

Another change of scene – another major new section

The opening verses of Revelation 21:9–22:21 again give us strong reasons for thinking a new section commences at this point. ⁹*Then there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, containing the seven last plagues. He spoke to me, saying, ‘Come with me. I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’* ¹⁰*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a large and high mountain, and he showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.* Once again (for the eighth time) there comes a ‘change of scene’ as John is taken somewhere else in his visionary experience. Each time there is a change of scene there is good reason to think that we are being introduced to a new major section in the total book of Revelation.

• *Bride – purity, beauty and preparedness*

• *City – closeness among people and God’s authority*

A picture of the final glory of God’s people – seven stages

Again (as in 21:1–8) the people of God are at the same time a bride and a city. The one picture speaks of purity and beauty and preparedness. The other speaks of closeness among people and the authority of God as King of his city. But now the vision is described more fully. It is a vision of the people of God as they approach their final glory. One question that must be asked is: is this a description of the people of God as they are **now**? Is it a picture of the way they will be **in the day of gospel-success**? Or is it a picture of the people of God as they will be for ever and ever **in their final situation**? I answer: it is all three! In Revelation 21:1–8 the old world has passed away¹. All wickedness and suffering – everything that makes one cry – is abolished². ‘The first things are passed away’ altogether. God makes all things new³. Revelation 21:5 speaks of the faithfulness of God, and his determination to see that this takes place. It is as good as done⁴. But in Revelation 21:9–22:5 we see a fuller version of the same vision. In Revelation 21:1–8 the starting point of the final glory was available even at that moment⁵. The promise was being held out⁶. Now in 21:9–22:5 we have a fuller picture of what is involved. It is a glimpse of **all** that is to happen as the final glory is introduced, and so it includes some stages along the way:

(i) *A picture of the city*

(ii) *God’s indwelling*

(iii) *Renewal*

(iv) *Fulfilment of God’s Word*

(v) *Completion of God’s plans*

(vi) *Final blessing*

(vii) *Final curse*

- Revelation 21:9–21 develops verse 2 (the picture of the city)
- Revelation 21:22–27 develops verse 3 (the idea of God’s indwelling)
- Revelation 22:1–5 develops verses 4–5a (renewal)
- Revelation 22:6–10 develops verse 5b (fulfilment of God’s word)
- Revelation 22:11–15 develops verse 6a (completion of God’s plans)
- Revelation 22:16–17 develops verses 6b–7 (final blessing)
- Revelation 22:18–19 develops verse 8 (final curse).

Between the opening word⁷ and the closing remark (22:20– 21) there are seven revelations of final glory.

A symbolic vision

• *The nations still exist*

• *Evil is not permitted in the city*

We must remember that this is a symbolical vision! The people of God are a bride and the bride is a city! This is not literally possible, but it is possible in a symbolical vision. In the vision the earth is inhabited by nations who walk in the light of the city, but not all are residents of the city itself. The nations still exist. Kings bring their glory into it¹. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations². Evil is not permitted in the city but dogs and sorcerers and wicked people are outside it, unable to enter in.

1 21:1

2 21:3, 4

3 21:5

4 21:6

5 21:6

6 21:7

7 21:9

1 21:24

2 22:2

The 'coming down' of Jerusalem

• Success of the gospel

• God makes all things new

What stage of the church's life does the vision represent? The city exists **now**; what happens in John's vision is that it comes down upon earth but it existed even before it came down! Hebrews 12:22 says, 'You have come to the heavenly Jerusalem – already!' The church is already the fiancée of the Lord Jesus Christ, getting ready for the marriage-supper. What is the 'coming down' of the new Jerusalem? It seems that what we have here is both the success of the gospel and what will happen as the final glory of the church is introduced, and God 'makes all things new'. Like many prophetic visions the final situation and the stages-along-the-way are included in the same vision (just as Old Testament visions of the kingdom often include both the first coming and the second coming of Jesus in the same prophetic preview).

Brightness of the city

• Purity

• Clarity of understanding

• Joyfulness

• Freedom from fear of discovery

We discover the brightness of the city. ¹¹ *The city was shining with the glory of God. Her light was like a very precious jewel, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.* John is describing his vision. The vision is itself symbolic, but we must realize that we have no way of thinking about heaven except in this picture language that John gives us. No doubt the vision is symbolic but we have to think about heaven in terms of the symbolism. Even if it is not literal we have to think of it as if it were literal – since there is no other way of thinking about heaven in detail than the way given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The city is shining with light. Light in the Bible is representative of purity (there is no such thing as dirty light), clarity of understanding, joyfulness, freedom from fear of discovery. Sinners do things at night because they do not want to be noticed. The light of this city comes from God himself. It is his glorious, joyful holiness that is shining in the city. It is dazzlingly beautiful, like the light from flashing jewellery. It starts even now. 'Let your light shine . . .', said Jesus¹¹.

¹¹ Matthew 5:16



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