

# The Father's House

Heaven on Earth – Part IV

Revelation 21:9-21

## Introduction

One million people visit a home nestled in the foothills of Asheville, North Carolina, every year. It is, in fact, the most visited home in the United States.

This home was built by a man named George Vanderbilt, the youngest son of William Vanderbilt. He inherited about seven million dollars, most of which was earned by his grandfather, nicknamed “The Commodore,” who basically owned the railroad business. George would grow up as a third generation millionaire, which is usually the generation that spends the money their parents and grandparents earned.

This man would end up spending more money on his house than he made – which makes him like a lot of people we know. George Vanderbilt died in debt at the age of fifty-one. However, he did not die until after building most of what we call today The Biltmore Estate.

This house was designed and patterned after a French chateau – a really big French chateau. It was approximately 175,000 square feet in size upon completion, and featured 250 rooms.



George Vanderbilt called his multi-million dollar extravaganza his “little mountain escape”. My family and I have toured this “little mountain escape” and the nearby gardens, and found it to be rather amazing.

This house is certainly not what I would call a “little mountain escape”. My version of that is driving on the Blue Ridge Parkway and stopping at a Dairy Queen. What more could anyone want?!

Vanderbilt’s home was designed by a famous architect with such elaborate and opulent detail that it was as if George and his family were European royalty. Chairs in their huge dining room were patterned after royal thrones. Private bedrooms and sitting rooms were outfitted as if for kings, down to the table and chess set that had once been owned by Napoleon. From the two-story library to an indoor swimming pool – something that was inconceivable for most people in the 1800s – the lavish settings included tapestries and art canvasses from European masters on the walls. It is really quite stunning.

Rare conveniences were built into this mansion, including an elevator, intercom system, hot and cold running water, a bowling alley equipped by Brunswick, no less, and even stables with indoor plumbing. Talk about a house!

The Biltmore is a place where someone can walk around with their jaw to the ground. Visitors can pay a little extra for headphones and a small receiver to go on a tour of the house at their own pace and listen to an audio message telling them more detail about the things at which they are looking.

Dozens of servants operated the estate, and the Vanderbilts hosted one holiday retreat after another. In fact, to receive an invitation to the Vanderbilt home for a vacation in the late 1800s was really something special.

Now, in comparison to your house and mine, the Biltmore – at 175,000 square feet – is a really big house. In comparison to its three-mile driveway, your driveway and mine are probably not much to write home about.

Today I want to talk about another house – it is our future home. It is a house that makes the Biltmore, and every other mansion on the earth, look like a shed or a little lean-to. This house is unlike any house we have ever imagined. The architect and builder of this house is God (Hebrews 11:10).

John records in his gospel account that Jesus Christ promised His disciples that He was going back to the Father’s house and would prepare a place for all those who believe in Him. He promised them, and us, that He would personally return, and us with

Him, to occupy the Father's house. By virtue of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have all received an invitation to not only attend a retreat here, but to move in as one of the family.

Turn to chapter 21 of John's Revelation, which describes some of this house. I must say that much of it will still be a mystery. God is the architect and builder and He has decided to keep most of it a secret. We are literally going to have to wait and see.

I thought this would be the perfect Mother's Day message because I am going to describe a future home that will never need to be vacuumed. You will never dust again, never wash another dish, and there will be no more laundry!

## **Aerial View of the Father's House**

If you were buying a house today, you would probably want to see certain things about it. The first thing you might want to see is an aerial view. Perhaps you would go to the Google Earth website, find the house via satellite, and focus in so that you could see the house and the land around it in one quick glance.

This is exactly what happens first to John the Apostle. Notice Revelation chapter 21, verse 9.

*Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."*

This is the same angel, by the way, that appeared to John in chapter 17, verse 1, and said,

*. . . "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot [Babylon] who sits on many waters"*

In other words, Babylon is pictured not only as a city, but as a harlot; as a woman who gave her love and attention to the false Messiah, the antichrist.

Now the angel shows up again to reveal to John the city of God, inhabited by the redeemed, and he refers to her not as a harlot, but as a faithful wife to the true Messiah, the Lamb of God, who is Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 10-11 of chapter 21.

*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,*

*having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.*

As John sees it from above, the thing that strikes him is the glory of God's light permeating throughout as the city literally sparkles with light.

The Greek word that is translated "jasper" in verse 11 is best understood as referring to a diamond. This is a very costly one too because John writes that it was "crystal-clear".

