

Measuring Glory  
Revelation 21:15-21  
2/7/2016

How do you measure glory? The answer is that you measure glory with an angel's measuring rod! Today, we will look at both the dimensions of glory, and the colors of glory.

Our passage is a commentary on verse 2. In verse 2, John sees the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. In our verses today, John sees and describes the city. We have seen its gates already, as well as the foundations. What we saw last time was that the city shows us that the people of God are one people. The twelve gates stand for the twelve tribes, and the twelve foundations stand for the twelve apostles.

The dimensions of glory are gigantic. The angel measures the city of Zion with a rod made out of gold, and the city is far bigger than any city in existence today. In fact, it is about as big as the entire known Greek world was at the time when John wrote. The NKJV translates in verse 16 that the city was 12,000 furlongs. Literally, the Greek word is "stadia." A stadium was about 700 feet long. So, 12,000 stadia is a little under 1600 miles long. So this city being measured is close to the same length as our country is from North to South.

Do not miss the fact also that the city takes the shape of a cube. The most obvious predecessor for the cube is the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle and temple, which were both cube-shaped in their dimensions. The cube was seen as a perfect shape in those days. John makes a point, however, of saying that he saw no temple in the new city (verse 22). The reason for that is that the whole city is the temple. Remember that the point of the temple was that it was a place where God and man could meet without man being consumed by the holy fire that is our Lord God. So John's vision of the New Jerusalem is supposed to remind us of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple. The New Jerusalem is a sort of expansion on the Most Holy Place.

Ezekiel's temple, which is very similar in design to John's city, is still seen as two dimensional in Ezekiel 40-48. Ezekiel's temple has

length and width, but Ezekiel does not mention any kind of height that equals John's height. There is then a sort of expansion of Ezekiel's temple to include the dimension of height. 1600 miles high is about as far away from the earth as many man-made satellites that orbit our earth, surely the ultimate highrise! It is surely difficult to imagine a city being so incredibly enormous. It is, therefore, quite possible that John means these numbers to be symbolic. As we have seen throughout Revelation, numbers do have a symbolic meaning. The number 12 features very prominently indeed. The stadia are 12 times 1,000 in length, width, and height. The city wall is 144 cubits wide, which is 12 times 12. And, if you were to measure all the lines of the city, you would get 144,000 stadia, which is also a number that we've seen before! It is the perfect place for the 144,000, is it not? (Just as a reminder, the 144,000 is the church militant, the church here on earth, while the countless multitude is the church triumphant. The church militant becomes the church triumphant eventually, and so enters in to the joy of her master.) In a context where John explicitly tells us that the twelve gates symbolize the twelve tribes, and the twelve foundations symbolize the twelve apostles, it seems fairly straightforward to suggest that the measurements of the wall and the city itself are also meant to emphasize the people of God, Old Testament and New Testament together as one people of God.

One of the most staggering things about the city is that John describes the whole city as being made out of pure gold. As we saw in the children's sermon, 5050 tons of gold, 173 billion dollars worth, would not fill a very large space. So for John to say that was looking at 4 billion cubic feet of gold is saying something stupendous!

John then says that the gold was like clear glass. We don't know exactly what John is looking at. Real gold is not transparent, of course. Maybe John means that the gold was shiny like glass. We can certainly say that the gold of the city was as clean as clear glass. John is hinting here that it won't matter how many people are walking all over that city, they won't be getting the streets dirty! Of course, in any modern city, the streets are dirty, and oftentimes absolutely filthy. No such problems exist for the new Jerusalem. You know, when we lived in North Dakota, it always amazed Sarah and I how obsessed with cleanliness the Dutch

Reformed farmers were up there. They mopped their garage floors, and cleaned the walls of the garage once every month or so. Well, all I can say is that this city will be clean enough even for them!

That leads us to the second major point: the color of the new Jerusalem. We've looked at the measurements of the city, and concluded that the measurements of the city are pure glory. But that is not the only significant thing about John's description. The foundations of the wall, which, as we recall, are associated with the apostles, are covered with every kind of precious jewel. What in the world is John saying with this? To answer that question, we have to go back to the description of the high priest's robes and vestment. There was a breastplate that the high priest wore on his torso when he went into the Most Holy Place. That breastplate had twelve gemstones set in it that represented the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, the high priest was carrying the people of God with him into the Most Holy Place. What is even more important is that, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, 8 of those stones are exactly the same as John's gemstones here in Revelation 21, and the remaining four are very close synonyms. It is not important to ask what the significance of each of these gems are. That is not John's point. The point was that these foundations were colorful. They represent all the colors of the rainbow. And, since the foundations are connected with the apostles, it is not difficult to arrive at John's point: in the New Testament era, God's people consist of people from every tribe, nation, tongue, and language, not just Israel. In the Old Testament time, you had to be an Israelite to be part of the people of God. Now it doesn't matter which people group we belong to. Every single ethnic group is included in the church. As the children's song goes: "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight."

