

Revelation 21 Commentary

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Revelation 21:1

In the previous chapter, John was shown an ideal time on earth when Satan was bound and Christ and the saints ruled for one thousand years. As wonderful as the [Millennial Kingdom](#) will be with many of God's promises regarding Israel, the earthly Jerusalem, and the renovated earth coming to fulfillment, it is not the ultimate plan of God. After the [Millennial Kingdom](#) and the final rebellion of Satan, John saw the original earth and heaven flee away. In the process the earth and sea gave up the dead who stood before God for judgment (Rev. 20:11-13⁺). During the Millennial Kingdom, sin and death had not yet been vanquished (Isa. 65:20; Rev. 20:9⁺). Now John sees the creation of a *new* heaven and earth which differs fundamentally from the old order. In a word, the new creation is *perfect*. There is no more sin or death. Those who populate the new earth enjoy full communion with God. The [OT](#) prophets saw glimpses of the eternal state. The Holy Spirit revealed through them that there would be a new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) and that death would eventually be no more (Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14). But their visions of the eternal state were often intertwined with revelation concerning the [Millennial Kingdom](#) making it difficult to draw a clear distinction between the two (e.g., Isa. 65:17-20).¹ Now, John is shown aspects of the eternal state which are markedly different from the [Millennial Kingdom](#). Beginning with the first verse of this chapter, we are no longer in the [Millennial Kingdom](#): there is no more *sin, death, sea, or Temple*.²

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth

The conjunction, *now* ([καί](#) [kai]), connects what follows with the previous chapter. The creation of the new heaven and new earth is in response to the destruction of the previous heaven and earth which fled away and gave up the dead (Rev. 20:11⁺). *New* is [καινὴ](#) [kainon]: "in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new. In such a case the new is, as a rule, superior in kind to the old."³

An earth which no longer smarts and smokes under the curse of sin,—an earth which needs no more to be torn with hooks and irons to make it yield its fruits,—an earth where thorns and thistles no longer infest the ground, nor serpents hiss among the flowers, nor savage beasts lay in ambush to devour,—an earth whose sod is never cut with graves, whose soil is never moistened with tears or saturated with human blood, whose fields are never blasted with unpropitious seasons, whose atmosphere never gives wings to the seeds of plague and death, whose ways are never lined with funeral processions, or blocked up with armed men on their way to war,—an earth whose hills ever flow with salvation, and whose valleys know only the sweetness of Jehovah's smiles,—an earth from end to end, and from centre to utmost verge, clothed with the eternal blessedness of Paradise Restored!⁴

The restorative work prior to the Millennial Kingdom was a *regeneration* (Mat. 19:28), not an entirely new created order as here. This is demonstrated by the fact that after the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6⁺), the earth and sea still contained all the unsaved dead of history. Although the millennial earth was renovated in order to recover from the judgments of the Tribulation and to restore Eden-like conditions, sin and death remained and the earth, in one sense, remained *unclean*. In the conflagration of the first heaven and earth, sin and death are completely purged from the created order (Rev. 20:14⁺). It was revealed to the OT prophets that the first heavens and earth would perish (Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 51:6) and be replaced by a new heavens and earth:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. No more shall an infant from there *live but*

a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isa. 65:17-20)

As we mentioned, the visions of the OT prophets often intermingled elements from both the Millennial Kingdom and the eternal state—the different elements sometimes being presented out of their chronological sequence. Isaiah saw the new heavens and earth, but went on to describe a blessed time which *includes death and sin*. These latter characteristics are incompatible with the eternal state:

Isaiah's vision, while glimpsing the Kingdom age, the last ordered age in time, is projected into eternity. He saw the Millennium merging into the final state of bliss and having an everlasting feature to it, according to the Davidic Covenant (2S. 7:13, 16). So the prophecy employs language that although applicable to a degree to millennial conditions, will be fully realized on the regenerated earth, which will follow upon the postmillennial renovation by fire (2Pe. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1⁺; cf. Heb. 12:26-28).⁵

The prophets sometimes saw future events not only together; but in expanding their description of these events, they seem occasionally to reverse the time sequence in their record of the vision. An example of this may be seen in Isa. 65:17-25 . . . It is apparent, therefore, that Isaiah saw together on the screen of prophecy both the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal Kingdom; but he expands in detail the former because it is the "nearest coming" event and leaves the latter for fuller description in a later New Testament revelation [Rev. 21:1-8⁺].⁶

Some interpreters, insisting upon a strict chronological order for Isaiah's vision, mistake the creation described as the regeneration of the earth *prior to* the Millennial Kingdom:

Most interpreters understand the new heaven and new earth to be postmillennial, as this description succeeds the account of the last judgment. It is necessary, however, in interpreting prophecy to take into account all that the rest of the prophets have written. If this is done, it will be seen that the new heaven and new earth are distinctly revealed to be premillennial in the only other passages which contain the prediction (Isa. 65:17-19. 66:22. 2Pe. 3:13). Every student of prophecy knows that there are numerous instances of prophecies given out of their chronological sequence.⁷

No matter whether the interpreter takes the creation described here to be *before* the Millennium or *after*, he is forced to accept a reversal in order between prophetic vision and historical chronology in *some* passage. Either Isaiah's vision of the new heavens and earth *preceding* the Millennium is in chronological order or John's vision of the new heaven and earth *following* the Millennium is chronological. They cannot both be true. Fortunately, God has not left us to guess at the answer. He has left us a key with which to solve this conundrum: the destruction of death. Since the destruction of the first earth results in all the dead being given up and Death itself cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14⁺), we can expect that death will be purged before the new earth is created. This is the chronological sequence of John's vision: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death . . . for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4⁺). Since Isaiah's vision included death (Isa. 65:20) after the new creation (Isa. 65:17), it cannot be in chronological order. Nor does it describe a renovation prior to the Millennial Kingdom:

But one objection may be made to the supposition, that the prophet is here depicting the state of things in the millennium; viz., that this description is preceded by an account of the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The prophet appears, therefore, to refer to that Jerusalem, which is represented in the Apocalypse as coming down from heaven to earth after the transformation of the globe. But to this it may be replied, that the Old Testament prophet was not yet able to distinguish from one another the things which the author of the Apocalypse separates into distinct periods. From the Old Testament point of view generally, nothing was known of a state of blessedness beyond the grave. Hades lay beyond this present life; and nothing was known of a heaven in which men were blessed. Around the throne of God in heaven there were angels and not men. And, indeed, until the risen Saviour ascended to heaven, heaven itself was not open to men, and therefore there was no heavenly Jerusalem whose descent to earth could be anticipated then. Consequently in the prophecies of the Old Testament the eschatological idea of the new Cosmos does unquestionably coincide with the millennium. It is only in the New Testament that the new creation intervenes as a party-wall between this life and the life beyond; whereas the Old Testament prophecy brings down the new creation itself into the present life, and knows nothing of any Jerusalem of the blessed life to come, as distinct from the new Jerusalem of the millennium.⁸

We see the same mix of revelation concerning the Millennium and the eternal state in another passage in Isaiah which mentions the new heavens and earth:

"For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass *That* from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD. "And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." (Isa. 66:22-24)

There is nothing in this passage of Isaiah which states that the new heavens and earth must precede the Millennium. It merely states

that as the new creation will endure before God, *so shall* the faithful of Israel continue.

the first heaven and the first earth had passed away

Since the previous heaven and earth which passed away were the *first* ([πρῶτος](#) [prōtos]), this is the first and only true creation of heaven and earth since the original creation (Gen. 1:1). Therefore, the *regeneration* ([παλιγγενεσί](#) [palingenesia], *again genesis*) spoken of by Jesus was a restoration of the original creation which occurred prior to the [Millennial Kingdom](#). Since the heaven and earth of the [Millennial Kingdom](#) were the *first*, it is not possible to interpret the passages by Isaiah (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) and Peter (2Pe. 3:10-13) as describing a creation event *before* the Millennium. If that were so, this would have been the *second* heaven and earth that had passed away. Moreover, the earth of the Millennial Kingdom contained the dead of all history (Rev. 20:13+) and so cannot be a new creation as described by Isaiah, Peter, and John. An important aspect of the revelation given by Peter concerns the *result* of the conflagration of the first heaven and earth:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for **new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells**. (2Pe. 3:10-13) [emphasis added]

Here is another evidence that Peter cannot be describing the renovation preceding the Millennial Kingdom. Peter informs us that the new heavens and new earth will be characterized by true righteousness. Unlike the millennial earth, there will be no sin or death. With the passing of the first heaven and earth, we find fulfillment of Jesus' predictions concerning the permanence of God's word:

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. (Mat. 5:18 cf. Luke 16:17)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Mat. 24:35 cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:33)

The purpose of God, as set forth by His written word, extends not just beyond this life, but beyond this entire created order. His words are more certain than the physical reality around us. The temporal nature of this present world is to be a powerful motivator for the Christian to invest in heavenly priorities:

But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away. (1Cor. 7:29-31)

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. (2Pe. 3:11-14)

no more sea

Some suggest the sea is omitted from the eternal state because of its negative connotation. It was the sea, overflowing with rain and the fountains of the deep, which judged the world at the flood (Gen. 7:11). The sea covered Pharaoh and his army at the Exodus (Ex. 14:28). Leviathan, the fleeing serpent who would be slain, made his home in the sea (Isa. 27:1). The wicked are compared to the troubled sea (Isa. 57:20). The [four vicious Gentile powers](#) seen by Daniel arose from the sea (Dan. 7:3). The final beastly ruler, the [Antichrist](#) arose out of the sea (Rev. 13:1+). Another possibility is that the sea represents the need of cleansing due to sin which will no longer be necessary in the eternal state.⁹ The lack of sea in the eternal state offers a helpful guide when interpreting the OT. In passages describing times of great blessing, if the *sea* is mentioned, then we know the passage cannot relate to the eternal state, but must describe conditions of the [Millennial Kingdom](#).

