



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 20, 2007
Released on Wednesday, May 16, 2007**

“God in Our Midst”

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 1:15-23.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21:9-22:5.

PRINTED TEXT: Revelation 21:9-10; 21:22-22:5.

Revelation 21:9-10, 22-27

9 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 show thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

.....

22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

23 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.

24 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 honor into it.

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

26 And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.

27 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.

Revelation 22:1-5

1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Introduction

The seven wonders of the ancient world included the pyramids of Egypt, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. Some biblical characters may have stood in the shadow of some of these wonders. When Moses was a prince of Egypt, the Great Pyramid of Cheops had been there a thousand years. When Paul was in Ephesus, the Temple of Diana had been worshiped in for six hundred years.

No matter how awed we are by the wonders of the world, none of them can compare with the wonders of heaven. How literally we should interpret John's vision is a matter of debate among respected saints and scholars. Nevertheless, what John saw causes us to stand in awe of what the Creator has prepared for His redeemed people.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to give a Bible-based description of the New Jerusalem, including material features and the central role played in it by God.

Principle: to promote a sure hope of eternal blessing that will sustain Christians in their sometimes troublesome journey from earth to heaven.

Application: to keep the goal of heaven alive within believers and encourage them to share it with others and make it their goal.

People of God (Revelation 21:9-10)

1. Who was John referring to when he mentioned "the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:9)?

We have already considered the image of *the bride, the Lamb's wife* in earlier lessons; in Revelation 19:7 and 21:2, we saw this terminology used as a reference to all who belong to God. The focus was on the bride's preparation, the way the faithfulness of those who belong to God prepared them for eternal life. When John refers to the Lamb, he draws attention to the fact of whose we are.

The counterpart of the bride is the great harlot of Revelation 17:1. The purity of the bride is in sharp contrast to the filthiness of the great harlot (compare Revelation 19:7, 8 with Revelation 17:2). Mention of *the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues* harks back to the judgment of God in chapters 15 and 16.

2. What does it mean that John was "in the spirit" (v.10)?

To be carried away "in the spirit" indicates something more than an ordinary vision, which could not be called ordinary in any case. This present experience might be similar to what happened to Ezekiel when he was taken by the Spirit to the valley of dry bones (37:1). Throughout Revelation, John is said to be "in the Spirit" (1:10; cf. 4:2; 17:3).

In this case, however, John was taken to "a great and high mountain" (Rev. 21:10). Such a vantage point would give him the proverbial bird's-eye view of the New Jerusalem "descending out of heaven from God."

It might also be noted that mountains have played a significant role in the history of God's people. Moses received the law on a mountain (Exod. 19:3) and later looked into the Promised Land from a mountain (Deut. 34:1). Elijah experienced a great victory on a mountain (I Kings 18:19). Ezekiel saw a restored temple from a mountain (Ezek. 40:2). Christ taught from mountains (Matt. 5:1; 24:3), was transfigured on a mountain (17:1), and ascended back to heaven from a mountain (Acts 1:9-12).

The significant point of this passage is what John sees while he is in the spirit: *that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God*. In the previous verse the angel said that he was going to show John the bride, the Lamb's wife. What John subsequently sees means that the bride of verse 9 is the same thing as the holy Jerusalem of verse 10.

3. What are some additional details concerning the holy city?

As the chapter continues, more details are given concerning the holy city. John uses breathtaking language to describe what he sees. What makes this city so beautiful is God's presence among His people. John sees the future of all who have remained faithful and how they manifest God's glory.

John goes on to tell us that the city has high walls and twelve gates bearing the names of Israel's twelve tribes (v. 12). On the twelve foundations of the city are the names of the twelve apostles (v. 14). The city is cube shaped (v. 16) and made of transparent gold (v. 18). "And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones" (v. 19). The gates are made of pearl, and "the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (v. 21). To say the least, this is a spectacular, awe-inspiring picture of what awaits God's people.

4. The church, the people of God, will reflect God's glory in the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city. But how can we reflect His glory while here on earth?

According to an old saying, "We can become so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good." God's glory is revealed as we offer the cup of cold water in His name, as we comfort the afflicted, clothe the naked, and care for the destitute. Having hearts of compassion instead of hearts of stone reflects the image and glory of God. This happens when the church becomes involved in deeds of goodness and kindness, in Jesus' name, here on earth as we fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). To be content to sit back in our church services or Bible studies, merely enjoying the company of one another, is not an option in God's sight.

City of God (Revelation 21:22-27)

5. What is conspicuously absent from the New Jerusalem (v. 22)?

At the center of life in the earthly Jerusalem was a temple, the most holy site among the people of Israel. Speaking of the New Jerusalem, though, John declared, "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (v. 22).

"Jesus told the woman at the well that the day would come when worship of God would no longer be geographically circumscribed (John 4:21). Paul later declared that the believing congregation was in fact the temple of the living God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22). The final state toward which this points is eternity itself, where the

presence of God the Father and the Lamb permeates and sanctifies all that the heavenly Jerusalem symbolizes" (Mounce).

