

NEW JERUSALEM

The New Testament Picture

The old covenant was between God and Israel; it was concerned with the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, their promised land, Israel, and its capital city, Jerusalem. God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom 11:28). As the prophets have made clear, God still has a plan for his chosen people, their land, and the eternal holy city, also chosen by God. Those who call on the Lord are told to give themselves no rest and to give God no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes her famous on earth (Isa 62:6-7). The future of Israel and Jerusalem is bound up in their hope for the Messiah to come and rule the world.

The New Testament is about the new covenant between God and the redeemed from all nations, the church. Their Lord and Savior is also the Christ, the Messiah in whom the Jews hope, but the prophets did not talk about the church, it was an unrevealed mystery to them. Nor did they mention the kingdom of God which was Jesus' main message. And Jesus did not say too much about the future of the Jews because it had already been revealed. However, their messages are the same; the kingdom of God is all about the authority of the Messiah, his monarchy, the church, and his future millennial reign over the earth from his capital city, Jerusalem.

There is a new and different Jerusalem described in various places in the New Testament. This city is not the home of Israel but the other people of God who are called the church. This new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God and is described symbolically by the apostle John (Revelation 21:2-22:5). It is referred to by Paul as the Jerusalem that is above (Galatians 4:26), and in Hebrews as the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:10, 12:22-24). This heavenly city has much in common with the earthly Jerusalem that the Old Testament prophets say so much about but is not the same. The prophets mention it in several passages (Isaiah 4:5-6, 25:6-10, 60:1-3).

The millennial Jerusalem will be a twin city, existing both in the earthly and heavenly realms which are intimately connected. The latter will be the home of the resurrected church and the Old Testament saints, while the former will be the capital city of God's people, Israel, who will be converted upon the Messiah's return. The Messiah will be king in both, with his throne in the New Jerusalem, while the old is termed his footstool.

Jesus' teaching about the future of Jerusalem

Jesus did not speak about the New Jerusalem or the future earthly Jerusalem as such. When talking about the future abode of the righteous, he usually spoke in terms of the kingdom of God rather than Jerusalem. His disciples knew that the Messiah's throne and the seat of his kingdom would be in Jerusalem.

Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:29)

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world (Matthew 25:34)

Jesus said that his Father's house had many rooms and that he was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). Significantly, he didn't mention heaven. He said he would come back and take them to be with him so that they might be where he was. He was referring to the holy city, the New Jerusalem that would come down out of heaven from God, that John saw in his visions (Revelation 21-22). When Jesus comes back he will bring the souls of the righteous dead with him. They will be united with their resurrected bodies, and the living saints will be raptured and transformed, and they will all meet the Lord in the air. From then on, they will be with the Lord.

Jesus prayed to the Father for his community (John 17). He wanted them to be united with him and the Father so that the world might believe that the Father sent him. He has given the saints the glory that

the Father gave him before the world was created. This is the glory of the next life; he wants them to be where he is so that they will see his glory. Where will the believers see Jesus' glory, share in Jesus' glory, and be one with him and the Father, so that the world will come to know that the Father loves him and his disciples, if not in the New Jerusalem when Jesus returns to rule the world with the saints?

Jesus only mentions the New Jerusalem once (Revelation 3:12), when he declares that he will make the overcomers pillars in God's temple. There is no temple in the New Jerusalem, the whole immense city is a temple, where God dwells with his people. In Psalm 23:6 David expressed his hope of dwelling with God forever. This is where it will happen. Jesus will write God's name on them, and the name of the New Jerusalem, and his own new name. The focus is on belonging to God and Jesus and being a member of the messianic community.

Paradise

Jesus told the thief who expressed faith in him while on the cross that he would be with him in *paradise* that very day. He also told the overcomers in the church at Ephesus that he would give them the right to eat from *the tree of life which is in the paradise of God*. The Jews believed that the Garden of Eden was paradise and that it was always present somewhere. Our union with Christ will lead us to a celestial-redeemed community called the New Jerusalem. It is a supernatural state with some continuity with the Garden of Eden. The tree of life which bears fruit every month is there, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The river of the water of life is there symbolizing eternal life with all its blessings. So, our future abode can be thought of as a glorious city that is as restful as a riverside park. Only the resurrected whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life can enter the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:27). Flesh and blood (normal human beings) cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can the perishable inherit the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:50). On the other hand, earthly Jerusalem has a temple and its gates are open continually, so that the unregenerate nations may bring their wealth to it (Isaiah 60:11).