Revelation 21:2

Then I, John, saw the holy city

This is one of five places in the book of Revelation where John refers to himself by name (Rev. 1:1+, 4+, 9+; 21:2+; 22:8+). See [Authorship](#). The *holy city* is also called the *holy Jerusalem* (Rev. 21:10+). Throughout Scripture, Jerusalem is considered holy,

although at times she plays the harlot (Isa. 1:21). Jerusalem is called the “city of the great King” (Ps. 48:2), “city of God” (Ps. 87:3), “the faithful city” (Isa. 1:21), and the “holy city” (Isa. 52:1). Joel predicted, concerning her final state: “Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:17). Anyone who takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy will have his part in the holy city taken away (Rev. 22:19+).

New Jerusalem

New is [καὶν](#) [ν](#) [kainēn]: new in quality, “by way of contrast with the old or obsolete *better, superior, different* . . . Substantively *new (and better) one*.”¹⁰ Although the earthly Jerusalem had been restored for the Millennial Kingdom in accordance with God’s word (e.g., Isa. 62), it is not the ultimate city sought by those who follow Jesus. In a similar way to which the [Temple](#) on earth corresponds to a [greater reality in heaven](#), the earthly Jerusalem will eventually be replaced by the New Jerusalem. Unlike the earthly Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem has never been subject to destruction or desolation. Nor has it ever needed watchmen on its walls to pray for its protection and reestablishment (Isa. 62:6). Paul compared the earthly Jerusalem with the “Jerusalem above” when teaching of the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old (Gal. 4:24-26). Jesus called the New Jerusalem “the city of My God” and promised the overcomer that He would write upon him the name of the city (Rev. 3:12+). The New Jerusalem is the ultimate destination of all the saints. Those who follow Jesus have no continuing city on earth, but ultimately seek the one to come, the New Jerusalem (Heb. 13:14).

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel. (Heb. 12:22-24)

Again, we meet with the tendency of many interpreters to take the description of the city as being symbolic of some deep spiritual truth rather than the description of a literal city which God has prepared as the ultimate dwelling place for the faithful in their glorified existence beyond this life (John 14:2-3). One danger of taking the description of the New Jerusalem as symbolism is the flexibility it affords for molding its meaning in accord with the desire of the interpreter. Symbolic interpretation has often been a useful tool of cults:

A symbolical New Jerusalem is crucial to at least three major cults—Christian Science, Mormonism, and the Swedenborgians. Christian Science symbolizes almost every detail of the New Jerusalem in order to fit it into the cult’s teachings. . . . Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, attempted to establish the symbolized New Jerusalem (“Zion”) in the State of Missouri. . . . The Swedenborgians . . . call themselves the Church of the New Jerusalem. Founder Swedenborg wrote voluminously, and his commentary on the book of Revelation [states] . . . “By the twelve thousand furlongs [in Rev. 21:16+] are signified all the goods and truths of that church.”¹¹

In order to prevent interpreters from waxing allegorical in their approach to the New Jerusalem, John is given a tour of the city by an angel who carefully *measures its physical dimensions*. The scene is reminiscent of the passage in Ezekiel where an angel (“man”) shows Ezekiel the [Millennial Temple](#) and provides detailed measurements concerning its physical layout (Eze. 40:3 ff). In both Ezekiel and here, the prophets behold structures vastly different than anything in history. Because of this, many are reluctant to take the details in a literal fashion and reduce the passages to teaching general spiritual principles.

These dimensions [of the city] should not be interpreted as providing architectural information about the city. Rather, we should think of them as theologically symbolic of the fulfillment of all God’s promises.¹²

One can wonder only how 12,000 stadia (Rev. 21:16+) and 144 cubits (Rev. 21:17+) could convey great “spiritual truths” or “theological insights!” If this were true, we should thank God that He chose *not* to give us truly important information, such as the requirements of salvation, in similar “theological symbolism” as these interpreters assume to be His mode of communication here! They are at a loss to explain the meaning of the details and why God would indicate that measurements be taken of immaterial objects. Those bold enough to hazard a *guess* at the symbolical meaning of the measurements have little agreement as to the insights of great magnitude and import which they purportedly represent. As is always the case with symbolic interpretation, the meaning of the text is rendered *unknowable*.

Unwilling to take the language of Scripture at face value, many seek for some hidden meaning behind John’s description. But if the words do not mean what they say, who has the authority to say what they do mean? Abandoning the literal meaning of the text leads only to baseless, groundless, futile speculation.¹³

If God gave these two chapters in symbolic form, then we dare say that man should not be held responsible for understanding their contents, for they mean whatever an interpreter wants them to mean! Instead, we believe the measurements are literal and the act of measuring is intended to indicate the physical reality of what is presented in the vision. Thus, the description of the New

Jerusalem concerns a real, physical city. Tan identifies numerous reasons for taking the city literally:

First, . . . all the elements of an actual city—dimensions, foundations, walls, gates, streets—are indicated. . . . *Second*, although the apostle John sees this prophecy in a vision, he certainly does not resort to imagination nor indulge in exaggeration. . . . The fact that John records non-earthly things such as gate-sized pearls proves that he does not alter the form of the prophecy for the sake of reader comprehension. *Third*, . . . In the account of the New Jerusalem . . . the same angel [who identified the Harlot of Rev. 17₊ as a symbol (Rev. 17:18₊)] offers not a word or clue regarding its possible symbolism. *Fourth*, in the account of the New Jerusalem, the inhabitants of the city are differentiated from the city itself. If the New Jerusalem symbolizes the church, and its inhabitants are church members, how could the church separate from itself. *Fifth*, the patriarch Abraham . . . “looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). Moreover, the early Hebrew Christians were assured of their positional rights “unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). And our Lord promises the disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (John 14:3). This hope of a city promised to so many people down the ages surely cannot be a symbol. *Sixth*, an actual, material city in eternity is proper and logical because of the constitution of the redeemed who will be in resurrected bodies throughout eternity. A resurrected body without any material point of reference would be highly unsatisfactory. *Seventh*, . . . a literal, material New Jerusalem . . . comes naturally and logically to the thinking of most uncritical laymen.¹⁴

We believe the approach which God intends is *literal interpretation with spiritual application*: every detail is to be taken literally, but also provides symbolism for spiritual learning, meditation, and application. See [Interpreting Symbols](#).

coming down

Coming down is [καταβαίνουσιν](#) [katabainousan], present tense: *while coming down*. John saw the city as it was in the process of descending. John sees the city descend in two separate visions. Here, he sees the New Jerusalem as part of the overall scene describing the newly recreated order. A few verses later, an angel gives John a detailed tour of the city which comprises the last half of the chapter (Rev. 21:9-27₊).

prepared as a bride

Prepared is [τοιμασμένην](#) [hētoimasmenēn], perfect passive participle: *having been prepared*. The passive form of the participle indicates the bride had no part in her preparation. This is because the bride is *inanimate*: a city. This bride contrasts with the bride mentioned in Revelation 19:7₊ who “made *herself* ready”, [τοιμασεν αυτην](#) [hētoimaseh heautēn]. The bride at the marriage of the Lamb participated in her readiness—indicating she is made up of living beings: the saints who had previously been resurrected at the [Rapture](#). See [Church Betrothed to Christ](#). Here, the bride is an inanimate city which is prepared by God:

In My Father’s house are many mansions [dwelling places]; *if it were not so*, I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place for you**. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. (John 14:2-3) [emphasis added]

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, **whose builder and maker is God**. (Heb. 11:8-10) [emphasis added]

Bride is [νύμφην](#) [nymphēn], “a young woman engaged.”¹⁵ “It can also be *the newly married woman*.”¹⁶ In Revelation 19:7₊, *bride* is [γυν](#) [gynē], meaning “woman.” There, her status as a bride was derived from the context. The two terms are made equivalent in Revelation 21:9₊ where John is shown “the bride, the Lamb’s wife”: [την νύμφην την γυναικα του αρνιου](#), *the bride, the woman of the Lamb*. At the time of the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7₊), the [OT](#) saints had not yet been raised (Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19) and the earthly Jerusalem suffered under the trampling of the Gentiles (Rev. 11:2₊). In the previous chapter, during the [Millennial Kingdom](#) (Rev. 20:4-6₊), all the saints had been raised and the earthly Jerusalem restored in glory for one thousand years. Then the first heaven and earth passed away and a new order was created. The [NT](#) teaching of the [Church Betrothed to Christ](#), the Lamb’s wife at the marriage (Rev. 19:7₊), is now joined with the OT passages which indicate that [Israel is married to Jehovah](#) and [Jerusalem is married to God](#). The New Jerusalem represents the ultimate consummation of the varied wedding motifs where all the people of God inhabit a city enjoying intimate communion with God face-to-face (Rev. 22:4₊).

Without the saints, whose home and residence it is, it would not be the Lamb’s Wife; and yet it is the Lamb’s Wife in a sense which does not exclude the foundations, walls, gates, streets and constructions which contribute to make it a city. Mere edifices and avenues do not make a city; neither does a mere congregation or multitude of people make a city. You cannot have a living city without people to inhabit it and you cannot have a city without the edifices and avenues arranged in some fixed shape for the accommodation of those who make up its population. It is the two together, and the order in which the parts are severally disposed, the animate with the inanimate, which constitute a city.¹⁷

adorned for her husband

Adorned is [κεκοσμημένην](#) [kekosmēmenēn], perfect passive participle: *having been decorated*. “Primarily to arrange, to put in order (English, cosmetic), is used of furnishing a room, Mat. 12:44; Luke 11:25, and of trimming lamps, Mat. 25:7.”¹⁸ Whereas the bride at the marriage of the Lamb wears *linen* for her covering (Rev. 19:8⁺), the city wears the glory of God and precious stones (Rev. 21:11⁺). The garments of the city are not given as clothing, nor related to righteousness, because the city is inanimate. God is her husband because it is He who restores her and has promised that she would rejoice as a bride. Although He had adorned the earthly Jerusalem as a beautiful woman, she played the harlot (Eze. 16:1-16). Nevertheless, He promised that one day Jerusalem would wear beautiful garments again, for she would be holy and no unclean thing would come into her (Isa. 52:1). See [Jerusalem Married to God](#).

