

10. NEW JERUSALEM

Heaven comes down to Earth

As long as God is in heaven and mankind is on Earth, something is lacking - a discord that Jesus came to correct. Revelation 21:1-3 reveals that a dramatic change will take place. John saw the new heaven and the new Earth that Isaiah had prophesied (Isa 65:17-25, 66:22-24), a renewal of the Earth rather than a new creation. There was no longer any sea, probably referring to the turbulent nations that were always in a state of rebellion against their Creator. The nations, that are under Satan's control, would no longer rule the world. The holy city will come down out of heaven from God. This city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26, Heb 11:10, 12:22-24, Rev 3:12), would change its location. It would enter, or at least overlap, the physical realm. No longer would God be in heaven and mankind on Earth; God's dwelling place would now be among people, and he'd dwell with them. They would be his people, and he would be with them and be their God. A city consists of its inhabitants, in this case, God, Jesus, millions of angels, and the spirits of the righteous dead. The city will come down out of heaven to be close to the Earth. This remarkable change is signaled by a loud voice coming from God's throne, saying: Look! God's dwelling place is now among people. This promise of God's presence is also true for Israel (Lev 26:11-12, Ezek 37:24-28). In the Church, there is neither Jew nor Gentile; we are all one in Christ Jesus. But in the new world, God will have two peoples, the Church living in New Jerusalem and a newly converted Israel living in the promised land on Earth.

Paradise will be regained for the inhabitants of New Jerusalem. There will be no more death, crying, or pain. The old order of things will have passed away. God's people are those who have been reconciled to him through faith in Christ and his redeeming blood. After being resurrected at Jesus' return, they'll rule the Earth from New Jerusalem, their home in the heavenly realm. They'll serve God and see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.

The New Testament Picture

The old covenant was between God and Israel; it concerned the Jews, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, their promised land Israel, and their capital city, Jerusalem. Paul said God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom 11:28), and as the prophets make clear, God has a plan in the future for his chosen people, their land, and Jerusalem, the eternal holy city. 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 that the world will praise (Isa 62:6-7). The hope of Israel and Jerusalem, and indeed of the Church and New Jerusalem, is bound up in their hope for the Messiah to return and rule the world from Jerusalem. God's plans for Israel are in the physical realm; those for the Church are in the heavenly realm.

The New Testament is about the new covenant between God and the redeemed from all nations, the Church that Jesus said he would build, the worldwide community of Christians. There are many churches and denominations, and millions of adherents, but only the Lord knows those who are his; their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Jesus gave his followers the right to be called children of God and the creation waits eagerly for them to be revealed. They are described as the righteous, the elect, and the servants of God. The Jewish Messiah is also the Lord and Savior of the Church, but the prophets did not talk about the Church, it was an unrevealed mystery to them. Nor did they mention 'the kingdom of God' but it became a hot topic during the intertestamental period and it was Jesus' favorite topic. Jesus did not say much about the future of the Jews because it had already been revealed by the OT prophets. His ministry was directed toward Israel, but his teaching was directed toward his disciples, the new community he was building, the Church. At the same time, his message and ministry were a fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. He was the promised Messiah, and he taught a lot about kingship; his role as king, his disciples' role as the monarchy, and their thousand-year reign on Earth. The kingdom of God is about the authority of the Messiah, that of his monarchy, the Church, and his future reign over the Earth from his capital city, Jerusalem.

There is a new and different Jerusalem described in various places in the NT. This city is not the home of Israel but the other people of God, the Church. New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God and is described symbolically by the apostle John (Rev 21:2-22:5). It is referred to by Paul as the Jerusalem that is above (Gal 4:26), and in Hebrews as the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 11:10, 12:22-24). This heavenly city has much in common with the earthly Jerusalem that the OT prophets say so much about. Isaiah refers to it in several passages (Isa 4:5-6, 25:6-10, 60:1-3), it is above the city which is its earthly counterpart.

During the millennium, Jerusalem will be a twin city, existing in both the earthly and heavenly realms. They overlap and are intimately connected. The earthly city is the capital city of Israel, God's people on Earth, to which the nations come to worship the Lord at his temple. The heavenly city, New Jerusalem, is home to the resurrected. The eternal throne of God and the Messiah is in New Jerusalem (Rev 22:3), but as the Messiah told Ezekiel, the temple on Mount Zion is his throne and the place where he would live among Israel. There is no mention of a palace.

Jesus' teaching about the future of Jerusalem

Jesus did not speak about 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.

I'm telling you the truth, 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 (Mt 19:28).

Then the King will say to those on his right: You whom my Father has blessed, come and possess the kingdom prepared for you since the world's foundation (Mt 25:34).

