

# A Biblical Tour of Heaven

Dr. Brant Pitre

## 1. The New Creation and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-5)

1 Then I [John] saw *a new heavens and a new earth*; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, *new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; 3 and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, *the dwelling* (Gk *skene* or "tabernacle") *of God is with men*. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and *death shall be no more*, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. 5 And he who sat upon the throne said, "*Behold, I make all things new.*" Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

### The Catechism on the New Creation

At the end of time, *the Kingdom of God* will come in its fullness. *After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign forever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed...* Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, "*new heavens and a new earth.*" It will be the definitive realizations of God's plan to bring under a single head "all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth." In this *new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem*, God will have his dwelling among men. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (CCC 1042-44)

## 2. The Twelve Gates, the Twelve Tribes, and the Twelve Apostles (Rev 21:6-11)

6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. 7 He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death." 9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

10 *And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with *twelve gates*, and at the gates *twelve angels*, and on the gates the names of *the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel* were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had *twelve foundations*, and on them the *twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*.

### Ezekiel 48: The Vision of the New Jerusalem

"These shall be the exits of the city: On the north side, which is to be four thousand five hundred cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. On the east side... three gates, the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan. On the south side... three gates, the gate of Simeon, the gate of Is'sachar, and the gate of Zeb'ulun. On the west side... three gates, the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naph'tali. The circumference of the city shall be eighteen thousand cubits. And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The LORD is there." (Ezekiel 48:30-35).

### Jesus, the Twelve, and the New Creation

Then Peter said in reply, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, *in the new world* (Greek *palingenesis*), when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, *you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Matthew 19:28)

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## 3. The Measurements of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:16-21)

And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 *The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth*; and he measured the city with his rod, *twelve thousand stadia* (= nearly 1500 miles); its length and breadth and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. 18 The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls*, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.

## 1 Kings 6: The Cubical Holy of Holies

The inner sanctuary he prepared in the innermost part of the house, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. *The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high; and he overlaid it with pure gold.* (1 Kings 6:19-20)

## Exodus 28: The Jewels of the High Priest's Breastplate

"And you shall make *a breastpiece of judgment*, in skilled work; like the work of the ephod you shall make it... It shall be *square and double*, a span its length and a span its breadth. And you shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row; and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes... *So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment upon his heart, when he goes into the holy place, to bring them to continual remembrance before the LORD.* And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the LORD; *thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually.* (Exodus 28:15-30)

## 4. No Temple, No Sun, No Moon (Rev 21:22-27)

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for *its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.* 23 *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.* 24 By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates shall never be shut by day -- and there shall be no night there; 26 they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## Isaiah 60: The New Jerusalem

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you... Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. *The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory...* Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; *they shall possess the land for ever*, the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified (Isaiah 60:1-21)

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## 5. The River of Life, the Tree of Life (Rev 22:1-7)

1 Then he showed me *the river of the water of life*, bright as crystal, *flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb* 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, *the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit*, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; 4 *they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads*. 5 And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. 6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. 7 And behold, I am coming soon." Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

## Jesus, the Fountain of Life (John 7:37-39)

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and let he who believes in me drink. *As the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water."* 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

## Ezekiel 47: The River of Water flowing from the New Temple

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and behold, *water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east* (for the temple faced east); *and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar*. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me round on the outside to the outer gate, that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side. Going on eastward with a line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the loins. Again he measured a thousand, and *it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through*. And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?"

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I went back, I saw upon the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh. *And wherever the river goes every living creature which swarms will live, and there will be very many fish;* for this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. *Fishermen will stand beside the sea;* from En-ge'di to En-eg'laim it will be a place for the spreading of nets; *its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea*. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. *Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.*" (Ezekiel 47:1-12)

## The Catechism on the New Jerusalem

For man, this consummation will be the final realization of the unity of the human race, which God willed from creation and of which the pilgrim Church has been "in the nature of a sacrament." Those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, *the "holy city" of God*, "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." She will not be wounded any longer by sin, stains, self-love, that destroy or wound the earthly community. *The beatific vision*, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion. (CCC 1045) For the cosmos, Revelation affirms the profound common destiny of the material world and man... *The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, "so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just,"* sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ. (CCC 1046-47)