

Revelation 21:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

Analysis

And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:... This verse from Revelation's vision of new heaven, new earth, new jerusalem - eternal state, god dwelling with his people employs apocalyptic imagery rich with Old Testament allusions and symbolic meaning. The Greek text uses vivid apocalyptic language characteristic of Jewish prophetic literature, drawing heavily from Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah.

The symbolism must be interpreted within its first-century context while recognizing timeless spiritual realities. The imagery would resonate powerfully with persecuted believers facing Roman imperial cult worship, providing hope that despite present suffering, Christ reigns sovereign and will consummate His kingdom. The apocalyptic genre uses symbolic numbers (seven, twelve, 144,000), colors, beasts, and cosmic imagery to convey theological truth rather than photographic descriptions.

Christologically, Revelation consistently exalts Jesus as the victorious Lamb, the faithful witness, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every vision ultimately points to Christ's supremacy, His finished redemptive work, and His certain return to judge the living and dead and establish the new creation.

Historical Context

John received this revelation circa AD 95 during Domitian's persecution, exiled on Patmos for his testimony. The seven churches of Asia Minor faced increasing pressure to participate in emperor worship and pagan religious practices. Refusal meant economic hardship, social ostracism, and potential martyrdom. Understanding this context illuminates Revelation's encouragement to faithful endurance.

The apocalyptic genre was familiar to first-century Jewish and Christian readers. Rather than newspaper-style predictions, apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to reveal spiritual realities behind earthly events, encourage the faithful, warn the unfaithful, and assert God's ultimate sovereignty over history. Parallels with Daniel, Ezekiel, and intertestamental apocalyptic writings would help original readers decode the symbols.

Rome's imperial cult demanded worship of Caesar as divine, placing Christians in impossible situations—compromise their faith or face persecution. Revelation identifies Rome as "Babylon" and assures believers that despite appearances, the Lamb conquered through His death and resurrection, and all earthly kingdoms will submit to His reign.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 21:12 reveal God's character, particularly His sovereignty, holiness, and justice?
2. What specific encouragement or warning does this verse offer for maintaining faithful Christian witness amid cultural pressure?

3. How does this passage point to Christ's victory and the hope of new creation, and how should that shape your present priorities?

Interlinear Text

ἔχουσαν	τε	τεῖχος	μέγα	καὶ	ύψηλόν	ἔχουσαν	πυλῶσιν
and had	And	a wall	great	and	high	and had	gates
G2192	G5037	G5038	G3173	G2532	G5308	G2192	G4440
δώδεκα		καὶ	ἐπὶ	τοῖς	πυλῶσιν	ἀγγέλους	
the names of the twelve		and	at	G3588	gates	angels	
G1427		G2532	G1909		G4440	G32	
δώδεκα		καὶ	όνόματα	ἐπιγεγραμμένα	ἃ	ἐστιν	
the names of the twelve		and	names	written thereon	which	are	
G1427		G2532	G3686	G1924	G3739	G2076	
τῶν	δώδεκα		φυλῶν	τῶν	υἱῶν	Ἰσραήλ·	
G3588	the names of the twelve		tribes	G3588	of the children	of Israel	
	G1427		G5443		G5207		G2474

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 21:25 (Parallel theme): And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

Isaiah 54:12 (Parallel theme): And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.