

Revelation Chapter 21 - John Karmelich

1. This lesson is called "Understanding Happily Ever After".
 - a) Children's fairy tales often end with the phrase "Happily Ever After". It refers to the idea that the heroes of the story go on to live a happy life at the end of the story.
 - b) With that said, we are now in the last two chapters of the bible. This is the "happily ever after" section of the bible. It gives us a glimpse of what our eternal life is all about.
 - c) Before I begin, think about this: The bible says very little about our eternal life after we die. We have two chapters here in Revelation and an occasional reference here and there. That is a small percentage of the bible. The vast majority of the bible focuses on the "here and now". That tells me that God wants us to primarily focus on this life.
2. Back to the title: The main point to get out of the last two chapters of Revelation is to understand the purpose of "eternity". Let's set the stage and I'll explain this further:
 - a) Most of Revelation focuses on the events of Jesus Second Coming.
 - b) Much of the book has to do with judgments prior to the Jesus actual return.
 - c) Chapter 19 was the actual return of Jesus and the events around that return.
 - d) Chapter 20 focuses on events after His return: This included a 1,000 year "millennium" period where Jesus rules from earth. The remainder of the chapter deals with "Jesus as judge" where all the unsaved get sent to hell as well as the final judgment on Satan and his demonic forces.
 - e) In Chapter 21 We're now done with judgments.
 - i) We're now done with Satan. We're now done with evil and sin.
 - ii) We're even done with Jesus 1,000 year rule during the millennium. The thousand-year period may be a long time, but it is relatively nothing compared to eternity.
 - f) Chapters 21 and 22 focus on the "happily ever after" section of our existence.
 - g) The question becomes, "now what"? What do we do for eternity? Do we just stand there and praise God? Doesn't this get boring after awhile? ☺ The other key question is how does this "happily ever after" section affect my life today?
3. If I had to pick one word to describe this eternal state, it is "fellowship". It is an old English word often used in "Christian-speak". The idea is to spend time with the one you love.
 - a) I've occasionally used the illustration of a young person who has a crush on somebody: When you are infatuated with someone, you want to find out all you can about them. You just want to be with them. You want to spend time with them.
 - i) That is what God desires of us. Sometimes we spend time in prayer, "just to be with God". We read His word to learn more about God and what He wants of us.
 - ii) If you are with friends you like, you enjoy talking to them. You trust them and tell them intimate things. You want to hear about their lives.
 - b) Remember that our God is a God-of-love. To use another of my regular illustrations, if somebody has a gift for canvas painting, they will paint whether they get paid for it or not. They do it because they just love to do it. If God is a God-of-love, He needs someone or some group to express that love upon. If we are forced to love God, it is not true love. That is why God allows free-will to exist, to see if we freely choose Him.
 - c) The point is the eternal "happily ever after" of these two chapters focuses on a love relationship between God and other Christians.
 - i) What if I'm shy or an introvert? Will I hate heaven? ☺ I don't know. I do know that God loves us too much to leave us alone. If we do love God, we want to spend time with Him. If we love people with common interests (i.e., our love for God), we want to spend time with them.
 - ii) The point is, "Get used to the idea of spending lots of time with God and with other Christians". That seems to be the theme of these last two chapters.

- iii) The application is to get started now. If we're going to spend eternity in a close personal relationship with God and other believers, get started now. It doesn't work in the sense one can live in isolation now, and expect to enjoy eternity.
 - iv) God wants the "happily ever after" to begin now, with our attitude. We can't control the world around us, but we can control our attitude at any time. Remember, we as Christians will live forever. We as Christians do spend eternity in a love relationship with God Himself and other believers. We'll develop this theme more during the lesson, but get used to the idea of "fellowship", i.e., a close personal relationship with God and with other Christians.
4. Last thing and then I'll get started: Is this all there is to heaven? If you've read Chapters 21 and 22, it reads like a nice fairy tale ending. Won't it get boring after awhile?
- a) My personal view is that this is not all there is to eternity, but this is all that God chose to reveal to us about eternity at this time.
 - b) I believe it's going to take an eternity to get to know all there is about God and about fellow believers. Imagine how long it's going to take to get to know fellow Christians and their lives. Even if and when we have perfect knowledge of all saved people and all human events, that still is "less than eternity". My point to all of this is that whatever happens in eternity, we only can focus on what we do know and not what we don't know. We have to trust God in His eternal plans for us.
 - c) Remember the bible verse that gives the purpose of human history: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. " (Ephesians 2:6-7, NIV).
 - i) The idea of this sentence in Ephesians is that the purpose of human history is for God to organize a group of people so that He can spend eternity showing His love to that group. I don't know what that fully entails, but it sounds pretty good to me, especially when one considers the alternative! ☺
 - d) If the main point of human history is to have a big group of people who spend eternity loving God and loving each other, the application of these chapters is to get started now and don't wait for "eternity" to begin. In a sense, our eternity began the moment we became born-again. If God's great ultimate purpose is a love relationship with Him and fellow Christians, then God wants us to start practicing now in preparation of that time!
5. Chapter 21, Verse 1: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.
- a) Remember that the events of Chapter 20 focused on the 1,000 year time frame called the millennium. This is a time when Jesus ruled on earth, presumably over those that survived through the Tribulation. The end of this tribulation brought a time of final judgment. Essentially, all those who are saved are now saved forever. Those who are condemned are condemned forever. There is no more new life.
 - b) Notice the word "I" in Verse 1. In the King James Version, the word "John" is in the text itself. The point is John is validating this particular point. To paraphrase what John is writing, he is saying, "I know you the reader must think all of this stuff is strange what I'm writing in Revelation and think I was just having a bad dream. Let me tell you, all of it is real. I saw it with my own eyes! I saw this stuff. I'm not just making it up!"
 - c) To open this next chapter in human events, John sees a new heaven and a new earth.
 - d) First, understand the bible has three different uses of the word "heaven".
 - i) The first "heaven" refers to the sky, or atmosphere above the earth.
 - ii) The second "heaven" refers to the stars and what is beyond our atmosphere.
 - iii) The third "heaven" refers to God's throne and wherever "eternity" exists.
 - iv) Paul refers to the fact he was taken up to "The third heaven" (Ref.: 2nd Cor. 12:2). The point is Paul understood the three heavenly references.

