

A New City

I wouldn't have guessed you for one of those 'pie-in-the-sky' folk," said Danny. "Christianity wants to keep you focused on some future heaven, which isn't real. Instead, you should be fixated on the here and now, and all the injustice we have to fight."

Terrence was talking to Danny, the new barber. Terrence was in his barber Cecil's chair, getting his fade touched up. Terrence had been talking to Cecil about heaven being an actual place. While Terrence knew it wasn't the typical conversation for most barbershops, what he liked about Cecil's Barber Shop was that a wide range of black men—old, young, and varying economic and educational backgrounds—were clientele. Thus, the topics of conversation were equally wide ranging.

Danny was a 30-something-year-old man with a background of surviving the streets. He engaged young black men to do the same and to become responsible sons, fathers, and community leaders. Terrence respected that and knew Danny to be a good man, but Terrence also tried to sow seeds of the Gospel whenever possible.

"The Bible encourages us to do both and a lot more," Terrence replied, after Cecil had turned his chair enough to where he could look directly at Danny. "I'm concerned about social issues. Still, this world will not last forever. Only those who know the Lord will live forever in heaven, and it's that glorious and real place that I never lose sight of."

1. *Are you a person who looks more ahead in life or lingers more in the past? Explain your answer.*

2. *How would you feel if this world is all you have to live for?*

3. *Describe how you feel when you think about having eternity ahead of you with God.*

<p>LESSON FOCUS: Keep looking toward the city that shines with God's eternal glory.</p>
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The City from God

Revelation 21:10-14, KJV

10 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,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12 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:

13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:10-14, NIV

¹⁰And 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.

¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

¹³There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Our last lesson ended with the angel telling John to “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9b, KJV). And with that summons, the angel took him “in the Spirit” (NIV) to the mountain top, where John saw the New Jerusalem descending from our God in heaven. John described its brilliance like an exceedingly precious jewel, specifically jasper, with the clarity of pure crystal. A jasper stone is usually a mottled, opaque stone of the quartz family, so it would be a very rare, valuable stone. It is possible that John’s focus was more on the dazzling splendor of the city than the specific gem in this

case, but there was something about it that reminded him of the beauty of a jasper stone. That it was clear speaks of the perfection and purity of the holy God who made it.

As John continued to observe the glorious city descend out of heaven, he noted that it had very high walls with 12 gates guarded by angels, three gates per each of the four walls. Each of the 12 gates had the name of one of the tribes of Israel written upon it. Israel represents the Old Testament law, and though keeping the laws that God gave Moses could not save a person from sin, they did point to the need of salvation. Now, it is through salvation in Christ that we will enter the gates of the city.

Whereas the 12 gates are named after the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 foundations are named after the 12 apostles of Christ. We can know with great certainty that the magnificent city is built on the firm foundations of the apostles and their doctrine—that is to say, it is built upon Christ Himself. As sure as the Lord Jesus and His Word are, so too will be the foundations of the New Jerusalem.

4. *What did the angel show John descending from heaven?*
5. *What gates did John see?*
6. *What foundations did John see?*

The City of Gold

Revelation 21:15-18, KJV

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

16 And the city lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

Revelation 21:15-18, NIV

¹⁵The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.

¹⁶The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷The angel measured

17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. ¹⁸The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

The angel next took a rod of gold and measured the city. Whether a cube, some other geometric shape such as a pyramid, the width, length, and height were the same. And depending upon which unit one uses to translate a furlong or stadia, the city measured from 1,400 to 1,500 miles in all three directions. Furthermore, the thickness of the walls is 144 cubits. With a cubit typically defined as 18 inches (1.5 feet), the walls' width would span 72 yards across.

John's description of the nNew Jerusalem details a truly awe-inspiring structure, not only in its incredible size, but also in its incomparable beauty. These massive walls were made of jasper, and the city within the walls is pure gold with the clarity of glass.

What John described coming down from God in heaven staggers the imagination! If the new Jerusalem were to come to rest in the current United States, it would roughly cover the distance from New York City to Dallas. And most of the city would reach above the major portion of the Earth's atmosphere into outer space.

7. What did the angel find with the rod of gold?

8. What were the dimensions of the New Jerusalem?

9. How did John describe the city's wall?

The City of Gems

Revelation 21:19-21, KJV

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious

Revelation 21:19-21, NIV

¹⁹The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious

stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

John next described how the foundations and the gates were decorated with precious gems. We would expect the foundations to be garnished with stones, since each foundation would be strong, solid rock to support such a massive city. So, garnishing solid rock with like materials—stones of great value and beauty—makes perfect sense.

On the other hand, the gates were each a single, giant pearl. Unlike stones, which have their origin within the earth, the pearl has as its source a living organism, namely the mollusk. This is also appropriate, since these gates of pearl allow passage to the very source of life within, specifically God Almighty and the Lamb (Rev. 21:22). When it comes to the New Jerusalem, there is nothing more valuable than the gates, which provide entry to the very presence of God. And, of course, as with the rest of the city structure, the great city street is made of the purest gold.

10. *How are the foundations decorated?*

11. *Of what did God make the gates?*

12. *How can this glimpse of the new Jerusalem give God's people hope today?*

Greener Pastures or Golden Streets

Jeremy spent his life searching for one greener pasture after another. First, he earned as many degrees as possible, believing more knowledge meant more happiness. Then, Jeremy found the most beautiful woman and began a family. He believed a lovely family would lead to love and peace. He started his own business, because he thought being his own boss would be better than working for someone. Year after year, he looked for greener pastures, but often discovered the pasture wasn't greener on the other side—it was just different.

Dan lived his life in the present. He knew this life wasn't his final destiny. As a youth, he saw the importance of seeking God's direction in every step he took. When it was time to further his education, he sought God for which school to attend. Dan didn't rush to marry soon after graduation. He waited on God to bring him the person to be his wife.

One day, as Dan spent time with God reading His Word, the Holy Spirit led him to take a step of faith and begin his own business. Dan, his wife, and children prayed daily for the right timing for him to become an entrepreneur. His decision-making was grounded in his eternal destiny—not accumulating earthly possessions. Dan knew that loving and serving God on Earth determined whether or not he would hear God say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Both Jeremy and Dan furthered their education, married, and started their own businesses. But their motivations differed. Jeremy was driven by his desire to find greener pastures. Daniel was motivated by his desire to walk the "golden streets" with his Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity.

13. *Why is it important to have the right motivation as we make decisions for the future?*

14. *How do God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit help us move forward in life?*

15. *What does having an eternal perspective mean to you personally?*

Citizenship in Heaven

When thinking of our future home, it's good to remember Paul's words to the Philippians: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that we will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21). Therefore, we should have a grateful heart to God, who will one day transform our bodies to become like His glorious body as we live eternally with Him.

► Write a "Thank You" card to Jesus. Thank Him for coming to saving us from sin and preparing a place for us after death. Express your gratitude to God our Father, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit. After writing this "thank You" card, keep it in your Bible as an encouragement whenever you are struggling. This world is not our home.

KEY VERSE

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. —Revelation 21:14, KJV

The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. —Revelation 21:14, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 15 through August 21

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cook* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 63—My Soul Thirsts for You.
- Tue.** Zechariah 14:6-11—Living Waters Shall Flow from Jerusalem.
- Wed.** John 4:4-14—Jesus Promises Living Water.
- Thu.** John 4:15-26—Worship God in Spirit and Truth.
- Fri.** John 7:37-40—Rivers of Living Water.
- Sat.** Isaiah 44:1-8—Water on the Thirsty Land.
- Sun.** Revelation 22:1-9—For the Healing of the Nations.