In fact, this is the only time in the New Testament that the Greek word for "crystal-clear" is ever used.<sup>i</sup>

Heaven's capital city is pictured in these verses as if it were a huge, flawless diamond refracting and reflecting the brilliant, blazing glory of God.<sup>ii</sup>

Skip to verse 18 to see that John tells that . . .

*. . . the wall [of the city] was jasper . . .*

We will see in a moment that other costly and colorful gems are added to the materials used to construct this city so that it will literally reflect an amazing rainbow display of color.

I remember as a kid chasing a rainbow a few times with my friends. If we saw one in the sky, we would hop on our bikes and pedal toward it. Of course, the faster we rode, the further away it went. We never got to it, and we never saw the Leprechaun either.

In the Father's house it will seem like we are literally walking into the rainbow, immersed in a waterfall of color.

John continues in verse 18 to tell that . . .

*. . . the city was pure gold, like clear glass.*

Immediately, we are struck with the fact that we have never seen any material like this before. We have never seen gold so pure that it is transparent.

Gold will only add to the warmth and wealth of the city. It is the substance throughout this city that is designed to magnify and display the glory of God.

In the Old Testament, the Shekinah glory – the brilliance of God's presence – rested on the Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies. The prophet Ezekiel informs us that the glory departed before the final destruction of Solomon's temple (Ezekiel 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:23). While the builders of the second temple prayed for the glory to return, there is no record that it ever did (Haggai 2:3). Israel's only hope at that time was that the glory would return one day.

For over four hundred years the temple was dark and empty. It stood as a symbol of Israel's empty ritual. There was no glory, no presence of God, and no power. However, God took on flesh and the angels appeared outside Bethlehem, and "... the glory of the Lord shone around them ..." – in other words, the glory returned – as they sang, "Glory to God in the highest..." (Luke 2:9-14).<sup>iii</sup>

Even then, however, the glory of God's light was shadowed by human flesh.

The glory of God was seen by the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration when Christ's glory became visible for a brief moment of time.

What John sees in this vision, however, is the full and open disclosure of the glory of God that the shepherds saw, only with more brilliance. They had seen a sliver of the light, just as the apostles did on the Mount of Transfiguration when the curtain of flesh was pulled back for just a moment. However, here it comes in its fullest and now eternal expression. The city of gold, sparkling and shimmering like a diamond, the Father's house, the glory of God's light now descends to the new earth.

## **Design of the Father's House**

John moves in for a closer inspection and inspects the front exterior of the Father's house in the first part of verse 12.

***It had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels . . .***

There really are gates into heaven – twelve of them – and angels are posted at each gate.

Notice that Peter is not standing at any of these gates. Poor Peter, he has been forever relegated to standing at the gate with a clipboard.

God has assigned angels to stand at the gates as eternal greeters – not to keep people out, but to welcome them in.

Peter is not a gatekeeper; he is an inhabitant.

Notice further in verse 12 that John says,

***. . . and names were written on them [the gates], which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.***

Each of the twelve gates has the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved upon it.

Skip to verse 14 and notice these are not the only names. John writes,

***And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the***

***twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.***

On the city gates there are the names of the twelve sons of Israel, and on the twelve foundation stones there are inscribed the names of the twelve apostles.

I know someone is going to come up to me after every one of the services this morning and ask me, "Who is the twelfth apostle?"

I will tell you that I am absolutely convinced that it is not me. Beyond that, your guess is as good as mine.

It could very well be Matthias. He met the qualifications of an apostle as the early believers selected him in Acts 1:26. It could be the great apostle to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul.

If it is not Paul, I am sure he will not be going around heaven muttering under his breath that he got ripped off. No, he really will not care.

The significance of their names is the fact that God is both referencing and distinguishing Israel and the church.

This text, by the way, is the last nail in the coffin of replacement theology, which postulates that the church has taken the place of Israel.

The names of the twelve apostles carved into the foundation stones and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel carved into the city gates make an eternal distinction between them.<sup>iv</sup>

God intends to remind the inhabitants of heaven, His beloved people drawn to Him by grace out of every dispensation, of His plan through the nation Israel and through the church birthed on the last Pentecost. One has not voided the other.

Imagine it, then – God has built into the architecture of His house an eternal reminder to us of His plan of redemption throughout the ages. First it is through Israel, and then through His church.

I find it fascinating that God does not engrave verses of scripture into the foundation and gates, but the names of people.

Now notice John informs in verse 13 that . . .

