

November 13

Lesson 11

NEW

## JERUSALEM

DEVOTIONAL READING:: Genesis 1:28-2:3

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21:9-27

### REVELATION 21:9-14, 22-27

<sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. <sup>14</sup> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>22</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> 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.



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### KEY VERSES

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 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.—Revelation 21:22, 23*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List features of the Jerusalem that descends “out of heaven from God.”
2. Describe the function of “the Lamb’s book of life” and locate other references to it.
3. Describe one way that the lesson text should change one’s attitude or behavior, and make a plan to implement that change.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Firm Foundations
- B. Lesson Background
- I. Holy City from the Outside ([Revelation 21:9-14](#))
  - A. Angel and Bride ([v. 9](#))
  - B. Spirit and Glory ([vv. 10, 11](#))
  - C. Wall and Gates ([vv. 12-14](#))
- II. Holy City from the Inside ([Revelation 21:22-27](#))
  - A. No Need for a Temple ([v. 22](#))
  - B. No Need for Sun or Moon ([vv. 23, 24](#))
    - Life Without Light*
  - C. No Need for Closed Gates ([vv. 25-27](#))
    - Parade of Nations*

### Conclusion

- A. Eternal Temple
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Firm Foundations

Houses are built on many types of foundations. A very old house we owned in Tennessee was built on a brick foundation. This did not prove to be durable, for part of it collapsed, causing the front of the house to sag. Our house in Seattle was built on a hill that was actually debris from an ancient glacier. This was prone to washing away, and several houses on our cul-de-sac had ongoing foundation issues. Our home in Nebraska is apparently built on dirt fill that was used to level the lots in the subdivision. This makes these homes susceptible to settling, something that has cracked and distorted our driveway but not damaged the house itself (so far).

Jesus used the idea of a firm foundation in his great parable of houses built on rock and sand ([Matthew 7:24-27](#)). The analogy explained why lives must be founded on obedience to Jesus. The strength of a foundation and the ground on which it is built are huge factors in a house's longevity. Crumbling brick, eroding dirt, or settling fill are not the best choices for a house intended to last.

Today's lesson describes the new Jerusalem and some features of its construction. It has massive walls, and it is built on the rock of a mountain. We expect nothing less for a city intended to last forever.

### B. Lesson Background

Cities of the ancient world were established with three primary concerns: access to water, access to trade routes, and defensibility. Regarding the last, cities were usually built on high ground. Combined with the added height of the city's walls, this gave a strong tactical advantage to the defenders of the city. Attackers had to advance uphill, making them easier targets for city defenders to shoot arrows and hurl stone from atop the ramparts (compare [2 Chronicles 26:15](#)).

A strong wall and gate system not only permitted an able defense, they deterred many would-be attackers from even considering an attempt to conquer a city. Walls defined the city's fortified footprint, and the walls' gates controlled access. The walls could be massive. Excavations reveal that the rampart walls of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon were some 300 feet high and as much as 80 feet thick at the base. Supposedly there was enough width at the top to allow chariot races up there! Such walls made the city virtually impregnable to direct attack and contributed to the city's grandeur and prestige.

All this helps us understand why John's vision reveals the new Jerusalem to be a city with tremendous walls and gates. For John and his first-century readers, the greatest city imaginable would have an imposing outward appearance. The new Jerusalem of his vision was not a figment of his imagination. Even so, we should not take every detail of its description as a physical characteristic, since the Bible does contain figurative or symbolic language (examples: [Galatians 4:24-26](#); [Hebrews 9:9](#)).

Using words describing ultimates (entirely pure gold; [Revelation 21:18](#)) and perfection (cube shaped; [21:16](#)), John's vision is of the unimaginable dwelling place of God to be available to humanity. With its tree of life ([22:2](#)), the city is something of an "Eden restored," but not as a pristine garden. It is a city, a place with plenty of room for the great multitudes of the saved ([7:9](#)).

## I. Holy City from the Outside

(REVELATION 21:9-14)

[Revelation 19:9](#) records the blessing on those “invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.” In that context, the bride of Christ is ready to be revealed, wearing “fine linen, bright and clean” ([19:8](#)). But we do not see her then. Instead, the bridegroom (Christ the Lamb) is delayed, for he is called to fight a great heavenly battle ([19:11-19](#)).

