

WEEK 25: CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 21

- This chapter represents the timing after the Millennial Kingdom and the Great White Throne judgment of God upon all those who have ever lived and rejected Christ as their Savior.
- Chapter 21 is the beginning of the saint's new glorious life where perfect fellowship with one another and with Christ will never end.
- Where we live and operate today is not our final destination. All saints from all of time have looked forward to this final consummation the Lord has in store for those who love Him.
- **Isaiah 65:17** "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind."
- **Hebrews 11:9-10** "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; [10] for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."
- **Hebrews 13:14** "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."
- Saints are never satisfied with what this world has to offer, but we look forward to the one that is coming.

CHAPTER 21:1 ~ THE NEW HEAVEN AND 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, and there is no longer any sea."

- As the Millennial period ends and God's judgment upon the whole earth and its inhabitants comes to a completion, John sees what all of God's people have longed for throughout time.
- Since the 1st heaven and earth have passed away, it is time for the new heaven and earth to come.
- When John says *new*, it is not about a chronological sequence of events but rather speaking of a qualitative state of heaven and earth.
- These are not just something that merely replaces where we are now or something that succeeds our current reality, but something that will be completely purified new in ways that we cannot even imagine.
- It is not going back to the same earth that Adam and Eve were created.
- It is not just adding a coat of paint to the sky or some extra rocks on the mountain tops.
- It is going to be something so glorious and unimaginable that man's words are completely insufficient to comprehend what God has in store for those who enter into the new heaven and new earth.

What does it mean to have a new heaven and earth?

- “You might be surprised to learn that your future in heaven is going to involve life on Planet Earth.”¹
- **2 Peter 3:10-13** “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which 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. [11] Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, [12] looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! [13] But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”
- While there are some who think that this world we live in and on will be completely destroyed, the language leads us to believe that there is going to be a renewal or a restoration of the earth we currently live on.
- **Colossians 1:20** “...and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”
 - The reconciliation of all things created; not the destruction of them for something new.
- **Acts 3:19-21** “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; [20] and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, [21] whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.”
 - Again, notice that Peter says “...the period of restoration of all things...” not an annihilation of things when Jesus comes.
- **Romans 8:20-21** “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”
 - Creation is not waiting for God to completely annihilate it so that it no longer exists; but to be restored and to have freedom from the bondage of slavery.
 - If there was just annihilation that awaited, there would be no reason for hope.
- When reading 2 Peter 3:10-13, it is not a complete and utter destruction of the earth, but rather a cleansing or a purging of sin.
- “The earth that was cursed and plunged into futility because of man’s sin (see Rom. 8:20; cr. Genesis 3) will be renewed. It will be purged and purified and found better than before. Much like precious metals go through fire to be purged, the earth will be purged but remain. God does not give up on His creation.”²

¹ <https://www.wisdomonline.org/>

² Michael Vlach, *The New Creation Model*, 75-76.

- God desires to redeem and transform His creation, not to vaporize it.
- “If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory.”³
- “This is like your future glorified body. You will still be you, with your personality and gifts and physical features, but you will be perfected and made immortal. So also, the earth is not going to look like the moon; it will look like the earth. It will be recognizable but different—perfected and made to last forever.”⁴
- John also says that there will be no more sea. This does not mean that there will be no more water.
 - **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, [2] 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.”
- It is entirely possible that it means there are no more oceans that bring separation between God’s people.
- God’s heart has always been the unification of His people; both spiritual and geographical.
- There will more than likely still be lakes and other bodies of water that God’s people will be able to enjoy throughout eternity.

CHAPTER 21:2 ~ THE 1ST VISION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

Revelation 21:2 “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”

- Upon the new earth, there is a new city, a holy city, it is the New Jerusalem.
- This city has descended from the heavens as a real place with real people who live real lives.
- John calls this a city...it should be taken to mean that this place coming from heaven has all the characteristics of a normal city.
- There will be streets, shops, buildings, etc. There will be conversations between people, places for them to live and have life.
- John describes New Jerusalem as “made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”
- “Throughout the Bible, the redeemed are referred to as a bride. Israel is called the bride of Jehovah; the church is called the bride of Christ. Here, this new Jerusalem is called the bride, and that is because it contains all the people who belong to God. You might say this city descends like a golden carriage, bringing

³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 280. (quoted in above reference)

⁴ <https://www.wisdomonline.org>

within it the bridal party of God. And John's saying, "Look, here comes the bride." She is beautifully adorned for her beloved Groom, the King of Kings."⁵

- "Just as a bride spends extensive time preparing for the wedding day, the New Jerusalem represents the ultimate finished masterpiece of God's craftsmanship, adorned with precious stones and divine glory, fully prepared to descend to the renewed earth."⁶
- In the Scriptures, the marriage relationship is often used as the highest picture of covenantal fidelity between God and His people.
 - This is between God and Israel and Jesus and the church.
 - The arrival of the New Jerusalem signifies that there is going to be a sweet, eternal, unbreaking communion between God and His people.