- v) Remember God's location, (i.e., "the" heaven) is not somewhere one can travel via a spaceship. It exists in dimensions we cannot comprehend. If God created the universe as we know it, He must exist outside of that universe. If "God is everywhere", He must exist in dimensions beyond our comprehension.
 - e) With all that said, we can now go back to the concept of a "new heaven and new earth". There are a number of Old and New Testament references to the fact that God will one day create a new heaven and a new earth. (E.g., Isaiah 65:17, 22, 2nd Peter 3:13, and here.)
 - f) Some people believe the new heaven is a new "God's throne room". The majority of scholars argue it only refers to the first heaven, which is the atmosphere above the earth. If God's throne is perfectly holy, I don't see a need for a new throne-heaven. Further, John saw will see a new "Jerusalem" come down from the sky (i.e., space). I believe the sky (or space) doesn't change, but just the earth and its atmosphere, which is the first "heaven".
 - g) OK, onto the big question: Why get rid of the earth as we know it? Why have a new one?
 - i) Being a guy, let me use a football illustration. ☺ I once attended a football game where a strange pre-game ceremony took place. In American team sports, there is often a person dressed up in a costume as a "mascot" for that team. It somehow represents the team's nickname. The week prior to this game, the uniform of the mascot was stolen by the team's archrival. Just before the game, the mascot's uniform was returned. Given all of that, there was a ceremony before the football game where the uniform was completely destroyed. The joke was, "This uniform was touched by our enemies. It is permanently infected and now it is beyond repair. We must destroy it and create a brand new one".
 - ii) In a strange way, this joke of a ritual is biblical. The idea is that sin has corrupted the world so bad, that it is beyond repair. It is like the way one has to shoot a horse that has a broken leg. That horse will be in pain the rest of his or her life. It is more merciful to kill the horse than let it live with the pain. That is the main reason why God will create a new earth, and the atmosphere around it. Our world is too corrupted by sin and God makes a new one through eternity.
 - h) There is a lot we don't know about the "how" question: How does God destroy the old one? Is there any debris floating around? ☺ Where does God get the material to create a new one? My view is that if God can create the universe as we know it "out of nothing", He can do it a second time. If you can accept the idea that God created the universe, it should be easy to accept the fact God can create a second one.
 - i) It's relatively easy to think about the idea that there is no more evil and corruption. Stop and think about all the beautiful things that will be destroyed. Think about one's favorite art work. Think about one's favorite nature spot to visit. Think about watching a sunrise or sunset. It's all going to be gone one day. I take by faith that whatever the new earth is, it will be better than what we know in this lifetime.
 - i) The application is not to be too "hung up" on things of this world. We can still enjoy its beauty and yes, even enjoy man-made things. The point is to put it in the perspective of eternity. When our beautiful new car gets its first scratch, don't get too upset, God's going to destroy it one day anyway! ☺
6. Lets get back to the Verse 1: The second sentence points out that the new earth has no sea.
- a) If you think about this, it must be some sort of future vision. John was standing on the earth when this chapter begins. Obviously, the same world still exists today. John must have seen some sort of vision of the world being instantly destroyed and a new earth put in its place. The first thing John notices is that there is no more sea.
 - b) Remember John's perspective: He lived all of his life in and near Israel. He may have traveled to parts of the Middle East and the Mediterranean, but that's it. John had no knowledge of the world's great oceans. My point is "a new sea" is not just a reference to a new Mediterranean Sea, but I suspect there are no major seas or oceans in this world.

