

THE GATES OF THE CITY

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Lesson: Revelation 21:9-27

Do you know how cities were built in olden times? Often a city would be built on a hill, so that it could look down on the surrounding valleys. Inside the city, the houses would be built close together, with streets between the rows of houses, and there might be a palace. Around the outside of the city there was a high, thick, stone wall, strong enough to keep out all enemies. And in certain places in the wall there were big gates of iron that could be closed at night. Such a city was Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish Church.

But the city that we read about in the book of Revelation is very different. This city was seen many years ago by the disciple John when he was in the spirit, and was taken up into a high mountain in the highest heaven. There, in a vision, he saw what the Lord's New Church was going to be like: he saw how it would look to the angels of heaven. That is a church to which everyone can belong if only they will love and worship the Lord as He has revealed Himself in His new Word, the Writings of His second coming, which are called the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem.

The new Word is said to be of the New Jerusalem because, to the angels, the New Church appears as a beautiful city, called the holy Jerusalem. And John was allowed to see this city, coming down from God out of heaven.

The New Jerusalem is far more wonderful and beautiful than any city in this world could ever be. When John saw it, he said that the glory of God was there, so that the city was shining with a bright light that sparkled like a very precious stone. It was a very large city and when an angel measured it, he found that it was square, and that the length and the breadth and the height of it were equal. The wall of the city was made of jasper, a white stone that shines like clean snow in winter; and at the bottom of the wall, the foundations were made of precious stones that shone and sparkled with red, blue, green and yellow—with all the colors of the rainbow. The city itself was made of pure gold, and the street also was of gold. This was indeed a splendid and beautiful city, and when the angels look down to earth, to see the Lord's New Church, they see it as this holy city, the New Jerusalem.

Would you not like to see this glorious city, to see its walls of white jasper and the foundation stones of many colors? Would you not like to go into it and see the beautiful homes and the golden street? You can do these things when you become angels, if you know where to find the city and how to get into it. And in

this world you can learn how to find it and how to enter into it. How, then, do you suppose that you can enter into the city?

John tells us that the holy city has twelve gates, three on each of the four sides, and that on the twelve gates are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. He tells us also that above the gates are twelve angels, one at each gate, who keep guard lest anyone who does not belong there should try to enter. These are not like any ordinary gates in this world. For the twelve gates are twelve pearls. Each gate is made of one great, exquisite pearl. And the most wonderful thing of all is that these gates are never shut; for there is no night in the holy city, and people can go in at any time.

How, then, can you find these gates, so that you may go in through them? There is only one way to find them, and that is by learning to know about the Lord and to love Him. That is why the angels are there to guard the New Jerusalem, which is the New Church. For the New Church is holy because it is the Lord's church. The New Jerusalem is holy because it is the Lord's city. Only those who love Him and obey the teachings of His Word can go into it. The angels will not let any others pass through the gates.

Now you cannot be in the Lord's New Church or live in the heavenly Jerusalem just by signing your name on a roll of church members, or by going to church to pray and listen to the minister, or by giving money to the church. These things are important and should be done. But the most important thing of all is to learn what the Word tells about the Lord and to learn to love Him. For it is those who love Him who have their homes in the heavenly Jerusalem. In this world we cannot really tell who loves the Lord and who does not, for here people can hide their true feelings. But in the other world people's true feelings shine out from their faces, and the angel guards can tell at once who are worthy to enter through the gates of pearl and who are not.

The Lord has invited all people to come and dwell in His holy city. That is why He sent His disciples forth into the whole spiritual world on the nineteenth day of June in the year 1770, to tell all the people there that the Lord God Jesus Christ rules heaven and earth. And that is why, also, He gave His new Word—the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem, sometimes called the Writings—so that all people might know the way to the holy city.

The gates of that city are never shut. And you, too, can enter into it. You, too, can come into the Lord's true church as you grow older, if you will learn to obey the Ten Commandments because the Lord has given them—if you will learn not to steal, lie, cheat, commit adultery and be covetous, because the Lord has said that these things are wrong. For as you learn these things, as you learn to put out of your lives everything that defiles or works abomination or makes a lie, you will be learning to love the Lord above all else. You will be learning to love the Lord more than yourselves. And if you truly love the Lord,

you will find that heavenly gate of pearl through which you will enter into the New Church, which is the holy city, New Jerusalem, to go no more out forever.

The Lord said. "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9). And as those love the Lord who obey His commandments, it is written also in the Word: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). *Amen.*