

NEW JERUSALEM

The "New Jerusalem" as described in Revelation 21, has captured the hearts, minds and imagination of many. I too rejoice in this. I marvel at the depth of His handiwork in my life, and in the life of all who belong to Jesus. God the Son. The beginning and the end of all. Jesus - the "Lion of the tribe of Judah", the victorious "Lamb", the reigning "King of kings and Lord of lords" and lover of our souls – who is expecting great things from those who belong to Him, His church - prepared and presented as His "bride" when we enter the season of a new heaven and a new earth as Revelation 21 informs us.

We may all look forward to a literal new heaven and new earth, for as scripture declares our Lord will create all things new. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be

remembered or come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17). “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it...what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set of fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:10-13). I do not see metaphor or symbolism in these words which are easily understood when taken literally – as they stand.

And, from Revelation 21:1... “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...”

Let's first consider a sound approach in understanding God's word. I first heard years ago, while I was in Bible College, something which made sense to me, and which I have often referred to in my mind. It would not surprise me if you have heard it said as well: "If the literal sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense." Now, that is a good starting point, but of course there needs to be much more involved. It is important that other words of Scripture relating to the issue be carefully compared and considered because there are different perspectives which must be looked at in arriving at a common understanding and agreement. History, archaeology, original wording, consideration given to an understanding of metaphor and symbol can all be helpful. But, above all, and supporting all is an understanding gained by seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the word of God. Jesus promised us that

“when the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide us into all truth” (John 16:13). Then we must obey and apply the truth given to us, in keeping with the text of God’s word, in an intellectually and spiritually honest manner regardless of our preconceived notions.

Further, it is important to handle metaphor and symbolism in a manner which is in keeping with the truth that God’s word is expressing to us. How so? Metaphor and symbolism is used extensively in God’s word, along with some allegory as well. Our Lord loved metaphor! I believe that it pleases the Lord when we take metaphor and symbolism “literally” but not “literalistically” (the adverb form, which I use differently - to help express what I am trying to say). By this I mean that I take the common sense approach that metaphors and symbols can be taken as they literally stand to express a meaning, a truth to be understood without being taken

“literalistically”. An example or so will help. When John the Baptist saw Jesus and declared: “Behold the lamb of God...” the metaphor of the “lamb” has a literal common sense understanding that Jesus is recognized in the sight of God the Father (and hopefully by us as well) as taking the place of a sacrificial lamb. Jesus sacrifices Himself and pays for our sins. “He Himself bore our sins in His body...” (– 1 Peter 2:24). We are saved when we place our trust in Him, taking refuge in His sacrifice. The metaphor has a literal meaning. However, to take the metaphor to mean that Jesus is a literal, physical lamb to be found in a field, and available for sacrifice would be to take the metaphor “literalistically” as I say. When Jesus said that He is the “bread of life”, He was using metaphor with a meaning that He is the one who provides us with the nourishment and sustenance needed to experience true, eternal life – not that He is

somehow a loaf of bread. You get the point. Our Lord used many metaphors and colorful illustrations to provide us with concrete, literal understanding of spiritual truths. (You may be interested in reading the article "Eat My Flesh" for an understanding that I believe the Lord has guided me to in regards to that important metaphor.)

I have had need to explain all of this because I see God's word as clearly using metaphor when it speaks of the "New Jerusalem" in Revelation 21. We will get there in a bit, but first...

When understanding the "New Jerusalem", we must also keep in mind that Jesus told us: "I go to prepare a place for you..." This simple statement by the Lord is easy to get because it is a straightforward literal statement – no symbolism to watch for and navigate.

We know it will be a beautiful place that the Lord is preparing – and contain even more than we can conceive of. For the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit and alluding to Isaiah 64:4 declared in 1 Corinthians 2:9...

