

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
November 13, 2016

Lesson Text: Revelation 21:9-14, 22-27
Lesson Title: The New Jerusalem

Introduction

Speaking to His disciples in the upper room prior to His crucifixion and death, Jesus said, *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:1-2). The *“Father's house”* of which Jesus spoke is the New Jerusalem where God will live with His people forever.

Prior to John's vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, the Rapture of the church has passed, the Tribulation and Great Tribulation is over. The battle of Armageddon is over, and judgment on the earth has been meted out by God. The thousand-year Millennial Kingdom is over. Satan and all sinners who have rejected Jesus Christ are in the lake of fire, sent there by God after the Great White Throne of Judgment.

Revelation 21 opens with a breathtaking description of the New Jerusalem. *“John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Revelation 21:1-2). What John saw in Revelation 21:1-8 is the present state of heaven where believers go when they die. As John's vision continues, he sees *“that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God”* (Revelation 21:10). Because the *“great city, the holy Jerusalem”* is the capital city of eternity, it becomes John's focal point of his description of the believer's final home.

As we study John's description of our heavenly home, it is important not to miss the forest for the trees! There is much detail in every word and sentence. If we are not careful we may miss the intimacy of what John is describing. He is describing our eternal state. A new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem. But at the heart of it all is God the Father and the Lamb of God, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The New Jerusalem as the Bride (Revelation 21:9-11)

Verse 9

“And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.”

One of the “seven angels” in Revelation 16:1 who had poured out one of the seven bowls of wrath on the earth invites John to “Come hither” to see “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” This “angel” may have also been the one mentioned in Revelation 17:1 who showed John the vision of the harlot, Babylon. Consistent with Revelation 21:2, the New Jerusalem is here characterized as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” Since a city is not actually a “bride,” or a “wife,” the comparisons are made to convey the thought of the New Jerusalem being beautiful like a “bride” and intimately related to Jesus Christ as “the Lamb’s wife.”

Verse 10-11

“And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;”

John is “carried away in spirit” by the angel to a great and high mountain.” The thought is the angel positioned John at a vantage point where he could see the entire scene of “that great city, the holy Jerusalem.” Once John has arrived “in the spirit,” he repeats what he already stated in Revelation 21:2, that “the holy Jerusalem” was “descending out of heaven from God.” John wants his readers to see the difference in the worldly city of Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18, and the earthly city of Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem John saw coming down did not rise from the earth. It “descended out of heaven from God.” It was heavenly and holy!

Verse 11 gives a general description of the New Jerusalem. First, it has the “glory of God.” The “glory of God” is the sum total of God’s attributes. The New Jerusalem reflects all God is. We must lovingly but confidently reject the idea of some people that heaven is a place which bears a striking resemblance to the life we now live. Heaven is not what you want it to be nor is it a place of man’s making. It is a place, a great city, designed by God, coming down from God, reflecting all His “glory.” Second, the city is ablaze with “light.” John compared this “light” to “a stone most precious.” The thought is something “valuable, costly, or esteemed.” The “stone” is described as “a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” Heaven’s capital city appeared to John as a massive, flawless jewel, blazing with God’s glory!

The Wall and Gates of the City (Revelation 21:12-14)

Verse 12-14

“And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of

the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

After giving a general description of the “great city, the holy Jerusalem,” John focuses on specific details of the city. Should we take John’s description literally? The answer is yes! The saints of all the ages, those who have been redeemed by God’s amazing grace, will have as their home a glorious city, filled with God’s glory, with walls, gates, and dimensions exactly as John described.

John was writing to people who lived in cities surrounded by walls because they needed protection. Ancient city walls were famous for their height and width to keep out their enemies. There were no enemies of God’s people in the new heaven and the new earth. So why does God’s holy city have a “great and high wall”? The “great wall” signifies the eternal security of the city and its citizens. It is symbolic of the security we will have in God’s holy city. The “twelve foundations” also represents security. The city to come will stand firmly and forever. It cannot be shaken. This is God’s eternal city!

The number “twelve” is a dominate number throughout scripture and in John’s vision. He wrote about “twelve gates, angels, tribes, foundations, and apostles.” “Twelve” signifies completeness. There are “twelve gates” in the “wall” guarded by “twelve angels.” In harmony with the foursquare shape of the city, the “twelve gates” are located on the “east, north, south, and west.” There are “three gates” on each side guarded by the angels. Twelve gates, three on each side suggests there is an abundance entrance into God’s holy city. God’s saving grace is abundant, and will redeem an innumerable multitude.