- c) Our climate depends on the ocean to produce clouds, then rain, etc. Whatever this new world is, it will be different than the one we know right now.
 - i) I believe the first point of "no more sea" is to understand it will be different from the one earth we know. John had enough insight to realize that he just wasn't watching a big globe come out of the sky, but a new earth. John realized this new earth was distinct from the earth as we know it and didn't have any more "sea".
 - d) OK, why does God want us to know the new world has no sea? The text doesn't say.
 - i) Here's my favorite theory on this. The prophet Micah said, "You (God) will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities (sins) into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19, NIV parenthesis added) The point is of this word picture is God removes all of our sins and throws them into the depth of the sea. Here in Revelation, God gets rid of the sea!
 - ii) I mentioned in a previous lesson the story how Jesus once "rebuked" the sea as if it was demon controlled. (Ref.: Matthew 8:26, Mark 4:39). There are hints every now and then that somehow, the "sea" is somehow tied with sin. Back in Revelation 13:1, the antichrist, "came out of the sea". The point here in Revelation 21 is this "sea", with all of its sinful overtones (as a word-picture) no longer exists.
 - e) Hey look, there's a Verse 2 in this chapter! ☺
7. Verse 2: I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.
- a) In Verse 1, John saw a new earth, and a new heaven. The "heaven" most likely refers to the atmosphere around the new earth.
 - b) In Verse 2, John saw a new city, which he calls the "New Jerusalem". Notice this city comes to earth separately. Some scholars think this new city doesn't actually touch the new earth, but hangs in space. I disagree with that idea, but some argue it hangs in space.
 - c) In this verse, notice the word "as". The city is prepared "as a bride..."
 - i) The point is this city is really a city called Jerusalem. It is not a female bride.
 - ii) John is making the point of how this city is prepared. Just as a bride makes herself beautiful prior to the wedding ceremony, so is this city prepared for its arrival.
 - iii) I have a great memory of my wife first coming down the aisle at our wedding. It was one of the most beautiful sites I've ever seen. John is using a word-picture that most people can comprehend.
 - d) I have to admit, I thought about this verse way too much: How did John know it was "New Jerusalem". Did it have a big neon sign saying, "Welcome to New Jerusalem"? ☺
 - i) First, way back in Revelation Chapter 3, Verse 12, there was a reference to the fact there would be a "New Jerusalem" coming out of heaven. Therefore, this reference here in Chapter 21 is fulfilling a promise made in Chapter 3.
 - ii) I suspect John had some sort of "tour guide" as he was writing explaining to John just what He saw and what He wanted John to write down.
 - iii) I've explained in earlier lessons that a nickname for the bible is, "A tale of two cities". Those two cities are Jerusalem and Babylon. Jerusalem represents the headquarters (or "capital") of a close relationship with God. Babylon represents the headquarters of any and all organized rebellion against God.
 - a) A few chapters back, we read of the final destruction of Babylon. Here in Chapter 21, we now read of the final fate of "Jerusalem". Just as the "old" Jerusalem represented God's "spiritual capital" of worship on the present earth, so a new Jerusalem is prepared for the new earth. Since there is no more sin, there is no new Babylon in this new world.
8. Verse 3: And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

- a) Back in the introduction, I stated that God's purpose for human history is to create a group of people to which God can express His love upon. In this lifetime, we only have limited capacity to comprehend what is that love of God.
- i) Think of it this way: Can we see God? Do we fully understand Him? Of course not. With that in mind, re-read Verse 3. Go ahead, I'll wait here. ☺
- b) One gets the idea that "whatever" is happening in Verse 3, somehow God the Father Himself actually dwells with people. God won't just be our next door neighbor. He will live in the same house, the same city and same location as us. It is an intimate personal relationship that we can only imagine in this lifetime.
- i) Won't we feel guilty if we sin and God is watching us? He's watching us now! ☺ Remember that sin no longer exists at this time!
- c) What is happening in this verse is someone (probably an angel) announcing the fact that God will dwell with people.
- i) Notice the lack of conditions to this promise. God is just saying in effect, "To those who trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, there is now no more sin and now those people (i.e. the saved) can spend eternity with Me (God).
- ii) There are those on earth who think, "Is that it? Where's the golf courses in heaven? ☺ Where's my big house that I get to hang around in for all of eternity?
- iii) The point of eternity is that we get to "be" with God. We get the privilege of experiencing God's love for eternity. This gets back to my opening theme of "understanding happily ever after". It is all about love. It is about God's love being showered upon us. It is about us reflecting that love back to God and upon fellow believers. It is joy, but not from material things. It is the greatest joy that exists, one of a true love relationship without the influence of sin.
- d) Most of Chapter 21, beginning in Verse 9, rest of this chapter is going to describe the beauty of the New Jerusalem. We're going to have images of gold, precious jewels and even pearls. Yet to me, somehow this dwarfs in comparison to the concept of "face to face interaction with the God of the Universe".
- i) Somehow, someday, we are going to have an intimate relationship with God in ways we cannot imagine today.
- ii) We are also going to have intimate relationships with other Christians without the interference of sin or even that of demonic influences. I believe that will be far greater in beauty than any of the gold and jewelry to be described later.
- e) Let's personalize this verse. We may understand that one day we have a very close and personal relationship with the God of the Universe and other Christians. How should that affect our lives today?
- i) The first idea is we are to "practice". A close relationship with God doesn't start after we are resurrected. It begins now. Prayer is a balance between realizing that God is in charge and perfect in all His ways, and at the same time, talking to God like we would to a close friend who we can trust with our most intimate secrets.
- ii) As an example, sometimes my prayers are more formal as I want to remember God is holy (perfect) in all His ways and I am a sinful person. Other times, I just pour out whatever is on my mind to share my thoughts with Him. The point is to start developing "now" the relationship that will last for eternity.
- iii) The next idea is to practice relationships with other Christians. Yes, we all know saved people who we desire they stay on the other side of heaven. ☺ We all have "unsaved" friends or relatives. The point is we are going to spend eternity with other Christians. Might as well get used to them. Get to know other Christians. Minister to others, which simply means putting others' needs in front of one's own. Again, it is about practicing now what God intends for us for all of eternity.