“However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,

what no ear has heard,

and what no human mind has conceived”

the things God has prepared for those who love him—” (- 1 Cor. 2:9)

Yeah, the literal, physical place in the new heaven and new earth that the Lord is preparing for those who love Him is beyond our imagination –

“what no human mind has conceived” - Wow! That is what we have to look forward to. Our hearts can rejoice.

Now, medical doctors affirm in their profession to “first do no harm”. And, those who love God’s word and seek to order their lives by it must “first read the text”. Read it. Stand by what it says. Let God’s word stand as it states. And remember - we can seek the Lord’s guidance – for our Lord promised us that “when the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide us into all truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit will guide us regarding God’s word as we seek Him - regarding the truth of any scripture – and that begins with what the scripture actually says.

It strikes me that many have not carefully read the text in Revelation 21: 9-10, (or, worse yet, choose to ignore these words) when it says in verse 9 and 10... “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the

Lamb.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...” So, here we have: “I will show you the bride... and he showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem...” And, in Rev. 21:2 we have “...new Jerusalem...prepared as a bride.” I think it is important to point out for the sake of some, that the text does not say in verse 9: “I will show you the “City of the Bride”, or the “City where the bride will live for all eternity”. No, rather, I will show you “the bride ...”

This is what Scripture declares for us - available to all who would hear what it actually says and embrace with their hearts and minds. Now, we can know that the “bride” of the “lamb” is the church, as other scripture identifies for us – John the Baptist speaks of Jesus as the bridegroom and mentions the bride, then there are the gospels and the parables...) – The

“bride” is the true church as it enters into eternity (not any religious, ecclesiastical order) – the assembly of true believers who know Jesus and He knows them.

A city as a metaphor for the church is an easy metaphor for me to add to the list of metaphors for the church: “living stones” His “bride”. His “sheep”. His “city”. This first came to my attention when I noticed quite forcibly that God’s word tells us...I will show you “the bride”... and He showed me the Holy City Jerusalem...” Hence, I am no longer at peace accepting this as a picture of a literal city. Firstly, as has been pointed out, the text does not say “the city where the bride will live” or the like. But rather simply “the bride”... For me, the only honest thing to do is to recognize the metaphor as the text presents it. The metaphor is clearly there – the New Jerusalem as His bride, His sheep, His body of believers...

But, how can we understand the extended metaphors in Revelation

21 regarding the New Jerusalem?

As I seek the Lord's guidance, as He promised to give, I am at peace

with such things as:

In Revelation 21:11, we see New Jerusalem "having the glory of God..." 2 Corinthians 3:18 is in keeping with this when it is declared that we will be "...all...transformed...from one degree of glory to another..." – 2 Corinthians 3:18). And, from Rev. 21:11, the true church will be precious to Him – like a most rare jewel. And, pure (our sins removed) – clear as crystal. In the first few chapters of Revelation, Jesus shares with churches, His "body" (compare Eph. 5:23) of believers: praise, admonitions, and what His expectations for them are. How fitting that after much spiritual battle, in this chapter of Revelation we return to see

the church in the end, the true body of believers at last perfected and prepared. This is in keeping with Ephesians 5:27 where we read: "so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." We do win in the end!

In Rev. 21: 12-14 we see... the gates, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel looks to the heritage we have in God having revealed His truth to His chosen people before sending to the ends of the earth. The names of the apostles recognizes their contribution in the building up of the true body of believers – foundations and a wall for us.

How about the measurement in verses 15-17 of this chapter? Do we not also use the very same metaphor when we speak of the "measure of a man" or, what is the "measure" of his character? Here I see, by the length

and width being the same, that it will be very stable. The true church will have the same, stable character for all eternity – both in human terms and spiritual terms (– as measured by God’s emissaries, the angel’s measurement) And, the “measure” of the true church’s character will be significant (these are large numbers). That is the “measure of the man”, the “measure” of the true church. We will be pure – as “pure gold” – v. 18. Also 1 Peter 2:4-5 speaks of us in the true church as being chosen and precious - like living stones being built up a spiritual house...” From 1 Peter 2 we are living, precious stones... In Rev 21 these stones are described in verse 19-22 as “every kind of jewel” stone... Precious in His sight.