Jesus said his Father's house had many rooms and he was going to prepare a place for them (Jn 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, New Jerusalem, that John saw in his visions (Rev 21-22). When Jesus returns, he'll bring the souls of the righteous dead with him. They'll be united with their resurrected bodies and the living saints will be raptured and transformed, and they'll all meet the Lord in the air. From then on, they'll be with the Lord.

Jesus prayed to the Father for his community (Jn 17). He wanted them to be united with him and the Father so that the world might believe that the Father had sent him. He has even given the saints the glory that the Father gave him before the world was created (Jn 17:22). 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 New Jerusalem when Jesus returns to rule the world with the saints?

Jesus only mentions New Jerusalem once (Rev 3:12), when he declares that he'll make the overcomers pillars in God's temple. There is no physical temple in New Jerusalem, the whole immense city is a temple, where God dwells with his people. David expressed this hope of dwelling in the Lord's house forever (Ps 23:6). This is where it will happen. Jesus will write God's name on them, 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.

Paradise

Jesus told the thief who expressed faith in him when on the cross that he'd be with him in paradise that very day. He also told the overcomers in the church at Ephesus that he'd 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 redeemed community called 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 there (Rev 21:27). Flesh and blood (normal human beings) can't inherit the kingdom of God, nor can the perishable inherit the imperishable (1 Cor 15:50). On the other hand, earthly Jerusalem has a temple and its gates are open continually, so that the unregenerate nations can bring their wealth to it as offerings (Isa 60:11).

Paul contrasts earthly and heavenly Jerusalems

In 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 "the Jerusalem that is above" (Gal 4:26), the place where the spirits of the righteous dead are (Heb 12:28). There is no reason to believe that this community in heaven which includes God, angels and the spirits of the righteous made perfect is not actual. At the resurrection, this whole city with its inhabitants comes down out of heaven to Earth with the Lord to meet the resurrected saints in the air. This is New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2). Its visible description symbolizes its glory, size, security and inhabitants. It is Eden restored.

The heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God

Heb 12:22-24 You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, 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 that speaks a better message than the blood of Abel.

The author of Hebrews gives us much more detail. He informs Christians that they have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, which is the heavenly Jerusalem. This does not mean that there is a physical city in heaven. Heaven is not bounded by time and space and as Einstein said: Time and space have no existence apart from matter. Heaven is another dimension and is not made of matter,. Information is there and we don't know how it expresses itself in the spiritual realm. 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 OT saints), Jesus, and his sprinkled blood which speaks of forgiveness rather than revenge. Heaven will come down to earth because God and his people 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 is 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 new Earth, undergoing a rebirth, and a new sky, dominated by 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 are (Heb 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 realize 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 with permanent foundations and whose designer and builder is God (Heb 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” (Gen 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 vice-versa. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria (northern Iraq), a blessing on the Earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying: Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance (Isa 19:23-25). Millennial Israel will consist of lands currently occupied by Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

The faithful desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one (Heb 11:16). The author says that believers will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). They have no lasting city here in this world but seek the city that is to come (Heb 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

Rev 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, 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’ll dwell with them. They’ll be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He’ll 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’m making everything new! Then he said: Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

John provides a detailed description of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2 – 22:5). It’s described symbolically because it’s in the heavenly realm, a different time-space dimension from planet Earth. The Church’s immediate destination after the resurrection is not heaven, but this holy city that comes down out of heaven. Those who come out victorious from the Great Tribulation will dwell in God’s city, New Jerusalem (Rev 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 renewed, as Isaiah envisioned it (Isa 65:17-25). God said he's making everything new, in contrast to the old. John said there was no longer any sea. This may seem contradictory, when the prophets said that water would flow from the temple in Jerusalem to both the Mediterranean and Dead Seas (Ezek 47:8, Zec 14:8). John also 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 it is the meaning here. Jesus will rule the nations with an iron scepter, there will be no wars during his reign; peace will replace the previous turbulence.

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

New Jerusalem is called a heavenly city because its origin is in heaven and it is heavenly by nature; it exists 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 in heaven. The holy city is our future destination, and the Earth, 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. 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's 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 the Messiah during a peaceful and righteous era.

Details of their existence are not explained: whether life in the holy city or ministry on earth. But we know that they'll have supernatural resurrection bodies which enable them to commute from one dimension to the other, and they'll no longer experience sickness, aging, death, pain, or tears. God will be their God and they'll be his children: princes and princesses. The city will be glorious and have no need of the sun or moon; it'll be completely self-sufficient. The nations on Earth will walk by its light and bring their treasures to its 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's the heavenly city that is their future home. But the OT prophets wrote their prophecies for Israel, and their prophecies concern the future earthly Jerusalem and 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 spoke about the future of Israel and were mostly ignorant of the Church, which Paul said was a mystery to former generations (Eph 3:6).

