the church is that we are the bride of Jesus. The angel invited John to take a look at the church, “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

This is important: John saw the church collectively. He saw us all together, all at once. The city adorns the collective bride.

Just as a bride is adorned with her gown and jewelry, so is the church adorned by New Jerusalem.

Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God,

Jesus promised He would occupy Himself building mansions in Heaven for us. When the heavens and Earth are remade New Jerusalem will be moved from its construction site in Heaven to the atmosphere above Earth.

Rev 21:11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

There is something beautiful about an aerial view of a great city lit up at night. All the Earth’s cities combined are barely a match compared to New Jerusalem. It shines “having the glory of God.”

*I gotta home in gloryland
that outshines the sun
Way beyond the blue*

Rev 21:12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

Rev 21:13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

The ministry of angels changes dramatically throughout the dispensations of human history. They are everywhere during the Great Tribulation performing incredible deeds. Afterward they stand honor guard in New Jerusalem. There is no reason, no need, to guard. It is a ceremonial posting.

God gifts each of His believers. It doesn't mean our gifts are ours to exercise when, where, and how we will. You will have postings that test your obedience.

Regardless your gifts, you are first a servant:

- A servant does whatever they are asked.
- A servant sees a need and meets the need.

The gates have the names of the "twelve tribes of Israel." In verse fourteen, we will read, "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The apostles, along with prophets, laid the foundation for the church.

Israel and the church are two distinct entities in God's plan.

Israel and the church are *not* one and the same. Roman Catholics and most Reformed Christians, and others, are confused. They teach that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan. Not true, proven here.

You cannot understand prophecy, and you will be led into misinterpretation unless you keep Israel and the church separate in God's plan.

The apostle Paul wrote, "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:1-2).

Commentators and critics make a hullabaloo about the "twelve tribes." The original twelve were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

I said 'original' because Joseph had two sons while serving as Prime Minister of Egypt. Jacob rewarded Joseph with a double portion of land by adopting Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, like his own (Genesis 48:5). This adoption technically split the tribe of Joseph in two, making thirteen tribes. The various lists of the twelve tribes in the Bible don't always match.

Bottom line: We are never told why these lists differ. It is need to know, *and we don't need to know.*

Rev 21:14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

More commentator-confusion surrounds the twelve apostles. Jesus chose Judas Iscariot to be one of the twelve. After his betrayal and suicide, the eleven drew lots to pick Matthias as his replacement.

Some commentators think they were premature because it seems evident that God meant for Paul to be the twelfth apostle.

After Matthias is chosen, the group of apostles is called "**the twelve.**" God the Holy Spirit considered Matthias the bonafide twelfth apostle or He would not have inspired the writer of Acts, Luke, to use the title.

Peter and Andrew; James and John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Jude, aka Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot; **and Matthias.**

Is it possible that the great apostle Paul will not have his name commemorated in the city? Yes. Let it be a lesson to us. Paul said of himself, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (First Corinthians 15:9). Our rush to honor him for his work reveals a wrong tendency to desire recognition and position. It is a sign we are looking at outward things, whereas the Lord looks at the heart

Rev 21:15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.

Rev 21:16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

Rev 21:17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

The angel's third career is as a surveyor. Although an angel, he uses the "measure" of humans. It solves a great debate. We won't be using either the metric system or imperial measurements. Cubits and furlongs are in your future. Better read up on it.

The New Jerusalem's length, height, and width are equal. It is either a cube or a pyramid. A cube is more reminiscent of the Tabernacle and Temple.

Let's do some math together. New Jerusalem measures about 1400 miles in every direction. One human being takes up minimum space of about 2' by 2' by 6', or 24 cubic feet per person.

Mathematicians calculate that six billion people can 'fit' in one cubic mile. If the city had twenty billion residents, each person would have a cube of space that is seventy-five acres **in every direction.**

A few more calculations:

- New Jerusalem is a multi-story city. In *The Return of the King*, the city of Gondor is an excellent example of a multi-story city. If each 'story' in New Jerusalem were 10' high, **it would have 792,000 floors.**
- Suppose the mansions on each floor were 250,000 sq.ft. There could be more than one quarter million mansions per floor.
- At a vantage point 5000 miles away, New Jerusalem would appear more than 130 times larger than the moon.
- The ground coverage would equal the combined areas of all but nine of the states in the United States. Some scholars suggest the city sits on Earth, *not* hovering in the heavens. It's pretty obviously too big to be on Earth.

It's big and will be no Ghost City. A lot of people have gotten saved, and many more will get saved before the city makes its dramatic descent.

