

The Far Distant Future

Some Thoughts about Revelation 21 & 22

By Dave DeWitt

The Bible ends with a look to the future. Everyone who takes the Bible at face value understands we are headed for a time when an antichrist rules the earth and God judges it for seven years with a great tribulation. This ends with the Second Coming of Christ, followed by a 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, followed by the Great White Throne Judgment. But then what? In Revelation 21 & 22, God seems to be giving us the introduction to His new book, one He will write in the far distant future.

The dynamic contribution Jesus made to prophecy was to add an eternal perspective. Although the Old Testament allows for an eternal hope (Job 19:25; Daniel 12:13), its primary perspective of the future is a kingdom on earth which fulfills God's promises to Abraham (Genesis 13:15). The author of Hebrews tells us, *By faith Abraham...was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God* (Hebrews 11:8-10). But we learn nothing about that from the account of Abraham in Genesis.

Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus taught the same sequence of events listed above (Matthew 24–25). But Jesus pushed the perspective of believers beyond that to an eternal city, which is not on this earth. What Jesus and the apostles talked about was not just an eternal perspective, but an eternal **place**, a heavenly city, a New Jerusalem.

- **John 14:2-3** *In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 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.*
- **Galatians 4:25-26** *...the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.*
- **Hebrews 11:16** *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*
- **Hebrews 12:22-23** *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.*
- **Hebrews 13:14** *For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.*
- **Revelation 3:12** *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God.*

What we know about that eternal city, *which comes down out of heaven from God* in the far distant future, is not near as clear as we would like it to be. Most of us want to know more about the eternal state than God tells us. People often ask questions we don't have the information to answer, and many writers give us books of speculation to fill in the gaps. Others say something like, "Since we don't know much about it, why bother to think about it at all?" The answer to this last question is—because **God told us about it**. He didn't give us as much information as we would like, and we must be careful with speculation, but He did give us some significant facts about His eternal city. And we must conclude that the things He told us are things He wanted us to know. With this in mind, we shall explore some of the things we **can** know about the far distant future.

We shall divide our short study into three parts:

1. Some things we can know about the new earth.
2. Some things we can know about the holy city, the New Jerusalem.
3. Some things we can know about the people in the New Jerusalem and on the new earth.

Some Things We Can Know about the New Earth

1. There will be a *new earth*

- **Revelation 21:1** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away*

There will be a new earth, and the new earth will not be a revision, renewal, or rebuilding of this present earth because *the first heaven and the first earth passed away*. Peter also said,

- **2 Peter 3:10** *the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*

There are some confused teachers, who are saying, “Heaven Is a Place On Earth” (the title of a 2009 book by Michael E. Wittmer, although several others also promote this confusion). Their idea is that this earth is our final dwelling place, so we need to take care of it, protect it, etc. This teaching is supported by skipping clear statements that say this earth will pass away, taking millennial passages about Christ’s Kingdom on earth as referring to the eternal state, and extending the promise that believers will live forever to say the earth they live on will last forever. These are teachers and preachers who know very little (or ignore what they know) about how to exegete a written text. It seems these guys think they have a better understanding of biblical texts that for centuries have for been understood to proclaim an eternal future for believers in a heavenly place. Apparently, they know more than, say, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Edwards, Moody, Lewis, Ryrie, Walvoord, Pentecost, and McGee. I know of no biblical scholar, at any other time in history, who thought “Heaven Is a Place On Earth.”

There is no suggestion that this earth becomes something eternal. There is more to this than just a different ball, it’s a different ball game. This earth operates with the Laws of Thermodynamics and the Second Law shows that everything is wearing out, slowing down, and dying. The new earth operates by completely different laws that allow for an eternal existence.

2. The new earth will be surrounded by a new heaven

In the Bible, the word “heaven” is used for three different places: (1) the atmosphere surrounding the earth; (2) the universe of the stars, galaxies, and constellations; and (3) the place of the presence of God. Here, it probably refers to the atmosphere around the new earth, although if in the distant future there are things like stars and galaxies, they would probably also surround the new earth. So the new heaven may be a reference to the new atmosphere or new stars.