Paul contrasts earthly and heavenly Jerusalems

Galatians 4:21-27 Paul compares Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, to God's two covenants, one based on law and the other on promise. Ishmael was born to Hagar (Sarah's slave) according to the flesh (naturally, reliant on self) while Isaac was born to Sarah as a result of God's promise (supernaturally, reliant on God). Paul interprets this allegorically: Hagar represents Mount Sinai, where the law was given, and which bears children for slavery as was the case with the current population of Jerusalem who failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Isaac, on the other hand, being born to Sarah as a result of a promise, corresponds to the population of the heavenly Jerusalem, who are saved by grace and are free. Paul is not comparing the present Jerusalem with a future one, but the earthly Jerusalem with a heavenly one where the spirits of the righteous dead are (Hebrews 12:28). There is a community in heaven that includes God, angels and the redeemed which will, at the resurrection, come down out of heaven to earth. Paul calls it the Jerusalem above, John calls it the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2).

The heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The author of Hebrews gives us much more detail. He informs Christians that they have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, which is the heavenly Jerusalem. Not that there is an actual city in heaven or a mountain, but rather, heaven is not bounded by time and space. As Einstein said, time and space have no existence apart from matter. Heaven is another dimension. Information is there; God is omniscient. So the inhabitants of the future city are there: innumerable angels, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (born-again believers), God, the judge of all, the spirits of the

righteous made perfect (the righteous dead), Jesus, and his sprinkled blood which brings about forgiveness and atonement. Heaven will come down to earth because those who are in the heavenly realm are going to intervene in and take over earthly affairs. The kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of the Messiah and his monarchy. God's original creation which fell into a state of decay will be redeemed. Jesus' death on the cross is the catalyst and his resurrection was the first-fruits. This will be followed by the resurrection of the righteous and then by the redemption of the whole creation during the millennial reign. The new heavens and the new earth prophesied by Isaiah means a renewed earth and a renewed sky dominated by the New Jerusalem.

This heavenly community is the future New Jerusalem that is being prepared for us, the city where the spirits of the righteous made perfect already (Hebrews 12:22), the city that Abraham was looking forward to and where he is right now. When we rule the world with the Messiah, living in a glorious city in the sky, the world will know that Jesus and the church have been glorified with resurrection bodies and that the kingdom of the world is now in their hands.

Abraham was looking forward to this city that has permanent foundations and whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10). No record of this hope is given in Genesis, but we know that he was a man of incredible faith. He had the promise of the land and the promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed 'in him'. These promises can only be fulfilled in the millennium when Israel will be extended to the full borders as promised, "from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18), or as Isaiah prophesied: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance" (Isaiah 19:23-25). Millennial Israel will consist of all the lands currently occupied by Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

The faithful desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16). The author says that believers will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken (He 12:28). They have no lasting city here in this world, but we seek the city that is to come (Hebrews 13:14). The church's inheritance is the heavenly New Jerusalem in contrast to the earthly city which will be the capital of Israel and the whole world under the Messiah.

The New Jerusalem as described by John

Revelation 21:1-5 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

John gives us a long description of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2 – 22:5). It is described symbolically because the city is in a heavenly realm, in a different time-space dimension to planet Earth. The church's immediate destination after the resurrection is not heaven, but the holy city that comes down out of heaven. Those who come out victorious from the Great Tribulation will dwell in God's city, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12). Jesus said he would write the name of the city on them, as a sign that they are permanent residents.

The Bible always pictures man as living on a redeemed earth, not in heaven, so the new heaven and new earth should be interpreted as a renewed, as Isaiah envisioned it (Isaiah 65:17-25). God said he is making everything new, in contrast to the old. John said there was no

longer any the sea. This is a bit confusing when the prophets said that water would flow from the temple in Jerusalem to both the Mediterranean and Dead Seas (Ezekiel 47:8, Zechariah 14:8).

John saw a beast rising out of the sea (Rev 13:1), the sea being symbolic of the rebellious nations. The sea often has this metaphorical meaning in scripture and that is probably the meaning here. Jesus will rule the nations with an iron scepter, there will be no wars during his reign.

