

Revelation 12 - War with the Dragon

May 9, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 12:1-17

Purpose: To awaken our imagination to the true story of history and to reveal our role in the spiritual war.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? Chapter 12 begins the second cycle or act of the book of Revelation. We saw that chapter 11, provides a summary of the remaining chapters and themes of the book. Chapter 12 reveals in more detail the relationship between God's people and the godless world. Specifically it shows the spiritual forces at work. Chronologically, we are brought back to the beginning of the messianic age, for we see reference to the incarnation and ascension of Christ. The things spoken of in chapter 12 do not occur after chapter 11, but go back to a time that is roughly parallel to the seals.

Explaining the Imagery:

The Woman: Although this woman gives birth to Jesus, the woman does not represent Mary, because in verse 17 the woman is mentioned as being the mother of Christians. The sun moon and 12 stars echo Genesis 37:9 and suggest that this woman represents Israel or the people of God. Israel is considered to have given birth to the Messiah, because Jesus came from the lineage of Abraham. Some will argue that this woman represents the physical nation of Israel, but because this woman is considered to have offspring "who hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17) it is better to see the woman as Ideal Israel and therefore representative of God's people regardless of nationality. Because in verse 17, the woman is distinguished from her offspring who are believers, it is best to see that the woman does not represent the physical people of God, but rather the people of God in an ideal or heavenly perspective, parallel with Galatians 4:26.

The Dragon: Clearly identified in verse 9 as Satan. He has seven heads and crowns indicating his mockery of God and his desire to rule. His sweeping a third of the stars to the earth (Verse 4) is a reference to the fallen angels in league with Satan. His attempt to devour the child is a reference to Satan's opposition to the Incarnate Christ including Herod's slaughter of the children, Christ's temptations and even the crucifixion.

The Male Child: Clearly a reference to Christ in his incarnation and ascension. His ruling with an iron scepter identifies him as the Messiah through the messianic prophecy of Psalm 2:9.

Is there a Time Warp between Verse 5 and 6: Some approaches which take the reference to 1260 days as referring to a literal 3 ½ year period during final great tribulation suggest that there is a major time gap between verse 5, which refers to Christ's ascension and verse 6, which refers to the time immediately before his return. As such

they understand the war with Satan in heaven (12:7-9) as a future event. Others see that the fact that the 1260 days follows right after the ascension an indication that the 1260 days is symbolic of an unspecified but limited period of tribulation which began with Christ's ascension and will end with his return. In this approach the war with Satan is understood to be historical, a portrayal of the defeat of Satan through Christ's death, resurrection and ascension.

War in Heaven: Understanding there to be no time gap between verses 5 and 6, this war in heaven reflects the victory Jesus won over Satan through his death, resurrection and ascension. This understanding is preferred because the results of this war (verse 10) correspond to what Christ has already achieved. The establishment of the kingdom and salvation and authority of God / Christ (verse 10) fits well with Christ's resurrection / exaltation. Jesus took a position of authority in heaven when he was exalted (Phil 2:9). If this war referred to the beginning of the tribulation, it would be difficult to associate it with anything that Christ has done. Also when it says in verse 10, that our accuser has been cast down, this too relates well to Christ's victory on the cross and in resurrection. With Christ having made complete payment for sin, Satan has no basis for critique / accusation.

Protection of Woman (12:6, 13-16): The two description of the woman being protected are not two separate occurrences, but rather verses 13-16 describes in more detail what was first mentioned in verse 6. This protection of the woman has a parallel meaning with the other images of protection such as the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7 and the measuring off of the temple in 11:1-2. Interpretive approaches that hold the woman to be physical Israel, see that this refers to God preserving the Nation of Israel from Satan's attempt to destroy it. Taking the woman to refer to ideal Israel from a heavenly perspective, the protection of the woman refers to God's spiritual protection of his people (regardless of nationality) The flood from the dragon's mouth would represent deception and false teaching.

Offspring of the Woman (12:17): The offspring of the woman, are clearly Christians. If the woman represents physical Israel, then these offspring would have to represent Jewish believers. If the woman represents the people of God from an ideal or heavenly perspective, then her offspring would refer to the people of God from a physical perspective.