CHAPTER 21:3-4 ~ GOD DWELLING WITH MAN

Revelation 21:3-4 "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, [4] and 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.'"

- Now, God is in heaven and we are on earth.
- Then, God and man will dwell for eternity in the same place...God's tabernacle is coming to the new earth.
- There is not going to be any difference between heaven and earth in the final state.
- This is the ultimate fulfillment of the New Covenant promises to Israel:
 - **Jeremiah 31:33** "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"
 - **Ezekiel 37:27** "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people."
- While we look forward to seeing all our friends and family who went ahead of us to heaven, our greatest anticipation is that we are going to finally see in person what we believed by faith.
- **1 John 3:2** "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."
- Heaven is not centered upon us but upon God Himself.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Vlach

- “Going to heaven without God would be like a bride going on her honeymoon without her groom. A heaven without God would be like a palace without a king.”⁷
- “God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean.”⁸
- **Verse 4** gives us a description of what life in the presence of God looks like.
- He will wipe away every tear.
 - This does not mean that there will be tears in heaven but rather the emphasis is on God’s personal care and comfort for His children.
 - In the presence of God, there are no more tears because there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain. All those effects of sin have passed away and will never be again.
- This is absolutely impossible for us to understand right now. suffering, pain, tears, and sorrow are woven into the lives that we live. They are all around us and part of our daily living.
- “The Scriptures make plain that not only the old earth and heaven pass away but also all the details and associations that belong to it which would mar the situation in the new heaven and the new earth.”
(Walvoord)

CHAPTER 21:5-8 ~ THE FINAL CHANGE

Revelation 21:5-6 “And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’ [6] Then He said to me, ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

- The declaration that all things are being made new by God the Father.
- This is not just a minor change but a drastic one.

⁷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, 187.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, sermon delivered in 1733 titled “The True Christian’s Life, A Journey Towards Heaven”, accessed <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/to-go-to-heaven-is-better-than-the-most-pleasant-accommodations-here/>

- This earth, this time that believers are living in, it is the worst that it will ever be. This is our “hell” as we await our new abode in heaven with God and Jesus.
- **Verse 6** He says *it is done*.
 - “The reference is to the work accomplished throughout the whole drama of human history prior to the eternal state. This statement does not mean that there are no future works of God but that a major work has been brought to completion and that the works now relating to the eternal state are beginning.” (Walvoord)
- “The speaker now introduces Himself as the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” It is by this precise title that Christ is introduced in 1:8, and the phrase is again found in 22:13. While the expression is appropriate for God the Father, the fact that it is introduced in 1:8 in reference to Christ seems to confirm the idea that Christ is also in view in this passage as sitting on the throne.” (Walvoord)
- Those who are in heaven with God and Jesus are those who have been fully changed.
- **They are the ones:**
- “who thirsts”, **John 4:13-14** “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.’”
- “who overcomes”, **1 John 5:4-5** “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. [5] Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”
- The blessing to the one who *overcomes* is given 7 times in **Revelation 2 – 3**:
 - To him who **overcomes**, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. (2:7)
 - He who **overcomes** will not be hurt by the second death. (2:11)
 - To him who **overcomes**, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it. (2:17)
 - He who **overcomes**, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS. (2:26)
 - He who **overcomes** will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (3:5)
 - 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, and My new name. (3:12)
 - He who **overcomes**, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (3:21)

- What does it mean to *overcome*? Living the true Christian life in the midst of a dying world. The believer's endurance until the end is proof of God's saving grace upon them. It is not sinless perfection but rather it represents a lifestyle of repentance and resisting worldly compromise.
- "who inherit", **1 Peter 1:4** "...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..."
- "who is God's son", **Romans 8:23** "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."
- **Verse 8** gives a description of those who did not overcome this world. They were cowards, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, immoral persons, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars.
 - Those whose lives were characterized by these descriptions do not have a place as sons of God. Rather they are in the lake of fire.
- "Notice that the text does not say that anyone who has ever committed any of these sins will be excluded, but people whose lives are characterized in these ways. There is a difference, for instance, between occurrences of lying in one's life and living a liar's lifestyle."⁹
- Notice the contrast between the suffering of those who did not overcome and the glories that those who did experience in the presence of God.
- "While there is further mention of the fate of the unsaved later in the book of Revelation, this is the last mention of the lake of fire and of the second death specifically." (Walvoord)

CHAPTER 21:9-11 ~ THE NEW JERUSALEM

Revelation 21:9-11 "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' [10] And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, [11] having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper."