Revelation 21:3

a loud voice from heaven

The [NU](#) text has *from the throne*. A loud voice from heaven told John not to write what the seven thunders uttered (Rev. 10:4⁺). The same voice commanded John to take the little book from the hand of the angel which stood on the sea and earth (Rev. 10:8⁺). A loud voice from heaven called the two witnesses up to heaven at the time of their [Rapture](#) (Rev. 11:12⁺). A loud voice from heaven indicated that those who died at the time of the worship of the [Beast](#) would be blessed (Rev. 14:13⁺). A loud voice from heaven called God’s people out of Babylon prior to her destruction (Rev. 18:4⁺). In each case, the voice is probably that of God. Here, the voice refers to God in the third person which may indicate it is that of a mighty angel: “This is an announcement about God, not directly from Him.”¹⁹

Behold, the [tabernacle](#) of God *is* with men

Tabernacle is [σκηνή](#) [skēnē], “*lodging, dwelling*, of the tents of nomads [Heb. 11:9] . . . [used] in the account of the Transfiguration . . . Mat. 17:4; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33.”²⁰ The same term is used of the [Tabernacle in the Wilderness](#) (Acts 7:44) and of David (Acts 15:16). The Beast blasphemed the tabernacle of God (Rev. 13:6⁺). The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony was opened prior to the pouring forth of the seven bowls of wrath (Rev. 15:5⁺). The tabernacle is the meeting place between [sinful man and a holy God](#). Through His work on the cross, Jesus created the [Temple of the Believer](#), the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit among believers in this age (1Cor. 6:19; 2Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22). But the spiritual union of believers with Christ is not the ultimate communion which the voice now declares. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1Cor. 13:12 cf. Rev. 22:4⁺).

Such an unveiled view of God is impossible for mortal men. No living person has ever seen God in the fullness of His glory (John 1:18; 6:46; 1Jn. 4:12); He is invisible (Col. 1:15; 1Ti. 1:17) and “dwells in unapproachable light” (1Ti. 6:16; cf. Ps. 104:2), exposure to which would mean instant death for any living person (Ex. 33:20). But in heaven, “the pure in heart . . . shall see God” (Mat. 5:8), since they will be perfectly holy.²¹

He will dwell with them and they shall be His people.

He will dwell is [σκηνώσει](#) [skēnōsei], related to [σκηνή](#) [skēnē], *tabernacle*. The same root word, [σκηνοῶ](#) [skēnoō], describes God dwelling among men in the incarnation (John 1:14). *People* is [λαοί](#) [laoi]: “peoples” ([TR](#) and [NU](#) texts), but [λαός](#) [laos]: “people” ([MT](#) text). If plural, it may refer to the *nations* ([ἔθνη](#) [ethnē]) which bring their glory and honor into the city (Rev. 21:24-26⁺).²² Of all the things which God could say concerning the blessings attending the eternal state, why is this emphasized by being the first? Because it is the *greatest blessing found in all of Scripture*. In this promise is found the culmination of the scarlet thread of redemption which runs from Genesis through Revelation. This has been the great purpose of the Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ (see commentary on [Revelation 5:2](#)). Since the rebellion of Adam, every tabernacle, every [Temple](#), every correspondence between God and man has been with this ultimate goal in mind: the restoration of full fellowship between God and man. Thus, the great multitude which John saw coming out of the Great Tribulation were blessed by being in God’s presence night and day: “And He who sits on the throne will dwell [tabernacle] among them” (Rev. 7:15⁺). Now, in the New Jerusalem, man will see God face-to-face (Rev. 22:4⁺)—without the encumbrance of sin which has separated man since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. See [The Abiding Presence of God](#). *Being His people* speaks of an intimate relationship between God and men (Lev. 26:11-12; Jer. 7:23-24; 11:4; 30:18-22; 32:38; Zec. 13:8-9). They are only His people because *He has given them a heart to know Him*. It is a work of God. This spiritual restoration had already begun for Israel in the [Millennial Kingdom](#):

For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Then **I will give them a heart to know Me**, that I *am* the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart. (Jer. 24:6-7) [emphasis added]

But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” **for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them**, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (Jer. 31:33-34) [emphasis added]

During that time, God’s sanctuary had been in the midst of Israel (Eze. 37:24) within the [Millennial Temple](#). Now, in the New Jerusalem, God *is* the Temple—the entire city is as the *holy of holies* of all previous temples. In the past, both Israel (Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:26) and the Gentiles (Zec. 2:10-11) were “not his people.” In the eternal state, all the redeemed are His.

Revelation 21:4

And God will wipe away every tear

Wipe away is [ἔξειψει](#) [exaleipsei], also used of *blotting out* names from the [Book of Life](#) (Rev. 3:5+). Both the justice and mercy of God can be seen in this term: God blots out the names of unbelievers from the [Book of Life](#) even as He wipes away the tears of believers. God wiped away every tear from the eyes of those who came out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:17+). God will minister to all those who previously suffered: “Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Mat. 5:4). All the memories of pain and suffering will be forgotten in the wonder of the new order which God creates. The only exception will be those who were blotted out of the [Book of Life](#). Having been cast into outer darkness, they will continually weep (Mat. 8:12).

there shall be no more death

Here is the fulfillment of the incredible promise of the [OT](#) prophets that death would be swallowed up (Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14). Death had not been a part of the original created order, but came by the curse at the disobedience of Adam (Gen. 3:19). Throughout history, with few exceptions,²³ death has been the common lot of the living. Although Christ abolished death *de jure* at His First Coming (2Ti. 1:10; Heb. 2:14-15), the shadow of death extended even beyond the Second Coming of Christ and into the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 65:20). Death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:14+). See commentary on [Revelation 20:14](#). They were destroyed in the conflagration of the old order. The last enemy that would be destroyed was death (1Cor. 15:26).

Around our churches lie our graveyards, and all the highways are lined with cemeteries and depositories of the dead. We can scarcely open our eyes without seeing the gloomy hearse, the funeral procession, the undertaker’s warehouse, the shop full of mourning goods, or the stonemason chiselling epitaphs. Every newspaper we pick up has its obituary lists, and every week brings forth its bills of mortality. On the right hand, on the left hand, before us, behind us, around us, beneath us, in all seasons, in all climes, everywhere is death. . . . The time will come with death itself shall die; not by the power of man, not by mortal skill or earthly medicines, but by the great redemption of God.²⁴

Now the curse which brought death is done away with in entirety and, with it, death (Rev. 22:3+ cf. Gen. 3:19). See commentary on [Revelation 21:24](#).

nor sorrow, nor crying

Although there was great joy in the [Millennial Kingdom](#) (Isa. 65:18-20; Jer. 31:13), this will surpass it because there will be no death.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isa. 35:10)

former things have passed away

Former things have passed away is [τὰ πρῶτα ἀπέλθαν](#) [ta prōta apēlthan]: *the first [things] departed*. They departed when the “first ([πρῶτη](#) [prōtē]) heaven and earth passed away ([ἀπέλθαν](#) [apēlthan])” (Rev. 21:1+). Paul encouraged the Corinthians to retain an eternal perspective in their daily lives because “the form of this world is passing away” (1Cor. 7:29). “The things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (2Cor. 4:17). See commentary on [Revelation 20:11](#). One of the reasons believers are not to love the world is because, knowing the Scriptures, they realize that all that is in the world is ultimately transitory:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1Jn. 2:15-17)

Revelation 21:5

He who sat on the throne said

This is God the Father Who John saw when he first ascended in his vision to heaven (Rev. 4:2+, 9+: 5:1+).

Behold, I make all things new.

I make is [ποιῶ](#) [poiō], present tense: *I am making*. *New* is [καιν](#) [kainā], new in quality or kind, better. See commentary on [Revelation 21:1](#). What God creates in the new heaven and new earth will surpass anything which man has imagined: "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' " (1Cor. 2:9 cf. Isa. 43:16-19). The old creation which had long groaned under corruption is delivered by a new creation:

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:19-23)

The redemption set forth in the book of Revelation is much broader than the individual redemption of sinful men. It extends to the redemption of the earth and even the entire creation. See commentary on [Revelation 5:1](#). Like the new birth, the new creation is a work of God: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2Cor. 5:17).

Write, for these words are true and faithful

John is reminded of his task, to record that which he sees and hears for the benefit of the saints. See commentary on [Revelation 1:11](#) and [Revelation 1:19](#). The statements which God has just made, concerning the elimination of death and the making of all things new, are difficult for people living under the dominion of physical death to consider so God emphasizes the reliability of what John has been told (Rev. 19:9+: 22:6+). "Forever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). The word of God lives and abides forever (1Pe. 1:23). The words spoken by the voice from heaven have the same characteristics as those of Jesus. Jesus referred to Himself as "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness" (Rev. 3:14+). When He rode forth at the Second Coming, He was called "Faithful and True . . . the Word of God" (Rev. 19:11-13+). There is unity between the will of the Father and the Son.

Revelation 21:6

It is done!

It is done is [ἔγινον](#) [Gegone], perfect tense: *it has become!* The perfect tense emphasizes the completion of the task of creating the new order and the ongoing effects of that creative act which continue into the present as seen by John. The words of the Father are reminiscent of the words of the Son which resulted in redeemed saints being present to enjoy the new creation: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). *It is finished* is [τετέλεστοι](#) [tetelestai], perfect tense, *it has come to an end, been completed, accomplished* Jesus' words emphasize the *closure* which His death on the cross brought to the old order of things. The Father's words emphasize the new beginning of blessing which flow from the work of the Son. Now, the *de jure* (legally obtained) work of Christ on the cross becomes *de facto* (accomplished reality). The last enemy, death, has been destroyed and redemption, in its totality, extends throughout God's creation.

I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

I am is [ἐγώ εἰμι](#) [egō eimī]: *I, am*. Great emphasis is placed upon the One speaking and His uniqueness. This unique title of God is applied both to the Father (here) and the Son (Rev. 22:13+). The phrase is also applied to the Son in two parts (Rev. 1:11+: 2:8+). See commentary on [Revelation 1:11](#). The same title, with the addition of "the First and the Last," is taken by Jesus (Rev. 22:13+). Jesus and the Father are One (John 10:30)! Jesus is "the Beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14+). See commentary on [Revelation 3:14](#).