The battle results in the capture of the beast and the defeat of his allies, followed by their judgment. The sentence of the beast and his companion, the false prophet, is to be thrown into the lake of fire ([Revelation 19:20](#)). They are later to be joined there by the devil ([20:10](#)) and by others who are not among the saved ([20:15](#); [21:8](#)). With the delay caused by the need for the Lamb to lead a victorious heavenly army now over, the bride is revealed.

### A. Angel and Bride (v. 9)

**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.”**

This book features three cycles of sevens: breaking of seals ([Revelation 6:1-8:5](#)), blowing of trumpets ([8:6-11:19](#)), and pouring out of *bowls* ([15:1-16:21](#)). The breaking, blowing, and pouring trigger events that John then sees in his visions. The third of the three series concerns *plagues* that symbolize the wrath of God ([15:1](#); [16:1](#)).

When these plagues are poured out, this judgmental wrath of God is finished ([Revelation 15:1](#); [16:17](#)). The final plague is a catastrophic earthquake accompanied by massive hailstones; the result is the destruction of Babylon, the city in rebellion against God ([16:19](#)). Babylon is very likely symbolic of the city of Rome (compare [1 Peter 5:13](#)), the greatest city the world has seen to John’s time. It is the seat of a government that persecutes God’s people. It is fitting, then, for one of the angels who assists in that city’s demise to be John’s guide to reveal the new Jerusalem, *the bride*.

#### *What Do You Think?*

If an angel said to your community “I will show you the bride” while pointing to your congregation, what would you want people to see?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- With regard to purity
- With regard to devotion to the bridegroom
- Other

### B. Spirit and Glory (vv. 10, 11)

**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.**

For John to be *in the Spirit* indicates the beginning of a new visionary event (see also [Revelation 1:10](#); [4:2](#); [17:3](#); compare [2 Corinthians 12:1-4](#)). To be *carried ... away* gives him the experience of moving to a different location so he can see what is next to be revealed. This is something of a repeat of John’s encounter with the new Jerusalem as related in [Revelation 21:2](#), last week’s lesson. The emphasis there is on hearing things that are said. Now the emphasis is visual.

The vision begins with John’s locating the scene on *a mountain great and high*. This gives the impression of a lofty peak that tops the immense bulk of a mountain that covers many square miles of land (compare [Ezekiel 40:2](#); [Matthew 4:8](#)). This towering mountain is met by *the Holy City, Jerusalem* as the latter descends. Heaven and earth are meeting, a central feature of the new Heaven and the new earth (compare [Revelation 21:1, 2](#), last week’s lesson).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How can we make our “mountaintop experiences” have lasting spiritual impact?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- In the context of the natural world (real mountains)
- In the context of church endeavors
- In the context of family activities
- Considering [Matthew 17:1-13](#); [Hebrews 12:22-24](#); [2 Peter 1:18](#)

**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.

It's hard to imagine the detailed description of the new city beginning on a higher note! Above all, the city shines *with the glory of God*, a divine radiance caused by the Lord's presence (compare [Isaiah 60:1, 2, 19](#)).

John tries to describe this for the readers, who have never experienced God's glory (compare [Isaiah 66:18](#); [John 17:24](#)). John can only say that it is like seeing the brilliance of one of the most beautiful of gems, a *very precious jewel*. He chooses *jasper* (a variety of chalcedony) to embody this description. This stone is well known and beloved in the ancient world (compare [Exodus 28:20](#); [39:13](#); [Ezekiel 28:13](#); [Revelation 4:3](#); [21:18, 19](#)). But it is unlike any jasper that John's readers have ever seen, for it is *clear as crystal*, not veined or speckled. This implies shining luminosity, helping to explain the radiance and light of the city.

## C. Wall and Gates (vv. 12-14)

**<sup>12, 13.</sup> 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. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.**

Combined with [Revelation 21:16](#) (not in today's text), these two verses tell us that John is seeing a cube-shaped city. Three similar gates on each of the four walls indicates symmetry. The gates may be spaced evenly along the length of the walls.

An alternative arrangement is for the gates to be grouped together, perhaps as a three-fold gate at the center of each wall. Such a triple gate has been found on the southern wall of the temple mount in Jerusalem, still visible today. These gates represent a later rebuilding, but it is likely that such a triple gate was used to enter the city during the time of Jesus. If so, John's vision may be for him a certain déjà vu experience, as in "I've seen this pattern before!"