The first high-rise building in the Bible was the Tower of Babel. Nimrod & Co. started construction on a brick and slime structure to reach the heavens. He wasn't building a stairway to Heaven. The finished would be a place to observe and worship things in the heavens.

Archaeologists call these ancient towers *ziggurats*. They good-guess that the tallest of them was just under 200'.

The tallest building in the world is Khalifa Tower in Dubai. It is just over half a mile tall at 2,722'. It has about 163 stories.

It wouldn't be a lawn ornament in New Jerusalem.

Rev 21:18 The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

Striking, vibrant colors will be produced as light passes through and reflects off gems and precious metals.

"Pure gold" is said to be "like clear glass." In verse twenty-one we will read that "the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."

Rev 21:19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,

Rev 21:20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

I don't see any reason to get bogged down explaining all these individually. It's going to be purdy.

Rev 21:21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Oysters that big scare me... But I suppose they'll be friendly. This description is probably where we get the idea that Peter will meet us at the "pearly gates." It won't be Peter; it will be Jesus.

Notice it says, "the street," *singular*. No cul-de-sacs, only one winding ribbon of road climbing up 792,000 stories. Once again, think Gondor.

The building materials are precious gems and minerals. What do we do with precious stones and gold today? Or, better yet, what do wives want their husbands to do with them?

They are in the jewelry that we give to the one we love.

New Jerusalem is precious gems in a pure gold setting. The city is an immense jewel that will surround the bride.

Extravagance is a trait of romantic love. You want to be able to give your loved one something amazing. It's not because you are materialistic, but because you are romantic.

When given to the one you love, things of great value show you care more about him or her than the things in all the world. If you could, you'd give your

loved one the world - because the one you love has more value to you than everything valuable in the world.

Charles Spurgeon said, *"Let me revel in this one thought: before God made the heavens and the earth, He set His love upon me."*

You, glorified, will be the highlight of the city.

#2 - Jesus' Glory Will Light New Jerusalem (v22-23)

We've encountered several 12's. There are a lot more 12's in the Bible, 187 of them to be exact. In most of those instances, the number 12 conveys God's perfect government:

- The 12 Patriarchs of the 12 tribes were the leaders governing Israel.
- The 12 apostles had the authority to lay the church's foundation, govern it, and establish its future governing leaders.

The 12's of New Jerusalem tell us that it will be more than big and beautiful. It will be perfectly governed.

Rev 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The sense I get of John's statement, "I saw no Temple in it," is that he was looking for one. The Temple at Jerusalem had been a constant in his life. For many years he had visited it at least twice annually as was required of every male Jew.

The lack of a Temple in New Jerusalem would have been a stunning realization for John. Stunning in a good way because he was immediately inspired to understand that "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple."

God met with Adam and Eve face-to-face. Adam and Eve's sin broke their face time with God. The penalty for sin, for them and their offspring, was and is death.

The sacrificial death of an animal as a substitute could temporarily restore fellowship. The Law of Moses eventually codified a system of substitutionary sacrifice. God put His glorious presence in the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple. He met with His people through a mediator after the shedding of blood.

The New Testament Book of Hebrews proves that Jesus was better than the Temple system of sacrifice in every way. He is our mediator, and since we are in Him, we have immediate access to come boldly to God the Father.

Please do not get involved with rites, rules, and rituals that distance you from the intimacy made possible by Jesus shedding his blood.

Rev 21:23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.

Who doesn't enjoy a good sunrise or sunset? Better get that out of your system.

The city will be constructed so that the light of Jesus Christ will reflect throughout it. It will be like no light we've ever experienced before. No one will miss darkness.

I was watching an old *Pawn Stars* episode. They discussed how they were fooled when cubic zirconia first hit the streets in the late 1970s.

John knew his gems. He knew as well that the Lord would never build with sub-standard, faux materials. He mentioned "pure gold" when, in fact, on Earth gold cannot be 100% pure.

Neither ought we to build with "wood, hay, stubble," but with "gold, silver, precious stones" (First Corinthians 5).

How?? Do everything as unto the Lord, in His empowering, and you are building with the best materials.

You earn rewards from the Lord while building. John earlier likened your rewards to adornments you add to your white robes of righteousness. He wrote, "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is **the righteous acts of the saints**" (19:8).

Be beautiful. Walk with Jesus and receive His rewards for stuff He asks you to do, then enables you to perform.

- Gals, you will never wear The Nightingale of Kuala Lumpur.
- Guys, you'll never build anything like the Khalifa Tower.

Compared to New Jerusalem, building for Jesus far exceeds anything mankind could ever accomplish.

It isn't the city that looks mahvelous. It is the church within it that the city adorns.

One final thought, this from A.W. Tozer:

An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others.