I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.

Freely is [δωρεάν](#) [dōrean]: "*as a gift, without payment, gratis . . . undeservedly, without reason.*"²⁵ The water of life is redemption, portrayed in many different aspects throughout the Scriptures. "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec. 13:1). These are the wells of salvation which Isaiah spoke about (Isa. 12:3). The water of life is only available from God, the fountain of life (Ps. 36:6). He is the "fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13). In the wilderness wandering, Moses' struck the rock (representing Christ, 1Cor. 10:4) from which life-giving waters came forth (Ex. 17:6). The promise of redemption by the Holy Spirit is compared to life-giving water (Isa. 44:3; John 7:37-38).

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:10-14)

Those coming out of the Great Tribulation were led by the Lamb to living fountains of waters (Rev. 7:14⁺). During the [Millennial Kingdom](#), living water flowed from the [Millennial Temple](#) (Eze. 47:1, 8-9; Joel 3:18; Zec. 14:8). A pure river of water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1⁺). The final invitation given by the Spirit and the bride in the book of Revelation is to take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17⁺). Because redemption is infinitely costly, only God could pay the price. The price was the death of God in the person of the Son of God (Rev. 1:18⁺). It was the Lamb who *redeemed* ([ὑπορέτω](#) [agorazō], purchased) sinners from among men by His blood (Rev. 1:5⁺; 5:9⁺). Since the price has already been paid in full (John 19:30), no man can add to the finished work. To even suggest such a possibility is to devalue the life of the Son of God and declare His purchase inadequate. The joyous result of God's work is that eternal life, which would otherwise be infinitely expensive, is now available simply for the asking:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isa. 55:1)

This is the essential difference between *religion* and *relationship*. Religion looks to find, in the puny self effort of man, something of value to present before God by which man may be justified. Relationship sees man's utter incapability and throws itself upon the grace and mercy of God, accepting that which God has already provided as a remedy. Self-righteousness, which is no real righteousness, is the primary stumbling block leading to God for it recoils at the idea that restoration to God *is completely without cost*.

Independent, rebellious man says the opposite—"Something in my hand I bring." This is the one thing common to all systems of religion. They quarrel and fight to the death over the question as to what that "Something" is to be: but they are all at one agreement that it must be *something*. and as the weary conflict has gone on, and will continue to the end.²⁶

If this gift is *free*, without cost, how can it be that so many refuse to accept it? The answer is found in their *lack of thirst*. It is free for *him who thirsts!* Do you know the Lamb as your redeemer? Are you thirsty for this water which will become a fountain in you springing up into everlasting life? It is available for the asking to all who come to Him in humility and need.

Revelation 21:7

He who overcomes shall inherit all things

He who overcomes is [ὑικ ν](#) [ho nikōn], by now familiar: *the overcomer*. The promises to the [Seven Churches of Asia](#) were given to "him who overcomes" (Rev. 2:7⁺, 11⁺, 17⁺, 26⁺; 3:5⁺, 12⁺, 21⁺). Through their identification with Jesus, the True Overcomer (John 16:33; 1Jn. 4:4), they inherit all the promises given to the overcomer and everything which Jesus is given. See [Who is the Overcomer?](#) They inherit the kingdom of God prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mat. 25:34). As children of God, believers are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:15). What an incredible promise! *Anything and everything* which the Father has given to the Son is also the possession of the saints! It is *demeaning* of the saints, given their eternal position, to compete and strive over earthly morsels when all the while they have bank accounts swelling with eternal value. Paul recognizes this and admonishes the Corinthians not to boast or become partisan in their thinking because "all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours" (1Cor. 3:21). In the same way as an earthly inheritance, the things which pass to the saints do so without reference of their merit or effort. They are attained solely because they stand as brothers of Christ. It is the value accumulated at the Father's hand which passes to the sons in their inheritance:

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:11-12)

Not only is the inheritance bountiful beyond measure, it is also *incorruptible*. In this world we may lose our job, our savings, our home, our health, and our loved ones, but our inheritance in God is beyond the reach of disaster and loss:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. (1Pe. 1:3-4)

The [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts have “these [things]” instead of “all things”.

I will be his God and he shall be My son

He shall be is [αὐτὸς σταί](#) [autos estai]: *He, he shall be*. The position of the overcomer as a son of God is emphasized. This phrase emphasizes the reason for the overcomer’s inheritance: his position as a son of God. The phrase *son of God* describes those who are of *direct descent* from God. The angels were created directly by God and are the sons of God (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Adam was created directly by God and is called the “son of God” (Luke 3:38). In His humanity, being born of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 1:35).²⁷ And the redeemed, born of God’s Spirit, are the sons of God:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

Being born of the Spirit, the overcomer has the *Spirit of adoption* Who identifies him as a son and therefore an heir:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. (Rom. 8:14-17)

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal. 4:6-7)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1Jn. 3:1-2)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph. 1:3-5)

The relationship between the overcomer and God is to be one of intimacy, modeled after that of the Son and the Father (John 1:1; 17:5). See commentary on [Revelation 20:3](#).

Revelation 21:8

But the cowardly

Cowardly is [δειλοῦς](#) [deilois]: “timid [ones],”²⁸ “persons showing fear in a shameful way.”²⁹ The word is used to describe lack of faith (Mat. 8:26; Mark 4:40). During the Tribulation, the [Beast](#) worshipers took his mark, partly out of fear of losing their lives (Rev. 13:15+). They were among those who, because of fear, saved their lives, but ultimately lost both their soul and body in hell (Mat. 10:28). The wicked and lazy servant hid his talent in the ground out of fear rather than investing it for the Lord’s benefit. He was cast into outer darkness (Mat. 25:25; Luke 19:21). Those who deny Jesus before men, possibly out of fear, will not be confessed by the Son of Man before God and His angels (Luke 12:8-9). Many of the religious rulers believed in Jesus, but for fear of being put out of the synagogue by the Pharisees, would not confess Him. *They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God* (John 12:43). This passage concerns those who are among the *unredeemed*, it is not a threat that believers who struggle with fear at times are in danger of the Lake of Fire. Those who are born-again have not been given a spirit of fear, “but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2Ti. 1:7).

unbelieving

Unbelieving is [πίστοις](#) [apistois]: *ones without faith*. Those who did not believe the truth are condemned (2Th. 2:12). Those who are unbelieving have a defiled mind and conscience. They often profess to know God, but by their works they deny Him (Tit. 1:15-16). Lack of faith in the Son results in eternal condemnation:

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. (1Jn. 5:10)

There are no unbelieving among the overcomers: “And this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who

overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1Jn. 5:4b-5).

abominable

Abominable is [βδελυγμένοις](#) [ebdelygmenois]: "abhorrent, detestable [ones];"³⁰ "loathsome [ones]."³¹ The passive participle indicates they have become abominable because they participated in activities which are considered abominable to God. They are considered unclean and, therefore, will never enter the holy city (Rev. 21:27+). The cup which the [Harlot](#) held was full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication ([πορνείας](#) [porneias], see below) (Rev. 17:4+). Abominable activities under the Law of Moses include: partaking of unclean animals (Lev. 11:10-42); homosexual behavior (Lev. 18:22; 20:13); bestiality (Lev. 18:23-26); improper consumption of an offering (Lev. 19:7); idol worship (Deu. 7:25-26); child sacrifice (Deu. 12:31; Deu. 18:10); offering an imperfect sacrifice (Deu. 17:1); worshiping other gods, including astral bodies (Deu. 13:13-14; Deu. 17:3-4); sorcery, witchcraft, soothsaying, interpreting omens (Deu. 18:12); cross-dressing (Deu. 22:5); offering money gained through sinful practices in the house of the Lord (Deu. 23:18); taking a woman back after having divorced (Deu. 24:4); and many more. All of these activities have a common attribute: they are behaviors which arouse God's anger because they contravene His law. In this sense, abomination and rebellion are related. See commentary on [Revelation 17:4](#).

sexually immoral

Sexually immoral is [πόρνοις](#) [pornois]: fornicating ones³², used of a man who has sexual intercourse with a prostitute (1Cor. 5:9). The same root word describes the Harlot: [πόρνης](#) [pornēs]. During the Tribulation, the [earth dwellers](#) refused to repent of their sexual immorality (Rev. 9:21+).

sorcerers

Sorcerers is [φαρμάκοις](#) [pharmakois]: "one who prepares and uses drugs for magical purposes or ritual witchcraft *sorcerer, poisoner, magician*."³³ During the Tribulation, the [earth dwellers](#) refused to repent of their sorceries (Rev. 9:21+). See commentary on [Revelation 9:21](#).

idolaters

Idolaters is [εδωλολάτραις](#) [eidōlōlātraiς]: those who take part in idol-worship or consult false prophets.³⁴ [Jezebel](#) seduced God's servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20+ cf. 1Cor. 10:19-20). See commentary on [Revelation 2:20](#).

liars

Jesus told the Pharisees, "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. . . . there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). The coming of the lawless one, the [Antichrist](#), was with all power, signs and *lying* wonders (2Th. 2:9). Those who continue to lie will ultimately fall prey themselves to lies: they will not come to the truth (2Th. 2:11-12). Eventually, their own conscience becomes seared (1Ti. 4:2). All who reject salvation are ultimately liars: "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (1Jn. 2:22). The truth of God has been made known to men through general revelation, but men actively *suppress the truth* (lie) in unrighteousness. Knowing the truth, they promote false ideas such as God doesn't exist or that His existence cannot be known (Rom. 1:18). See commentary on [Revelation 20:12](#).

shall have their part

Not having the Holy Spirit, these do not inherit the kingdom of God and, by nature, practice the works of the flesh (Rom. 8:1-5; Gal. 5:16):

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. (Eph. 5:5-7)

But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is

contrary to sound doctrine. (1Ti. 1:8-10)

Those described by this list are ones who *continued in these activities without repentance*. In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul emphasizes the forgiveness which remains available for the godless in this age of grace, if they would but turn to God in faith and be cleansed of their sin:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1Cor. 6:9-11) [emphasis added]

the lake which burns with fire

Which burns is [καίονμέν](#) [kaiomenē], passive participle: *the lake being presently burnt* with fire. Emphasis is placed upon the ongoing reality of the fire. All the unsaved dead, who were not found written in the [Book of Life](#), were cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 20:15](#).