As with many things in John's description, the gates have symbolic meaning. *The twelve tribes of Israel* (another name for the patriarch Jacob, see [Genesis 49:1-28](#)) are scattered in John's day (compare [James 1:1](#)). That has been the case for hundreds of years. But now he sees the perfect city with the gathered and reunited tribes (compare [Exodus 28:17-21](#); [39:10-14](#); [Revelation 7:4-8](#)). The dispersion is ended, and everyone is invited to come home. Each tribe will even find a special gate with its name on it. There is no service entrance or back gate here. All who are admitted are of equal dignity.

**<sup>14.</sup> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

Ancient city walls have huge stones at their base. These are *foundations*, chiseled to precise shapes to anchor the wall for stability. Here, such stones form symbolic counterparts to the gates of [verse 12](#) above, for they bear *the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. The city is thus made up of the Old Testament people of God (signified by the 12 tribes) and the New Testament people of God (signified by the 12 apostles).

## II. Holy City from the Inside

([REVELATION 21:22-27](#))

John next watches an angel measure the city's walls to be 12,000 stadia in length ([Revelation 21:15, 16](#), not in today's text). Just short of 1,400 miles, that is approximately the straight-line distance from New York City to Dallas, Texas! The dimensions of the new Jerusalem point to its divine origin. The further description of the city's gates as being each carved from a gigantic pearl ([21:21](#)) is the reason we commonly refer to the gates of Heaven as "the pearly gates."

### A. No Need for a Temple (v. 22)

**<sup>22.</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.**

Our lesson text now takes us to what John sees within the city. His first observation is striking if we have been reading the previous chapters of the book: there is no *temple in the city*. In earlier visions, John saw the temple of Heaven several times (example: [Revelation 15:5](#)), and even was told to measure it ([11:1](#)). But that was in "old" Heaven. In the "new" Heaven, there is no need for a place for people to go to worship God. The permanent and immediate presence of *the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb* make this unnecessary. In this way, they themselves *are its temple*.

The most important feature of the earthly Jerusalem's temple was (past tense, since it lies in ruins as John writes) its inner sanctuary, the holy of holies. But there are no "levels" of holiness here, for the holiness of God makes the entire city a temple or tabernacle ([Revelation 21:3](#)).

## HOW TO SAY IT

Babylon *Bab-uh-lun*.

chalcedony *kal-suh-din-ee* or *kal-sah-doe-nee*.

Corinthians *Ko-rin-thee-unz* (*th* as in *thin*).

Ezekiel *Ee-zeek-ee-ul* or *Ee-zeek-yul*.

Isaiah Eye-zay-uh.

Jerusalem Juh-roo-suh-lem.

Nebuchadnezzar Neb-yuh-kud-*nez*-er.

Zechariah Zek-uh-rye-uh.

*What Do You Think?*

How can we relate the future fact of God as the temple with the current reality that we as the church are God's temple ([2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1](#); [Ephesians 2:21, 22](#); etc.)?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

