

The Holy City

Revelation 21:9—14, 21—27 (v. 10—11)

Introduction

Chapter One of Revelation lays the foundation for the book. Chapters Two and Three contain the letters to the seven churches, which serve as instructions, promises, and warnings to us. But from there on, the book seems to go a different direction, full of bizarre and colorful descriptions of things that seem unreal, like a bad trip on LSD. These images scare us, and we tend to avoid Revelation. It doesn't seem like much is "revealing" about it.

Wiping Away the Fog

Indeed, trying to read Revelation can be like trying to drive with the windshield fogged up. So, we are going to turn on the defroster and get rid of the fog. There are two keys to understanding Revelation. First, Revelation is highly symbolic, so we must understand what the symbols represent. Second, contrary to popular opinion, Revelation isn't a "glimpse at the end times." It is a God's-eye-view of history from the first coming of Christ to His second. And this history is told several times in many ways. So, with that in mind, let's turn our attention to the Holy City of **Revelation 21**.

The Holy City as the Church (v. 9—10)

We may be tempted to think of the Holy City as referring to heaven, equating it with the celestial city of **Pilgrim's Progress**. But here, an angel tells John he will *show him the Bride, the wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9)*. This is obviously a reference to the church. But what he shows John is *the Holy City, Jerusalem (v. 10)*. The writer of Hebrews also identifies the church as the heavenly Jerusalem (read **Hebrews 12:22—24**).

The Wall (v. 12)

This city has a *great high wall (v. 12)*. The wall is Jesus Christ. Walls are for defense. Jesus is the church's Defender. Walls are also boundaries. Jesus is the church's boundary. We don't go anywhere outside of His love. This wall is *144 cubits high (v. 17)*. Now a cubit is roughly 18 inches, or a foot and a half, making the wall 216' high. But remember, this is symbolic. The height isn't as instructive as the measurement. 144 is 12 X 12. The number 12 represents governing authority and completion or perfection. 144 is perfection squared. The church is contained by Jesus Christ, our Perfect Governor.

The Gates (v. 12, 21)

The wall has twelve gates, three on each side. Once again, the number 12 represents governing authority and completion or perfection. Christ is our perfect and complete gate, as He says in John 10, *“I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7)*. The fact that the names of the 12 sons of Jacob are inscribed on the gates shows that *the whole band of patriarchs belonged to the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* – Apringius of Beja (6th Century bishop and exegete) in **Tractate on the Apocalypse 21.12**. Three is the number of the Holy Trinity.

The Foundation (v. 14)

This wall has 12 foundation stones. Jesus Christ is the perfect foundation upon which we build our faith, as He says in Matthew 7, *“Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24)*. The names of the 12 apostles are on the stones of the foundation. This shows that the apostles’ teaching about Jesus Christ is the basis for our faith, the foundation of the church. We see this in the **Apostles’ Creed**.

The Glory (v. 11, 22—27)

The gold and jewels the city is made of are so pure, they are translucent. That shows the glory of the city. There is no temple, because God is present Himself in the city. The temple is a sacred space where people go to meet God. The nations will *bring their glory into the city (v. 24)*. This is a vision of the future when all will worship the Son of God, as Paul says in Philippians 2 – *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10—11)*. Since this is after the great judgment and Satan is banished to hell, there is no danger from him, so *its gates will never be shut (v. 25)*. There is no night because *its lamp is the Lamb (v. 25)*.

Then and Now

Of course, this is a picture of the church in glory, after the second coming of Christ. But in this life, Jesus still encircles the church; we operate under His authority; the door to the church is open to all people; and Christ is always with us, giving us His light to lead the way. This is all possible because:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