- "In keeping with the earlier revelation of 21:2, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is here characterized as "the bride, the Lamb's wife." Since a city is not a bride nor a wife, the truth here represented is that the city, the residence of the saints of eternity future, is to be compared to a bride for beauty and is intimately related to Jesus Christ the Lamb." (Walvoord)
- This is going to be the city for all the redeemed from all the ages.

⁹ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 167

- This city was designed and built by God.
 - **Hebrews 11:10** “...for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”
- “Of major importance are the facts that John actually saw a city, that this city was inhabited by saints of all ages, and that God Himself was present in it. Until further light is given, it is probably a safe procedure to accept the description of this city as corresponding to the physical characteristics attributed to it.”
(Walvoord)
- The heavenly city will be like a huge flawless diamond that is constantly reflecting the glory of God.
- For thousands of years the people of earth waited for the sun to rise and set. But in heaven, the glory of God will be the illuminating power for all of eternity. (see Rev. 21:23)
- **Isaiah 60:19-20** “No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. [20] Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be over.”
 - God’s people have been waiting for this moment for thousands of years.
- John’s description leaves us in awe of what is waiting for us.
- The “crystal clear jasper” is a stone so perfect that it is transparent...probably nothing like it on earth today.

REVELATION 21:12-14 ~ THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:12-14 “It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. [13] There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. [14] And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

- John not only describes the glory of the city, but also the overall construction of the city.
- “And I’ve got to tell you – much of it will still be a mystery. God is the architect and builder and He has decided to keep most of it a secret – we’re literally gonna have to wait and see.”¹⁰
- We have a lot of information over the next several verses, but there is so much more left out. Knowing only part of what is there makes us long to know everything that awaits us!
- John says that there was a great high wall that had 12 gates with 12 angels and there were the names of the 12 sons of Israel.

¹⁰ <https://www.wisdomonline.org/teachings-detail/revelation-lesson-66>

- He then saw 12 foundation stones that had the 12 names of the 12 Apostles of Jesus.
 - I think that since there are specifically the 12 sons of and different from them the 12 Apostles of Jesus, it further shows that even in heaven there is a distinction between the Israel and the church.
 - Do you know what that means? There is “an eternal distinction between them.”¹¹
 - A common question...*who is the 12th Apostle?* To quote others... “all I know is it’s not me.”
- “God intends to remind the inhabitants of heaven His beloved people drawn to Him by grace out of every dispensation of His plan through the nation Israel and through the church birthed on the last Pentecost. One has not voided the other. Imagine it, then – God has built into the architecture of His house a way of reminding us forever of His plan of redemption throughout the ages – first through Israel and then, through His church.”¹²
- Walls...gates...angels posted at the gates.
- In ancient cities, these were all necessary for protection from invading armies and bands of robbers.
- Walls were to keep enemies from invading, gates were closed at night to keep evil men out, and guards were posted to keep watch over the city.
- **Why are they there now in the heavenly realm around the city of God?**
- While they don’t serve functional purpose, perhaps they are there to show the security of our eternal home.
- Perhaps angels are not there to protect but to welcome into the city those who are travelling there.
- We have come to see that the gates are giant pearls (v. 21) and that they never close (v. 25).
- “In fact, many commentators suggest that because a pearl is formed through the oyster’s pain, the pearl may symbolize Christ’s suffering on our behalf as well as the eternal beauty that can come out of our temporary suffering.”

REVELATION 21:15-21 ~ THE DETAILS OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:15-21 “The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. [16] The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. [17] And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. [18] The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. [19] 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; [20] the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. [21] And the

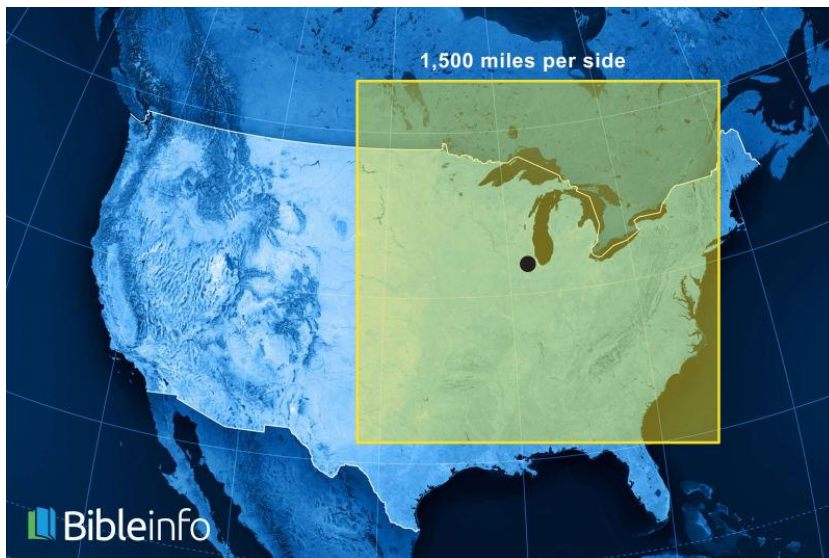
¹¹ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation: Volume 2* (Moody Press, 1995), p. 465

¹² <https://www.wisdomonline.org/teachings-detail/revelation-lesson-66>

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.”