Main Theme of the Chapter: This chapter intends to inspire the imagination that we might see heavenly realities. The main point of the chapter is the description of the role of believers in spiritual warfare. Four things need to be made clear

1. Our Main Enemy is Spiritual. This is not a fight between flesh and blood but with spiritual forces of evil. The portrayal of the dragon is intended to open our eyes to heavenly reality. We need to see our true enemy.
2. The victory has already begun: While we need to take our enemy seriously, we must also take encouragement that the Christ through his death, resurrection and

ascension, has already begun to rule in heaven. The dragon has already lost territory.

3. We have spiritual protection. The picture of the protected woman, is a picture to us, that God takes care of his people. The dragon may attempt to deceive us, but we are protected spiritually.
4. There is still a fight to be fought. While we can take heart in the spiritual protection, we are called to overcome the forces of evil. (Remember how each of the 7 churches was called to overcome). This overcoming of Satan is described in 12:11 and is on the basis of Christ's blood, faithful testimony and willingness to die for Christ. Although protected spiritually, we may suffer persecution and even death in this fight.

Summary:

Believing that Revelation is a book that speaks to us as believers today, I disagree with interpretive approaches that tend to limit the message of revelation for a future time period and a different people. The spiritual warfare described here is relevant to all Christians at all times. If this passage is about the nation of Israel at some yet future time of tribulation, its message is in danger of irrelevance to us today. However, one could argue that even if this is describing Israel in the future, it could serve as a model for us today.

Although not the only approach to this chapter my view would be that this chapter refers to the whole period of time from Christ's ascension to his return. The casting down of Satan refers to Christ's victory won in his resurrection and exaltation and that Satan's attacks on earth are present realities which call for our response, which is outlined in verse 11 and centers around being a faithful witness.

Revelation 13 - Attack of the Beasts

May 23, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 13:1-18

Purpose: To inspire loyalty to Christ and patient endurance by dramatically portraying the evil behind worldly powers which come against God's people.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? There is a clear connection with chapter 12. Chapter 12 closes with the dragon turning his focus to make war against believers. Chapter 13 describes how the dragon makes war through giving power to the beasts. We are clearly following through with the major theme of how God's people interact with a godless world.

Explaining the Imagery:

Beast out of the Sea: This is clearly a composite picture of the four beasts portrayed in Daniel chapter 7. Daniel sees four beasts that resembled a lion, bear, leopard and one with 10 horns. The beast in Revelation 13 has attributes of all these beasts. Given that Daniel's beasts represented kingdoms who opposed God, one would conclude that the beast of revelation represents all kingdoms that oppose God.

It also seems likely that this beast has a number of specific fulfillments.

1. To the original audience, there would have been a definite connection to the Roman empire, which was the reigning kingdom of the time. Rome had long persecuted Christians. Furthermore the fatal wound (verse 3) connected with a popular rumor of the day that the terrible emperor Nero, who had committed suicide, was actually alive and was going to regain the throne.
2. There is very likely a future fulfillment in that in the end times there will be an Antichrist figure who will rule over the world and bring persecution on God's people.

Taking our cue from 1 John 2:18, which warns of a coming antichrist, but also mentions that many antichrists have come, we should interpret this beast a little more generally and see that this beast represents all earthly kings and kingdoms which persecute believers and pull people alliance away from God. We ourselves are not immune to these beast. Anyone who allows patriotism to replace devotion to God could be called a beast worshipper. Anyone feeling the oppression of government could be considered under attack from the beast.

Beast out of the Earth: This beast is clearly of Satan, but uses deception to appear to be godly. He has two horns (mimicking a lamb), he performs miraculous signs (mimicking the two witnesses). As such this beast represents false religion. Through the mark of the beast he also bring economic persecution on believers. Generally, this beast represents all forms of godless society, economy and religion, which turns men away from God and brings persecution on believers.

As with the first beast there are also some specific fulfillments.

1. Historically, this probably represented the pagan trade guilds and cult of the emperor. In order to promote the interest of the empire (first beast) the emperor cult attempted to get people to worship the emperor himself. Also in order to participate in civic life and economic trade, there were often associated pagan rituals and festivals. Those Christians refusing participation would have been persecuted.
2. There will likely also be a future false prophet or world religion, which will serve the antichrist figure.