As seen in Hebrews, the New Jerusalem community consists of God, Jesus, angels, and the redeemed: saints from all eras. The redeemed are there with their resurrection bodies in their status as children of God. There is no more death or crying or pain because the saints are now glorified. They are immortal and will reign with Christ forever.

The New Jerusalem is called a heavenly city because its origin is in heaven and it is heavenly by nature; it is in a different dimension to the created order. However, the fact that it comes down out of heaven means that we should not envisage it as being heaven. The holy city is our future destination, and the earth will be our place of ministry. God the Son is the creator of the physical universe and its sustainer. He is the savior of the world and its heir. In other words, the world and the whole physical universe are the Son's project, with the Father in the background as sovereign over all. John says the dwelling place of God will be with man; not that the dwelling place of man will be with God. It is God who will leave his traditional dwelling place in heaven and come down to earth. The Platonists and their disciples the amillennialists don't like this idea, because they regard the world as corrupted and not a fit place for God to live, but God plans to show the world and the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm that by his manifold wisdom he has won the battle against evil by saving the church, a truly representative community from all of humanity, and given them the privilege of ruling the world with Christ during a peaceful and righteous era.

Details of their existence are not explained: whether it be their life in the holy city or their ministry on earth. But we do know that they will have supernatural resurrection bodies which means they can commute

from one dimension to the other, and they will no longer experience sickness, aging, death, pain, or tears. God will be their God and they will be his children: princes and princesses. The city will be glorious and have no need of the sun or moon; it will be completely self-sufficient. The nations on earth will walk by its light and bring their treasures to the earthly counterpart, over which the heavenly Jerusalem will shine. The book of Revelation is not so concerned with the earthly city, because it is written to the churches and it is the heavenly city that is their future home. But the OT prophets wrote their prophecies for the people of Israel, and their prophecies concern the future earthly Jerusalem, the temple that will be built there, where the Messiah will be worshipped. His reign over the earth will be characterized by peace, righteousness, and a universal knowledge of the Lord. The prophets prophesied about the future of Israel and were mostly ignorant of the church, which Paul said was a mystery to former generations (Ephesians 3:6).

The description of the holy city is a symbolic representation of our glorified eternal state which begins at the resurrection. It will be our home during the millennium and on into eternity. So what does all the symbolism teach us? Its radiance is like a rare jewel reflecting the glory of God. The streets are of gold and the foundations are adorned with every kind of jewel. Compare that to our dirt roads and buildings made of stone or brick. The great high wall with angels standing at the gates is symbolic of the security of the city. The twelve gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the foundations have the names of the twelve apostles symbolizing the unity of God's people from the Old and New Testaments as they constitute the population of the city. The city is a cube, its length, breadth, and height being equal and each measuring twelve thousand stadia. This number is symbolic (12 x 1000) symbolizing perfection. The walls are 144 (12 x 12) cubits high, about sixty-five meters. Einstein claimed that time and space have no existence apart from matter. We are ignorant of what an approximate 2,200-kilometer cube might mean in the heavenly realm. The holy city is out of this world!

The holy city will come down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride for her husband (Revelation 21:2). The catalyst for the descent

is that the spirits of the righteous are to be embodied. They will no longer be incorporeal spirits, they will be given immortal, supernatural bodies. In Matthew 24:30–31, the resurrection is pictured as the Messiah returning with power and great glory, sending out his angels to the ends of the earth to gather the elect. But the spirits of the dead are in the holy city, not in their graves and Jesus will bring them with him. After they are embodied, they will meet the Lord in the air. It all happens in the blink of an eye. At the same time, the living saints are gathered up (raptured) and transformed.

John was carried away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain and he saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, *having the glory of God* (Revelation 21:10–11a). In a vision, Ezekiel saw *the glory of the God of Israel* coming from the east, and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with *his glory* (Ezekiel 43:2). Is this not the same event, the return of Jesus Christ?

Revelation 21–22 is often interpreted as following the Last Judgment, which is a mistake. The visions John saw are not always chronological. The descriptions of judgments on the world as portrayed by the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of wrath all terminate with the coming of the Messiah. Chapter 12 takes us back to the birth of Christ. The description of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2–22:5) is appropriately left until last because it is a description of the eternal state of the redeemed. There is only one verse in Revelation that speaks of a new sky and earth (21:1) and this is not the creation of a new planet to replace planet Earth which disappeared in 20:11. The Bible has nothing to say about a new creation. The original prophecy of a new sky and earth (Isaiah 65:17–25) referred to a regenerated or recreated earth, not a new creation. The new earth that God will make will endure for a thousand years when all humanity will go to Jerusalem to worship him (Isaiah 66:22–24). This is the millennium which is followed by the Last Judgment.