3. The new earth has no sea



The only descriptive comment we are given about the new earth is *there is no longer any sea*. Undoubtedly, that means there is no large body of water. It could just mean that there is no salt water, but the word *sea* was not confined to salt water in the Bible (John 6:1). The absence of large bodies of water is a huge difference between this earth and the new one. Here is what we have on this earth. “The oceans cover 71 percent of the Earth’s surface and contain 97 percent of the Earth’s water. Less than 1 percent of the Earth’s water is fresh water, and 2-3 percent is contained in glaciers and ice caps. The oceans contain

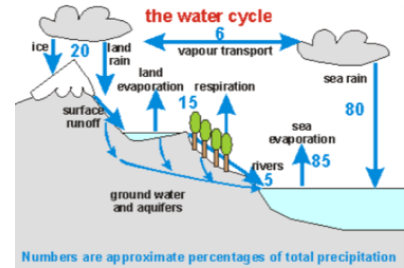
99 percent of the living space on the planet. [www.oceanicinstitute.org/aboutoceans/aquafacts.html]

[By the way, the above picture may be a good depiction of what the earth looked like after *God said*, “*Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear* (Genesis 1:9) and before it split apart to its present configuration at the time of Noah’s flood.]

Although the details are not necessary for our discussion here, suffice it to say that on our earth the seas are crucial for our existence. Life here depends on huge bodies of water.

There is water on the new earth, at least in the New Jerusalem. John said, *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb* (Revelation 22:1).

But it does not accumulate into large bodies like our oceans. So the life dynamic is very different than for this earth. And, of course, there is no way life on this earth could survive if it became an earth where *there is no longer any sea*. That’s the whole point of the turning the sea to blood during the tribulation (Revelation 8:8).

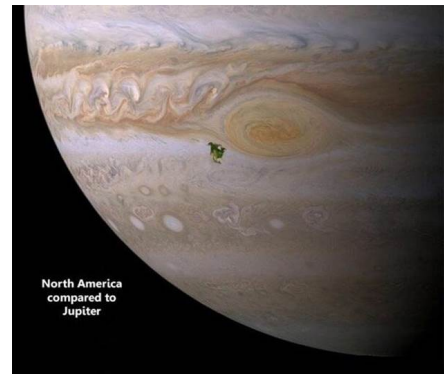


4. The new earth is very large

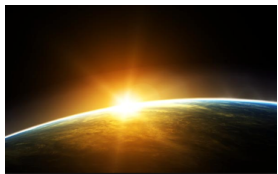
The New Jerusalem is *fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal*. That means it’s a cube, or a pyramid, or something like a mountain. Its base would be approximately the distance from Detroit to San Antonio to San Francisco to the Canadian border, and back to Detroit. But a city 1500 miles high would never fit on this earth. Most satellites orbit at 200 miles above the earth. That means the New Jerusalem is 7 ½ times higher than where the satellites orbit the earth.



Such a city sitting on this earth would look like an ice cream cone, or a smiley face wearing a party hat. If it is spherical like ours, in order to accommodate the New Jerusalem, the new earth would have to be more the size of one of the larger planets, something like Jupiter.



5. The new earth is lighted by the New Jerusalem



Revelation 21:23-25 *And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light... In the daytime (for there will be no night there)...*

John does not say “there is no sun or moon,” but it doesn’t seem like there is, or they aren’t significant. Our old earth orbits around the sun and gets its warmth and light from the sun. But the sun’s light also emits radiation, which is lethal for most planets close enough to a star to be warmed by it (like Mars). Except our earth has a magnetic field, that deflects the radiation, allowing us to be warmed safely. All that’s completely different with the new earth, where its needs are met by the New Jerusalem supplying its light without danger. That also implies there might be a place away from the New Jerusalem of *outer darkness* (Matthew 8:12; 22:13 25:30). Such a place could be on the dark side of the new earth, or some other place inaccessible to the New Jerusalem.

Some Things We Can Know bout the Holy City, The New Jerusalem

1. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, comes “out of heaven from God”

In the upper room before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples,

- **John 14:2-3** *I go to prepare a place for you. 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.

It seems that between His first and second coming to earth, Jesus is preparing a place for His disciples. The point is not that it takes a certain amount of time to do that, but rather there will be a place prepared for believers, presumably from all ages (Daniel 12:2-3), by Jesus, in some heavenly realm.

After the Apostle John saw the vision of the final world war at the end of the 1000-year Millennial Reign of Christ (Revelation 20:19) and the first earth passed away (2 Peter 3:7 & 10; Revelation 21:1), he saw a new earth. Then he reported, *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband* (Revelation 21:2). This could mean John saw it come out of the sky. But since John adds the phrase *from God*, it would be reasonable to assume this *holy city* is the place prepared by Jesus in His heavenly realm, then brought to the new earth. At any rate, it is a place for believers, and it is brought down to the new earth after the destruction of the old earth.

2. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will be a dwelling place of God

- **Revelation 21:3** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them...”*

The dwelling of God in the New Jerusalem is described as being, a *tabernacle*, which is the normal word for a *tent*. A tent is usually a temporary place that moves from time-to-time and from place-to-place. By way of contrast, a temple is a permanent structure that does not move. But later, John reported, *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple* (Revelation 21:22). A temple is a place for worshiping God when God is not personally manifested in that place. But in the holy city, sitting on the new earth, God is dwelling among His people. So God is pictured with a tabernacle rather than a temple.

There are two things we should always keep in mind about the omnipresence of God:

1. Unlike the “everywhere but nowhere” idea of pantheism, God is always located somewhere.
 - **Psalm 103:19** *The LORD has established His **throne** in the heavens...*
 - **Revelation 22:1** *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the **throne of God** and of the Lamb*
 - **Revelation 22:3** *...the **throne** of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him...*
2. But God is also everywhere.
 - **Isaiah 66:1** *Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?”*
 - **Revelation 21:3** *He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them...*

In the *holy city the New Jerusalem*, God is present everywhere, He also has a throne somewhere in the city, and because of this, there is no temple.

3. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will be a place without suffering

- **Revelation 21:4** *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away*

- **Revelation 22:3-5** *There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him...*

John heard a loud voice from the throne, reminding him that the first things had passed away. We already know that meant the first earth and the first heaven passed away, but now John is told it also included the curse on the first earth. The fall of Adam and Eve was accompanied by death and suffering. We live on an earth which, although magnificently balanced, is also sustained with suffering.

- **Romans 8:22-23** *For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*

But in the vision of the Apocalypse, John received word that this present suffering would all pass away. Specifically, he said four things will pass away:

- *Death*, the common word for the end of life
- *Mourning*, the common word for crying
- *Crying*, a word that can mean crying, shouting, or making an outcry
- *Pain*, a word that can mean pain, or hard labor and toil

The point of the *loud voice from the throne* was to tell the Apostle John not only will God be among His people but the curse of the old earth will not be transmitted to the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

4. The New Jerusalem will be very colorful

We know the new earth is very large compared to ours because we know the size of the New Jerusalem – 1500 miles long x 1500 miles wide x 1500 miles high. But we know more.

- **Revelation 21:11-14** *Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.*
- **Revelation 21:18-21** *The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was **jasper**; the second, **sapphire**; the third, **chalcedony**; the fourth, **emerald**; the fifth, **sardonyx**; the sixth, **sardius**; the seventh, **chrysolite**; the eighth, **beryl**; the ninth, **topaz**; the tenth, **chrysoptase**; the eleventh, **jacinth**; the twelfth, **amethyst**. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

The city has a wall around it that measured 72 yards/meters, but whether that means the height or thickness is unknown. It has 12 foundation stones, although we don't know where they are or their shape. But we do know that there are 12 gates, each of which is a giant pearl. We also know the street of the city are *pure gold, like transparent glass*. We also know it is made up of various colorful stones that have the collective effect of *crystal-clear jasper*. Jasper is usually a multicolored stone. The overall effect in the city seems to be a transparent glass-like structure with light coming through in various colors.

By the way, this is not the first time God created something like that. Speaking about Satan before he fell, Ezekiel tells us God said, “*You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of **the stones of fire**.*” And when Satan sinned God said, “*I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of **the stones of fire***” (Ezekiel 28:14 & 16). It also appears that the phrase *stones of fire* is not a bad description of the New Jerusalem.

5. The New Jerusalem will be a place where there is measurable time

Revelation 22:1-2 *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and the Lamb, in the middle of the street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month*

In the New Jerusalem, there is a tree, apparently large enough for the *river of water of life* to flow through it, and it is *bearing twelve kinds of fruit*. The twelve kinds of fruit are clarified with the information that the tree is *yielding its fruit every month*. *Twelve* seems to be equated with *every month*. That would imply twelve months complete something, like a year.

Also in verse five we learn,

Revelation 22:5 *And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them.*

The statement is not just that there is no longer any darkness. There is a specific description of that lack of darkness as there will *no longer be any night* [*night* and *darkness* are different Greek words with distinct meanings similar to English]. That seems to imply that there is a time which would normally be nighttime but isn't because of the light supplied by *the Lord God*. This suggests a time period of a day, something like our 24-hour day.

In addition, we learned earlier that time was measured in hours around the throne of God.

Revelation 8:1 *When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour*

And we learned that in other kinds of measurements, *human measurements* were also *angelic measurements* (Revelation 21:17).