- iv) Nothing else will last for eternity other than our relationship with God and other people. All "things" of this world will be destroyed. It is a reminder of what is important in life: Relationships with God and relationships with people.
9. Verse 4: He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
- a) Apparently, once this intimate relationship begins in heaven, such things as death, sorrow (mourning), crying or pain are done away with.
 - b) The question becomes, if God is wiping away our tears, what are we crying about?
 - i) There is all sorts of speculation about this one. Crying is a human reaction when gets overwhelmed emotionally and there is no other way to let it out.
 - a) The crying (i.e., God wiping our tears) could be from the happiness of seeing heaven and knowing we are saved for all of eternity.
 - b) Some have suggested the tear wiping could be from lost opportunities. We could look back at the parts of our lives and realize what we have "wasted" that could have been used for God.
 - ii) My personal view is that God will take away part of our memory. Let's assume we all have friends and loved ones who will not be saved. How can one be truly happy, knowing a close friend will be in hell for eternity? That is why I'll argue that part of heaven is "selected memory removal". (Hey, it's just my theory. ☺)
 - c) Here is what is important about heaven: There is no more suffering. This is the "happily ever after" part about heaven.
 - d) This is a great verse to take comfort in during times of suffering. It will come to an end. There is a day for believers were there is no more death, mourning, crying and pain.
 - i) If you've seen the 1997 movie, "The Titanic", there is a scene near the end when one man is quoting Revelation Chapter 21 and 22 as they were all about to die. There is something wonderful about quoting the joy of heaven during times of stress and worry. It is comforting to know that suffering is only temporary.
 - ii) I like to recommend reading Revelation 21 and 22 during times of intense suffering and mourning. It is a reminder that there is a hereafter and whatever one is going through now, is still relatively nothing compared to eternity.
10. Verse 5: He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."
- a) Let's start with the first sentence of this verse: God announces from the throne in an audible voice that John can here: "I am making everything new".
 - i) Verse 1 described a new heaven and a new earth. By Verse 5, God is stating again, what is now obvious: That everything (as we humans know it) will be new.
 - ii) Why is "new" necessary? Basically, because we humans have ruined the old one so that it is beyond repair. We as saved creatures are going to have new resurrected bodies. Such bodies are going to require a new world to live in.
 - b) Again, to understand what "happily ever after" is about understanding what we take and not take into the next world. What we don't take is "things". We have a new set of "things" in the next world (e.g., the "New Jerusalem"), but no material things pass on from one world to another. What we do take into the next world is our relationship with God and our relationship with people. That will continue forever. It is another reminder about what is important in life.
 - c) The second sentence of this verse says in effect, "Write this down, it is Gospel truth!"
 - i) As I've stated before, I picture John the writer of Revelation being transported from place to place watching all of these visions. An angel handed John a bunch of legal pads and pens, (ok, technically ink wells and papyrus paper) and John did his best to describe what he saw. Here John is commanded to write what was said. John did not want us to miss the point that God spoke to him personally.

- ii) The reason for the emphasis is for us to comprehend that everything, as we know it, (materially speaking) will be new. It is another reminder of what will, and will not be important in the next life.
11. Verse 6: He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.
- a) Let's start with the "He". Who is the "He" that is talking to John?
 - i) The clue is the phrase, "I am the Alpha and the Omega". That is the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It would be like us saying, "I am the "A" and the "Z". That is, it begins with me and ends with me."
 - ii) Let's go back to Chapter 1, Verse 17b and 18: "I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!"
 - iii) Whoever is speaking was dead and is now alive. That sounds like Jesus to me. ☺ My point is the "first and last" in Chapter 1 is very similar language to the "Alpha and Omega" reference here in Chapter 21.
 - iv) Remember that the person "on the throne" is the one speaking to John, as stated in Verse 3 and Verse 5 of this chapter. My point is it is Jesus Himself speaking to John. Remember that Jesus knew John personally. In the Gospel of John, John referred to himself as "the one Jesus loved" (John 20:2, 21:20). Jesus is still that intimate friend to John, but He is also God. Jesus is commanding John to keep writing and specifically write that everything as we know it will be "new".
 - b) The second sentence is Jesus stating, "To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."
 - i) If one knows their Gospel stories, one can't read this and not think of the "woman at the well" story. One time Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman getting water at a well. One of the lines in that story is, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:10, NIV)
 - ii) The point of that verse is Jesus compares "living water" to eternal life. I believe there is a similar concept here in Verse 6 of Chapter 21.
 - iii) Remember to whom Revelation is written: Christians. This "thirsty/drink" reference is a reminder to keep on indulging in the "living water", which is Christ. The idea is to keep on praying and developing that intimate relationship with God. The idea is to keep on studying God's word as to understand what God is like and what He requires of us.
 - c) In Chapter 22, there are a few other references to water that relate to this verse:
 - i) "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1 NIV)
 - ii) "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (Revelation 22:17b NIV)
 - iii) It appears there is literal water in our eternal existence. Some sort of river flows from wherever God and Jesus are located. We'll talk about this in Chapter 22.
 - iv) To drink water is the idea of "taking in" what God is offering. The idea of "thirst" represents our spiritual need to commune with God. I am convinced God created humans with a physical need to worship "something". God fulfills that need through our relationship with Him.
 - v) Also understand that God is not all we need. If Adam only needed God, Adam would have not wanted a wife. (See Genesis 2:18). The point is our relationship needs requires both human interaction as well as a relationship with God. That is why I'll argue that "heaven" is designed for interaction between God and ourselves as well as Christians interacting with each other.