***There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.***

There are twelve gates – three on the south side, three on the west side, three on the north side, and three on the east side of the city. Do not follow the direction I am pointing, by the way, as I do not know which that is! I was raised in the south, and we do

not know which way is east – we just know which way the Dairy Queen is.

In the North people say, “Go three blocks and turn east, then go one mile and turn north.” In the South people say, “Go to where those trees are and turn left, then go to the Dairy Queen, and after you get an ice cream cone, turn right.”

This is the reason we love our navigation systems in the South. I have one in my cell phone that actually talks to me. It has a woman’s voice, and she is constantly telling me, “You are now off course. Make a legal U-turn. What are you thinking?”

No, she does not say that, but I know she wants to!

By the way, the gates on all four sides of the city are not just for decoration, but are designed to enter and exit. We have every reason to believe that the redeemed will have their dwelling place in the Father’s house, as the Lord promised, but will be able to leave the city to enjoy the new earth. Perhaps they may even travel to distant planets or galaxies throughout God’s recreated universe.

Believers will repeatedly enter through these gates for unique worship before the throne of God, and perhaps for special events and special seasons of corporate worship, and then will exit again to serve Him on some appointed task or journey.<sup>v</sup>

## Foundation of the Father’s House

If you are interested in living in a house, you might look at it from the air; you will certainly inspect the materials it is made of; you will also want to have an inspector make sure the foundation of the home is secure.

This is what John shows us next in verse 14.

*And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

Skip to verses 19 and 20 to find a description of each foundation stone.

John writes in verse 19,

*The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone....*

Stop at this point for a moment. We might get the idea that each foundation stone is decorated with gems. However, the language John uses is better understood to mean that each one of these foundation stones was a solid gem.

- The first city wall foundation stone that John mentions in verse 19 is *jasper*.

The “crystal-clear” description is not added this time, so this stone might be the reddish-tinted gem that we know today.

Keep in mind that all we have ever seen are little pieces of these precious stones. John’s description is of huge foundation stones.

To give an idea of the staggering glory of these stones in the Father’s house, when Herod rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, the foundation stones were 70 feet long, 8 feet tall, and 9 feet wide.<sup>vi</sup>

One of these stones was as long as the distance between this pulpit and the back wall of this large auditorium, as wide as the island I am standing upon, and would almost reach the top of this pulpit. And the temple was a relatively small structure compared to the eternal house that encompasses nothing less than an eternal city.

As we will see in a moment, the walls of the heavenly city will require absolutely gigantic foundation stones. However, keep in mind that these will be solid gemstones created by God to not only support the city walls, but reflect light into, around, and away from them in this stunning display of beauty.

You may want to write into the margin of your Bible the different colors that are represented in this list.

So the first is jasper – a clear stone in John’s description.

- The second foundation stone that John mentions in verse 19 is a *sapphire*, which is a deep blue stone.
- The next stone mentioned comes from a Greek word pronounced, “kalkedon” (χαλκηδων), or *chalcidony*, which is a word that is only found in this verse in the New Testament. It is a gemstone that has a greenish-blue color.<sup>vii</sup>
- The fourth foundation stone is an *emerald* with a deep green color.
- The next stone that John mentions in verse 20 is the *sardonyx*, which is a white stone with bands of brownish-red streaks encircling it.
- The sixth foundation stone is the *sardius*, which is a deep red gemstone.

- The seventh stone is the *chrysolite*, which is a gold colored gemstone.
- The eighth gemstone is *beryl*, which is a word that only appears in this verse in the New Testament, referring to a stone that has a teal-blue color.
- The ninth foundation stone is a *topaz*, which has a golden-greenish color.
- The next gemstone is *chrysoptase*, which is a pale green gemstone.
- The eleventh gigantic foundation stone is the *jacinth*, which is a pale violet color.
- The final foundation stone is the *amethyst*, which is a rich purple.

Talk about interior design! Think about this list; do not just read it and think, “That’s nice.”

The brilliant light of God’s glory will pass through these many different colored stones, and it will be breathtaking.<sup>viii</sup>

God reveals that He will take the most stunning and precious gems in this world – the ones that we buy in little chips – and use them lavishly to decorate with beauty and color the eternal home of His beloved.

What a house – this is the Father’s house!

## Dimensions of the Father’s House

One of the key questions we will ask about a house we are interested in is, “How many square feet does it have?”

The angel anticipates this question, so he measures the floor plan in verses 15-16.

*The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.*

*The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.*

Because John writes that the “length and width and height are equal,” we might think that this city must be in the form of a cube. However, this is not what he writes.