As a witness for fellow believers to see

As a witness for unbelievers to see

## B. No Need for Sun or Moon (vv. 23, 24)

**<sup>23</sup> 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.**

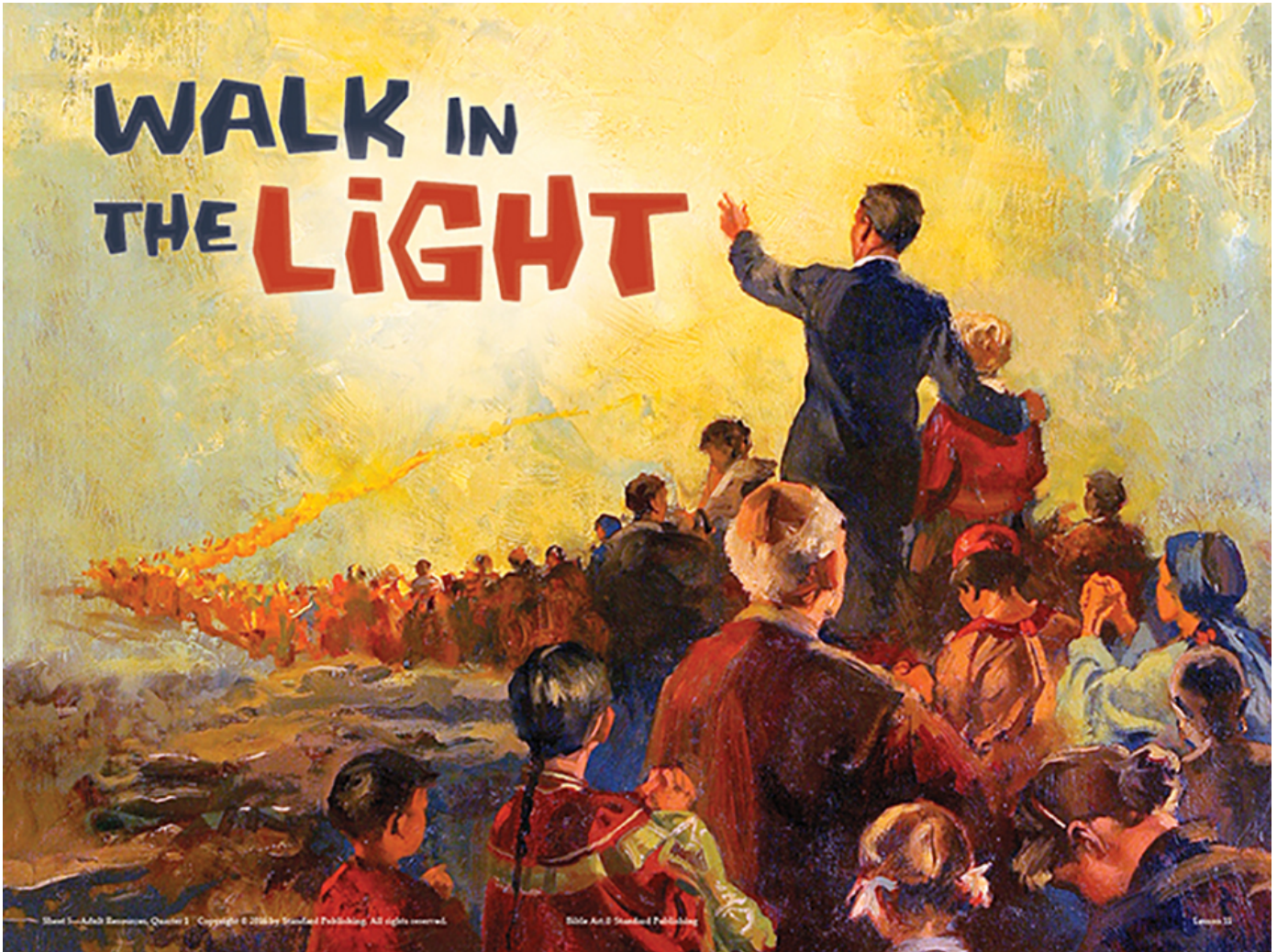
John's old-creation cosmology must change! He is familiar, of course, with the account of God's creation of *the sun* to be the dominant light source and *the moon* to serve a similar but lesser role ([Genesis 1:16-18](#)). This arrangement is no more.

Even so, the absence of sun and moon do not result in a darkened city. The reasons seem to be two in number at first glance. But looking at the text closely leads us to conclude that the two reasons are really one and the same. *The glory of God* is the idea of his presence being experienced as brilliant illumination (compare: [Isaiah 60:1-3, 19, 20](#); [Luke 2:9](#)). The same thing in different words is the fact that *the Lamb is its lamp*. The word translated *lamp* is the word used for the flame of an oil lamp (compare [Mark 4:21](#); [John 5:35](#); [Revelation 18:23](#)). The Lamb is pictured as such an overpowering flame that the entire city is illuminated.

### *LIFE WITHOUT LIGHT*

My husband and I spent our first year of marriage living in Ukraine. Because of energy shortages, the local government rationed electricity by turning it off every evening. The lights would go out just about the time the sun had set completely, so we kept on hand candles, a lighter, etc.

At first, complete darkness was an adventure. But before long we felt imprisoned inside our apartment, since leaving the house meant navigating a completely darkened city. I was in a stairwell without a flashlight on one occasion, and I sensed someone on the landing above me. So I stuck close to the right side and listened to his (or her) breathing and footsteps as we passed in pitch black.



**Visual for Lesson 11.** Start a discussion by pointing to this imperative as you ask, “How do we know when we’re doing this and when we are not?”

Living where electricity was a precious commodity taught me the importance of light by its absence. But we will not have to depend on electricity or sun or moon in the new Jerusalem. Jesus himself will be the eternal light! But isn’t he that right now, even when (or especially when) earthly darkness surrounds us? See [John 8:12](#).—L. M. W.