Revelation 21:9

one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls with the seven last plagues

The seven last plagues were called *last* because “in them the wrath of God is complete” (Rev. 15:1⁺). This may be the same angel which showed John the [Great Harlot](#) (Rev. 17:1⁺).

Come, I will show you

The angel, having one of the seven bowls, refers back to theseventh bowl itself which destroyed Babylon (Rev. 16:19⁺) and invites a comparison between two *great cities*: Babylon, the [Harlot](#) and the New Jerusalem, the bride (Rev. 21:10⁺).

the bride, the Lamb's wife

Bride is [νύμφην](#) [nymphēn], used of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2⁺). *Wife* is [γυναικα](#) [gynaika], used of the wife of the Lamb at His marriage (Rev. 19:7⁺). Concerning Jesus' title as *Lamb*, see commentary on [Revelation 5:6](#). See commentary on [Revelation 21:2](#). See commentary on [Revelation 19:7](#). See [Jerusalem Married to God](#). Some expositors take the remainder of this chapter and the first part of the following chapter as a recapitulation which describes the participation of the New Jerusalem within the [Millennial Kingdom](#) hovering over the earth.³⁵ They interpret the nations on the earth (Rev. 21:24-26⁺) as being millennial nations which access the New Jerusalem above. In particular, they point to the existence of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem as evidence that the millennial nations will receive healing from it. There are significant problems with the recapitulation view:

- If the millennial nations have access to *the* tree of life, why then is there still death during the thousand years (Isa. 65:20)? Although, the millennial nations will have access to *all kinds of trees* (plural) which provide fruit for food and leaves for medicinal purposes, these are not the tree of life (Eze. 47:12). Nor do the location of these trees correspond with that of the tree of life in the eternal city (Rev. 22:2⁺).
- Within this vision of the city, the curse is said to be no more (Rev. 22:3⁺). Yet the curse continues during the Millennium (Isa. 65:20; Rev. 20:8-9⁺).

This is not a recapitulation, but a further refinement of the overview which John saw in Revelation 21:1-8.³⁶

Revelation 21:10

he carried me away in the Spirit

The identical phrase described John's journey with the angel who showed him the [Harlot](#) (Rev. 17:3⁺). An intentional contrast is being made between the *Harlot*, the great city Babylon, and the *bride*, the great city, the New Jerusalem. It is the Holy Spirit who transports John while the angel journeys with him. See commentary on [Revelation 17:3](#). John was “in the Spirit” on the Lord's Day when he had his first vision of the glorified Lord (Rev. 1:10⁺). He was also “in the Spirit” when he was called up to the throne room to see the things yet future (Rev. 4:2⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 4:2](#).

to a great and high mountain

In the twenty-fifth year of the Babylonian captivity, the hand of the LORD was upon Ezekiel and took him in the visions of God to a

very high mountain upon which there was “something like the structure of a city” (Eze. 40:2). Ezekiel was shown the millennial Jerusalem, not the New Jerusalem as here. Like John, he was attended by an angel (*man*) with a measuring rod who then measured aspects of the city for Ezekiel to record.³⁷ The high mountain may merely be the vantage point from which John is shown the holy Jerusalem. Or, it may reflect the terrain upon which the holy city alights. This would correspond to the *mountain of the Lord's house*, the site of the [Temple during the Millennial Kingdom](#) (Isa. 2:2-4; Zec. 8:3-4). This seems likely because, as in the Millennium, a river goes forth from beneath the throne (Rev. 22:1+). Thus, the area of the New Jerusalem must be elevated above the surrounding region.

the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God

Descending is [καταβαίνουσαν](#) [katabainousan], present tense: *while coming down*. John saw the city as it was in the process of descending. It appears John sees the city descend twice. First, he sees it descending as part of the general presentation of the eternal order (Rev. 21:2+). Now, the vision recapitulates the descent prior to a detailed tour with the angel. The appearance of the city's descent twice in the same chapter does not necessitate taking the descents as two different points in history (one a millennial descent, the other in the eternal state). As we discussed above, lack of the curse (Rev. 22:2+) is conclusive evidence against any idea that Revelation 21:9+-22:7+ concerns the New Jerusalem in the Millennium. See commentary on [Revelation 21:9](#).

Revelation 21:11

having the glory of God

This is the Shekinah, the visible manifestation of God's presence. Because of His presence, the eternal city has no need for the light of the sun or moon (Isa. 66:19-20; Rev. 22:5+). See commentary on [Revelation 22:5](#). See [The Abiding Presence of God](#)

Her light was like a most precious stone

Her light will be like “a city that is set on a hill” which “cannot be hidden” (Mat. 5:14).

like a jasper stone

Her walls are of jasper (Rev. 21:18+) and her first foundation is adorned with jasper (Rev. 21:19+).

clear as crystal

Because of how jasper ([ἰασπίδι](#) [iaspidi]) is described by Scripture, some think it is not the jasper we know, but perhaps *diamond*. See commentary on [Revelation 4:3](#). The purity and clarity of the city is consistently emphasized (Rev. 21:18+, 21+, 22:1+). The description of her pure light recalls the sea of glass under the heavenly throne (Eze. 1:22; Rev. 4:6+, 15:2+). As we have seen, there is a close analogy between the Church and the New Jerusalem, both being the Lamb's wife (Rev. 19:7+, 21:2+, 9+). The purity and preparation of the New Jerusalem are closely analogous to Christ's purification and preparation of the Church:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:25-27)

Revelation 21:12

she had a great and high wall

Isaiah saw a time of peace for Jerusalem when the people of God would “call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise” (Isa. 60:18).

This wall doubtless was a memorial to God's protection of His people throughout their long history. The New Testament saints would well remember how their lives were “hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Now, the wall does not need to serve as a means of protection for God Himself dwells in the city. This is further proven by the fact that each of the four walls of the city has three gateways which never will be shut.³⁸

with twelve gates

Gates is [πύλῳα](#) [pylōnas]: used “of the large gate at the entrance of temples and palaces . . . at the place of the richman (Luke 16:20) . . . of the magnificent city gates of Babylon.”³⁹ There are three gates on each of the four sides of the city (Rev. 21:13+). Each gate is of one pearl (Rev. 21:21+). None of the gates will ever be shut (Rev. 21:25+) and the glory of the nations and kings of the earth shall be transported through them (Rev. 21:24+). See [Twelve: Jewish Tribes, Completeness](#).

twelve angels at the gates

Those who do not have the right to the tree of life are unable to pass through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14+). The gates may remain open because there is no possibility of the unclean approaching the city. They are eternally relegated to the Lake of Fire which is the “outer darkness” (Mat. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

twelve tribes of the children of Israel

Children is u v [huiōn]: *sons*. Within Scripture, the sons of Israel are the literal, physical offspring of the man Jacob (Rev. 7:4-8+). Those who deny any distinction between the Church and Israel in God’s purposes are hard-pressed to account for the distinction here, carried into the eternal state, between the *twelve tribes of Israel* and the *twelve apostles of the Lamb* (Rev. 21:14+). Mounce is typical of those who read past the plain distinction in the text and interpret it to mean just the opposite: “The juxtaposition of the twelve tribes with the twelve apostles **shows the unity of ancient Israel and the NT church**.” [emphasis added]⁴⁰ If the Church is the “new Israel” as [Replacement Theology](#) claims, then why the *distinction* between the names of the tribes of Israel and the names of the apostles of the Church—as two separate groups—memorialized in eternity? The names of the *tribes* on the gates and the names of the *apostles* on the foundations (Rev. 21:14+) are a memorial to two different peoples of God who occupied different roles in God’s redemptive plan, both of which are found in the eternal city: *Israel* and the *Church*.

It is significant that John brings together the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles here, and makes a distinction between them. Jesus did the same earlier (Mat. 19:28; Luke 22:30). This distinction shows the wrongness of identifying the twelve tribes in Rev. 7:4-8+ with the church.⁴¹

Even though the twelve apostles were all Jewish, and therefore physical descendants of Jacob, their names are distinguished from the twelve tribes. This reflects the reality that the Church did not exist prior to the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first began His baptizing work forming the body of Christ (Mat. 16:18; Acts 1:5). Although the apostles are all Jewish and will rule over the twelve tribes (Mat. 19:28), their greater affinity is as members of the Church. Once more we see the Scriptural declaration that all twelve tribes of Israel are known to God (Rev. 7:4+). None of the tribes are lost. See [Ten Tribes Lost?](#)

Revelation 21:13

three gates on the east . . . north . . . south . . . west

The layout of the gates around the holy city is similar to the [Camp of Israel](#) around the [Tabernacle in the Wilderness](#). In the wilderness, three tribes camped in each compass direction around the [Tabernacle](#). The Levites camped in the center and served as a buffer between the glory of God (in the Tabernacle) and the tribes. See [Camp of Israel](#). See [Tabernacle in the Wilderness](#). If the heavenly layout were to follow the encampment in the wilderness around the Tabernacle, then:

- The gates on the east would be named for Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.
- The gates on the north would be named for Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.
- The gates on the south would be named for Reuben, Simeon, and Gad.
- The gates on the west would be named for Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin.

In the camp in the wilderness, Jacob and Levi are omitted in favor of listing Jacob’s two half tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh. Since Levi encamped around the Tabernacle in the center, and Manasseh and Ephraim comprise all of Joseph, every individual in all twelve tribes is accounted for. However, in the heavenly scene, there is no encampment around the sanctuary which is the entire New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22+). Therefore, the names of the gates may be according to the plan of the millennial city (Eze. 48:30-35):

- The gates on the east would be named for Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan.
- The gates on the north would be named for Reuben, Judah, and Levi.
- The gates on the south would be named for Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun.
- The gates on the west would be named for Gad, Asher, Naphtali.