The description of the holy city is a symbolic representation of our glorified eternal state which begins at the resurrection. It'll be our home during the millennium and on into eternity. So what does 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 symbolizes the security of the city. The twelve gates inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the foundations having the names of the twelve apostles symbolize 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), 12 being the number of God's people and 1000, indicating completion. The walls are 144 (12 x 12) cubits high, about sixty-five meters. We are ignorant of what an approximately 2,200-kilometer cube might mean in the heavenly realm; the holy city is out of this world!

The holy city comes down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride for her husband (Rev 21:2). The catalyst for the descent Jesus' return

when the spirits of the righteous are to be embodied. They'll no longer be incorporeal spirits, they'll be given immortal, supernatural bodies. 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 their embodiment, they'll meet the Lord in the air, in the blink of an eye. At the same moment, 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* (Rev 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 21:1 – 22:5 is often interpreted as following the Last Judgment, which is a mistake. The visions John saw aren't 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 New Jerusalem (Rev 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, it's a one-verse description of the millennium. 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 thousand years when all mankind will go to Jerusalem to worship him (Isa 66:22–24). This is the millennium which is followed by the Last Judgment.

When the saints are resurrected, they'll meet the Lord in the air and rule with him during the Messianic reign (Rev 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, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing

fire with his mighty angels, he'll come to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at among all who believe (2 Th 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 who are in heaven will come down to Earth with the Messiah and receive their resurrected bodies on the way. They'll join the living saints who will be 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 will be with humans. He'll make his home with them and they'll be his people (Rev 21:3). The dimensions of the city are large enough to cover most of the Middle East, not just Mount Zion. It'll 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 (Isa 4:5, 60:1-3).

At the end of the millennium, the Messiah hands 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 little alternative to the interpretation given above. If the resurrected saints don't immediately enter their eternal home in 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.

The holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, is eternal because it is God's dwelling place. It is surely better to think of God as dwelling in a city rather than sitting on a cloud. Believers 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. Paul says: We have a building from

God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands (2 Cor 5:1). When we enter there, we won't be homeless spirits. As 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.

At the resurrection, the holy city comes down out of heaven from God, and the bodiless souls of the righteous are clothed with immortality. Expressed another way, God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him, and the dead in Christ will be resurrected (1 Thess 4:14-16). Despite the holy city's monumental move from heaven to Earth, the sun and moon will not exist there; their light will be eclipsed by God's glory. There is no night, and nothing accursed or unclean enters the city because the throne of God and the Lamb is there. God exists everywhere but this is his home together with his redeemed. They will see his face. God told Moses that mortal man would not see him and live, but Jesus said the pure in heart would see God. In this spiritual dimension, the saints will be like God and they'll see him.

This city that descends is 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'll no longer be incorporeal spirits, they'll be united with immortal, supernatural bodies. In Matthew 24:30-31, the resurrection is pictured as the Messiah returning with power and great glory, sending his angels out 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'll meet the Lord in the air and be embodied simultaneously in the wink of an eye. 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). Compare: 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). Compare: *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).

This is the return of Jesus Christ! The holy city is New Jerusalem, different from earthly Jerusalem, the capital city of the nation of Israel. Only the resurrected whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life can enter New Jerusalem. 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).

At the great white throne judgment, the Earth and sky flee away from God's presence and no place is found for them (Rev 20:11). Death and Hades are thrown into hell where the beast, the false prophet, and the devil have been thrown, and those whose names are not found in the Lamb's Book of Life are also thrown. Death and Hades are annihilated while the devil, the Antichrist, and his false prophet are tormented 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 eternity. 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. Revelation 21 - 22 is 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 describes the eternal state. Revelation 21:1 refers to the new sky and earth that Isaiah prophesied about, the millennium. It is a mistake to interpret this as the creation of a new planet to replace planet Earth which disappeared in Revelation 20:11. Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 65:17-25) refers to a regenerated or recreated Earth where all humanity will go and worship (Isa 66:22-24); it is not a new creation.

We may well ask how all humanity will go and worship the Lord? Will the Messiah be physically present on earth, or do the nations come to worship at his temple in Jerusalem where his glory is present? 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 said that his feet would stand on the Mount of Olives, which involves a physical appearance at his coming, but we are not told what happens after that. 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, a statement that should not be spiritualized, as some commentators do when they speak of the Messiah's reign and that of his saints. The saints will possess the Earth but obviously not yet, the Messiah and the saints are still only heirs. Paul corrected Corinthian believers who thought they were already reigning (1 Cor 4:8). 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 or we will rule the world during the 'thousand years' that John mentions six times. We know what Christ will accomplish and that the saints will reign with him. As the Messiah and the saints will live in New Jerusalem during this time, we must conclude that they will rule the Earth from their heavenly abode, frequenting the earthly realm in their resurrection bodies as Jesus did after his resurrection.