It appears there are days, months, and years measuring time in the New Jerusalem. Of course, the existence of time is necessary for any course of events to take place. As the old saying goes, "God created time so everything doesn't happen at once." It seems that not only is there time, but the time is to be measured in a way similar to the way it is now. The New Jerusalem is not a place without time, it's just that those living there don't run out of it.

Some Things We Can Know About the People In the New Jerusalem and On the New Earth

There seems to be three groups of people associated with, or at least mentioned in connection with, the new earth.

1. There are the people who live permanently in the holy city

- **Revelation 21:3** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..."*
- **Revelation 22:3-5** *There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads...and they will reign forever and ever.*

The first people described in the far distant future are those living in the New Jerusalem, the place where *God Himself will be among them*. These are also the people for whom *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain*. Who are these people, and where did they come from? If the comments of Jesus to His disciples

in the upper room refer to this city when He said, “*I go to prepare a place for you,*” then we can assume these people are believers (like the disciples) in their eternal resurrected bodies.

Does this mean all believers from all ages will be in this city? Well...

- We know that *whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16) and *God...raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:6-7).
- We also know, *If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.... For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad...it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God...So, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward* (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 10:26-39).

2. We learn about a people called *the nations*

- **Revelation 21:24-26** *The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.*
- **Revelation 22:1-2** *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*
- **Revelation 22:14** *Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.*

The word for nations is the very common word ἔθνος (*ethnos*) which can mean:

“A race, a nation, pl. the nations (as distinct from Isr.): —Gentiles(93), nation(31), nations(37), pagans(1), people(1)” [NAS Greek Concordance]

ἔθνος (*ethnos*) is the word Jews used for Gentiles and the word Jesus used for those He commanded the disciples to *go make disciples of* in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18). We know that there were believing Gentiles who were not allowed in the assembly, and later the temple, of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:2). Is this something like that? Who are these people? Where did they come from? There is a lot we don’t know about them, but let’s look at what we do know.

- They are true believers in God and Jesus. At the end of chapter 21, we are told they are *those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life* (Revelation 21:27). *They are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city* (Revelation 22:14).
- They live outside the city, but close enough to *walk by its light*. On an earth big enough to support the New Jerusalem, that’s a huge area. At any rate, they live in the light of the city, not the outer darkness.
- They come in and go from the city. When they come in the city, *they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it*. And they might do that at any time (*for there will be no night there*) *its gates will never be closed*.
- They appear to need some sort of *healing* that those living in the city do not need. That healing is obtained from the *tree of life* in the city. *On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

So there are believers living outside the city, in the area of light provided by the city, who bring some *glory* into the city and take out some *healing* [The word “healing” (θεραπείαν) can be understood as “health-giving (Walvoord)” obtained from the tree of life while they are in the city.

3. We learn about a people called *the immoral persons*

- **Revelation 21:27** *...nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*
- **Revelation 22:15** *Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.*

There is also a third group of people mentioned who are clearly unbelievers, which seems strange in light of the fact that we are talking about the eternal state with the New Jerusalem, located on the new earth. Again we want to ask, “Who are these people, and where did they come from?” It would be easy to say they are just off in some distant hell, disconnected from the new earth. But then why are they mentioned in a discussion which centers on the holy city, the New Jerusalem? And why are we told they don’t *come into it*. I looked at my four favorite commentators, and none of them dealt with these questions. Everyone talks about their sins, that they are judged for their sin and excluded from the city. Yeah. No kidding. But why are these people mentioned here?

We know unbelievers are cast into a place Jesus called a *fiery hell* (Matthew 5:22). The Apostle John told us:

- **Revelation 20:14-15** *Then death and Hades were thrown into the **lake of fire**. This is the second death, the **lake of fire**. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the **lake of fire**.*

But there is an additional description of this *lake of fire* or the dwelling place of unbelievers. Three times Jesus referred to it as *the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Peter also saw hell as a place of darkness. Speaking of demons, Peter said *God cast them into hell and* [there is no word in the Greek text for “and”] *committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for* [better, *being kept unto*] *judgment* (2 Peter 2:4). **Darkness** is used elsewhere in Scripture as the judgment of God (Exodus 10:22; Isaiah 8:22).

There is no way to fill in all the blanks, but we have to observe that in a huge (by comparison) earth lighted by the holy city, there is mentioned of a people who are outside the city and without access to it. If the new earth was spherical, like our old one, but lighted by the holy city rather than a sun, then it would be reasonable to assume that on the opposite side from the city is a place of outer darkness, or pits of darkness which, like a lava flow, could also be a lake of fire. We cannot know this for sure, but we do know that, contrasted with *those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life who will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it... no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it*.