12. Verse 7: He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.
- a) Let's discuss the word "overcome". We've talked about this in earlier lessons of Revelation. For those of with short-term memory loss, let's do it again. ☺
 - i) John uses that term "overcome" five times in 1st John. Here's the fifth one:
 - a) "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." (1st John 5:5 NIV).
 - ii) The point is John uses "overcome" in the sense that Christians have overcome any and all temptations to turn from believing in Jesus as the payment for our sins.
 - iii) This does not mean that momentary doubts mean we lose our salvation. It means that when "push comes to shove" and we have to take a stand for or against Jesus, we stand with Him. That is what John meant by "overcoming".
 - b) This leads us back to this verse: The verse is saying that all Christians have the privilege of (the last part of this verse) of "I will be his God and he will be my son".
 - i) Take that last phrase and fill in your name. (For women, you can use daughter instead of son. In that culture, men had a higher standing of power than women. For God to call us "sons" (men or women) is a high standing of privilege.
 - ii) The idea here is one of adoption. It is to adopt a child and give it the same legal rights as a naturally born child.
 - iii) This verse is mind boggling when we consider it: We as Christians have the same power, privileges and blessings as Jesus Himself. We inherit "everything". That does not mean we are equal in stature to Jesus. Just as God the Father is greater in stature (i.e., the leader) than God the Son, so are we lower in stature than Jesus.
 - iv) The point of all of this is that God creates everything "new". That "new" stuff is for all of us to enjoy equally and fully.
 - v) Remember the purpose of all human history is for God to pick out a group of people to show His love upon. That love is more than a big hug. ☺ It includes all the blessings the next eternal life has to offer. The point is we are not saved for eternity just so we can be a janitor in heaven. We are saved to share in God's love for us and have a blessed joyful life without the influence of sin. That should bring far more joy than everything and anything this world has to offer.
 - c) OK, the next life will be hunky dory. ☺ What does that mean I have to do now?
 - i) Focus on the word "overcome". I do believe there is a single-moment decision where one accepts Jesus for the payment of one's sins. It is also a lifetime of "behavior modification". If we truly believe Jesus is our Lord, then it is our desire to obey His commandments. "Overcoming" is our constant struggle between our old sinful nature and doing God's will for our lives.
13. Verse 8: But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."
- a) Verse 7 tells us who is in heaven. Verse 8 tells us who is not in heaven. This verse gives a list of "bad behaviors". Those people who commit such behaviors and do not seek God for the forgiveness of those behaviors are sent to hell.
 - b) Hell here is called "The fiery lake of burning sulfur". It doesn't sound very pleasant. ☺
 - i) Remember that Verse 1 stated there is a new heaven and a new earth. I suspect that wherever this place is, it can't be found on the earth as we know it. It is located in dimensions we as humans cannot fully comprehend.
 - c) Verse 8 gives a list of the types of people in hell. The first item mentioned is "cowardly".
 - i) What the word "cowardly" means is those who are afraid to commit their lives to Jesus out of fear of being unpopular or out of fear of not wanting to give up some particular sin or their lifestyle. It has nothing to do with a Christian being timid.

