

Church = a City

14.05.2006

Fay looked in disgust at the person holding up the queue at the supermarket. She waited as the lady argued that the money was not right. The lady could not add up well, so Fay quipped to the man behind her: 'She's as thick as a brick!' He looked at the lady and said 'She's not skinny, but I wouldn't say she was that overweight' The lady rolled her eyes to the heavens in despair.

Sometimes we can misunderstand similes and metaphors.

The Bible uses similes and metaphors to describe the joys and pleasures of heaven. We cannot yet see the imperishable, undefiled and unfading treasure waiting for us. Heaven's been described in many ways, usually picking up the hopes of the Old Testament people, and seeing them consummated in a never ending delight with God.

One of those hopes is the New Jerusalem, which we heard in Revelation 21. But there is a surprising twist in the passage which describes heaven this way. For often when people think about a city, they think about the buildings, the shows, the dinginess and windiness, as well as the beauty and architecture.

Sydney can be an empty city very early in the morning, and a very busy city in the rush and cram of lunch. The word 'City' more often than not means the place where many people live or work.

Yet this metaphor of heaven in the Bible has a delightful twist which is often overlooked. Revelation 21 describes the city as cubic, jewelled, and with constantly open gates. There is no temple, no lights and see through walls.

Yet the new city of Jerusalem is not simply the buildings, jewels, streets, river and trees of life. For verse 2 says: *"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."* and in verses 9-10, *"I 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." 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."*

The Holy City is the bride, the wife of the Lamb. But Jesus is not the bridegroom of buildings. He is the bridegroom of his people. The church is the bride. So

the description of the New Jerusalem is also a description of the church as we will be when he's prepared us for marriage to him, ie when he returns and we live eternally in our spiritual bodies with Him.

The resurrected church is the new city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. It is quite a fitting end to the Bible, to have this marvellous picture of what life will be like.

There are many themes and images from the Old Testament which are picked up and expanded on in Revelation 21's description of the consummated church, the city of God. Today I want to look at the comparison between Genesis 1-3, and the image of the holy city, to see the unity of the Bible, and the glory that Jesus has brought us, to fix the problems of mankind, and to renew life to even better than it was in the Garden of Eden.

The Bible began with God creating the heavens and the earth. The Bible ends with God bringing in a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the 1st earth had passed away. When God created the first earth, it was a watery formless ball, which He then modified. At the end, we are told that there will be no longer any sea.

Creation is perfectly completed. No more formless chaotic ocean.

When he created mankind, we were naked, without shame and living in the garden. They were able to delight in the beauty of the garden, and walk with the Lord in the cool of the afternoon. At the end of the Bible, God's people are *"prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."* Yet the description of the city is just as pure and as unstained as Adam and Eve. No shame, so the walls are totally see-through. No fears, so the gates are always open. No tears, no sadness, no death, no mourning, no pain. and God's presence is always with them. Access to God is immediate, open, free and beautiful. No more hiding in shame. No more sacred-secular divisions, no more temple.

And the river which flowed, watering the Garden of Eden, is there as the river of life in the holy city, quenching the thirst of all in the holy city. and alongside the river flowing down the main streets in the city are not just one tree of life, as in Eden, but rows of them, each flowering at different months of

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the year. The leaves are for the healing of the nations.

No longer is there a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for that has been dealt with. Evil is banished, and never again will temptation afflict God's people. That belongs to those who've rejected Jesus and have suffered the second death, the torment of the fiery sulphur etc.

And the serpent is not there in the Holy City, for Satan was dealt his final blow in Revelation 19-20.

And finally, the river in the Garden of Eden flowed out and split into four main rivers. The 1st of these was the Pishon, which winds through a land where there is gold, and pearls and onyx. The holy city is full of gold, has large pearl gates, and many jewels create the foundations of its wall.

The imagery is alive and brimming full of allusions.

But even if we spent time scouring them all, the picture of us being the holy city, pure, undefiled, untainted, undiminishing, and preserved by God is a marvellous hope which Jesus gives us, because of His death and resurrection.

That's we're I'm headed. I pray that you are too. and as we head there to be part of the holy city of God, let's reflect that glory now. Verse 27 says "*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.*"

Make sure your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, by trusting in Jesus. Your name will not be there simply because you have been good, or simply because you want to go there.

Your name can only be found there if you trust Him. He died for you, to forgive you and wipe your slate clean. Hold onto that promise. Then claim his promise to save you. and live for him in thanks. For then you too will rejoice in the holy city, as God's faithful church.