**24. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.**

John now describes fulfillment of [Isaiah 60:3-5](#), which foresees a time when more than just the people of Israel will stream to the city of God. Peoples from *the nations* are coming, and their rulers contribute to the city’s majesty by bringing and yielding their own *splendor*. We get the sense here that this action is irresistible. *The kings of the earth* are drawn to the city even though they realize that they themselves will neither rule nor receive adoration. Their status pales in comparison with the glory of God and the Lamb.

We are reminded of [Revelation 4:10, 11](#), where the elders “lay their crowns before the throne.” The kings are doing something similar, for their authority counts for nothing in this city. They will be grouped with all the rest of the city’s servants—no higher, no lower ([22:3](#)).

**C. No Need for Closed Gates (vv. 25-27)**

**25. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.**

The *gates* of ancient cities are normally open during daylight hours and closed when darkness falls. Since there is to be *no night* in the new city, the old practice of gate closure will not apply ([Isaiah 60:11](#); [Zechariah 14:7](#); [Revelation 22:5](#)). We should remember, though, that each gate is guarded by an angel ([Revelation 21:12](#); compare [Genesis 3:24](#)), so this is not a case of uncontrolled access. Later we will be told about those who “may go through the gates into the city” ([Revelation 22:14](#)) in contrast with those who are left “outside” ([22:15](#)).

Some students claim that the image of gates that are eternally open means that, in the end, all people will enter—all will somehow come to repentance and be saved. But this is not the image we are given in the last chapters of this book, where some are in the city and others are outside and in the lake of fire ([Revelation 21:8](#), [lesson 10](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

In what ways can we make sure the doors of our church are not shut in a welcoming sense?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- To those seeking God
- To those seeking acceptance
- To those needing help
- Considering [Romans 16:17-19](#); [1 Corinthians 5](#)

**26. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.**

What the NIV renders in the passive voice (*will be brought*) is actually active voice in the Greek: “they will bring.” This refers to the kings of [Revelation 21:24](#), above. The mental image is that of a public parade of royalty who are attired in their best garb that is reserved for official occasions.

They do not come to be admired, however, but to offer their best to the ruler of the new city and acknowledge him as God and king (compare [Psalm 72:10, 11](#)). We are given the impression that this is the fullest expression of worship they can offer. Perhaps we see the visit of the foreign wise men to worship the newborn King Jesus as prefiguring this ([Matthew 2:11](#)). John does not make this connection, however.

**PARADE OF NATIONS**

The Games of the XXXI Olympiad will be history by the time of this lesson. If it is like previous games, it will have featured a Parade of Nations in the opening ceremony, when smiling athletes from every corner of the globe marched into the arena. The ceremony proclaims camaraderie as athletes from countries hostile to one another converge peacefully. The feeling of goodwill displayed tends to be infectious.

What a wonderful opening ceremony it will be when the glory and honor of the nations parades into the new Jerusalem! As the rulers of the earth enter, we can imagine that they are accompanied by those who have been redeemed from “every tribe and language and people and nation” ([Revelation 5:9](#)). Believers from every place on earth will gather, their cultural finery giving glory to the creativity of God.

Unlike the Olympics, though, the Parade of Nations during Heaven’s opening ceremony will not be a prelude to competition and disappointment. There will be no disgruntled athletes and commentators to tweet about substandard lodging or mistakes in judging as in every Olympics. The beauty of the nations will glorify God, for he has created that beauty.—L. M. W.

**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.**

Having celebrated the glory of those entering the city, John now gives a general summary of the characteristics of those to be denied entrance. Fuller descriptions may be found in [1 Corinthians 6:9, 10](#); [Revelation 21:8](#) ([lesson 10](#)); and [22:15](#) ([lesson 13](#)). The unrepentant, morally filthy noncitizens are identical with those not listed in *the Lamb’s book of life* and therefore forbidden from entering the city. This vitally important book is mentioned also in [Exodus 32:32, 33](#); [Psalm 69:28](#); [Daniel 12:1](#); [Philippians 4:3](#); [Revelation 3:5](#); [13:8](#); [17:8](#); [20:12, 15](#). The names in it have been written there “from the creation of the world” ([Revelation 17:8](#)). The holy city will be just that—holy.