- ii) It is "human" for even the best of Christians to be timid at times and be afraid to speak up for Christ in certain situations. That is not what this verse is talking about. This verse is about those who refuse to make a commitment in the first place as they are afraid of not being liked, or giving up their lifestyle.
 - iii) It seems unusual that "cowardly" would be listed before murderers! I suspect this is first on the list as it is the most common reason people are in hell. I'll argue the biggest reason people won't commit their life to Christ has nothing to do with the logic of Gospel, it has to do with not wanting to change their lifestyle. They are afraid of change. They are afraid of a Christian commitment.
 - d) Next on the list is "unbelieving". That simply means those who understand the Gospel message, but refuse to believe it. Again, I'll argue it is second on the list as it is less common than "cowardly" as I described it.
 - e) The rest of the list described various sinful activities. It is not any particular sin that keeps one from getting into heaven. We all sin. The problem is people refuse to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.
 - f) There also has to be a willingness to "walk away" from those sins and at the same time, acknowledge what we did was wrong. I do believe a murderer can be in heaven. That person should still be punished by society, but they can be forgiven of God. The "sin-list" here in Verse 8 refers to those who refuse to change or even try to change their lifestyle. In other words, they are more comfortable in these sinful behaviors than desiring to change in order to please God.
 - g) Remember that these are not the only sins that need be avoided. They are just examples of people who are not in heaven. The "complete list" is much larger. The idea of this verse is to contrast those who "overcome" the temptation of living these types of lifestyles versus those who give themselves over to these sins.
14. Verse 9: One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."
- a) In Verse 9, we have a cameo appearance of an angel from an earlier chapter. ☺
 - i) Back in Chapter 15, we had the seven "bowl" judgments. There were seven specific angels. Each had some sort of judgment in a bowl that was poured out on earth. One of those angels, who is now done with their bowl work, now talks to John to show him the "stuff" of the rest of Chapter 21.
 - b) This verse tells us a few things about angels:
 - i) They are distinct and recognizable. John recognizes this angel from the bowl judgments and this angel is distinct in appearance from other angels.
 - ii) Angels can have more than one duty or function. This angel not only did the "bowl thing", ☺ but was a tour guide for John for the next part of Revelation.
 - c) Now let's talk about the purpose of Verse 9: The assignment this angel was given is to show John the "bride" of Christ. That is a collective term to describe either all Christians or all saved people, depending upon one's point of view on this issue. Remember that John the writer of Revelation was also part of the "bride of Christ", so John is watching his (and our!) future in this next scene.
15. Verse 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.
- a) Back in Verse 2 of this chapter, John saw a "New Jerusalem" coming down out of heaven.
 - b) Here in Verse 10, John is stating the same fact again. From Verse 11 to the end of the chapter, we are going to get more details on the New Jerusalem.
 - c) Notice John moves locations. We don't know just how John "moved", but he was moved. John's last reported location was in the "wilderness" (Rev. 17:3) watching various things. Here in this verse, John is now moved to a mountain. I suspect the reason for this detail is John is about to watch a big city come out of the sky.

- i) The bible also uses the word "mountain" to describe authority. John could have mentioned this "mountain" reference to show God's authority in this action. (See Rev. 17:9-10 as an example where a mountain refers to a location of authority.)
 - d) Remember that in the previous verse, John was told he was seeing "the bride, the wife of the lamb". If the "lamb" refers to Jesus, as in "The Lamb of God", the bride refers to the church. (Ref. Ephesians 5:32). So, is the "city" a literal city or a word-picture(s) of the Christian church? I'll argue it is both. It is a literal city comes down from heaven. If the entire group of inhabitants consists of Christians, than one is associated with the other.
 - i) We'll have more evidence coming up that this is a literal city.
16. Verse 11: It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.
- a) The first thing that John says about this city is that it "glittered" (my word) in beauty. It was not so blinding that John had to turn away. Yet, it was so dazzling to behold, it was like the light reflecting off a precious jewel.
 - b) There is debate among bible scholars as to what "jasper" means. Most suspect it is a diamond or a diamond like jewel. If a put a jewel in the right light, it shines beautifully.
 - c) Remember that John was looking at a city, but at the time same the city represented "the bride of Christ", which is a collective word for Christians.
 - d) Jesus said that He was the light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5), but we as Christians are to walk in that light (John 12:36, et.al.). My point is that jewels don't give off light, they reflect light. I suspect that is a similar type of word picture being presented here.
17. Verse 12: 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.
- a) John is still describing the city of "New Jerusalem". John noticed the city had a high wall around the city. There were 12 gates leading into the city and an angel at the gates.
 - b) Something strange occurred to me as I was pondering this verse: Why does this city require walls? Satan was sent to hell in the previous chapter. All the condemned souls were sent to hell in the previous chapter. Why exactly does this city require walls?
 - i) A clue, coming up, is that we discover these gates are never closed. What I suspect (it's just my theory) is that this New Jerusalem exists on the new earth. It is a place to enter and exit. People living on this new earth are always invited to draw close to God. Imagine someone saved, but isn't very "intimate" with God. The open gates are symbolic (and maybe real) invitations to draw closer to God!
 - c) The next bit of information is that there are angels at the gates. (Notice there is no reference to "Saint Peter" guarding the gates of heaven!) The purpose of the angels is not stated. Going back to my theory, I wonder if the angels are there to invite people in!
 - d) Now we come to the next sentence: "On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel." The question is, "why are the 12 tribes of Israel" listed on these gates?
 - i) To answer the question, we have to go back to Jesus and the "woman at the well" story in the Gospel of John, Chapter 4". After the woman was convinced Jesus was the Messiah, she asked in effect, "Who is more religiously correct in their views, the Jewish people or the Samaritans?" Jesus responded by saying, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:22, NIV).
 - ii) Jesus is not saying salvation requires one to be Jewish. Jesus is saying that salvation requires the understanding that the God of the New Testament is the same God of the Old Testament. The Jewish nation had the responsibility of bringing the Messiah (Jesus) into the world.
 - iii) That is why, symbolically, in this picture, to enter "The New Jerusalem" one is reminded of the "Jewish-ness" as one entered the gates of this city.