6. Why is there no need for sun or moon in the eternal city (v. 23)?

Since the glory of the Father and the Son is in the eternal city, there is no need for sun or moon to brighten its streets. The imagery is similar to Isaiah 60:19-20: "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.... and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

7. In what sense do the kings bring their glory into the city of God (v. 24)?

The word "nations" (Rev. 21:24) is *ethne* in the Greek and is elsewhere translated "Gentiles" (Matt. 6:32; 1 Cor. 10:20). It is the word used in the Great Commission when Christ commanded that the gospel be taken to "all nations" (Luke 24:47).

"From the fact that the nations (the Gentiles) will be in the city (Rev. 21:24,26)-it is evident that the city is the dwelling place of the saints of all ages, and God Himself" (Walvoord and Zuck). Note that only "them which are saved" (v. 24) will have access to the city of God.

That "the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour" into the New Jerusalem is clear in Isaiah 60:3-5. This glory they bring or offer has always belonged to God in the same way that all power has always belonged to God. This is the ultimate point of the Isaiah passage: any power, wealth, or "forces" that seem to belong to us truly belong to God. The faithful will surrender it all to Him.

8. Why will the gates of the New Jerusalem remain open all the time (vs. 25,27)?

In an ancient city the gates were shut at night to keep out bands of marauders and others who might wreak havoc on its streets. Gates, doors, and locks are necessary in a fallen world where evil men and dishonest individuals of all types flourish. Very few people in our time live without taking any security measures. The New Jerusalem will be different: "Day extends indefinitely without interruption because darkness never comes. Thus there is no need of closing gates" (Mounce).

Revelation 21:8 concerns the kinds of people who have no place in heaven. John reiterated those thoughts in verse 27. The defiled, the abominable, and liars will have no portion in this city. Only those who are "written in the Lamb's book of life" will share in the glories of the New Jerusalem. Mentioned several times in the Book of Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15), the book of life is God's roll of the faithful. Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (13:8), and the saved are those whose names were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world (17:8). This is a great mystery, to be sure. "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (20:15).

Peace of God (Revelation 22:1-5)

9. Why is the tree of life in heaven? Do you think there will be actual fruit on the tree (Revelation 22:1,2)?

The "pure river of water of life" is similar to the vision of Ezekiel 47:1-12, although it seems the Prophet Ezekiel was not dealing with the eternal state. "Some writers find in the imagery of flowing water a reference to the Holy Spirit. Others find the promise of immortality or a reference to the abundant life that God now gives to his people. All this is true, but the central affirmation of the verse is that in the eternal state the faithful will live at the source of the life-giving stream that proceeds from the very presence of God" (Mounce).

Especially noteworthy is the presence of the "tree of life" (Rev. 22:2) in the New Jerusalem. Had Adam and Eve not sinned, they would have been able to eat from the tree of life and live forever (Gen. 2:9; 3:22). Because of their decision to disobey God, Paradise was lost. Human beings have been forever affected by the Fall (Rom. 5:12, 19). Now, however, Paradise has been restored, and man is once again permitted to eat from the tree of life and live forever with God.

Regarding how "the leaves of the tree [are] for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2), we are given no details. "Even though there is no sickness in the eternal state, the tree's fruit and leaves seem to contribute to the physical well-being of those in the eternal state" (Walvoord and Zuck).

10. Unlike our previous relationship, how will we view God (vs. 3-5)?

Because redeemed humanity is now before the throne of God, the curse that was upon the human race has been forever removed. This is why man will no longer become ill and die, for all that came about because of Adam's sin and our willingness to follow in his footsteps (Rom. 6:23).

Under the Mosaic law, God said, "There shall no man see me, and live" (Exod. 33:20). Likewise, the New Testament declares, "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). This, however, will change, for the saved "shall see his face" (Rev. 22:4). God's name will be stamped upon the foreheads of His chosen ones, for they belong to God and to the Lamb.

It will be the brilliance of the Lord God and the Lamb that will provide everlasting light for the eternal city of God (22:5; cf. 21:23).

Unlike the millennium (20:6), those occupying the New Jerusalem will live with God and "shall reign for ever and ever" (22:5).

Conclusion No Gray Areas

If you ever take a class in ethics at a secular university, you may discover that the teaching is absorbed with the so-called *gray areas*. These are areas where right and wrong are determined by the individuals in the particular situation under consideration-and almost all situations are thought to be gray areas in some way!

Make no mistake: there will be no gray areas when it comes to determining who will live in God's presence and who won't. God knows those who are His and those who aren't. The choice to stay within the love of Christ or reject Him confronts us daily. What does your choice today say about where you intend to spend eternity?

Prayer

Father, we praise You for the victory that You have already secured through the death and resurrection of Christ. We pray that we would have the strength to make that victory true even now in our present lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

Anticipate eternity!

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

As they read Revelation 22:6-21 for the next lesson, urge your students to realize that the majority of people are in a sinful condition and desperately need to come by faith to Christ before the time arrives for Him to come for His own.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

Willie Ferrell

Jesus Is All Ministries

www.jesusisall.com