*What Do You Think?*

How can we use various familiar listings to illustrate to others the importance of being named in the Lamb’s book of life?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Immigration records at Ellis Island
- A *Who’s Who* publication
- A preferred guest list
- Voting rolls for a community
- Other

## Conclusion

### A. Eternal Temple

A church in my city is disbanding. For many reasons and for many years, its numbers have dwindled and its finances deteriorated. Another church is buying the building to establish a satellite campus. But the building needs a lot of work before that can happen. It looks great on the outside, but close inspection reveals years of delayed maintenance and neglect. The shell of the building is impressive, but the insides are rotten.

Delayed maintenance, crumbling infrastructures, etc., are ongoing problems in our realm of existence. We build great things, but they don't last forever. But the picture John gives is of a worship reality that will never grow old. It needs no building to house services, because the Lord is its temple. It needs no electrical upgrade, because the Lord is its light. It is a place prepared for us, where we will never grow old either. When we have been there 10,000 years, we will be just beginning!

### B. Prayer

Holy God, we thank you for giving us great hope through John's great vision! Give us strength to endure as we await the day when we join you in the eternal, holy city. We pray this in the name of the Lamb who makes this possible. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Make sure your name is in the Lamb's book of life.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

### Into the Lesson

If you have computer projection capabilities, show video segments from National Geographic's [Jerusalemthemovie.com](http://Jerusalemthemovie.com) or from [vimeo.com/15034110](http://vimeo.com/15034110). If you do, say, "Now you have seen old Jerusalem as you came down upon it; now let's see New Jerusalem from John's perspective, as it comes down upon us from Heaven!"

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Old Jerusalem" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download to use as an introductory study.

### Into the Word

Search online for a printable cube pattern, which will look something like the illustration below. Prepare a copy for each learner.

Then distribute the following attributes of John's description in [Revelation 21](#) of the new Jerusalem, on separate slips randomly to learners:

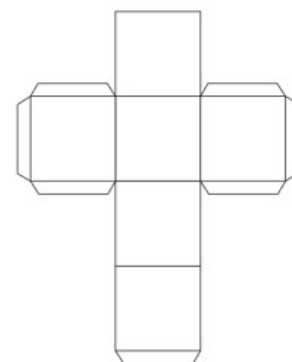
1. the Lamb's wife; 2. coming down out of Heaven; 3. surrounded by a great, high wall; 4. with 12 gates; 5. with inscriptions of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel; 6. each gate is pearly, as if carved from a giant pearl; 7. characterized by a shining luminosity; 8. has three gates on each wall facing the four directions; 9. wall sits on 12 foundation stones; 10. names of the 12 apostles are on the 12 foundation stones; 11. has no temple structure; 12. needs no external light sources; 13. has citizens from all nations; 14. kings will bring their glory to it, but will give that glory to God; 15. each side of the "cube" city is 12,000 furlongs in length; 16. the Lamb himself provides all the light needed; 17. no evil thing or deed is found therein; 18. the gates are never closed; 19. the residents are all those named in the Lamb's book of life; 20. the streets are made of transparent golden glass.

Say, "We are going to have read several attributes of the new Jerusalem, as described by John in [Revelation 21](#). As they are read, I may have a comment or question, but for each one I want you to identify in which verse or verses these descriptions can be found. Then I want you to choose up to 12 statements you will add to your squares on your sheet, two per square. Write them in as we go. Decide which of the attributes are impressive to you; make your choices."

Call on learners randomly to read their phrases or sentences. Ask any questions; make any explanatory commentary as needed. Be certain to pin each descriptor to a verse or verses, noting that some of the elements are not in verses of the printed text. At the end, suggest, "Sometime later today, cut out and fold your shape into a cube and tape it. Keep the cube close by for a few days as a reminder."

Ask, "What does the cube-shaped sheet you have been using have to do with today's text?" The answer, of course, relates to the "foursquare," cubic shape of the new Jerusalem as John sees it.

*Option.* Ask learners to relate the list and the image on the reproducible page under "New Jerusalem." They will easily see the difficulty John has in describing the new city, even as the artist had in preparing his image.





## Into Life

Point out that the concept of *bringing splendor/glory and honor* is included twice in today's text, in [verses 24](#) and [26](#). Then ask, "What are some ways to demonstrate the glory of Christ by honoring him in such ways that others will see him in us?"

Encourage free discussion as your learners suggest ideas. Jot ideas on the board. Challenge learners to pick one idea each to work into their lives in the week ahead.