John simply says that the city has the same dimensions in three ways: length, breadth, and height. In other words, it was as long as it was wide as it was high.

This could be a cube, but it could also be a kind of pyramid-styled structure.

We have already studied this in our exposition of the Father’s house in the millennial kingdom – this same structure lands on the topographically altered earth as Christ reigns on the top tier of the structure.

There are many expositors who believe that during the millennial reign this city hovers above Jerusalem and then comes down to rest on the newly formed earth.

This could well be the way it will happen. The city could also have rested on the earth during the millennial reign, risen off while the earth was destroyed, and then descended again – this time with all the redeemed from all time, including mortals who were born into the millennial kingdom and trusted Christ as their Savior.

A pyramid fits perfectly, not only with John’s terminology, but also with what we have seen throughout history in the heart of man who sought to unseat the authority of God and build a tower to represent his worship of the heavens.

From Mexico to China to Egypt, from the time of Babel’s tower and the origination of the zodiac in Genesis 10, rebellious man has attempted to build a structure to epitomize his own glory and the worship of the stars. From the pyramids of the Pharaohs to the ziggurats of the Mayans, mankind has sought to connect with the stars and the universe beyond, while ignoring the creator God.

Could it be that Adam and Abraham after him were told enough about this city – and we are told that Abraham looked for this city whose builder and architect is God (Hebrews 11:10) – to pass down enough knowledge among the ancients that those who rebelled against God, like Nimrod, would try to replicate the coming house of almighty God?

There is little doubt in my mind this is exactly what happened.

For our study today, none of this makes much of a difference, except that now John gives us dimensions.

The angel measures the wall one way and then another in verse 16, and the measurements are equal to the height of the city. The angel measures it to be 12,000 “stadia,” in the Greek language, which is translated to be about 1,500 miles.

Most current research indicates that a “stadia” was about 607 feet long. This would make the city walls and its height around 1,300 miles.<sup>ix</sup>

There is healthy debate about John's description. One side argues that John is giving the length of each side, or he is giving the combined total of the sides and height.

In fact, if we look closely at verse 16 again, John does not tell us that each side is 1,500 miles, but that the length, width, and height are equal. Notice the verse again.

*The city is laid out as a square, and its length is a great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.*

To put this in the words of a mathematician, John is actually giving three dimensions. This means that 1,300 miles refers to a cubed measurement.

Eleven times eleven times eleven equals approximately 1,300 miles.

In other words, the angel measures one wall length and it is 11 miles long. He turns the corner and measures another wall and it is 11 miles long. He then says the height is the same distance as the length and the total measurement is 12,000 stadia or right at 1,300 miles.

What kind of house would this be? How big would this house be?

Those who think I am inclined to believe that this measurement is cubed because I have trouble believing the city could possibly be 1,300-1,500 miles long and high are mistaken. God can do this with one arm tied behind His back. I simply do not think this is what John is saying.

Let me try to describe just how big this house is at 11 miles long, wide, and high.

The tallest building on the earth today is the Burj Khalifa Tower in Dubai, on the coast of the Arabian Gulf.



It happens to be 2,717 feet tall and cost a few billion dollars to build.

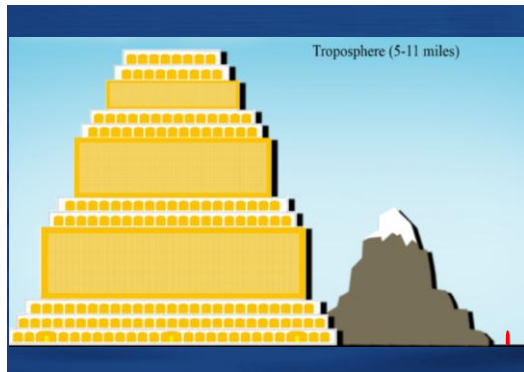
However, it is not anywhere near the height of the Father's house.

The tallest mountain in the world is Mount Everest.



It stretches 29,000 and a few feet into the air in all its magnificence.

Even still, it is not nearly as magnificent in size as the Father's city of gold.



If we could compare these three structures – the tallest skyscraper built by human hands, the tallest mountain mankind has ever scaled, and the Father's house towering into earth's troposphere – the skyscraper and mountain are dwarfed.

By the way, the Biltmore House cannot be seen on this scale.

The city of God – the Father's House – towers 11 miles into the sky. The atmosphere stretches up 11 miles, and there the troposphere begins.