Generally, we should see this beast as representing all forces of society, especially economics and false religion, which turns people away from God and persecute believers. People today are not immune from this beast. Anyone falling prey to false religion or the pursuit of wealth, ultimately falls under this beasts attack.

666 / Number of the Beast: Many people have attempted to use a correspondence between numbers and letters to try to identify this beast. There is, however, no credible solution to this puzzle. If this is referring to a future antichrist, then it is no wonder that no solution is available. However John does seem to challenge people to calculate the number as if it were possible for even the original audience. One could take a more general symbolic approach suggesting that 6 is symbolic of imperfection (falling short of 7). No matter what we do see the challenge to not place wealth above allegiance to Christ.

Summary:

Verse 9 and 10 show that God's people (at all times, but certainly in the end times) will face difficulties (captivity and death) This chapter has the overall message of calling for patient endurance and faithfulness. In all times, Christians will face beastly opponents which will test both of these things. Persecution attacks our endurance. Temptation and deception attack our faithfulness. We must be careful not to assign the relevance of this passage to the distant past or the future. This is a message for all times. We all face these beasts to varying degrees.

Revelation 14-16 - Salvation and Judgment

June 20, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 14:1 to 16:21

Purpose: To emphasize God's glory, to encourage the saints and warn unbelievers by contrasting images of salvation and judgment.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? This large passage divides into two main sections between chapter 15 verses 4 and 5. The first main section (14:1-15:4) serves a role similar to chapter 7. As in chapter seven, we see material reflecting on the protection of God's people (the 144,000) and we see some foreshadowing of final salvation. Having just spoken about the attack of the beasts, our attention is now turned to God's people and the security of spiritual protection and final victory. The second section (15:5-16:21) contains the seven bowls of God's wrath. These bowls parallel the seven trumpets in chapters 8 and 9. These judgments reflect the judgments of God on unbelievers just prior to the return of Christ. These judgments serve as warnings, calling people to repentance.

Notice the Parallelism

General Themes / Time Periods	Revelation 6 to 9	Revelation 12 to 16
Trials and tribulations throughout history leading up to the final days	Six seals of Chapter 6	Dragon and the Beasts of Chapters 12 and 13
Reflections of Spiritual protection of God's people and hints of final victory	144,000 and Multitude in Chapter 7	144,000 and harvest in chapter 14 and 15
God's wrath on unbelievers in the final days, calling them to repentance	First six Trumpets of Chapters 8 and 9	Bowls of God's wrath in Chapter 16

Although this is a large amount of material, I have chosen to bring the two sections together, because their message is parallel to chapters 7-9 and the themes of salvation and judgment fit well together.

Explaining the Imagery:

The 144,000: As in chapter 7, I have argued that this is a figurative number that represents all God's people. Some argue that these will be 144,000 Jewish believers who will play a prominent role in the final days. In either case, it is clear that these are God's people marked out for spiritual protection as they are gathered for spiritual warfare.

Virginity / Purity: The references to sexual purity and being blameless, connect with the purity that was called for of the Israelite armies before entering into battle. This may be figurative of spiritual faithfulness to Christ. As opposed to the spiritual adultery associated with the harlot Babylon (14:8 and chapter 17) The emphasis is that God's people follow Christ and are devoted to him.

Warnings from 3 Angels: (14:6-13) These angels call all people to worship God and warn them of the punishment in store for those who follow Babylon and the beast. The mention of Babylon is foreshadowing. Chapters 17 and 18 elaborate this, so we will leave our discussion on Babylon until that time. These angels look forward to final judgment and warn of the ongoing torment of those that reject Christ. This is also a message to believers calling them to patient endurance and faithfulness (verse 120)

The Two Harvests: The language of "son of man" and the crown indicate that the harvester is Christ. The difference between believers and unbelievers is portrayed in the two harvests. The first harvest is not described in detail, but seems to be a positive image. The New Testament often refers to believers being harvested. The harvest of the grapes seems to refer to those people who will suffer wrath. The treading of the grapes to make wine is a graphic picture of what is in store for unbelievers. The river of blood is clearly too extravagant to be a literal river, but rather figurative depicts God's judgment.