With Joseph including both Ephraim and Manasseh, Levi is explicitly listed and all twelve tribes are accounted for. It may be that an entirely new order occurs in the New Jerusalem as Scripture does not give us these details.

Revelation 21:14

the wall of the city had twelve foundations

The foundations are adorned with precious stones (Rev. 21:19+). See commentary on [Revelation 21:19](#).

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Heb. 11:8-10)

See [Twelve: Jewish Tribes, Completeness](#).

on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb

The [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts have *the twelve names of the twelve apostles*. Regarding the distinction between the names of the tribes of Israel and the apostles of the Lamb, see commentary on [Revelation 21:12](#). The question arises as to which twelve names are represented? Eleven of the twelve seem clear enough, but who will be listed as the twelfth? Will it be *Judas*, the original apostle chosen by Jesus (John 6:70)? Or perhaps *Matthias*, chosen by the eleven to replace Judas (Acts 1:26)? The third possibility is *Paul*, chosen by the Lord (Acts 9:3-6, 15-16). While it is impossible to know, and perhaps not of great importance, we are inclined to think the twelfth name will be that of the Apostle Paul, for it seems impossible that his name would not appear on a foundation as a major contributor to the early church and the New Testament. On the other hand, like the scars which remain on Jesus' glorified body (John 20:27 cf. Rev. 5:6+), perhaps the name of Judas will be retained as a memorial of Christ's atoning work on the cross. The apostles, along with the prophets, are considered the foundation of the spiritual temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:19-22 cf. Eph. 3:5; 4:11). Concerning Jesus' title as *Lamb*, see commentary on [Revelation 5:6](#).

Revelation 21:15

a gold reed to measure the city

Reed is [μέτρον κάλαμον](#) [metron kalamon]. [Μέτρον](#) [Metron] is "an instrument for measuring."⁴² [Κάλαμον](#) [Kalamon] is "the (dried) stalk of tall plants."⁴³ The *reed* is a golden staff made for measurement. Ezekiel was shown the [Millennial Temple](#) and told to record the dimensions measured by an angel (Eze. 40:3-5). Previously, John was instructed to measure the [Tribulation Temple](#) (Rev. 11:1+). The New Jerusalem is measured to highlight its importance to God and indicate its real physical dimensions. Zechariah saw an angel who measured Jerusalem. The precise dimension were not given, but the measurement indicated that God's attention was directed toward the city for enlargement and restoration (Zec. 2:1-5). See commentary on [Revelation 21:2](#).

Revelation 21:16

The city is laid out as a square

Although the land dedicated for the millennial city had the dimensions of five thousand cubits wide and twenty-five thousand cubits long (Eze. 45:6), the portion where the city itself stood was, like the eternal city, also square: four thousand five hundred cubits on a side (Eze. 48:16, 30-35).

twelve thousand furlongs

Furlongs is [σταδίων](#) [stadiōn], each of which is equivalent to 400 cubits or 1/8 mile. The dimension is equivalent to 4,800,000 cubits or approximately 1,500 miles.⁴⁴ Morris takes the stadia as 600 Greek feet or approximately 607 English feet resulting in a dimension of 1,380 miles.⁴⁵

The city itself is gargantuan; it is a cube of 12,000 stadia (i.e., with sides of 1,380 miles each [depending upon the value taken for 1 stadia]). Now, the base of the city is staggering enough, for its area is 63% of that of the forty-eight contiguous states of the USA, yet it is 1,380 miles high as well. Now, as we are given no details, we cannot say what significance the height has, but by way of comparison, this city would only need 102 levels to equal the surface area of the earth, i.e., the combined areas of the oceans and the land masses (this last figure would require each level to be separated by 70,000 feet, considerably higher than commercial jet airplanes operate in 1998). These hypothetical 102 levels would have a combined area 340% larger than the total land area, deserts and vast frozen wastes included, of the present earth. The point of all this comparison is to emphasize that the city God describes is actually many times more commodious than the earth we know.⁴⁶

Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

The eternal city is over 1,060 times larger in each dimension than the millennial city proper and has a total square area over 1.1 million times larger. The gargantuan proportions of the city are such that many seem unable to take them as the description of a

literal city. But how is this huge city any more difficult to believe than a totally new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1+)? And how often is skepticism over God's prophecy based on our limited experience in the present reality—none of which need attend the scene before us? The equal dimensions of the city recall the holy of holies in the [Temple](#) where the ark of the covenant resided, which was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high (1K. 6:19). The entire New Jerusalem is the eternal "holy of holies" (Rev. 21:22+). For a detailed estimate of the ability of the city to accommodate the redeemed of history, see [Morris, [The Revelation Record](#)].

Revelation 21:17

one hundred and forty-four cubits

Each *Cubit* is a "forearm; as a measure of length . . . equivalent to 17.5 inches, 1.5 feet, or 0.46 meters."⁴⁷ The wall measures one hundred and forty-four cubits, or approximately 216 feet (65.8 meters). Since the wall is said to be "great and high" (Rev. 21:12+) and the city itself is of immense height, this dimension is most likely the width.⁴⁸

Revelation 21:18

The construction of its wall was *of jasper*

Jasper was the last stone in the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:20; 39:13). It was also one of the stones which was Satan's covering in the garden of God (Eze. 28:13). The light of God's glory in her midst shines through the jasper walls (Rev. 21:11+).

pure gold, like clear glass

Pure and *clear* are from the same word, [καθαρός](#) [katharos]: *clean, pure, free from dirt*.⁴⁹ [Solomon's Temple](#) was overlaid with gold (1K. 6:22). The New Jerusalem is considered the queen in relation to the King, the Lamb. "At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir" (Ps. 45:9). See [Jerusalem Married to God](#). The purity of the gold speaks of that which has been tested and refined by fire to remove the dross (Job 23:10; Zec. 13:9; 2Cor. 4:17-18; 1Pe. 1:7). Those who inhabit the New Jerusalem are now without sin. No mention is made of lesser metals, such as silver or bronze (Isa. 60:17).

Revelation 21:19

The foundations of the walls of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones

Were adorned is [κεκοσμημένοι](#) [kekosmēmenoi], perfect passive participle: *having been decorated*. She was adorned in the past in preparation for her husband. See commentary on [Revelation 21:2](#).

O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. (Isa. 54:11-12)

There is some uncertainty as to the relationship between the names of the stones in the original languages (Greek and Hebrew) versus our modern equivalents. The interested reader is encouraged to refer to more extensive treatments concerning their identity in recommended reference works.⁵⁰

3.21.19.1 - Tribal Stones

The description of the foundations of the New Jerusalem mentions twelve different stones. Immediately, this brings to mind the twelve stones on the high priest's breastplate. Each stone represented one of the twelve tribes:

On the outside of the breastplate and placed in gold settings were twelve precious stones in four rows of three stones each. On each of the stones was inscribed the name of one of the tribes of Israel, presumably in the order of their births, as was the case with the onyx stones on the shoulders (Ex. 28:10). The order and names of the stones are listed in Exodus 28:17-20.⁵¹

A survey of various Bible translations (ASV,⁵² DBY,⁵³ ESV,⁵⁴ KJV,⁵⁵ MKJV,⁵⁶ NASU,⁵⁷ NET,⁵⁸ NIV84,⁵⁹ NKJV,⁶⁰ NRSV,⁶¹ TNK,⁶² YLT⁶³) indicates some uncertainty surrounding the identification of several of the stones associated with the twelve tribes as found in the high priest's breastplate.

Stones of the Tribes of Israel



Birth Order	Tribe	Majority Stone ⁶⁴	Alternate Stones
1	Reuben	sardius	ruby (NASU, NIV84, NET), carnelian (NRSV, TNK)
2	Simeon	topaz	chrysolite (NRSV, TNK)
3	Levi	carbuncle	emerald (DBY, NASU, NKJV, NRSV, TNK), beryl (NET, NIV84)
4	Judah	emerald	turquoise (NASU, NET, NKJV, NRSV, TNK), carbuncle (DBY)
5	Dan	sapphire	
6	Naphtali	diamond	emerald (NET, NIV84), moonstone (NRSV), amethyst (TNK)
7	Gad	jacinth	opal (DBY, MKJV, YLT), ligure (KJV)
8	Asher	agate	
9	Issachar	amethyst	crystal (TNK)
10	Zebulun	beryl	chrysolite (DBY, NET, NIV84, MKJV)
11	Joseph	onyx	lapis lazuli (TNK)
12	Benjamin	jasper	

Attempts to correlate the tribal stones with the stones on the foundations of the New Jerusalem meet with several difficulties:

1. The correlation between the Hebrew names of the stones of the breastplate and the Greek names of the stones is uncertain.
2. The foundations are named according to *apostles* and not *tribes* and therefore there may not be a precise correlation between the stones on the foundations and the stones of the tribes.

Thus, attempts to connect the foundation stones with the stones of the breastplate have generally been unproductive:

Eight of the stones are the same as in the breastplate, with the four remaining ones being words that are unused in the LXX: [χαλκήδων](#) [chalkēdōn], [χρυσόπρασος](#) [chrysoprasos], [ἰακίνθος](#) [huakinthos], [σαρδόνυξ](#) [sardonix] (Swete). The symbolism is rich in meaning. The old covenant confined the privilege of direct fellowship with God to the high priest, but in the new city the privilege will belong to all the people of God (cf. Rev. 21:22+) (Moffatt). A difference in the order of the stones' listing in the two situations is not a serious problem for this view.⁶⁵

There seems no way, however, of identifying the stone that corresponds to each apostle. Similarly, there is no apparent correlation with the order of the precious stones in the priestly breastplate (Exodus 28:17-20) or the stones in the heavenly garden (Ezekiel 28:13), although a number of the stones are the same in both instances. . . . No particular patterns or reasons for the particular sequence seem discernible at this time.⁶⁶

What we *can* be sure of is that God will have chosen the foundation stones to achieve a visually stunning result! It may well be that the stones are chosen more for visual effect than any relationship to the stones on the breastplate of the high priest:

A close study of the colors of these precious stones will bring to mind the colors of the rainbow, and how God used the rainbow as a promise to Noah that he would never again destroy the earth by water (Gen. 9:12-17).⁶⁷

Each foundation will be composed of different precious stones with its own dominant color. They can be delineated as follows: 1. Jasper—green; 2. Sapphire—blue; 3. Chalcedony—greenish; 4. Emerald—green; 5. Sardonyx—red and white; 6. Sardius—fiery red; 7. Chrysolite—golden yellow; 8. Beryl—aqua green; 9. Topaz—greenish yellow; 10. Chrysoprase—golden green; 11. Jacinth—violet; 12. Amethyst—purple.⁶⁸

Revelation 21:20

See [Tribal Stones](#)

Revelation 21:21

The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl.