It is as if God's house rises to the very top level of the atmosphere in order to communicate that He alone is the true and living God of the earth, and that the prince of the power of the air no longer rules in rebellion against Him. He is the God of the earth, the air, and everything beyond.

## Doors to the Father's House

If you were going to buy a house, you would want to see an overall picture of it; you would want to make sure the materials were well chosen and the

foundation well secured; you would be interested in the interior design – even the colors on the walls would either disinterest you or interest you. You would also want to step out onto the front porch to take a good look at the front door.

John shows us several front doors. We have already noted that there are twelve of them – three gates on each side.

John adds one remarkable detail, however, to the front doors of this palace. Notice the first part of verse 21.

***And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. . . .***

In verse 17 we were given the thickness of the wall, which comes out to be around 144 cubits or about 250 feet, when translated into English.

We are told by John that there are gates hinged with single pearls matching, obviously, the thickness of the wall. This allows us to figure out something just as staggering as a city stretching 11 miles into the air.

Based on the language in this verse and the width of the wall, each pearl would have a diameter of 250 feet.<sup>x</sup>

Now to help you imagine how big one of these pearls would have to be to have a diameter of 250 feet, let me illustrate it this way.

We are sitting in an auditorium in which we can squeeze 1,400 people into one service if we have to. If we could take a crane and lower one of these pearls into this auditorium, it would not fit. In fact, this auditorium would not be nearly big enough to house one pearl.

We would have to go to the RBC Center where the Hurricanes play hockey and N. C. State University plays basketball. If we had a crane and tried to lower one of these pearls into this 19,000 seat arena, we still would have problems. In fact, we would have to double the size of that arena to 37,000 seats before we would have a building large enough to hold one pearl the size of these twelve pearls that serve as one gate each.

This gives the idea of just how big the gates are. These gates are huge. This is quite a house.

Why would pearls be the gateway into the capital city of heaven?

Of all the other precious gems, the pearl is the only gem mentioned that is formed by living flesh. The little oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around this offending article that has penetrated and

hurt it, the oyster layers over it and over it, again and again until it builds a pearl.<sup>xi</sup>

A pearl speaks of beauty born out of pain.<sup>xii</sup>

We might say that a pearl is the answer of the oyster to that which injured it. Heaven is God's answer, in Christ. He was put to open suffering and He was crucified, bearing the greatest irritation possible of sin and shame.

John Phillips wrote,

*As the believers come and go through the gates of glory, they will be forever reminded that access to God's home is only because of Calvary. Think of the size of those gates! What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl. Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ. Those pearls, hung eternally at the access routes to glory will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree and whose answer to those who injured Him was to invite them to share His home forever.<sup>xiii</sup>*

## Conclusion

So what does our tour of this house reveal to us of God? What speaks from these snapshots of our eternal home?

Our God is a God:

- of light and glory;
- who appreciates ceremony, wealth, and royalty;
- of accessibility and openness;
- who measures carefully and designs thoroughly;
- who demonstrates truth with sentimental value;
- who does not forget names;
- of unimaginable extravagance;
- who loves to give and cares to remind us of His love;
- of splendor, creativity, and colorful detail;
- of security, strength, opulence, and lavishness;
- who sacrificed everything for us and gives us everything;
- who is, above all, a God of grace.

Because of Christ, these gates will swing open for us; because of grace, we will be able to enter this celestial city, and we will have a place in the Father's house!

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<sup>i</sup> Stewart Custer, Revelation: From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 243.

<sup>ii</sup> John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 279.

<sup>iii</sup> Edward Hindson, Revelation: Unlocking the Future (AMG, 2002), p. 217.

<sup>iv</sup> Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 465.

<sup>v</sup> Stephen J. Lawson, Heaven Help Us (Navpress, 1995), p. 124.

<sup>vi</sup> William Barclay, Revelation: Volume 2 (Westminster, 1976), p. 213.

<sup>vii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, Revelation: Be Victorious (Victor Books, 1987), p. 150.

<sup>viii</sup> Daymond R. Duck and Larry Richards, The Book of Revelation: Smart Guide to the Bible Series (Thomas Nelson, 2006), p. 324.

<sup>ix</sup> MacArthur, p. 281.

<sup>x</sup> Grant R. Osborne, Baker Exegetical Commentary: Revelation (Baker, 2002), p. 758.

<sup>xi</sup> John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 254.

<sup>xii</sup> Ray Stedman, Revelation: God's Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 344.

<sup>xiii</sup> Phillips, p. 254.