This whole picture portrays the return of Christ which will be elaborated and more fully developed in chapter 19. At this place in the book, we should take this as foreshadowing. We are given a peek of the final act in order to encourage perseverance.

Song of the Victorious: (15:2-4) At this point we are given a picture of redeemed people praising God for his justice and righteousness. This too is a prophetic picture that anticipates the final salvation. In the midst of God's judgments we are reminded that it is a different story for those who trust God. We need to see the contrast between worship and judgment.

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath: These bowls represent God's final earthly judgment on the forces who oppose him (the beast) and the people who worship the beast. They do not represent the final judgment and as such also serve as warnings, calling people to repentance. Chronologically I would argue that these judgments come in the last days, just prior to the return of Christ. I would further argue that they directly parallel the 7 trumpets.

	Seven Trumpets (Ch 8-9)	Seven Bowls (Ch 16)
1	Hail and Fire affect land and grass	Poured on land (painful sore)
2	1/3 Sea turns to blood	Sea turns to blood
3	Wormwood makes fresh water bitter	Rivers and springs to blood
4	Third of Sun moon and stars darkened	Sun scorches people
5	Smoke Darkens sky and demon locusts torment unbelievers	Beast's kingdom in darkness and people suffer pains and sores
6	Demon influenced armies from beyond Euphrates kill 1/3 of men	Demon influenced armies from beyond Euphrates fight battle of Armageddon
7	Amidst thunder earthquakes etc, "Kingdom of world becomes kingdom of God"	Amidst thunder and earthquakes etc, voice says "It Is Done"

Although not exactly parallel there are enough similarities that you have to wonder if the trumpets and bowls are speaking of the same time period. One could argue that the bowl are much more severe. Whereas the trumpets only affect 1/3 of things, the bowls seem to utterly destroy. Despite these differences, the similarities are much more convincing.

The main point is that these judgments, deprive people of their earthly security, calling people to repentance and punishing those who refuse to repent.

In both cases the first 5 plagues seem to be directed at removing earthly securities. The sixth plague represents the final end times battle and the seventh item refers to final judgment and salvation

Summary:

These sections are certainly dominated by judgment, but also contain a healthy dose of worship and victory for the saints. Sprinkled within these passages are verses that show us the proper response to God

14:4 Follow the lamb wherever he goes

14:12 Patient endurance and faithfulness

15:3-4 Worship

16:15 Be awake and clothed

We must not become complacent or despair. Christ will return. Judgment is real. Victory will be sweet. When we see these visions of final reality, it should be clear that we must follow Jesus and not the Beast.

Revelation 17-18 – Fall of Babylon

June 27, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 17:1 to 19:10

Purpose: To encourage faithfulness to Christ by showing the true nature and ultimate end of those things that inspire spiritual adultery.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? In the final bowl of God's wrath referred to in 16:17-21 we see that Babylon the great drinks the cup of the fury of God's wrath. And in 14:8 we hear an angel announce this same destruction of Babylon the great. Chapters 17 and 18 represent a more detailed description of this fall of Babylon. Chronologically, we should understand that the material from chapter 17 and 18 are encompassed within the seventh bowl and that this refers to the time during or immediately before the return of Christ, which will be more fully described in Chapter 19.

Explaining the Imagery:

Babylon the Great: The dominant image of these chapters is this harlot city called Babylon the Great. We will look at some of the details of the description of this Babylon in order to come to terms with what is being symbolized.

Harlot / Prostitute: The imagery of the harlot makes reference to spiritual adultery and idolatry. This adultery is spoken of in terms of greed / economics (18:3). This suggests that Babylon the great is the social/economic/religious world system that lead people away from God

Sits on Many Waters: Verse 15 defines these as many peoples, nations etc. This shows that the spiritual unfaithfulness is widespread.

Riding the Beast: This is the same beast out of the sea from chapter 13. This shows that the economic – false religious system of the harlot is related to the power of the state.

