

# Living Word Fellowship Church

## An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 21

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### I. A Biblical Exposition of Revelation 21:2b-

#### A. The Bride Adorned for her Husband (verse 2b):

1. The bridal imagery resumes from 19:7–9, where the wedding of the Lamb and his bride is announced. The use of this image suggests that the new Jerusalem is a people, the church. In 11:2, God’s people are portrayed using the figure of a holy city that was trampled; here “Holy City” describes their heavenly destination where safety and security are assured (cf. 21:10; 22:19). The participation of the saints in this city fulfills the promise to be a part of the new Jerusalem (3:12). The coming of a new, second Jerusalem thus implies the passing away of an old, first Jerusalem. This newness suggests more than renewal or renovation, but, in fact, replacement.<sup>1</sup>
2. Rev. 19:7–8 has already alluded to the same Isaiah passage to make a similar point about God’s intimacy with his redeemed people. It thus clarifies further that the bride is a metaphor for the saints.<sup>2</sup>
3. In particular, the wedding garments in 19:7–8 connote not only righteous acts committed by saints but also their vindicated condition as a result of their faithful acts (or their vindication as a result of God’s acts of judgment against their oppressor, which is also a prophetic theme in the Isaiah context). Throughout the Apocalypse ἐτοιμάζω (“prepare”) has been used of an event occurring ultimately as a result of God’s decree and not human action (so 9:7, 15; 12:6; 16:12; cf. 8:6, where angels “prepared themselves to sound”). So also here in 21:2 the intimate union of God and his people, and possibly his vindication of them, is a prophetic decree depicted as fulfilled in the future. Preparation of the “bride adorned for her husband” conveys the thought of God’s preparation of his people for himself. Throughout history God is forming his people to be his bride, so that they will reflect his glory in the ages to come (so Eph. 5:25–27), an idea developed in what remains of Revelation 21 (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).<sup>3</sup>
4. But the woman of Revelation 12 represents that community in its suffering existence on earth, though spiritually protected because of its ultimate heavenly identity. The bride in Revelation 21:1ff., on the other hand, represents the end-time completion of the redeemed, believing community from throughout the ages, finally secured from any dangers and residing in the midst of God’s perfect, full presence. Therefore, the new Jerusalem of ch. 21 has its inaugurated existence throughout the ages in the true Israel of the OT age and the church of the NT age (the latter of which Gal. 4:21–31 and Heb. 12:22–23 testify to).<sup>4</sup>
5. The “bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:9) is a reference, not to the city itself, but to its inhabitants (21:24, 27; 22:2–5). For the twelve gates (21:12), see Ezekiel 48:30–34. The city is portrayed with equal dimensions like a cube, significant because the holy of holies in the temple was also a cube (cf. 1 Kings

<sup>1</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 364). Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1045). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>3</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1045). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>4</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 1045–1046). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

6:20). The image is of the perfect tabernacle of God (21:3), built from the ground up with the most precious of materials.<sup>5</sup>

B. Behold the Tabernacle of God is among men (vs. 3a):

1. Indeed, the image of God tabernacling over Israel at Sinai and in the wilderness as connoting a marriage relationship has already been observed as part of the background for the marriage of the Lamb and his bride in 19:7–8.<sup>6</sup>
2. The tabernacle had always symbolized God’s dwelling among his people (Ex 25:8–9; 29:45; 1 Kings 6:12–13).<sup>7</sup>
3. God had also promised to “dwell” among his people as part of his covenant (Lev 26:11–12), especially in the sinless world to come (Ezek 37:24–28; 43:7–10; Zech 2:11).<sup>8</sup>

C. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes:”

1. No more tears or pain is depicted in the Old Testament in passages such as Isaiah 25:8; 35:10; 51:11 and 65:16-19.<sup>9</sup>
  - a) First, God’s people will receive eternal respite from their former trials, since God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” This will be a fulfillment of Isa. 25:8: “the LORD God has taken away every tear from every face” (see also on Rev. 7:17). The same verse in Isaiah says that this will be a comfort from “death,” which formerly “prevailed” during Israel’s captivity in the world, which gives rise to the directly following mention of “death” being done away with in Rev. 21:4 (2 Bar. 21:22–23 also refers to the end of death in the future).<sup>10</sup>

D. Once more we have the title of Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, which are the first and last words of the Greek alphabet, indicating that Christ is before the universe which was created by him, and will be at the end of all time, for all things will be consummated in him.<sup>11</sup>

1. The point of the title is that the God who transcends time guides the entire course of history because he stands as sovereign over its beginning and end. Therefore, the two titles in 21:6 refer to God’s absolute sovereignty over all events in history. On this basis, the readers are assured that just as God brought the first creation into being, so he will certainly bring it to conclusion.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 748). Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1046). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>7</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 21:3). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>8</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 21:3). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>9</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 21:3). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1049). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>11</sup> Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 21:6). Moody Press.