When the saints are resurrected, they will meet the Lord in the air and rule with him during the millennial reign (Revelation 20:4). The souls of dead believers have been with the Lord in the heavenly Jerusalem since they died but all God's people will meet him in the air in their

resurrection bodies. Paul said that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his mighty angels, he will come to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at among all who believe (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10).

John saw the holy city coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Revelation 21:2). The community of the saved who are in heaven will come down to earth with the Messiah and receive their resurrected bodies on the way. They will join the living saints who will be gathered up by the angels. This is the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth that John saw. The city consists of its inhabitants: the redeemed, the angels, and God himself. Now the dwelling of God is with humans. He will make his home with them and they will be his people (Revelation 21:3). The dimensions of the city are given as twelve-thousand stadia cube, about 1,380 miles or 2200 kilometers. The city is in another dimension, so these dimensions are either symbolic of its immense size, or the size of what will be seen in the sky, an area large enough to cover most of the Middle East, not just Mount Zion. It will be visible only as cloud during the day and fire at night, but so bright that the land below no longer needs the light of the sun or the moon. The glory of the Lord, whose throne is in the city, will give it light that is visible above the earthly Jerusalem (Isaiah 4:5, 60:1–3).

At the end of the millennium, the Messiah will hand over his earthly kingship to God the Father. The saints will continue to reign with God the Father and God the Son eternally, and that's about all we know about eternity.

There is no alternative to the interpretation given above. If the resurrected saints do not immediately enter their eternal home in the New Jerusalem at the beginning of the millennium, where do they go? There are no scriptures that indicate that the resurrected go to heaven, and there are no verses that speak of them living on earth among the unregenerate nations.

Integrate what has been omitted.

New Jerusalem

(Rev 21:2 – 22:5)

The vision of New Jerusalem with all the jewels and huge cubic dimensions is symbolic. The details should not be taken literally, but every detail has a meaning. The vision expresses the great size of the city and its great glory. The city is called the Bride because the city is equivalent to its inhabitants – it is the community of the redeemed; those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. The city has a great size because its inhabitants number in the tens or hundreds of millions. It is glorious with the glory of God himself, who dwells with redeemed humanity. He is their God and they are his people. He is their Father and they are his sons. It is one big family, a royal family, and they reign together.

If the holy city, New Jerusalem, is the bride of Christ, when did it begin? F. F. Bruce says the city has existed eternally in heaven (The Epistle to the Hebrews p. 374). It is surely better to think of God as dwelling in a city than sitting on a cloud. Hebrews 12:22-24 tells believers that they have already come to the city of the living God. They have come to a spiritual realm, to innumerable angels joyfully gathered together, to the community of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (in the Lamb's Book of Life), to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to his sprinkled blood (Heb 12:22-24). We have come to it, but we are not there yet. But if the spirits of the righteous are there, it seems probable that this holy city in the spiritual realm is our destination when we die, the so-called intermediate state. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are there. The poor man who was carried to Abraham's bosom is there. This city is the home of the redeemed, but it is not in the physical dimension; it is not a part of this creation. There is no sun and moon there, no night, nothing accursed or unclean. The throne of God and the Lamb is there. God exists everywhere, but this is his home, together with his redeemed. They see his face. God told Moses that man would not see him and live, but later, Jesus said that the pure in heart would see God. In this spiritual dimension, we will be like God and we will see him.

This city is New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride for her husband (Rev 21:2). The catalyst for the descent is that the spirits of the righteous are to be embodied. They will no longer be incorporeal spirits, they will be reunited with immortal, supernatural bodies. The resurrection is pictured in Mt 24:30-31 as the returning Messiah coming with power and great glory and sending out his angels to the ends of the earth to gather the elect. In reality, the spirits of the dead are in the holy city, not in their graves, and they will meet the Lord in the air and be embodied. Then the living will be gathered up and transformed. All will descend with the Messiah to Jerusalem together with the angels. This is the second coming. The Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive will meet the Lord in the air and we will always be with the Lord (1Thess 4:17). John was carried away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain and he saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, *having the glory of God* (Rev 21:10-11a). *The glory of the God of Israel* was coming from the east, and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with *his glory* (Ezek 43:2). Is this not the return of Jesus Christ? The holy city is New Jerusalem, but it is different from earthly Jerusalem, the capital of the nation of Israel. Only the resurrected whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life can enter New Jerusalem. There is no sun or temple there because God's throne is there. But earthly Jerusalem has a temple and its gates are open continually, so that people may bring the wealth of the nations into it (Isa 60:11).