Great City: In 17:18 the harlot is referred to as the great city. While it is difficult to ignore the fact that this refers to Ancient Rome in all its economic power and pagan religion, we should not limit it to this. The harlot represents the tantalizing effects of wealth and the idolatry of false religion. In John's day this was embodied in the city of Rome.

Although making a connection with imperial Rome in all its luxury and idolatry, the harlot represents all powers of false religion and luxuries which turn people away from God.

The Beast She Rides: We have already seen from chapter 13 that this beast represents the power of the state which persecutes believers and deceives people. We say that the beast as a conglomerate of the beasts in Daniel represents all earthly kingdoms in opposition to God. This is strengthened by the description of the heads and horns in 17:9-13.

Seven heads are seven hills: This draws a connection with Rome, which is renowned as a city on seven hills. The beast however is not limited to Rome, though Rome was certainly the form the beast took in John's day.

Seven heads are seven kings: Attempts have been made to associate this with various Roman emperors, but there is no agreement as to which is first, which one was current and if any should be ignored. It is probably better to associate these kings with world empires.

Five have fallen: Difficult to associate with specific emperors, but could refer to former world empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece.

One is: Could be Nero or Domitian but more easily associated with the Roman empire.

Other not yet come: Probably best to see this as the variety of kingdoms from Rome until the end times. This is where it all breaks down a bit.

Eighth king: Probably the future antichrist and the kingdom of the antichrist.

Ten horns are ten kings: These are probably future rulers who give their authority to the future antichrist.

Not easily interpreted, but certainly suggests that the beast is representative of all worldly kingdoms. Both the beast and harlot represent larger spiritual forces which cannot be restricted to one time period, past, present or future.

The Beast attacks the Harlot: Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the state turns on the economic / religious system before it attempts to make war with the lamb. Given that the harlot is representative of false religious systems including, but not limited to the apostate church and apostate Israel, this could refer to the antichrist turning against such religious organizations.

The Fall of Babylon: Chapter 18 is an extended dirge which describes the destruction of Babylon. This leads merchants and captains and kings to mourn over the loss of wealth and the end of luxury, but leads the saints into rejoicing, because the harlot represents forces which are against Christ and have persecuted saints. Many early Christians were persecuted economically when they refused idolatry.

Summary:

In the opening verses of chapter 19 we see the interesting contrast between two types of women. On the one hand we have the harlot who represents spiritual unfaithfulness, but who ultimately comes to ruin. On the other hand we have the bride who represents faithfulness to Christ. The bride suffers at the hands of the harlot and beast, but ultimately celebrates at the wedding supper of the lamb.

As we have seen the book of revelation is often a study in contrasts. We are encouraged again towards endurance and faithfulness. We are warned to not pursue adulterous greed or idolatry, but to rather remain faithful to Christ.

We must hold out for our ultimate reward and not fall under the ruin of the harlot.

Revelation 18:4

Then I heard another voice from heaven say:
“Come out of her, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

We must examine ourselves and not associate with forces of spiritual prostitution.

Revelation 19-20 Return of Christ and Millennium

July 4, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 19:11 to 20:15

Purpose: To encourage Christians by showing that Christ will decisively defeat evil.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? Having already seen the fall of Babylon, our attention now turns to the defeat of the two beasts and the Dragon. This passage portrays the final defeat of evil. We have seen a lot of material on judgment, but now we are faced with the final judgment.

Explaining the Imagery:

Rider on the White Horse: This is clearly Jesus Christ in his second coming. The crowns speak of his Lordship, his eyes and sword are reminiscent of the opening vision in chapter one and suggest judgment. He is directly called the Word of God (verse 13) in parallel to John 1:1. He is accompanied by his saints (believers) as signified by their white robes. We are told that his coming results in the defeat of the two beasts and their armies. This victory is accomplished by Christ alone and his word (signified by the sword of his mouth verse 15). I would argue that this war is a parallel description of the sixth trumpet and sixth bowl.

The Millennium: Revelation 20:1-10 speaks of a 1000 year period at which time:

- Satan is bound in the abyss so that he cannot deceive the nations
- Faithful martyrs come to life and reign with Christ.

After the millennium

- Satan is released, he deceives the nations, but they are defeated and he is thrown into the lake of fire
- The rest of the dead are raised to face the final judgment.