<sup>12</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1055). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

E. They will not thirst (John 4:13-14):

1. The promise of the water of life complements the earlier “life” promises—tree of life (Rev. 2:7), crown of life (Rev. 2:10), and book of life (3:5). Such metaphors emphasize that a high quality of life will be a hallmark of the new Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup>

F. “He who overcomes will inherit all this (21:7). “

1. Overcomers:

- a) They ironically conquer when they maintain their faith even though they may appear defeated in the world’s eyes because of persecution (see on 2:26–29 for further discussion of “overcoming”). Though the process of overcoming commences before death, the focus here is on the completion of the process at the end of one’s life, and especially on the full inheritance at the end of the old world. The purpose of this verse, and the whole of 21:1–22:5, is to encourage true Christians to persevere through hardship in order to inherit the fullness of God’s blessings.<sup>14</sup>
- b) The promises to the overcomer in the letters in chs. 2–3 all referred to the salvific blessing of communion with God, which provides all the essentials of life (security, home, power, food, clothing, and a name), and therefore must apply to all believers, who are all included in the household of God. “One basic promise is conveyed in multiple images, since all of them illustrate the principle ‘where I am, there will the victor be’ ” (cf. 21:3, 7; 22:3–4). Rev. 21:7 makes the same point by summarizing the reception of the multiple promises in 21:1–6 by saying, “the one who overcomes will inherit *these things*.”<sup>15</sup>

2. Will Inherit:

- a) Inheritance was an important matter in ancient society. In Israel, the father’s inheritance was passed on to the sons, although daughters could obtain the inheritance if there was no male heir (Num. 27:4–11). Such social legislation protected a family’s inheritance. The firstborn son, as the first sign of his father’s strength, was given twice as much property as the other sons (Deut. 21:15–17). Greek society did not practice primogeniture; rather, the father’s estate was divided equally among the surviving sons by lot. In Roman society, the father was the undisputed family head and retained full legal authority over his male children of any age until his death. A father could make his will as he determined, so the fear of disinheritance was a great motivation to filial obedience. Only with the father’s death could full manhood be attained and one’s inheritance enjoyed. This is the only reference to inheritance and sonship in Revelation. Paul developed the theme similarly: “And since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Gal. 4:7) and “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). The victors’ inheritance—the sum of all the promises—relates directly to the promise of adoption as sons.<sup>16</sup>
- b) Ephesians 1:13-14 – The Holy Spirit is a pledge of our inheritance.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 365). Zondervan.

<sup>14</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1057). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>15</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 1057–1058). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 365). Zondervan.

c) Multiple inheritance for overcomers:

- “the tree of life which is in the paradise of God” (2:7; 22:2), inclusion in the new temple (3:12; 21:22ff.)
- participation in “the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God” (3:12; 21:2, 10)
- the name of God on one’s person (3:12; 22:4)
- one’s “name written in the book of life” (3:5; 21:27)
- bright garments (3:5; 21:2, 9ff.; cf. 19:7–8)
- a bright stone and a luminary (2:17, 28; 21:11, 18–21, 23; 22:5, 16)
- consummate reigning with Christ (2:26–27; 3:21; 22:5)
- exclusion from the “second death” (2:11; 21:7–8).<sup>17</sup>

G. **21:11.** The emphasis on the wealth of the new Jerusalem would remind older Jewish readers of the glory of the temple, whose gates had been adorned with gold and silver; John declares that the whole city will share the glory of the temple. God would set his glory among his people in the end time (e.g., Is 60:1–3; Eccles 36:4). Jewish writers spoke of supernatural precious stones that were luminous, or light-giving, by themselves.<sup>18</sup>

H. **On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (21:12).** This is the first use of the number twelve, used repeatedly in chapter 21 to speak of gates (vv. 12, 21), angels and tribes (v. 12), foundations and apostles (v. 14), and pearls (v. 21). Twelve signifies completion and perfection and is the product of the sacred numbers three and four. The gates were the only means of entrance to an ancient city. Ancient Babylon had eight massive gates, while Jerusalem in the time of Jesus had four gates through its outer defensive walls. Ephesus also had four outer gates—Magnesian, Harbor, Koressos, and Agora. The visionary city seen by Ezekiel likewise had twelve gates, three on each side, which were named after the twelve tribes (Ezek. 48:31–34). These twelve sons of Jacob differ from the list in Revelation 7:4–8 where Manasseh is mentioned and Dan omitted. The more general nature of John’s description suggests that it is symbolic. Entrance through these gates guarded by angels is not based on Israelite lineage but through moral purity (cf. Rev. 21:27; 22:14). Gates were closed at night for protection but, because there is no night in the Holy City, its gates are forever open (21:25). The twelve open gates suggest unlimited access to God and the Lamb for the victors/kings who will forever offer up their glorious praise (21:24; cf. Isa. 60:11).<sup>19</sup>

### The Make up of the City of Jerusalem

The Rainbow:	1. Jasper, greenish? yellow?
	2. Sapphire, azure.
	3. Chalcedony, doubtful, green and blue.
	4. Emerald, green.
1. Red	5. Sardius, red.
2. Orange	6. Sardonyx, red and white.
3. Yellow	7. Chrysolite, yellow.

<sup>17</sup> Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1058). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>18</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 21:11). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>19</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, pp. 367–368). Zondervan.

4. Green
5. Blue
6. Indigo

8. Beryl, sea-green.
9. Topaz, yellow.
10. Chrysoprasus, golden-green.