The names of the “twelve tribes of the children of Israel written on the gates,” magnifies for all eternity God’s covenant relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. The names of the “twelve tribes of the children of Israel” and the “twelve apostles” signify the saints of the old and the new covenant. They will be united in God’s holy city. They will dwell together as one people of God and live together forever. They are all united in one person: the “Lamb.”

The Temple of the City (Revelation 21:22)

Verse 22

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

“And I saw” indicates John is describing another phase of the vision. The words magnify the importance of what John is about to say. As he searches the city he finds “no temple.” The word “temple” in this verse is used for the sanctuary, or God’s dwelling place, the Holy of Holies, in the Temple of Israel. The “temple”

building itself was very important to the life of the Old Testament Jew and the city of Jerusalem. It was the place built for the worship of God. For Jerusalem to have “no temple” is shocking. Why? John explains, “For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” are its “temple.” This is the heart of God’s holy city, our heavenly home. God dwells there with His people.

The Old Testament temple was set up in such a way as to restrict people from the presence of God. There was hardly any access for Gentiles and limited access for Jews. Only one person could enter the Holy of Holies, the high priest. But in the holy city John saw, there will be no more sin and everyone will have access into the immediate and holy presence of “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.”

Although believers now have access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, we will, in the future, live forever in His eternal and immediate presence.

The Light of the City (Revelation 21:23-24)

Verse 23-24

“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.”

Throughout the history of man, God has provided light by means of the sun and moon. But in “the city,” John saw, “the sun, neither of the moon” giving light.” The “glory of God” and “the Lamb” will be “the light thereof.” While Satan and all unbelievers are dwelling forever in outer darkness, God’s redeemed people will be living in the “light” of His “glory.” The city of the New Jerusalem is designed to transmit the “light” of God’s pure glory and the beauty of the “Lambs” redemptive love. All eternity will be lighted by the glorious presence of Jesus Christ.

“And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it” fulfills Isaiah’s prophesy in Isaiah 60:3-5. “Nations” literally translated means “peoples.” John foresees a time when more people than just the people of Israel will enter in the city of God. That the “kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour” into the city means those among the saved who have honored positions on earth will give the honor that once was theirs to Jesus Christ.

Access to the City (Revelation 21:25-27)

Verse 25-27

“And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

Once more John mentions the “gates” of the city. They are not “shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.” “Night” is full of evil and danger. It represents rebellion, unbelief, and all that opposes God. The “gates” of the city will never be closed, because there will be no enemy and no reason to close the gates.

“John repeats his assertion that the rulers of the earth will bring the glory and honour of the nations with them, since they refers to the kings of Revelation 21:24, above. This creates a mental image of a public parade of royalty who are attired in their best garb that is reserved for official occasions. They do not come to be admired, however, but to offer their best to the ruler of the new city and acknowledge Him as God and king (compare Psalm 72:10, 11). We are given the impression that this is the fullest expression of worship they can offer. Perhaps we see the visit of the foreign wise men to worship the newborn King Jesus as prefiguring this (Matthew 2:11). John does not make this connection, however.” (*Standard Lesson Commentary 2016-2017, KJV*).

Verse 27 indicates nothing will ever enter the city which is unholy or defiled. Our eternal home will be a perfect environment in contrast to this world of sin and evil. Only those whose names “are written in the Lamb’s book of life” will enter God’s holy city and dwell with Him forever.

Conclusion

Repeatedly in the New Testament we are told as believers we are citizens of heaven and are waiting to go be with our Savior and Lord. Our permanent dwelling is in heaven. Our names are written there. Our brothers and sisters in Christ who have died are there. Our inheritance is there. Our affections and hearts should be there as we await our Lord’s return and prepare to be with Him.

The city of God is a glorious city indeed. But it is far more than beautiful stones, walls, streets and gates. At the center of it all is the throne of God, and the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without Him, there would be no heaven. Without Him, no sinner will ever see God’s heaven.

Christ is this very moment preparing a place for everyone who will call upon His name for salvation. Are you saved? If so, rejoice. If not, the Bible says, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Romans 10:13).

Call upon Him today and He will save you. Confess Him publicly and follow Him to the New Jerusalem!

Amen.