This passage on the millennium is subject to four broad interpretations

Postmillennialism: Interprets the millennium to be fulfilled symbolically by the church, which will lead the world into a period of spiritual blessing that will occur before the return of Christ.

Amillennialism: Interprets the millennium symbolically as representing the heavenly reign of Christ between Christ's comings. Satan is bound by the work of Christ's first coming and will not deceive the nations until the end times.

Premillennialism: Holds that Christ's second coming will establish a glorious earthly kingdom, where Christ will reign from Jerusalem with his saints.

Symbolic Approach: An alternative approach would be to consider that the millennium is itself a symbolic image of vindication for the martyrs and those faithful to Jesus. This view suggests that the 1000 years do not refer to a time period, but are rather a symbol of final vindication.

Of these four interpretations, premillennialism and the symbolic approach seem to be the most reasonable. Amillennialism and Postmillennialism run into problems because:

- The millennium seems to follow the second coming which is described in Revelation 19 and therefore could not represent a time period before the second coming as these views demand.
- The passage talks about two resurrections and it seems unwarranted to spiritualize these resurrections as amillennialism demands.
- Postmillennialism does not take seriously passages like 1 John 2 which teach that the future holds greater apostasy rather than greater blessing.

Personally, I favor a more symbolic approach because a literal 1000 year rule raises several difficulties such as "Who would the saints rule?", "Is this just for the martyrs or for all believers?" "If Christ defeats the nations in 19, who is left over?", "Will non believers exist?" "Would people die?" "Would life carry on and new people be born?" "Would sin still exist?". The character of the book of revelation is to use physical pictures of time, number an space, to convey spiritual realities. Perhaps then the millennium is merely a way to symbolically show that those who suffered for Christ will ultimately be vindicated and will rule with him.

Lake of Fire / Second Death: This is the final destination for the beast and false prophet (19:20), the devil (20:10), death and Hades (20:14) and anyone whose name is not found in the book of life (20:15). This is the final state of the ungodly and represents utter banishment from the presence of God. The exact nature of this punishment is not specifically mentioned. While it is specifically mentioned that the devil is tormented forever, no such claim is made of unbelieving humans. Some, being led by the reference to a second death, suggest that unbelievers are annihilated, while others taking the cue from Satan's punishment and the image of fire suggest an eternal conscious torment. This torment need not be limited to fire and burning and could represent other torments. Clearly, however, this speaks of the total removal of evil from the presence of God.

Summary: This passage, while making mention of the vindication of the saints and martyrs, focuses mainly on the final destruction of evil. The specific details of the 1000 years need not cloud this basic idea. There will be loss and anguish for unbelievers, but more importantly this sets the stage for the final blessing of the saints. At its core, this is a promise that God will deal with evil and set things right. This passage serves as a warning and invitation to all.

Revelation 21-22 The New Jerusalem

July 25, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 21:1 - 22:21

Purpose: To portray the glory of the presence of God and thus motivate people to overcome by remaining faithful to Jesus.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? Having already seen the destruction of evil in chapters 19 and 20, our attention is now focused on the blessings of God's presence which will be enjoyed by all of God's people. Chapter 21 is the climax of the whole book. Much of this book is written to encourage faithfulness to Jesus. This final vision encourages faithfulness by portraying the wonder and joy of unending fellowship with God.

Explaining the Imagery:

New Heaven and New Earth: In fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.", we are shown that God will transform creation. He will change the corrupt and temporary into the pure and eternal. The absence of the sea probably reflects the association that the sea had with evil. (See Rev 13:1)

New Jerusalem / Bride: The description of this New Jerusalem comprises the greater part of chapter 21. Given that this city is also called the bride of the lamb (21:9) we must understand that although the New Jerusalem is a place, it is mostly understood relationally. The lamb is not wedded to the city, but rather to those who live within the city. As such the New Jerusalem must be understood as the place where God dwells with his people. The Jerusalem Bride is contrasted with the Harlot Babylon. Both represent women who are cities. The harlot represents unfaithfulness while the bride represents all those who are faithful to Christ. Babylon is destroyed. Jerusalem is preserved forever.