In Rev 20:11 at the great white throne judgment, we are told that earth and sky fled away from God's presence and no place was found for them. We are also told that death and Hades will be thrown into hell where the beast, the false prophet, and the devil have already been thrown, and where all people whose names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life will also be thrown. Death being thrown into a lake of fire can only mean one thing; its annihilation. The same goes for Hades, the realm of the dead. The devil, the Antichrist, and his false prophet are tormented there forever. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus

described hell six times as a place of wailing and the gnashing of teeth for evil people.

After judgment day which follows the millennium, we enter what is called the eternal state. The Bible tells us nothing about the eternal state, except what we are told about New Jerusalem, which is the eternal state of the redeemed. Rev 21-22 are often interpreted as following the Last Judgment. But the visions John saw are not always chronological. The descriptions of judgments on the world as portrayed by the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of wrath all terminate with the coming of the Messiah. Chapter 12 takes us back to the birth of Christ, and chapters describing events in heaven (4, 5) are timeless. The description of New Jerusalem (21:2 – 22:5) is appropriately left until last because it is a description of the eternal state. There is only one verse that speaks of the new sky and earth (21:1). It is a mistake to interpret this as the creation of a new planet to replace planet Earth which disappears in 20:11. The Bible has nothing to say about a new creation. The original prophecy of a new sky and earth (Isa 65:17-25) referred to a regenerated or recreated earth, not a new creation. The new earth that God will make will endure for a long time and all humanity will go and worship him (Isa 66:22-24).

How will all humanity go and worship the Lord? Will the Messiah be physically present on earth, or does all humanity come to worship at his temple in Jerusalem where he is present spiritually? The Jewish expectation was always to have a physically present Messiah, and when Jesus told his disciples that at the renewal of all things, he would sit on his glorious throne, they would have expected to see him here on earth. Zechariah says that his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which means a physical appearance at his coming, but we are not told what happens afterward; there is only the statement that he would be King over all the earth and that the survivors would come to worship him year after year (Zech 14:9, 16). The meek will inherit the earth, Jesus said. That is a statement that cannot be spiritualized, as some commentators do with the Messiah's reign over the earth with his saints. The Bible does not teach that the Messiah, or the saints, are ruling on earth now. They will reign over the earth in the future. At the

Last Supper, Jesus conferred on his disciples a kingdom, just as his Father had conferred one on him, so that they might eat and drink at his table in his kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk 22:29-30). This suggests a banquet at the king's palace. Nevertheless, there is a mystery about the future reign of Christ. We are not given a clear picture of how he will rule the world during those thousand years. We know what he will accomplish, and we know that the saints will reign with him. Is it not possible to conclude that the Messiah and the saints will frequent two different dimensions during the millennium, just as Jesus did after his resurrection?

When the saints are resurrected, they will meet the Lord in the air, and they will be forever with the Lord as he begins the millennial reign. The souls of dead believers have been with the Lord in the heavenly Jerusalem since they died, but now all God's people will meet him in the air in their resurrection bodies. Where to from here? Paul said that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his mighty angels, he will come to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all who believe (2 Thess 1:7, 10). John saw the holy city coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 21:2). The community of the saved have come down to earth with the Messiah and have received their resurrected bodies on the way. They have been joined by the living saints who were gathered up by the angels. This is the descent of New Jerusalem from heaven to earth that John saw. The city consists of its inhabitants: the redeemed, the angels, and God himself. Now the dwelling of God is with humans. He will make his home with them, and they will be his people (Rev 21:3). The dimensions of the city are given as 12,000 stadia cube. That is about 1,400 miles or 2,200 kilometers cube. The city is in another dimension, so these dimensions may simply be symbolic of its immense size. It doesn't need the light of the sun or the moon. But the glory of the Lord will be visible over earthly Jerusalem (Isa 4:5, 52:7-10, 60:2-3).