Seek the Lord dear reader and I believe that you will see the remaining content to follow in like manner in this chapter and the next.

Naturally there will be no need of a temple, as we worship God in His presence. Gathered from various ethnic groups and nations, His "holy city Jerusalem" will be comprised of "those who are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev.21:27).

Now is a good time to set aside charts and listen to the word of God. Those who truly belong to Jesus, His Church, His Body – will be purified during difficult times in our lives, but our Lord will bring the faithful through to purity for our presentation to Him. Jesus is speaking in Matthew 24: 29-31, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days...then will appear...the Son of Man...a loud trumpet call...gather His elect..." and from 1 Thess. 4:13-17, "...the Lord Himself will descend...the sound of the trumpet...we...will be caught up...so we will always be with the Lord." I firmly see that the plain and simple teaching of the word of

God is that we who know Him and are alive, will go through the tribulation time. Our Lord's promise is that He will be with us: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – Matt. 28:20. The heart of God has always been to be with us in difficult and trying times, to strengthen and purify us. Hear from Isaiah as the Lord speaks to His people, those who belong to Him: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." – Isaiah 43:2. It has always been the case. Our Lord was with Noah and brought him and his family through. Our Lord was with His people, those whom He loved dearly, while they suffered greatly during bondage in Egypt, saw them, remembered them, and brought them through. Our Lord was with the disciples when they feared for their lives in the storm on the Sea of Galilee and brought them through. During the time of tribulation ahead, saints will be here for Rev. 13:7 tells us that the beast will be

“allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them”, or as Dan.

7:21 says “...made war with the saints and prevailed over them...” Jesus

has told us that “many will fall away” (Mt. 24:10), “but the one who

endures to the end will be saved” (Mt. 24:13). Jesus has told us that

“there will be great tribulation” (Mt. 24:21), but again, He is with us, and

will remember us just as He did His people in Egypt, “for the sake of the

elect those days will be cut short”. We need to trim our lamps and be

ready. By the time the church is “prepared as a bride” (Rev. 21:2), we

will be entering our season of celebration with the Lord, for “God has not

destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus

Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9). Until then, by His sufficient grace, may we steel

ourselves, be expectant and faithful even unto death, for He has promised

us “the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

In light of the overwhelming use of metaphor and symbol in Revelation, and because we are told in verse 9 and 10... "I will show you the bride... and showed me the Holy city Jerusalem"... we must understand the New Jerusalem to be the bride. Otherwise, we stand in danger of not reading the text and understanding what the Lord is telling us.

Keep in mind dear reader, as regards the vision of the perfected "Bride", the "New Jerusalem" of Revelation 21... To say that our Lord has given us a vision of his perfecting work in His people, is not to preclude the existence of a literal kingdom and a literal Jerusalem on the new earth. They quite rightly need to be understood quite apart from one another. Except, they are related. That is, I mean that because of the perfection of those who belong to Him (the vision of Rev 21), we the redeemed, will be

prepared and qualified to meet our Lord in that genuine place of
inconceivable beauty in His "holy mountain" on the new earth. One does
not rule out the other. They completely complement each other. We will
be perfected and qualified to "inherit" His holy mountain as alluded to in
Isaiah 57:13: "But he who takes refuge in Me shall possess the land and
shall inherit My holy mountain."

Of course there will be a literal Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:19) on a new
earth, a literal "mountain of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:1-4 ; Micah 4:1-3)! It is
what so many, many scriptures allude to throughout the Old and New
Testaments – His literal eternal kingdom on a new earth, and in the new
heavens.