Dwelling of God with men: In verses 3 and 4 we see that the central character of the New Jerusalem is that it is where God dwells with his people, thus eliminating all death, mourning, crying and pain. This is the central character of God's plan of salvation (see also Exodus 6:7) All the other images in this chapter center around the blessing of being in God's presence.

Water of life: In connection with John 6:35, where Jesus declares himself to satisfy all spiritual hunger and thirst, this water of life reminds us that our spiritual sustenance will be provided for by God.

Description of the City: In 21:11 to 22:5, the New Jerusalem is described in greater detail. The details of this description are not so much intended to explain the specific layout of heaven, but rather are intended to explain the spiritual character of heavenly life in God's presence. John uses spatial imagery to convey spiritual reality.

Shone with the glory of God like a precious jewel: (21:11) The glory of God is often associated with his presence and the brilliance of his presence is often associated with the splendor of precious jewels. The fact that the city shone with God's glory indicates his presence with his people.

The Gates: (21:12-13, 21) The open gates named for the twelve tribes of Israel represent the fact that this city is open to all the people of God. It stresses a connection with the Old Testament promises. The gates are made of single pearls to enhance a sense of wonder and glory

The Foundations: (21:14, 19-20) The foundations are named for the 12 apostles to signify that God's people are founded on Christ and his teachings. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." The variety of precious stones from which the foundations are made also contribute to the wonder and glory of the sight.

The Massive Dimensions: (21:16-17) The massive city seems to be a giant cube 12000 stadia in length width and height. The cube reflects that the holiest place in the temple, where God manifested his presence was also a cube. The massive dimensions (2200 kilometers in each direction) are not necessarily literal, but the use of the number 12,000 suggests completeness and perfection.

God and Lamb are Temple and Light: (21:22-23) This shows the full sufficiency of God and further heightens the understanding that this whole city is willed with the presence of God. There will be no need for a temple, because God himself will fill the city.

Nothing Impure will enter: (21:27) This again is connected with the presence of God. Because God is holy, nothing impure can enter this city. When it says that nations and kings will bring their splendor, it is talking about redeemed people from all nations.

River of Life: (22:1) This makes a connection with Ezekiel 47:1-9 and John 7:37-39. The water probably represents the Holy Spirit. The water of life makes a connection with eternal life.

The Tree of Life: Making a Connection with Ezekiel 47:12 and Genesis 2 we see that this final city renews so aspects of the garden of Eden. The trees with their fruit speak of healing and restoration. Man once barred from the tree of life will now enjoy its fruits. We are told in 22:3 that there will be no curse.

All the characteristics of this city speak of eternal life in the presence of God. We are supposed to be in awe of this marvelous sight and thus motivated to participate in this final reality. God will ultimately achieve his plan of salvation which is to redeem a people that will live forever in his presence. As it says in 22:4 we shall see his face.

Overcoming: 21:7 points to the fact that the blessing of the New Jerusalem are only inherited through overcoming. This echoes the challenges in the letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3). The vision of the New Jerusalem is intended to inspire perseverance and faithfulness. This is a central theme of the whole book. (Rev 12:11 teaches us how we overcome the dragon)

The Epilogue (22:6-21) The close of the book gives warning and encouragement, calling people to faithfulness to Jesus. We are told to pay attention to the words of this prophesy and to look forward to the coming of Christ.

Summary:

The book closes with images of wonder and glory. They speak of a time when God's people will enjoy his presence. We should not take this passage as spatial description of what heaven looks like, but rather a theological description of what heaven will be like.

The three main points are:

1. We will be in the presence of God and we will see his face.
2. Our spiritual hunger and thirst will be satisfied.
3. We must overcome in order to inherit this

We need to let our imaginations be overcome with the wonder and beauty of this city such that we are inspired and motivated to maintain faithfulness to Jesus as his bride.

As the Bride of the Lamb, may we say with the Spirit

Amen, Come Lord Jesus.

My primary reference books are The Book of Revelation by G K Beale, Revelation and the End of All Things by Craig Koester, The Book of Revelation by Robert Mounce and The Theology of the Book of Revelation by Richard Bauckham.