Being made of pearl speaks, primarily, of great value (Rev. 17:4⁺). Pearls, coming from an unclean animal (an oyster, Lev. 11:10), may also carry a secondary association of *unclean* or *Gentile*. In order to move the gospel out from the Jews to the Gentiles, Peter was given a vision of a sheet containing many unclean animals and told to kill and eat them. When he refused to partake of the unclean animals, God responded, "What God has cleansed you must not call common [κοινου](#) [koinou]" (Acts 10:13). This was preparatory to Peter entering the household of a Gentile, Cornelius, so that the gospel could go forth to the Gentiles. Here, John is told that nothing *that defiles* ([κοινου](#) [koinoun], *common*) will be allowed to enter through the gates of the city (Rev. 21:27⁺). Jesus paid for both a treasure hidden in a field (Israel) and a pearl of great price (the Gentiles) (Mat. 13:45-56). The pearl Jesus bought was considered unclean, but also of great value. The pearls may stand as a testimony that the redeemed from among the Gentiles, who responded to God in faith, are no longer considered unclean and can pass through the gates.

the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass

The street of the city is like the sea of glass (Rev. 4:6⁺; 15:2⁺; 21:18⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 4:6](#) and [Revelation 15:2](#).

Revelation 21:22

But I saw no temple in it

The word for *temple*, [ναός](#) [naon] has two general meanings in relation to the house of God in Jerusalem. "(1) In a narrower sense, the inner sanctuary within a sacred precinct ([τὸ εὐχριν](#) [to hieron]) where the divine being resides *shrine*, (*inner*) *temple* (Mat. 27:51); (2) in a broader yet specific sense, the sanctuary in Jerusalem consisting of the (outer) Holy Place and the (inner) Holy of Holies *temple* (Mat. 26:61)."⁶⁹

for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple

For most of history, God had purposed that there be a [Temple](#) to mitigate His holy presence in the midst of sinful men. Now there is no more sin and man and God can enjoy full fellowship without separation (John 1:1). It was the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross which ultimately restored full fellowship between man and God (Mat. 27:39; John 2:19; Col. 1:19; Rev. 5:9⁺). See [Temple of God](#). Significantly, God the Father and God the Son are equally considered to be the Temple. Again, we see the equivalency of Jesus Christ with the Father. Jesus is God (John 10:30; Col. 2:9; Rev. 1:8⁺, 18⁺)! See commentary on [Revelation 1:8](#) and [Revelation 1:18](#). *Almighty* is [παντοκράτωρ](#) [pantokratōr]. See commentary on [Revelation 1:8](#). Concerning Jesus' title as *Lamb*, see commentary on [Revelation 5:6](#).

Revelation 21:23

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it

Although most take this passage to indicate there will be no more sun or moon, the passage need not preclude the existence of the sun and moon. It merely indicates that the city had no *need* of their light because of the *Shekinah* glory of God in the midst of the city.

The form of expression would not make impossible the existence of the sun and the moon, as this scripture merely says there is no need of them.⁷⁰

Neither the sun nor the moon will ever really be destroyed, of course, since God has promised that they, as well as all the starry heavens, will endure forever (Psalm 148:3-6; Daniel 12:3). It is just that their light is no longer needed to illumine the holy city, for the city itself radiates light to all the surrounding regions (Rev. 21:24⁺). However, the sun and moon will continue to serve their present functions with respect to the nether regions of the earth, serving there as lights by day and night, respectively.⁷¹

It is difficult to be dogmatic as to whether the sun and moon will necessarily exist in the eternal state. It may be that there is no sun and moon, as in the early part of creation week.⁷² "The city will be bright enough to supply illumination for the whole new creation (Alford, Lee)."⁷³ God created light on the first day (Gen. 1:3), but the sun and moon were not created until the fourth day (Gen. 1:14):

On the fourth day the luminaries were made; because God, who possesses foreknowledge, knew the follies of the vain philosophers, that they were going to say, that the things which grow on the earth are produced from the heavenly bodies, so as to exclude God. In order, therefore, that the truth might be obvious, the plants and seeds were produced prior to the heavenly bodies,

for what is posterior cannot produce that which is prior.—Theophilus of Antioch⁷⁴

Here we see one of the primary characteristics of the eternal state: it stands as the restoration of many things from the early creation. See [Genesis and Revelation as Bookends](#). Several passages use the sun and moon as witnesses of eternal promises:

Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of hosts *is* His name): “**If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.**” Thus says the LORD: “If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD.” (Jer. 31:35-37) [emphasis added]

“Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, **And his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon**, even [like] the faithful witness in the sky.” Selah. (Ps. 89:35-37) [emphasis added]

These passages tie God’s faithfulness in promises regarding Israel and the Davidic throne to the continuance of the sun and moon: “It shall be established forever like the moon.” Whether these promises are meant to extend only to the end of the present order (Rev. 21:1⁺) or beyond into the eternal order is difficult to determine. The specifics of these promises may no longer pertain after the [Millennial Kingdom](#), once Israel’s promises have been fulfilled and the Lamb’s Davidic throne is merged with the Father’s throne (Rev. 22:3⁺). The reliance of these promises on the sun and moon may infer their continued existence in the eternal state. Another piece of evidence which points to the continuance of the moon in the eternal state is the tree of life. The tree is said to yield its fruit *every month* (Rev. 22:2⁺). *Month* is [μῶν](#) [mōna]: “using the moon’s cycle as a measure of time *month* (Luke 1:24); in reference to religious festivals held at the time of the new moon *new moon* (Gal. 4:10).”⁷⁵ Mention of a monthly cycle implies that the moon may still be present and continue to serve for “signs and seasons” (Gen. 1:14). The existence of the moon for calendrical reasons would imply the continuance of the sun as well, since the moon reflects the light of the sun.

the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.

Isaiah saw a day, after the punishment of the “host of exalted ones” (probably fallen angels), when the brightness of the *Shekinah* glory would make the moon disgraced and the sun ashamed (Isa. 24:23). Now, the glory of the Lord serves in their stead. Whether or not the sun and moon actually cease to exist, the *Shekinah* glory of God will serve in their place in the city and its vicinity:

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. (Isa. 60:19-20)

Similarly, the glory of the Lord illuminated the *holy of holies* within the original [Tabernacle](#):

The dwelling-place of God’s glory in the Tabernacle and the Temple on earth had no light of sun or moon; for the Shekinah or glory of God was sufficient.⁷⁶

What has happened? *Man has been brought fully into the holy of holies which is lit only by God’s glory!* Again, we see the emphasis on the communion of man with a holy God. There is no longer any separation of any sort because sin has been completely done away with. This is why there was still a [Millennial Temple](#) during the thousand years, but not [Temple](#) building in the New Jerusalem. In the Millennium, sin still existed (Isa. 65:20; Rev. 20:7-10⁺). In our own day, the Lamb serves as the spiritual light bringing revelation to men (Luke 2:32; John 1:4-5; 8:12). “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1Jn. 1:5). God’s glory had been seen in the millennial Jerusalem, but the New Jerusalem will eclipse everything from the previous order:

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isa. 60:1-3)

Revelation 21:24

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light

The [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts omit *of those who are saved*. The term *nations* ([ἔθνη](#) [ethnē]) denotes the diversity of the redeemed, from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9⁺; 13:7⁺; 14:6⁺). In the place of the sun and moon, the nations walk in the light provided by God’s glory which emanates from the city and illuminates the earth (Rev. 21:23⁺; 22:5⁺). Questions which arise in our mind concerning the curvature of the earth, how far the glory of God shines upon the earth, and whether there is darkness anywhere upon the earth are not answered in this brief description. The nature of the new heaven and earth could be so radically different from anything we know as to render our questions baseless. Perhaps the Shekinah glory extends its radiant beauty from the

city outward over the entire earth.

the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it

This had already been the experience of the earthly Jerusalem during the [Millennial Kingdom](#) (Isa. 60:3-12; 66:12). Here is evidence that “heaven” will be much different than is commonly conceived. These kings are *of the earth*: having their primary place of activity upon the earth rather than within the city. They bring their glory from *outside* the city *into* ([εἰς](#) [eis]) it. The glory and honor of the kings probably describes gifts of value and beauty which are brought as presents of worship to God and the Lamb in the midst of the city. Some have seen this as evidence of two categories of the faithful: those who reside within the city (glorified saints) and those who reside outside the city on the earth (those left living at the end of the [Millennial Kingdom](#)).

Those nations, during the Millennium, that walk in the Divine light of the earthly Jerusalem, are transferred to the new earth, to walk in the Heavenly light of the New Jerusalem.^{[77](#)}

Is there any way, however, that these could be nations of people still in a natural state (say, like Adam and Eve before the fall) continuing over from the millennium? . . . Admittedly, however, the Scriptures do not deal with this particular subject directly . . . one must certainly be tentative on this point, that this particular group of saints, some from each millennial nation, may have been (like Enoch and Elijah long before) translated to the heavenly Jerusalem still in the flesh. In such a hypothetical situation, they would then be in that state in the city when it descended to the earth. . . . This interpretation of this text, doubtful and fraught with difficulties though it may be, would help in answering certain other questions.^{[78](#)}

I . . . hold it to be a necessary and integral part of the Scriptural doctrine of human redemption, that our race, as a self-multiplying order of beings, will never cease either to exist or to possess the earth. . . . Ransomed nations in the flesh are therefore among the occupants of the new earth, and the blessed and happy dwellers in it, as Adam and Eve dwelt in Paradise.^{[79](#)}

This is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent, but there is one . . . theory which seems to satisfy the available criteria best. . . . This opinion holds that “the nations” are composed of saved people who survive the millennial kingdom without dying and without joining Satan’s rebellion and who undergo some sort of transformation that suits them for life in the eternal state. They will be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall (cf. Govett, Seiss). They will be unresurrected human beings who will inhabit the new earth, Paradise restored (Rev. 22:1-5+), throughout eternity.^{[80](#)}

Shall not God then during the “Renovation of the Earth by Fire,” in some manner, not as yet revealed, take off righteous representatives of the Millennial nations that he purposes to save, and when the earth is again fit to be the abode of men, place them back on the New Earth, that they may increase and multiply and replenish it, as Adam (Gen. 1:27-28), and Noah (Gen. 9:1), were told to multiply and replenish the present earth.^{[81](#)}

This surprising suggestion is not without complications. See commentary on [Revelation 22:2](#).