18. Verse 13: There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.
- a) Verse 13 finishes the description of the gates. We'll discover in a matter of verses that this city is square in its shape. John saw three gates on each of the four sides.
 - b) I wondered how John saw the entire city from the vantage point of standing on a mountain. Did the city rotate as it came down to earth? That's how I picture it.
19. Verse 14: The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.
- a) In Verse 12, the gates of the city had the names of the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - b) Here in Verse 14, the walls had foundations. On the foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of "The Lamb" (i.e., Jesus).
 - c) First, notice the city foundation is not being described here. The wall foundations are what is in view. The point is the names of the 12 apostles are on the wall foundations.
 - d) This leads back to, "Why does the city have walls? What are the walls separating?"
 - i) Let's start by defining "apostles". The word simply means "sent ones". It is a person sent on a specific mission.
 - ii) Jesus specifically picked 12 apostles to spread the word about Jesus. They told other people. Those other people told more people, and this has continued until the present age with billions of people following Christ.
 - iii) Let's stop and think about what the apostles were assigned to do: Tell people how to get saved. If the 12 apostles are the "foundation" of this wall, then the wall is symbolic of "barrier to salvation". The New Jerusalem is the new home of Christians. It is the job of Christians to tell others how to be saved. It started with the 12 apostles telling others the Good News of Jesus and that work has continued onto the present day. In a sense, all Christians are part of that "wall" whose foundation was "the" 12 apostles.
 - iv) I can't leave this section without a quick comment about Judas, the apostle who betrayed Christ. Obviously, even though he was picked as an apostle, he did not end up as one of the "heavenly 12". Some argue the 12th became Paul. Others argue it is a man named Matthias based on a story in Acts 1, Verse 23. One day we can dig up the wall foundation, read the names and end this debate. ☺
20. Verse 15: The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The 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. ¹⁷ He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using.
- a) Some scholars argue that this "New Jerusalem" is purely symbolic and it represents the Christian church. They argue it is not a literal city. Verses 15 through 17 rebuke the argument that this is not a literal city. In these verses, an angel took a measuring stick and measured its width, length, and height and wall thickness.
 - i) The point here is that this city is literal. When John took the time and trouble to give the specific dimensions of the city, it is to teach of its literal features.
 - ii) I'm sure the numbers have some sort of symbolic meaning. Notice the repetition of the number "12" in this chapter: The 12 tribes of Israel are inscribed on the 12 gates. The 12 apostles are mentioned. The city is 12,000 "stadia" in length, etc. As best scholars can tell, the number 12 is associated with "heavenly division". God likes to divide things into 12 "divisions" like the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. Some suggest "12" is God's number for perfection.
 - b) Notice the city was as high as it was wide. Does that mean it was full of skyscraper towers? Do we live in condos? ☺ I don't know those answers. Maybe it was just the walls that were that high.

- c) The surface area of this city is huge. The term "stadia" ties to a Roman mile, which is different from the mile that we know. Roughly, it is 1,500 miles wide, long and high. Some commentators point out the surface area (including heights) is equal to the moons surface area, only this is a cube. There is plenty of room for all who are saved!
21. Verse 18: The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.
- a) Remember that the walls are symbolic of the "boundaries" to enter the city and the foundation has the name of the 12 apostles.
- b) With that said, notice the walls are made of "jasper". This is some sort of precious stone. Remember that jewelry does not give off light, but reflects light. The idea is that Christians reflect the light of Jesus in our lives.
- c) The city itself was "pure gold, pure as glass". The yellow color we associate with gold is actually impurities. The idea is the city itself is "pure" as in perfect, i.e., "no sin". This is the place where God dwells and resurrected, "perfected" Christians dwell.
22. Verse 19: The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.
- a) Notice in Verse 19 that this is talking about the foundation of the walls and not the foundation of the city. There are 12 different jewels being used to describe the wall foundations. Again, it is the idea that we as Christians are beautiful "like jewelry" when we reflect the light.
- b) So why 12 different types of jewels? The idea is that each reflects light, but each is different. The 12 apostles came from various backgrounds. They probably each had distinct personalities, but each had the job of "reflecting" Jesus light.
- c) Let's put it another way: Not all Christians are called to preach Jesus to millions of people. Some are called to minister only to one's family or just those around us. God uses our distinct personalities, backgrounds, and God-given-gifts for His glory. Just because one's gift as a Christian is not as "great" as another does not mean one's rewards in heaven are less. God sees each of us as distinct and precious jewels reflecting the light of Jesus in our own distinct way.
- d) With all of that said, the commentators are full of speculation of the actual meaning of each jewel. From what I can gather, it is almost impossible to perfectly translate the meaning of each jewel into modern vocabulary. I believe the important idea is that each jewel is distinct, each jewel reflects God's light and each jewel is beautiful as it is reflecting the light of God. It is a wonderful picture of the role of Christians.
23. Verse 21: The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.
- a) Remember that this city has 12 gates to enter. Each gate was a pearl. First, contemplate that those are mighty big pearls!
- b) Something interesting to consider is that pearls are not "Jewish". The oyster is a forbidden food in the kosher diet in Judaism. (See Leviticus 11:9-10). I suspect the pearl was picked is because it is a reminder that Gentiles (non-Jews) are allowed to enter this New Jerusalem. Remember the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are listed on these twelve gates as stated in Verse 12. I see this as a symbolism of Gentile people approaching and being accepted by "The God of Israel".
- c) The next sentence describes the "great street" of this city. Most cities have a "Main Street" which is most traveled street within the city. This main street here is pure gold. Again, I see the symbolism of God's purity as one "walks" in this city.
- d) Let's stand back for a second and take in the last bunch of verses:
- i) First of all, one must accept the idea is that it is a literal city. It had literal dimensions and physical features.

