

CHAPTER 21

Hitherto the prophecy of this book has presented to us a very remarkable mixture of light and shade, prosperity and adversity, mercy and judgment, in the conduct of divine Providence towards the church in the world: now, at the close of all, the day breaks, and the shadows flee away; a new world now appears, the former having passed away. Some are willing to understand all that is said in these last two chapters of the state of the church even here on earth, in the glory of the latter days; but others, more probably, take it as a representation of the perfect and triumphant state of the church in heaven. Let but the faithful saints and servants of God wait awhile, and they shall not only see, but enjoy, the perfect holiness and happiness of that world. In this chapter you have,

- I. An introduction to the vision of the new Jerusalem (v. 1-9).
- II. The vision itself (v. 10, etc.)

REVELATION 21:1-8

THE NEW JERUSALEM

We have here a more general account of the happiness of the church of God in the future state, by which it seems most safe to understand the heavenly state.

I. A new world now opens to our view (v. 1): *I saw a new heaven and a new earth*; that is, a new universe; for we suppose the world to be made up of heaven and earth. By the new earth we may understand a new state for the bodies of men, as well as a heaven for their souls. This world is not now newly created, but newly opened, and filled with all those who were the heirs of it. The new heaven and the new earth will not then be distinct; the very earth of the saints, their glorified bodies, will now be spiritual and heavenly, and suited to those pure and bright mansions. To make way for the commencement of this new world, the old world, with all its troubles and commotions, *passed away*.

II. In this new world the apostle saw *the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven*, not locally, but as to its original: this new Jerusalem is the church of God in its new and perfect state, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*, beautified with all perfection of wisdom and holiness, meet for the full fruition of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.

III. The blessed presence of God with his people is here proclaimed and admired: *I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men*, etc. etc., v. 3. Observe,

- 1.** The presence of God with his church is the glory of the church.
- 2.** It is matter of wonder that a holy God should ever dwell with any of the children of men.
- 3.** The presence of God with his people in heaven will not be interrupted as it is on earth, but he will dwell with them continually.
- 4.** The covenant, interest, and relation, that there are now between God and his people, will be filled up and perfected in heaven. *They shall be his people*; their souls shall be assimilated to him, filled with all the love, honour, and delight in God which their relation to him requires, and this will constitute their perfect holiness; and he will be their God: *God himself will be their God*; his immediate presence with them, his love fully manifested to them, and his glory put upon them, will be their perfect happiness; then he will fully answer the character of the relation on his part, as they shall do on their part.

IV. This new and blessed state will be free from all trouble and sorrow; for,

- 1.** All the effects of former trouble shall be done away. They have been often before in tears, by reason of sin, of affliction, of the calamities of the church; but now *all tears shall be wiped away*; no signs, no remembrance of former sorrows shall remain, any further than to make their present felicity the greater. God himself, as their tender Father, with his own kind hand, *shall wipe away the tears* of his children; and they would not have been without those tears when God shall come and wipe them away.
- 2.** All the causes of future sorrow shall be for ever removed: *There shall be neither death nor pain*; and therefore *no sorrow nor crying*; these are

things incident to that state in which they were before, but now all *former things have passed away*.

V. The truth and certainty of this blessed state are ratified by the word and promise of God, and ordered to be committed to writing, as matter of perpetual record, v. 5, 6. The subject-matter of this vision is so great, and of such great importance to the church and people of God, that they have need of the fullest assurances of it; and God therefore from heaven repeats and ratifies the truth thereof. Besides, many ages must pass between the time when this vision was given forth and the accomplishment of it, and many great trials must intervene; and therefore God would have it committed to writing, for perpetual memory, and continual use to his people. Observe,

1. The certainty of the promise averred: *These words are faithful and true*; and it follows, *It is done*, is as sure as if it were done already. We may and ought to take God's promise as present payment; if he has said that he *makes all things new, it is done*.

2. He gives us his titles of honour as a pledge or surety of the full performance, even those titles of *Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end*. As it was his glory that he gave the rise and beginning to the world and to his church, it will be his glory to finish the work begun, and not to leave it imperfect. As his power and will were the first cause of all things, his pleasure and glory are the last end, and he will not lose his design; for then he would no longer be the *Alpha and Omega*. Men may begin designs which they can never bring to perfection; but *the counsel of God shall stand*, and he will do all his pleasure.

3. The desires of his people towards this blessed state furnish another evidence of the truth and certainty of it. They thirst after a state of sinless perfection and the uninterrupted enjoyment of God, and God has wrought in them these longing desires, which cannot be satisfied with any thing else, and therefore would be the torment of the soul if they were disappointed but it would be inconsistent with the goodness of God, and his love to his people, to create in them holy and heavenly desires, and then deny them their proper satisfaction; and therefore they may be assured that, when they have overcome their present difficulties, *he will give them of the fountain of the water of life freely*.

