Bible reading: Revelation 21:9-27

**I wonder how you picture heaven?** Far Side

* God’s ppl in heaven: bored – unfulfilled – unstimulated.
* **13:6** [the Satanic beast] opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander – 3 things: 1) his name and 2) his dwelling-place and 3) those who live in heaven.
  + God’s name slandered everywhere. Think abt 2nd, 3rd:
  + God’s dwelling place:
    - boring - /fun – lazing around playing harp all day – for eternity!
    - Like a beach holiday – OK for a week or two – actually pretty dull.
* **John 8:44** he is a liar and the father of lies.
  + Know Devil’s schemes[[1]](#endnote-1): strategy in Western world: convince ppl it’s boring – why would you care whether you go there or not – esp when we live in a nice place where life is comfortable.
* These 3 weeks: radically diff view of heaven: bursting with life, joy, excitement, discovery, beauty, wonder. Three pictures:
  + Heaven is a marriage - city – garden
  + Say “pictures” – each deeply symbolic. To some degree literal – but how much: ?
* Point: something to capture our imagination – give us a longing to go there. **2Peter 3:13** we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.
  + Meant to be s/w to look forward to. /Selfish.
  + Meant to be excited by righteousness.
    - Look around at our world – all of it’s sin – corruption – broken rels.
    - Looking fwd to a new H&E – where righteousness dwells.

**v9** He…showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

* Last 2 chapters: “City” x13 times.
* **Think abt how “city” is used in B:**
  + First: Gen 4 - Cain – murders brother – exiled –> builds a city.
    - Meanwhile Enoch walked with God – literally followed God around[[2]](#endnote-2).
  + Next: Babylon – proud city – tower
  + Next: Abraham called out of City: Ur -> wilderness
  + Next: Sodom – destroyed b/c -> paraded their sin about[[3]](#endnote-3).
    - Lot and family: flee from city across wilderness -> mountains.
  + Israel: captive in cities[[4]](#endnote-4) of Egypt –> released to worship God in the wilderness[[5]](#endnote-5) - mountain[[6]](#endnote-6)
* Overall picture:
  + Ppl in city: tend to get their identity, security from the city -> tend to rebel against God – why? Think: /need God.
  + Ppl in wilderness: tend to rely on God – walk with him – depend on him.
    - **Heb 11:38** sums up heroes of OT: They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.
* One exception: Jerusalem. “City of peace”.
  + Founded by Melchizedek[[7]](#endnote-7) “King of righteousness” - Place where peace & righteousness dwells.
    - Model city where God is @ heart. Later: build T.
  + But even that /work out – continue to rebel – ppl of Jerusalem kill prophet after prophet[[8]](#endnote-8) – and eventually kill Jesus, the Messiah.
  + Good Friday: glorious truth that Jesus was taken out of the city – murdered – crucified outside the city – so that those in the city could be saved.
* Saying?
  + Obv /saying anyone who lives in Stoke is a terrible sinner – those who live in countryside are righteous!
  + Only point is that symbolically in B: gathering together of ppl – leads to more sin – more rebellion – putting more hope in self.
* All this comes together in **Hebrews 11:9** By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
  + Picture of being a wanderer – exile – really powerful.
    - This is not our home!
    - Peter[[9]](#endnote-9): “foreigners and exiles” in this world. (1Peter 2:11)
  + **Heb 11:13** heroes of faith were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own…they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
* Get it? Rush! Show how Holy City - /spring up out of nowhere.
  + **21:10** 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.
  + Fulfilment of promises to Abraham!
    - One day: God’s ppl: /exiles – /left out - /wanderers - /fearful.
    - One day: City coming! Holy City – like Jer was always means to be but / because of sin.
    - One day: sin defeated forever – righteousness will reign supreme – and the city will be what it was always meant to be.
    - One day: Ppl /team up to rebel against God – but team up to glorify him!

**The only truly “holy City”**

Contrast: Babylon – other city in Rev.

* Rep all the powerful ungodly regimes, systems of the world.
  + Every other city. London is Babylon – Dubai – Stoke.
  + Fate is clear: **18:21** the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.
    - The rich will /always get richer. Poor /always downtrodden. Minorities /always oppressed. God /squeezed out.
* New Jerusalem -> Holy City!

**Glorious (21:11)**

**v11** It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

**v18** The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

* Gold: pure, untarnished. Jasper: precious stone – usually red – pure & clear – very best quality.
  + Seen Jasper before in Rev – ch 4 – he who sits on the throne had the appearance of jasper…
    - Glory of the City – is the glory of God.
* This is a place full of glory – even though the materials seem to be pretty special – it’s God himself who is the glory of the place: **v23** The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.
  + /Say there was no more sun & moon – talk abt next time: re-creation – v recognisably same place.
    - Says: /needed – background glow from presence of God.
  + City: full of God’s glory.