Revelation 21:25

Its gates shall not be shut at all

Not . . . at all is the double negative, [οὐ μὴ](#) [ou mē], indicating there is no possibility of their ever needing to close. *Shut* is [κλεισθῶσιν](#) [kleisthōsin], *they would be locked*. The same word describes the locking away of Satan in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:3+). In the [Millennial Kingdom](#), the gates of the earthly Jerusalem were never shut *day or night* (Isa. 60:11). Now, there is no night and the gates remain continually open. The gates remain open for those outside the city to freely enter into it, where God and the Lamb are in its midst, and where they may access the leaves of the tree of life. See commentary on [Revelation 22:2](#).

no night there

The glory of God will provide a continuous source of light within the city. The text does not say “there shall be no night,” but “there shall be no night *there*”—that is, in the New Jerusalem. Whether night exists elsewhere on the earth is not said. Many assume there is no night *anywhere* on the earth as if the mere existence of darkness were an indication of sin.^{[82](#)} But the text only says there will be no night *there*—in the neighborhood of the holy city and region of the earth which the Shekinah glory illuminates.

The city itself will radiate light as bright as daylight, so night will ever come, even when the earth’s rotation carries the city away from the sun.^{[83](#)}

Of course, we are in speculative territory supposing that the new earth is much like today: a sphere which rotates subject to physics as we know it today. The text tells us the barest minimum concerning many aspects of the new heaven and earth. They may be radically different from that which we assume from our experience today.

Revelation 21:26

they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it

The [MT](#) text adds: *that they may enter in*. See commentary on [Revelation 21:24](#).

Revelation 21:27

there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles

Defiles is [κοινῶν](#) [koinon]: *common*. This speaks of those things which are unclean. At one time, the Gentiles had been considered unclean ([κοινῶν](#) [koinou], Acts 10:13). All who inhabit the eternal state and access the city have been washing in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5+) and are now clean. There is no more sin. See commentary on [Revelation 21:21](#). Isaiah saw a “Highway of Holiness” over which nothing unclean would pass and upon which the redeemed would walk, those who had been ransomed (Isa. 35:8-10). A day was coming when the uncircumcised and the unclean would no longer come to Jerusalem (Isa. 52:1). “Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:17). See commentary on [Revelation 21:8](#).

only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life

This does not imply that some outside the city may be refused entry at the gates. The gates remain open at all times because only the redeemed and (now) sinless inhabit the new heaven and new earth. What this phrase is saying is that all who participate in the eternal state are the redeemed who were written in the Lamb’s [Book of Life](#) and that none of the lost will ever enter the city because they are eternally incarcerated in the Lake of Fire. These are the overcomers of all history, including those during the Tribulation who refused to worship the [Beast](#). Jesus promised the overcomer in the church at Sardis that his name would not be blotted out of the [Book of Life](#). The Beast worshipers were never written in the book (Rev. 13:8+; 17:8+). The unrighteous dead were judged by this book: those who were not written in the Book of Life were cast into the Lake of Fire at the passing away of the old order (Rev. 20:12-15+). See commentary on [Revelation 20:15](#). See [Book of Life](#).

Notes

¹See [Millennial Passages](#) where we discuss keys to identifying millennial passages from those which describe the eternal state.

²There may also be that there is no more *sun* and *moon* (see commentary on [Revelation 21:23](#)).

³Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 394.

⁴J. A. Seiss, [The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 487-488.

⁵Merrill F. Unger, [Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament](#) (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), Isa. 65:17-25.

⁶Alva J. McClain, [The Greatness Of The Kingdom](#) (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 138.

⁷Jerome Smith, [The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), Rev. 21:1.

⁸Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [Commentary on the Old Testament](#) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 7:624-625.

⁹“Water, for example, was used for cleansing—hence, the laver in the tabernacle and the sea in the temple. There is no more need for cleansing in the new earth, however.”—Henry Morris, [The Revelation Record](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 15:3.

¹⁰Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 212.

¹¹Paul Lee Tan, [The Interpretation of Prophecy](#) (Dallas, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1993), 288-289.

¹²Alan F. Johnson, [Revelation: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 200.

¹³John MacArthur, [Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2000), Rev. 21:12.

¹⁴Tan, [The Interpretation of Prophecy](#), 289-292.

¹⁵Friberg, [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#), 273.

- ¹⁶Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 545.
- ¹⁷Seiss, [The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation](#), 496.
- ¹⁸W. E. Vine, [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#) (Nashville, IL: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), G2885.
- ¹⁹Robert L. Thomas, [Revelation 8-22](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), Rev. 21:3.
- ²⁰Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 754.
- ²¹MacArthur, [Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#), Rev. 21:3.
- ²²"A noticeable change from the singular to the plural [λαοι](#) [laoi], 'peoples,' makes an expansion beyond the boundaries of Israel, usually referred to by the singular [λαός](#) [laos], 'people.'"—Thomas, [Revelation 8-22](#), Rev. 21:3.
- ²³Enoch, Elijah, translated saints at the [Rapture](#).
- ²⁴Seiss, [The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation](#), 489-490.
- ²⁵Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 210.
- ²⁶E. W. Bullinger, [Commentary On Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1984, 1935), Rev. 22:5.
- ²⁷He is the eternal Son of God—even before the incarnation.
- ²⁸Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 173.
- ²⁹Friberg, [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#), 105.
- ³⁰Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 138.
- ³¹Friberg, [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#), 89.
- ³²Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 693.
- ³³Friberg, [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#), 397.
- ³⁴Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 221.
- ³⁵ [Walter Scott, [Exposition of The Revelation](#) (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.)], [Arno C. Gaebelien, [The Revelation](#) (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961)].
- ³⁶It is analogous to the way in which Genesis 2 expands upon the creation of man on day six of Genesis 1.
- ³⁷The devil took Christ up on an exceedingly high mountain to show Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Mat. 4:8).
- ³⁸Donald Grey Barnhouse, [Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), Rev. 21:12.
- ³⁹Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 729.
- ⁴⁰Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), Rev. 21:14.
- ⁴¹Thomas, [Revelation 8-22](#), Rev. 21:14.
- ⁴²Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 515.
- ⁴³Friberg, [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#), 213.
- ⁴⁴Trent C. Butler, Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England, eds., [Broadman and Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 1666.
- ⁴⁵Morris, [The Revelation Record](#), Rev. 21:16.

⁴⁶Monty S. Mills, [*Revelations: An Exegetical Study of the Revelation to John*](#) (Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries, 1987), Rev. 21:16.

⁴⁷Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 312.

⁴⁸So [MacArthur, [*Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*](#)], [Mills, [*Revelations: An Exegetical Study of the Revelation to John*](#)], [Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#)].

⁴⁹Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 388.

⁵⁰ [Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., [*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979, 1915)], [Butler, [*Broadman and Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*](#)], [Merrill Frederick Unger, R. K. Harrison, Frederic F Vos, and Cyril J. Barber, [*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988)], [Ronald F. Youngblood and R. K. Harrison, eds., [*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995)], and [David Noel Freeman, ed., [*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*](#) (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996, c1992)].

⁵¹William Varner, [*Jacob's Dozen: A Prophetic Look at the Tribes of Israel*](#) (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1987), s.v. "The Ephod and the Breastplate."

⁵²*American Standard Version.*

⁵³*Darby's Translation.*

⁵⁴*English Standard Version.*

⁵⁵*King James Version.*

⁵⁶*Modern King James Version.*

⁵⁷*New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.*

⁵⁸ [*New Electronic Translation : NET Bible*](#), electronic edition (Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 1998).

⁵⁹*New International Version, 1984 Update.*

⁶⁰*New King James Version.*

⁶¹*New Revised Standard Version.*

⁶² [*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*](#) (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1997, c1985).

⁶³*Young's Literal Translation.*

⁶⁴Unless listed under the *Alternate Stones* column, each of the Bible translations listed above give the majority identification.

⁶⁵Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#), Rev. 21:19.

⁶⁶Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 21:18.

⁶⁷Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 407.

⁶⁸Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), rev ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 537.

⁶⁹Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 269.

⁷⁰John F. Walvoord, [*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), Rev. 21:23.

⁷¹Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 21:23.

⁷²"Sun and moon, the luminaries of the first creation (Gen. 1:14) have no place in the second; cf. Isa. 60:19."—Henry Barclay Swete, [*The Apocalypse of St. John*](#) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998, 1906), Rev. 21:23.

⁷³Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#), Rev. 21:23.

⁷⁴Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., [*Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. II*](#) (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), s.v. “ECF 1.2.3.1.2.13.”

⁷⁵Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 262.

⁷⁶Bullinger, [*Commentary On Revelation*](#), Rev. 21:23.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 668.

⁷⁸Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 21:24.

⁷⁹Seiss, [*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*](#), 483, 492.

⁸⁰Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#), Rev. 21:24.

⁸¹Clarence Larkin, [*The Book of Revelation*](#) (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1919), Rev. 21:24.

⁸²“The existence of darkness was another result of the curse on the earth at Satan’s fall (Gen. 1:2). During the six days of creation, there was only a partial removal of the darkness (the sun by day) and the night (the moon and the stars provided limited light) that existed. But in the Eternal Order, since all the effects of sin are to be removed forever, there will be no night.”—Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 538.

⁸³Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 21:25.

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