If we reach back even further into salvation history, we find that some of these precious stones are mentioned in the Garden of Eden. However, there it is only a few. Here there are a dozen, and entire foundations are made of single precious gems. John also means to tell us, then, that the New Jerusalem is better than Eden. People have been trying to "get back to Eden" for centuries. What they fail to realize is that something is coming which is better. What is coming will never

have any satanic intruders. There will be no possibility whatsoever for anything going wrong. The streets of glass-like gold will never be sullied by dirty feet.

Lastly we come to the famed pearly gates. I think, when a lot of people think about them, they are reminded of various jokes that start out with the line such as: “a lawyer went to the pearly gates.” However, the Bible does say that they are made out of pearl. However, notice what it says precisely. Each gate is made of a single pearl. Now, remember how high and wide these gates are in John's measurement? The gates are about 1600 miles high, and about 216 feet thick. The question I have is this: how many oysters have you seen recently that could produce pearls big enough to have a gate made out of a single pearl? An oyster that could produce such a pearl would have difficulty escaping detection, let's just put it that way. “I know I've lost my pack of 1600 mile-long oysters. Have you seen them recently? Maybe they're hiding here in the shrubbery somewhere.” Seriously, though, John is again using the pearl as a symbol. Pearls were the most expensive gemstone of the time, even more expensive than diamonds. What kind of king has this astounding amount of wealth to throw around that He could make entire gates out of single pearls, and have the streets made of pure gold? Only someone who makes King Solomon look like a beggar on the street. Only the God of the universe has such wealth at His disposal.

What kind of people live in such a city? That is the very practical question that we can now ask ourselves. Obviously, holy people are those who live in such a city. We have measured glory in the New Jerusalem. Our proper reaction should be awe and wonder. This is not a city the likes of which any of us have seen before. It is truly glorious. And yet this glory is but a pale reflection of the glory of God Himself. Yes, the glory of God rests on the city, but it is not the same thing. God shares His glory in the new heavens and the new earth. John is trying to make us gasp when we realize that all this stupendous wealth, humongous dimensions to the city, and the dazzling colors, are all a prelude to seeing God as He is. The new Jerusalem, as amazing and glory-filled as it is, is still only the place where God will dwell. John knows that he cannot get us to understand what meeting God will look

like, because John is seriously hampered by the irritating limitations of human language. Even as we catch a bare glimpse of the glory, John says, "Further up and further in," as Jewel the unicorn would say in C.S. Lewis's book *The Last Battle*.

I always marvel at people who complain about Christians who are so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good. How can one be too heavenly-minded? And why is it therefore implied that being heavenly-minded is somehow impractical? Folks, we have a whopping heavy dose, in our culture, of the exact opposite problem. People are so earthly-minded, that they are of no heavenly good. But let me ask the question this way: how can you look at this picture of heaven and not want to go there and look at it? People from all over the world go to see the crown jewels of Great Britain. They are magnificent. And they will look cheap and tawdry when compared to the New Jerusalem.

The real question is this: how does this longing which we should have for the New Jerusalem change how we live? It should change us in several ways. We should practicing to be citizens of that New Jerusalem now. And there are several components to such practice. The first is global-mindedness. As we have seen, the stunning colors matched up on the foundation of the apostles speaks of a church that is made up of people from all over the world. Our thoughts, deeds, and prayers ought to match such an all-encompassing vision. Do we pray for the church ultimately to look like this? Or do we want the church only to include people who are already like us? Let me put it this way: only if we are color-blind in this life will we fully appreciate the blaze of color in the next life.

Secondly, we ought to be cleaning our feet! Our feet go everywhere and easily get dirty. So also, where we go with our minds and thoughts are often places that get us dirty. We need constant cleansing. The blood of Christ will do that for us. But then we need to repent, don't we? If something makes us dirty, we need to turn away from it. Therefore, we need to pray and read God's Word, so that God will give us the grace to resist the temptation and conquer it. If we have done so, we will have taken the measure of glory, and pursued it.

How do we measure glory? An angel measures with a rod of gold. We measure it with our imagination, which can transform how we

live today, so that we will belong to Jesus Christ with our whole heart,  
soul, strength, and mind.