- ii) The word pictures of this city teach us now about how one is to enter this city. In many ways, this city has pictures of the gospel message and who can enter.
 - iii) It also has word pictures of our "future sinless life" by using "pure gold" to show our perfected, perfectly-forgiven life as believers in Christ.
 - iv) Finally, there are lots of verses comparing Christians to jewels. The idea is that we are beautiful and still "individual" in our reflection of God's light upon us.
 - v) This gets back to "understanding happily ever after". It is about our eternal relationship with God and other Christians. It is about understanding that we each will have our individuality, but at the same time function as a single unit. It also teaches of our new life without the influence of sin.
24. Verse 22: I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
- a) In the "old" city of Jerusalem, the central point would be the Temple. Even during the thousand year millennium, there is a central temple as described in Ezekiel 40-44. Yet, the one thing John notices in the New Jerusalem is the lack of any central temple.
 - b) The text says, "The Lord God Almighty (God the Father) and the Lamb (God the Son) are its temple". The point is there is no temple as the whole city is, in effect the temple.
 - i) It would be like coming to a new town and asking, "Where is the church?" A local resident would say, "You're standing on it. The whole city is one big church!"
 - ii) This gets back to "understanding happily ever after". The point of eternity is for God to develop close personal, intimate relationships with saved people. We don't have to get any closer than where we are standing. The whole city is the place of close communion with God. One has to enter the New Jerusalem as a saved person, but there is nowhere closer one has to get. It is all "one big church" of a close intimate relationship between God and His people.
25. Verse 23: 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. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.
- a) Remember back in Verse 1, God created a new heavens and new earth. One wonders what will become of the sun, moon and stars. Maybe they exist, and maybe they won't. The point here is sunlight and moonlight are not necessary. The light comes from God. Somehow, someday, the light source of this city is God the Father and Jesus Christ.
 - b) Do I believe this is literal? Yes. I'll also argue the application is to comprehend that in heaven, we will not be dependant upon anything but God. We won't need any other source of light but God Himself!
 - c) Verse 24 talks about "who" enters this city:
 - i) First, it says "the nations". This is another way of saying Gentiles. It does not mean Jewish believers are excluded. It is designed to show the Jewish reader that Gentiles can be saved by believing in Jesus.
 - ii) Next, it mentions the "kings of the earth". Remember at this point all saved people are here and all condemned souls are in hell. I suspect the "kings" refer to Christians. Jesus said we will rule and reign with Him. I suspect that we Christians are the kings in focus at this point.
26. Verse 25: On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.
- a) In downtown Los Angeles, there is a famous restaurant that has been around for about eighty years. It is open every day of the year and open all night and all day. I remember telling about this place to my boss at the time. He thought about it and said, "They must save money on locks!" ☺ The point is, the New Jerusalem, like that restaurant will be open for business around the clock and never, ever closed.
 - b) The text implies that gates would only be shut at nighttime, but since there is never a "nighttime" in heaven, the gates are never shut.

- i) One wonders if there are people on "the new earth" and come and go into the New Jerusalem. Are there saved people who then have the option of drawing closer to God by entering this New Jerusalem? I don't know.
27. Verse 26: The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ 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.
- a) The implication of the last two verses is that only the "pure" can enter heaven. The idea of pure is that one has to be perfect, or "perfectly forgiven" of all their sins. One can see the Gospel message subtly given though the last half of this chapter. The point of these last two verses is that the only people allowed in the New Jerusalem are "saved" people. The text says, "Those written in the Lamb's book of life".
28. In Chapter 22, the next lesson, the description of "happily ever after" will continue. This is the final chapter of the bible. We'll save that for the last lesson.
- a) What I want you to get out of Chapter 21 is the idea of "happily ever after" is about relationships. It is about our eternal relationship with God the Father and God the Son. (The Holy Spirit is there. He works in the background as part of His job is to draw us closer to God.) The other aspect is our relationship with other believers. We are all distinct, and we each have a "different types of jewelry light brilliance", but we are all there communing together.
 - b) The lesson of this lesson is to start "now", with what we will be doing for eternity. If our eternity is all about developing healthy relationships, that should start now. It is about developing that relationship "now" with God and with other Christians. All "stuff" as we know it will be gone, but our relationships will continue into the next life.
29. Father, Help us to draw closer to You and our relationships with other Christians. Help us to remember that relationships are all we take into the next world. Help us to not squander the opportunities we have to have close intimate relationships with those around us. Help us also to keep material things in perspective of what is important. Guide us as live to glorify You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.