VI. The greatness of this future felicity is declared and illustrated,

1. By the freeness of it — it is the free gift of God: *He gives of the water of life freely*; this will not make it less but more grateful to his people.
2. The fulness of it. The people of God then lie at the fountain-head of all blessedness: they *inherit all things* (v. 7); enjoying God, they enjoy all things. He is all in all.
3. By the tenure and title by which they enjoy this blessedness — by right of inheritance, as *the sons of God*, a title of all others the most honourable, as resulting from so near and endeared a relation to God himself, and the most sure and indefeasible, that can no more cease than the relation from which it results.
4. By the vastly different state of the wicked. Their misery helps to illustrate the glory and blessedness of the saints, and the distinguishing goodness of God towards them, v. 8. Here observe,

(1.) The sins of those who perish, among which are first mentioned their cowardliness and unbelief. *The fearful* lead the van in this black list. They durst not encounter the difficulties of religion, and their slavish fear proceeded from their unbelief; but those who were so dastardly as not to dare to take up the cross of Christ, and discharge their duty to him, were yet so desperate as to run into all manner of abominable wickedness — *murder, adultery, sorcery, idolatry, and lying*.

(2.) Their punishment: *They have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*.

[1.] They could not burn at a stake for Christ, but they must burn in hell for sin.

[2.] They must die another death after their natural death; the agonies and terrors of the first death will consign them over to the far greater terrors and agonies of eternal death, to die and to be always dying.

[3.] This misery will be their proper part and portion, what they have justly deserved, what they have in effect chosen, and what they have prepared themselves for by their sins. Thus the misery of the damned will illustrate the blessedness of those that are saved, and the blessedness of the saved will aggravate the misery of those that are damned.

REVELATION 21:9-27

THE NEW JERUSALEM

We have already considered the introduction to the vision of the new Jerusalem in a more general idea of the heavenly state; we now come to the vision itself, where observe,

I. The person that opened the vision to the apostle — *one of the seven angels, that had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues*, v. 9. God has a variety of work and employment for his holy angels. Sometimes they are to sound the trumpet of divine Providence, and give fair warning to a careless world; sometimes they are to pour out the vials of God's anger upon impenitent sinners; and sometimes to discover things of a heavenly nature to those that are *the heirs of salvation*. They readily execute every commission they receive from God; and, when this world shall be at an end, yet the angels shall be employed by the great God in proper pleasant work to all eternity.

II. The place from which the apostle had this glorious view and prospect. He was taken, in ecstasy, into *a high mountain*. From such situations men usually have the most distinct views of adjacent cities. Those who would have clear views of heaven must get as near heaven as they can, into the mount of vision, the mount of meditation and faith, whence, as from the top of Pisgah, they may behold the goodly land of the heavenly Canaan.

III. The subject-matter of the vision — *the bride, the Lamb's wife* (v. 10); that is, the church of God in her glorious, perfect, triumphant state, under the resemblance of Jerusalem, having the glory of God shining in its lustre, as *uxor splendit radiis mariti* — *the bride comely through the comeliness put on her by her husband*; glorious in her relation to Christ, in his image now perfected in her, and in his favour shining upon her. And now we have a large description of the church triumphant under the emblem of a city, far exceeding in riches and splendour all the cities of this world; and this new Jerusalem is here represented to us both in the exterior and the interior part of it.

1. The exterior part of the city — *the wall and the gates*, the wall for security and the gates for entrance.

(1.) The wall for security. Heaven is a safe state; those that are there are enclosed with a wall, that separates them and secures them from all evils and enemies: now here, in the account of the wall, we observe,

[1.] The height of it, which, we are told, is very high, *seventy yards* (v. 17), sufficient both for ornament and security.

[2.] The matter of it: *It was as jasper*; a wall all built of the most precious stones, for firmness and lustre, v. 11. This city has a wall that is impregnable as well as precious.

[3.] The form of it was very regular and uniform: *It was four-square, the length as large as the breadth*. In the new Jerusalem all shall be equal in purity and perfection. There shall be an absolute uniformity in the church triumphant, a thing wanted and wished for on earth, but not to be expected till we come to heaven.

[4.] The measure of the wall (v. 15, 16): *Twelve thousand furlongs* each way, each side, which is forty-eight thousand furlongs in the whole compass, or fifteen hundred German miles. Here is room sufficient for all the people of God — *many mansions in their Father's house*.

[5.] The foundation of the wall, for heaven is a city that hath her foundations (v. 19); the promise and power of God, and the purchase of Christ, are the strong foundations of the church's safety and happiness. The foundations are described by their number — *twelve*, alluding to the twelve apostles (v. 14), whose gospel doctrines are the foundations upon which the church is built, *Christ himself being the chief corner-stone*; and, as to the matter of these foundations, it was various and precious, set forth by twelve sorts of precious stones, denoting the variety and excellency of the doctrines of the gospel, or of the graces of the Holy Spirit, or the personal excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2.) The gates for entrance. Heaven is not inaccessible; there is a way opened into the holiest of all; there is a free admission to all those that are sanctified; they shall not find themselves shut out. Now, as to these gates, observe,

[1.] Their number — *twelve gates*, answering to the twelve tribes of Israel. All the true Israel of God shall have entrance into the new Jerusalem, as every tribe had into the earthly Jerusalem.