Abraham was looking forward to this city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Heb 11:10). No record or tradition of this hope is given in the Old Testament, but we know that he was a man of incredible faith. He had the promise of the land and the promise that

all the families of the earth would be blessed ‘in him’. These promises will be fulfilled in the millennium. Israel will be extended to the full borders as promised, and the saints from all nations will be glorified and will rule the world in union with the Messiah, Jesus, Abraham’s descendant (Mt 1:1).

The Holy City is a symbolic representation of our glorified eternal state which begins at the resurrection. It will be our home during the millennium and on into eternity. The descent of New Jerusalem that John saw (Rev 21:10-11, 24) suggests that this otherworldly city will be visible as a bright light above earthly Jerusalem. It will shine with the glory of God and the nations will come to its light and kings to the brightness of its dawn (Isa 60:3). Although the description of the city is symbolic, its descent is a historical event. Isaiah said that the Lord would create over the entire site of Mount Zion, including those who assemble there, a cloud by day, and smoke and the glow of a flaming fire by night (Isa 4:5). John saw it shining with the glory of God (Rev 21:11). Isaiah addresses the following words to the millennial Jerusalem:

Arise, shine, for *your light has come*,
the glory of the Lord has risen *upon you*.
For behold, darkness will cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples,
but the Lord will rise upon you
and his glory will be seen *upon you*.
And nations will come to *your light*,
and kings to *the brightness of your dawn*.

This description is to be taken literally. When the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, the Lord went in front of them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light (Ex 13:21). When he came down on Sinai, the mountain was completely enveloped in smoke because he had come down in fire on it (Ex 19:18). These manifestations of the Lord’s glory occurred physically, and another one is prophesied to occur over the millennial Jerusalem.

The light shining from New Jerusalem when the Messiah reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem will cause the moon to be confounded and the sun to be ashamed. In other words, his glory will be brighter than that of the sun or moon (Isa 24:23). The nations will be drawn to the light of Jerusalem, and their unbelieving kings will come and serve Jerusalem's inhabitants. They will bring their wealth, and if they don't serve, they will perish. Israel's traditional oppressors will now submit to them. The Messiah will rule them with a rod of iron, and they will be forced to acknowledge that Jerusalem is the city of Israel's God (Isa 60:3, 14).

John saw the Holy City prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 21:2, 9-10). In Rev 19:7, 21:9 the elect are called the bride of the Lamb, but in Rev 21:3 the emphasis is on God himself, who is going to live with them. They will be his people and he will be their God. The throne of God will no longer be in heaven; it will be in the holy city which will amalgamate with Jerusalem. This is our final state when we will be united to God.

Can, maybe a billion people, live in a cube like that? How could we serve our God and rule the world, if we are all concentrated in one city? The description of New Jerusalem is symbolic, the details are not revealed. But we will reign with the Messiah on his throne (Rev 3:21) and we will reign over the earth (5:10) for one thousand years (20:4).

The Messiah will reign from earthly Jerusalem where his temple will be. As the capital city of his worldwide empire, it also will be a glorious place and in need of the world's resources. All nations will go there to worship, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it (Rev 21:24). God will beautify his temple there with the treasures of the nations (Isa 60:7,13, Hag. 2:7-9).

The wedding ceremony, formally uniting the Messiah and his bride will take place in the air, when the city comes down out of heaven from God. The descent of New Jerusalem will constitute the inauguration of the messianic kingdom (Isa 62:1-5, Zech 14:5c, 9). There the Messiah will have his throne (Rev 22:3), and there the church will rest, feast, and reign with her Lord.

The New Jerusalem is first mentioned in Rev 3:12, where Jesus declares that he will make the overcomers pillars in God's temple. He will write God's name on them, and the name of New Jerusalem, and his own new name. The focus is on belonging to God and Jesus and being a member of the messianic community.

In Rev 19 the elders and living creatures worship God and cry 'Hallelujah' because the Lord their God reigns. Then they declare that the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. The lucky bride dressed in fine white linen is none other than the church; that is the saints, those who accepted the gospel invitation.

Paul alluded to this marriage in Eph 5 where he exhorted husbands to love their wives as the Messiah loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25-27). Then he spoke of marriage as a union: a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and the two become one flesh. It's a great mystery because marriage symbolizes the union between the Messiah and the church (Eph 5:31-32). The new Jerusalem is not depicted as a city of buildings; it's a community of people united to God. This community is represented by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles, indicating that it consists of believers from Israel and all the nations, but the Israel of the millennium won't be glorified until judgment day at the end of the millennium.