**Physical**

* Thinking: how real is all this?
  + Is this heaven something you can touch and feel and see?
  + Say yes: Absolutely: lots of symbolism. But if just symbolism: rubbish symbol.
    - If God meant us to think Heaven was floating on a cloud, he wouldn’t say it was like a city.
    - On the scale of solid objects: a massive city made of stone, built on 12 foundations - plated in metal – pretty solid!
* This city: pretty serious walls: **v12** A great, high wall
  + **v17** it was 144 cubits thick – 66m - >200 feet thick. Unimaginably thick walls.
* Build solid walls on solid foundations:
  + 12 of them. Symbolism: 12 tribes of Israel – 12 apostles of J. Eternal city of God built on all that’s come before.
    - Foundations also speak of physicality – weight – mass – strength.
* Literal?
  + Tempting to say it’s just symbolic – as if the scriptures have predicted that: the angel measured the wall using human measurement.
    - Sounds like – “no, actually, literally that big!”
  + Point: Any ideas that heaven is about floaty clouds is just plain wrong. That idea has come from the ancient Greeks: Plato.
    - Physical bad. Spiritual good. Therefore heaven must be purely spiritual – physical bodies, things, objects would pollute it.
    - No! God made physical things – physical world – finished: very good[[10]](#endnote-10).
    - If physical was very good back then – very good in future too.
* **Heb 9:10** [Abraham & other ancients:] looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
  + Problem w living in wilderness - tent: always insecure. Israelites: always vulnerable: a few days from starvation, from thirst, attacked by enemies.
  + The physicality of the Holy City is what the ancients longed for!
  + You today? Fast-moving world – constant troubles come and go – many of us: lives constantly on move. One day: settle. Safe. Secure. Home.

**Huge!**

* Plenty of space! Thinking: /like - crammed into a city with a bunch of other people for eternity – here’s hope for you!
  + The capital city, the New Jerusalem, is 12,000 stadia[[11]](#endnote-11) along each side.
    - That’s about 1,400 miles wide, 1,400 miles long. Nearly 2 million square miles. That’s 20x bigger then UK.
  + As high as it is long. Multiple floors?
* Could interpret as symbolic: 12, 1000 obv symbolic numbers.
  + But J said – to his scared disciples as he announces he’s leaving them: **John 14:2** My Father’s house has many rooms. IOW: /worry – plenty of space for you.
  + So, literal dimensions? Don’t know.
    - Msg: plenty of space for multitudes of ppl!
    - Introverts – quiet corner!

**It’s the ultimate Temple**

* Something abt dimensions of city: 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.
  + Shape[[12]](#endnote-12)? Cube.
  + Only 1 other cube in B: HoH.
    - **1Kings 6** room – 20x20x20 cubits. Whole room: gold – like this city.
    - Brought Ark of C – 1Ki8 - presence of God filled T – priests /carry on – overwhelmed w presence of God.
  + Remember as J died: curtain torn: top -> bottom. Access to God.
* Now: dwelling w God. Living forever in T – in presence of God.
  + **v22** I did not see a temple in the city – odd for a Holy City! Reason: because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
    - Immediate presence of God. Last time:
    - **Revelation 21:3** I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.
* All those times: longed for more of God’s presence. If only. Cried & begged -> closer. Yes.

**Now is the time to enter**

**v12** It 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. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west[[13]](#endnote-13).

* Walls are massive – impregnable - /can break in - /scale those walls.
  + But anyone has opportunity to enter: 12 gates – 3 on each side – enter from N-S-E-W – from every nation, tribe, people and language[[14]](#endnote-14) -
* But the time to enter is now.
  + By then, each gate has an angel (v12) guarding it. Remind you of anything?
    - After A&E sinned – /get back to Tree of Life – way back guarded by angel (Genesis 3:24)
    - **v27** Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.
* /Miss out! Holding off?

What lies beyond the gates? And what do we know abt ppl – what do they look like – do all day? Next time!

*Pr*

***2Peter 3:13*** *we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

1. 2Corinthians 2:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Walked” with God – in other places that word describes the life of a nomad (Genesis 13:17, 48:15) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Generally, they were “sinning greatly” (Genesis 13:13, 18:20-21), parading their sin around (Isaiah 3:9, I can’t help thinking of gay pride marches…) Homosexuality isn’t necessarily the major sin of Sodom, although it’s certainly notable. The most explicit condemnation of Sodom is in Ezekiel 16:49 [they] were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Exodus 1:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Exodus 7:16 and many other places [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Exodus 3:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Genesis 14 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Matthew 23 esp v37 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. 1Peter 2:11, also 1:1 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Genesis 1:31 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. 1 Stadia = 185m; UK land area = 93,638 square miles <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Geography/Land-area/Square-miles> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Mathematically, it could be a pyramid, but they were associated with pagan religion (Egypt, and before them, Tower of Babel) – seems very unlikely. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Is there a reference to the layout of the Israelite camp here? (Numbers 2-3) – I’m not sure. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 14:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)