[2.] Their guards which were placed upon them — *twelve angels*, to admit and receive the several tribes of the spiritual Israel and keep out others.

[3.] The inscription on the gates — *the names of the twelve tribes*, to show that they have a right to the tree of life, and to enter through the gates into the city.

[4.] The situation of the gates. As the city had four equal sides, answering to the four quarters of the world, east, west, north, and south, so on each side there were three gates, signifying that from all quarters of the earth there shall be some who shall get safely to heaven and be received there, and that there is as free entrance from one part of the world as from the other; *for in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free*. Men of all nations, and languages, who believe on Christ, have by him access to God in grace here and in glory hereafter.

[5.] The materials of these gates — they were all of pearls, and yet with great variety: *Every gate one pearl*, either one single pearl of that vast bigness, or one single sort of pearl. Christ is the pearl of great price, and he is our way to God. There is nothing magnificent enough in this world fully to set forth the glory of heaven. Could we, in the glass of a strong imagination, contemplate such a city as is here described, even as to the exterior part of it, such a wall, and such gates, how amazing, how glorious, would the prospect be! And yet this is but a faint and dim representation of what heaven is in itself.

2. The interior part of the new Jerusalem, v. 22-27. We have seen its strong wall, and stately gates, and glorious guards; now we are to be led through the gates into the city itself; and the first thing which we observe there is the street of the city, *which is of pure gold, like transparent glass*, v. 21. The saints in heaven tread upon gold. The new Jerusalem has its several streets. There is the most exact order in heaven: every saint has his proper mansion. There is converse in heaven: the saints are then at rest, but it is not a mere passive rest; it is not a state of sleep and inactivity, but a state of delightful motion: *The nations that are saved walk in the light of it*. They walk with Christ in white. They have communion not only with God, but with one another; and all their steps are firm and clean. They are pure and clear *as gold and transparent glass*. Observe,

(1.) The temple of the new Jerusalem, which was no material temple, made with men's hands, as that of Solomon and Zerubbabel, but a temple

altogether spiritual and divine; *for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof.* There the saints are above the need of ordinances, which were the means of their preparation for heaven. When the end is attained the means are no longer useful. Perfect and immediate communion with God will more than supply the place of gospel institutions.

(2.) The light of this city. Where there is no light, there can be no lustre nor pleasure. Heaven is *the inheritance of the saints in light.* But what is that light? There is no sun nor moon shining there, v. 23. Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun. What a dismal world would this be if it were not for the light of the sun! What is there in heaven that supplies the want of it? There is no want of the light of the sun, *for the glory of God lightens that city, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* God in Christ will be an everlasting fountain of knowledge and joy to the saints in heaven; and, if so, there is no need of the sun or moon, any more than we here need to set up candles at noon day, when the sun shineth in its strength.

(3.) The inhabitants of this city. They are described here several ways.

[1.] By their numbers — whole nations of saved souls; some out of all nations, and many out of some nations. All those multitudes who were sealed on earth are saved in heaven.

[2.] By their dignity — some of the kings and princes of the earth: great kings. God will have some of all ranks and degrees of men to fill the heavenly mansions, high and low; and when the greatest kings come to heaven they will see all their former honour and glory swallowed up of this heavenly glory that so much excels.

[3.] Their continual accession and entrance into this city: *The gates shall never be shut.* There is no night, and therefore no need of shutting up the gates. Some one or other is coming in every hour and moment, and those that are sanctified always find the gates open; they have *an abundant entrance into the kingdom.*

(4.) The accommodations of this city: All the *glory and honour of the nations shall be brought into it.* Whatever is excellent and valuable in this world shall be there enjoyed in a more refined kind, and to a far greater degree — brighter crowns, a better and more enduring substance, more

sweet and satisfying feasts, a more glorious attendance, a truer sense of honour and far higher posts of honour, a more glorious temper of mind, and a form and a countenance more glorious than ever were known in this world.

(5.) The unmixed purity of all who belong to the new Jerusalem, v. 27.

[1.] There the saints shall have no impure thing remaining in them. In the article of death they shall be cleansed from every thing that is of a defiling nature. Now they feel a sad mixture of corruption with their graces, which hinders them in the service of God, interrupts their communion with him, and intercepts the light of his countenance; but, at their entrance into the holy of holies, they are washed in the laver of Christ's blood, and presented to the Father without spot.

[2.] There the saints shall have no impure persons admitted among them. In the earthly Jerusalem there will be a mixed communion, after all the care that can be taken. Some roots of bitterness will spring up to trouble and defile Christian societies; but in the new Jerusalem there is a society perfectly pure. *First*, Free from such as are openly profane. There are none admitted into heaven who work abominations. In the churches on earth sometimes abominable things are done, solemn ordinances profaned and prostituted to men openly vicious, for worldly ends; but no such abominations can have place in heaven. *Secondly*, Free from hypocrites, such as make lies, say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. These will creep into the churches of Christ on earth, and may lie concealed there a long time, perhaps all their days; but they cannot intrude into the new Jerusalem, which is wholly reserved for those that are called, and chosen, and faithful, who are all written, not only in the register of the visible church, *but in the Lamb's book of life.*