Only the redeemed can enter New Jerusalem, so the nations and kings will bring their wealth to earthly Jerusalem. These nations are unregenerate survivors of the nations, but they will be healed of their animosities through God's word that goes forth from Zion.

When John saw his vision of the future Jerusalem, he saw the glorified New Jerusalem, but in Rev 21:24-25 he saw its earthly counterpart, described by the Old Testament prophets as an exalted city in the land of Israel, raised upon a mountain above a vast plain. The nations come to its light, the kings bring their wealth into it and its gates are never shut. The kings can't bring their wealth into New Jerusalem, it would be superfluous there. Only the redeemed can enter New Jerusalem, so the open gates can only refer to the earthly city. The prophets talk about planting vineyards, building houses, having babies, girls and

boys in the streets, and old people with canes, all of which are very alien to the description of New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is the abode of the redeemed, those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life and will reign with the Messiah. They don't marry or have babies (Mt 22:30). The earthly Jerusalem is inhabited by God's chosen people, the Jews, and the world is characterized by peace and righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord as the Messiah reigns. The nations of the world are the unbelievers who survived the Great Tribulation and now live in submission to the King of kings. They bring their worldly resources to Jerusalem and give honor to the king. Nearly all of the latter prophets talk about a glorified Jerusalem, with Israel victorious, and their former enemies living peacefully, but in submission to them.

These two cities are one but in different dimensions. Galatians 4:25-26 speaks of the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above, which Heb 12:22 calls the heavenly Jerusalem. New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven in close proximity to the earth. The saints will share the Messiah's throne (Rev 3:21) which is the earthly throne of David, rather than the eternal throne of God.

Our union with Christ results in a celestial-redeemed community called New Jerusalem. It is a supernatural state with some continuity with the Garden of Eden. Jesus told the thief who expressed faith in him on the cross that he would be with him in paradise that very day. He also told the overcomers in the church at Ephesus that he would give them the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. The Jews believed that the Garden of Eden was paradise and that it was always present somewhere. The paradise of Revelation is New Jerusalem. The tree of life which bears fruit every month is there, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The river of the water of life symbolizes eternal life with all its blessings. So, our future abode can be thought of as a glorious city or a restful riverside park; they are both symbolic representations of eternal life.

The elect will live in the presence of God and the Messiah. There will be no more death or tears or pain, and they will be fully satisfied. Their status will be that of God's sons, and princes, and they will reign with God and the Messiah forever. This life, which John describes in Rev

21:2 – 22:5, begins at the first resurrection, at the moment when the elect become supernatural beings. The reign over the earth will continue for the duration of the millennium. In the resurrection the saints will be like angels, their existence will be in another dimension, but being ‘in Christ’ they will participate in the millennial kingdom. They will inherit the kingdom, and as the monarchy, they will rule over the earth (Rev 5:10). The New Jerusalem has 12 gates with the names of the tribes of Israel and 12 foundations with the names of the apostles. All the elect from Israel and the Church will be included, all whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Jesus’ experience after his resurrection may be the best guide to understanding their existence in the world to come. He appeared to his disciples over 40 days but disappeared at will to another dimension. While in the world with his disciples he was fully human: he spoke with them, he breathed on them, he ate with them. He showed them his body and they touched him. He said that he wasn’t a ghost but had flesh and bones. On several occasions, he appeared to people and they didn’t recognize him or weren’t sure. For example: Mary Magdalene at the tomb, the disciples on the Emmaus road, the disciples while fishing, and when Jesus was with the eleven in Galilee. He had miraculous powers; he walked through walls, and he produced a fire of burning coals, with fish on it and some bread. While serving the Messiah as a kingdom of priests, during the millennium, the saints’ existence may be like that, appearing to people as normal humans, but not living among them. The teaching that we will meet the Lord in the air at the resurrection shows that we will have the ability to travel through space.

Zech 9:9 is messianic and describes Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He told them that their king was coming to them, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Then in verse 10, he jumps over to the millennial reign, saying that the Messiah will proclaim peace to the nations, his rule will extend from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. The last sentence is from Ps 72:8 which anticipates a worldwide rule of the Messiah. These texts should not be spiritualized when a literal interpretation is so well supported by other Scriptures.