As regards our dwelling place for eternity in the new earth, let us not
forget that it will be a place so beautiful that our imagination has no

capacity for it: “no eye has seen, no ear has heard... no human mind has conceived” (1 Cor. 2:9) what the Lord is preparing for us – where we will celebrate for aeons of aeons without end. Many have supposed that our literal dwelling place would be the “New Jerusalem” of Revelation 21, and I have heard various imaginative takes on the New Jerusalem, from a celestial city with streets of gold to a pyramid style heavenly spaceship of sorts. This mere fanciful imagination is surpassed by a reality which is far, far better... If the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21 is to be a literal city and not the bride as the text points out, then we would be in a position to imagine our future prepared place. We would have a detailed description to imagine, complete with measurements. This cannot be though because the reality of our eternal dwelling place is far more beautiful than we can imagine – as our Lord has told us. And the “New Jerusalem” of Revelation

21? Look to the meaning the Lord has given us. We must let the plain words of any text stand... "...New Jerusalem...a Bride..."

Our first and primary understanding of the New Jerusalem must be that it is a vision and prophecy regarding those who are in Christ, perfected by our Lord as a beautiful "bride". For the angel said to John (Rev. 21:9-10) "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb....showed me the holy city Jerusalem."

We can be assured that there will be a physical Jerusalem in the new earth as well – for as the prophets inform us. And, because dual prophecies are also presented to us in Scripture, I believe that may very well be the case in Rev. 21 regarding the "New Jerusalem" as well – allowing us by means of a dual prophecy and vision to see glimpses of the new physical city of Jerusalem which will also be in the new earth, and

understand that it will be a place where our senses are lost in the beauty of our Lord's reflected light. In the physical New Jerusalem in the new earth, we will be able to say: "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2), and: "Shout and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 12:6).

But, we must not lose sight of what the text of God's word tells us directly in Revelation chapter 21: "I will show you the Bride..." and we can see and know from the Revelation of our Lord, that His work of purifying and completing our lives in Him, will bring us to a point of perfection and beauty in the Lord's view of us. In the waning verses of Revelation 21 we are reminded that those of the city will have no need for the sun or moon for the glory of the God and the lamb will be its light (Rev. 21: 22-24), and

the city will be composed of “only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21: 27).

In the New Jerusalem, the Spirit and life of God will flow, flow...from the throne through the middle of the street, as the “water of life” (see Rev. 22:1-2). Jesus referred to the Spirit as “rivers of living water” flowing from our hearts (John 7:38-39). Jesus prayed in John 17:3, “...that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

A dual vision emerges perhaps – figuratively the Spirit of God flowing to all as a river, and literally as well - providing life and healing in the light of God, and we in fullness of joy worship Him, for all eternity.

The words of the prophet Isaiah should not fall lightly on our hearts and ears... “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the

former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness..." (Isaiah 65: 17-18).

May our Lord bless and keep you dear reader – He is always with us in all storms, and He is perfecting us to one day be prepared as His "Bride", His "Holy City Jerusalem", resplendent before Him as we enter eternity.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work

in you will perform it

until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

So thankful for our Savior,

Jim B

Post Script:

There are many examples in God's Word of prophecies with double meanings and fulfillments. (You may care to review this dynamic explained in "The Near and The Far" in Snippets). Please understand that of course I believe that our Father God can if He is pleased, may very well have a place of His abode modeled after what we see presented in "The New Jerusalem". Even so, we cannot know that from the description of "The New Jerusalem" in Rev. 21. What I hoping you see is that Rev. 21 does not speak to that issue and our Father God has something else to teach us in Rev 21. And, the Word of God is worthy of our careful examination and right understanding.

Because of the perfection of those who belong to Him, we will be prepared for and can expect to meet our Lord in a genuine place of

inconceivable beauty. I look forward to joining with others in saying

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD..." as Isaiah and Micah

declare. What a day! Our Lord of lords and King of kings recognized for

who He is. We will know Him in His glory. We will know Him as our friend.

Those of us who belong to Him will with our own living eyes see and experience that of which it is written: "Of His Kingdom there shall be no end" as many scriptural passages affirm throughout the Psalms, Books of History, the Prophets and the New Testament as well.

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end."