When the saints are resurrected, they meet the Lord in the air and are forever with the Lord as he begins the millennial reign. The souls of believers who died went to be with the Lord in the heavenly Jerusalem and now in resurrection bodies, they are with him in New Jerusalem. 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). Where else but in New Jerusalem? John saw the holy city coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 21:2). This community of the saved will come down to earth with the Messiah and receive their resurrection bodies on the way. They will be joined by the

living saints who are caught up from the Earth and transformed. This is the descent of New Jerusalem from heaven to earth that John saw. A city consists of its inhabitants, in this case, the redeemed, the angels, and God himself. From now on, the dwelling of God is with humans. He'll make his home with them, and they'll 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 the heavenly realm, so these dimensions simply symbolize the immense size, and twelve being the number that symbolizes God's people. This city doesn't need the sun's light for the glory of God gives it light (Rev 22:5) and its proximity to earthly Jerusalem means that it doesn't need the sun or moon's light either, for the Lord rises upon Jerusalem and his glory appears over Mount Zion. The nations will see God's glory from afar (Isa 60:2-3); it will be visible to them as a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night (Isa 4:5). It is also a shade and refuge for God's people and a manifestation of the presence of God.

Abraham was looking forward to the 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 city Abraham longed for was a heavenly one (Heb 11:16), described more fully in Hebrews 12:22:24 and what John calls the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God.

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 on it in fire (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 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). The elect are called the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:7, 21:9) but the emphasis is on God himself, who is going to live with them (Rev 21:3). They will be his people and he will be their God. The throne of God will be in the heavenly Jerusalem which will amalgamate with earthly Jerusalem. They will overlap, each in its own realm.

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 what is sure is that we will reign with the Messiah on his throne (Rev 3:21) and we will reign over the earth (5:10) for a thousand years (20:4).

The Messiah will rule the world from his temple in earthly Jerusalem. As the capital of his empire, it will be glorious and in need of the world's resources. People of all nations will go there to worship, and their leaders will bring their wealth to beautify his temple (Isa 60:7,13, Hag. 2:7-9, Rev 21:24).

The wedding ceremony, formally uniting the Messiah and his bride will take place in New Jerusalem, a coronation of both the king and his bride in the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom (Isa 62:1-7, Zech 14:5c, 9). There in NJ, the Messiah will have his throne (Rev 22:3), and there the church will rest, feast, and reign with her Lord.

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: the saints of both OT and NT.

Paul alluded to this marriage where he exhorted husbands to love their wives as the Messiah loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25-27). 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 two become one body. We are members of his body. 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. As inhabitants of New Jerusalem, we live together with Christ in harmony like a perfect married couple.

When John saw his vision of the future Jerusalem, he saw the glorified New Jerusalem, but he also saw it in its relationship to the nations (Rev 21:24-25, 22:2) and Israel's earthly capital that the OT prophets described as an exalted city, raised upon a mountain above a vast plain. John doesn't differentiate between the two Jerusalems, he treats them as one, but the difference is evident. Verse 24 says the kings of the Earth bring their splendor into it, and verse 25 says its gates will never be shut and the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Then verse 27 says, nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Verse 27 relates to New Jerusalem. The nations spoken of are unregenerate survivors of the great tribulation who will be healed of their animosities through God's word that goes forth from Zion.

When Isaiah spoke about the new heavens and the new Earth, he talked about planting vineyards, building houses, and having babies. Girls and boys would play in the streets and there would be old people with canes, all of which is very alien to the description of New Jerusalem which is the abode of the redeemed. They don't marry or have babies (Mt 22:30). The earthly Jerusalem is inhabited by God's chosen people, Israel, and the world is characterized by peace, 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 this glorified Jerusalem, with Israel victorious, and their former enemies living peacefully but in submission to them.

These two cities are the one Jerusalem but in different dimensions. Galatians 4:25-26 speaks of the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above, also called the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven and overlap Jerusalem in the physical realm. The saints will share the Messiah's Davidic throne (Rev 3:21) in the physical realm, and be subjects of God's throne in the heavenly realm (Rev 22:3).

Our union with Christ results in a heavenly redeemed community called New Jerusalem, 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 (in the heavenly realm). Both are 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, 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 state, the saints are like angels, their existence is in the heavenly realm, but being 'in Christ' they participate in the millennial kingdom on Earth. They inherit the kingdom, and as the monarchy, they 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 are 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 fact that we will meet the Lord in the air at the resurrection shows that we will have the ability to travel through space.

Zechariah 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 advances into 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 the worldwide rule of the Messiah. These texts should not be spiritualized when a literal interpretation is so well supported by other Scriptures.