Verses 15-17: The Measurements

- **Just for reference:** “The city of Grand Rapids has a population density of about 4,365 people per square mile That means if the heavenly city is populated with the same population density as Grand Rapids, it could house 9.8 billion people. But that’s just square miles...including the 1500 miles in height, it comes out to 3.375 billion cubic miles If you include the standard architectural height of 10 feet per living space, the New Jerusalem could hold close to 7.7 quadrillion people (7,700,000,000,000,000) at GR’s density.”¹³
- How is this possible?



¹³ Taken from a variety of sources. Math not done by me.

Verses 18-21: The Materials

- “Though the precise colors of these stones in some cases are not certain, the general picture here described by John is one of unmistakable beauty, designed to reflect the glory of God in a spectrum of brilliant color. The light of the city within shining through these various colors in the foundation of the wall topped by the wall itself composed of the crystal-clear jasper forms a scene of dazzling beauty in keeping with the glory of God and the beauty of His holiness. The city is undoubtedly far more beautiful to the eye than anything that man has ever been able to create, and it reflects not only the infinite wisdom and power of God but also His grace as extended to the objects of His salvation.” (Walvoord)

REVELATION 21:22-27 ~ THE WORKINGS OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:22-27 “I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. [23] 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. [24] The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. [25] In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; [26] and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; [27] and 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.”

- There is no temple in heaven. God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
- The temple served as a place of worship for OT Israel and for those in the Millennial Kingdom.
- In heaven, there is no need because God is dwelling with His people.
- “The word for “temple” (Gr., *naos*) is the word used for the sanctuary, or God’s dwelling place, the Holy of Holies, in the Temple of Israel. Believers now have access to the most sacred, intimate fellowship with the Lord their God in fulfillment of the many promises given to the saints.”
- No matter where you go or what you do, it will be an act of worship to God since you are always in His presence. He is not in a temple or a church, but God Himself is the place of worship.
- Unlike our modern idea of worship (singing), a biblical view of worship is about living the one’s whole life in the presence of God to bring Him glory.
- No temple and no need for sun or moon for a source of light.
- “That God Himself should be the light of the city is of course entirely in keeping with many passages in the Old Testament comparing God to light; and this new situation correlates with Jesus Christ Himself being the light of the world.” (Walvoord)

- Perhaps, just like during creation, before God created the sun and moon, there was light. The sun and moon were not created until the 4th day (Gen. 1:14-19) but there was light before that (Gen 1:3-5).
 - **1 John 1:5** “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”
- It is interesting that John does not say there is not sun or moon...just that there is no need of them.
- Some believe that there will still be those celestial bodies, but the City of God will be always shining with God’s radiant glory as it is mediated through the Lamb of God.
- In verses 24-27 there is more information about what the new earth is going to be like.
- There are going to be other nations, they are going to travel around the new earth and be led by kings.
- There’s a good chance that this is speaking of Gentiles (Greek word for nations, *ethne*) who are living in the eternal kingdom.
- Important to note that nations and kings are plural; showing that cultural diversity is perfected, not destroyed.
- As Michael Vlach points out:
- **Preservation of National Identity:** Vlach notes that the Bible tracks nations from Genesis to Revelation. He explicitly emphasizes that the "nations" (*ethne*) walking in the light of the New Jerusalem retain their distinct ethnic backgrounds, languages, and cultural histories.
- **The "Kings" as Cultural Leaders:** In his commentary on Revelation 21:24, Vlach highlights that sub-rulers or cultural leaders ("kings") still exist to guide these groups. They stream into the capital city to bring their unique honor, achievements, and glory as an offering to God. To Vlach, this proves that life on the New Earth is vibrant, organized, and structurally diverse.
- God had promised that one day the nations would worship alongside His people Israel.
- **Psalm 86:9** “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and they shall glorify Your name.”
- Nothing unclean, only those whose names are in the book of life, will come into the city.
- At this stage, only the redeemed are on the earth, living and populating the land.
- This is not to say that there is anything unclean in heaven, but a reminder that only those who have been born again can have access to the eternal city.